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The *Chidu* in Late Ming and Early Qing China

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian
National University.

I, David John Pattinson, hereby certify that this thesis is entirely my own original work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. J. Pattinson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Abstract

This thesis discusses the development and functions of an epistolary form called *chidu*, focussing on the period during which the *chidu* enjoyed the greatest popularity, namely the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Partly because there has been very little work done on the genre at all, and more particularly to provide background to the discussion of late Ming and early Qing *chidu*, I begin by examining early uses of the term *chidu* and by looking at those texts which later writers referred to in their writings on the genre. I will show that in fact the early development of *chidu* is not at all clear, and that the texts to which later writers on *chidu* referred were not about *chidu* at all, but were about the more formal form of letter-writing called *shu*, which achieved canonical status from quite early times. I then proceed to look at the more distinct emergence during the Song dynasty of the kind of *chidu* which were practised in late Ming and Qing times.

In the main part of the thesis, I examine a range of *chidu* anthologies from the late Ming and early Qing period and a number of texts about *chidu* which accompanied some of the anthologies, showing how there was a considerable discrepancy between the pedigree and ideals of the genre which they put forward on the one hand, and the actual practice of *chidu*-writing on the other. I will argue that the real motives of the compilers of *chidu* collections in presenting these arguments was to try to give their work the legitimacy it lacked precisely because of its lack of a classical pedigree and the general perception that it was a minor genre.

In the case study for this thesis, *Chidu xinchao* compiled by Zhou Lianggong in 1662, I then try to establish what some of the real attractions of the genre for late Ming and Qing scholars might have been, its value as genteel entertainment aside. I will argue that the lack of classical antecedents and canonical status in fact gave writers considerable freedom, both stylistically and in terms of content. Although writers were still constrained by literary and social tradition as a whole, they did use the genre to experiment and made attempts to express themselves more directly. I will also show that the minor status of the genre made it an ideal vehicle for the expression of ideas which, because of their sensitive nature, could not be easily expressed in the canonical genres where they would have much more weight. And in the case of *Chidu xinchao* at least, it is possible to show how

a compiler of an anthology of *chidu* could use such an anthology to present certain arguments through the letters in the anthology; not only was it a minor genre which was being anthologised, but the compiler was a step further removed from the contents because it was not through his own letters that the content was being presented.

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Abbreviations and Official Titles

Below is a list of the abbreviations I have used for commonly cited references. Please refer to the Bibliography for full details.

<i>BZJ</i>	<i>Beizhuan ji</i>
<i>CDXC</i>	<i>Chidu xinchao</i> (1988 Shanghai Shuju edition)
<i>CDXCwb</i>	<i>Chidu xinchao</i> (1662 woodblock edition)
<i>DMB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i>
<i>ECCP</i>	<i>Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period</i>
<i>LGTJ</i>	<i>Laigutang ji</i>
<i>MSJS</i>	<i>Ming shi ji shi</i>
<i>QSG</i>	<i>Qing shi gao</i>
<i>QSJS</i>	<i>Qing shi ji shi</i>
<i>QSLZ</i>	<i>Qing shi liezhuan</i>

All official titles are translated using the translations in Charles O. Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*.

Introduction

This thesis examines the definition, position and functions of *chidu*, a form of short informal letter which occupied a minor yet interesting place amongst the literary genres which Chinese men (and occasionally women) of letters cultivated at least from Song times onwards. The term itself can be found as early as the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 25), but as I will show, it is not clear that *chidu* existed as a distinct genre before the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), or if it did exist, it is not possible to establish what a *chidu* looked like since there are no reliable examples of the term *chidu* occurring with actual *chidu*. *Chidu* do begin to appear under that heading during the Northern Song dynasty, and there is evidence of literary appreciation of the genre by the Southern Song period (1127-1279). However, although the *chidu* of writers like Su Shi (1037-1101) and Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) later appear to have been regarded as the pinnacle of achievement in the genre, I have not yet been able to find any theoretical writing on the genre for the entire Song period. Then, following the fall of the Song dynasty in the face of Mongol invaders, *chidu* almost disappear as an object of collection and literary appreciation until the sixteenth century, though they were certainly still written.

The focus of this study is the period from approximately the middle of the sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth century, which is the period during which the greatest number of collections of *chidu* were published and most of the theoretical texts written. Although in the context of all literary production during the period, the number of *chidu* collections published was small and the number of writings about *chidu* even smaller, the genre still occupied a significant place amongst the *xiaopinwen*, or familiar essays, which enjoyed great popularity during the late Ming and early Qing. In contrast with the canonical genres, for which centuries of definition, practice, anthologising and theorising meant that scholars writing in these genres had to write within the bounds of certain conventions, expression in the various forms of familiar essay, including *chidu*, was less constrained both because of the lack of precedent and because their relatively minor status meant that whatever was written in them carried less weight than the contents of works in the canonical genres.

My discussion of the genre centres around the contrast between the

actual practice of *chidu*-writing and the compilation of anthologies of *chidu* on one hand, and the theoretical pronouncements made about the the genre's history and functions on the other. I will argue that most of what was written about the origins and functions of *chidu* by late Ming and early Qing writers was more concerned with trying to assert the respectability of this minor genre than with providing an account which was as accurate as the sources available would allow. The fundamental concern of those who compiled *chidu* collections was that they should not be viewed as frivolous because they were working with a genre which was not part of the canon and whose precise origins were in fact fairly obscure. A consequence of this was that, although I might have up to this point written confidently about 'the *chidu* genre', in fact no real attempt was made in pre-modern times to define it; rather there just seems to have existed, from Song times on, a sort of unspoken understanding of what a *chidu* was, which like many such understandings was imprecise and flawed when evaluated in terms of actual practice.

Because of its minor status, very little work has been done on the history of the genre. Although some of the leaders of the New Literature movement during the Republican Period (1912-1949), Zhou Zuoren in particular, wrote informally about *chidu* in the context of their efforts to encourage individual expression in Chinese literature, there has otherwise been very little research done into the genre either in English or in Chinese. Some scholars, such as Ellen Widmer and Ronald Egan, have made some brief comments about the development of the genre in the introduction to their studies of certain aspects of *chidu*, but no one has yet made a detailed study of this question. Otherwise, *chidu* have mostly been used by scholars as a source of historical or biographical information, with no discussion of the genre *per se*. Even discussions of letters in books on traditional Chinese genres by Chinese scholars are entirely about the more formal *shu*, and never mention *chidu*.

Chapter One is thus in part an attempt to fill in this gap. However, my particular concern is that material which informed the discussions of the genre by scholars, usually the compilers of *chidu* anthologies, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I look at the diplomatic letters of the Spring and Autumn periods, which later writers claimed were the predecessors of later *chidu*, and at the treatment of letters in the essay on epistolary writings in the fifth century work of literary criticism *Wenxin*

diaolong, which was the most influential source of wisdom on letter-writing in later times (and indeed the only early critical source of any note). However, my discussion will also show that in fact neither of the above was greatly relevant to the development of *chidu* as practised in late Ming and early Qing times. I will also look at the early uses of the term *chidu*, though these are mostly inconclusive, and suggest that clues as to the true origins of *chidu* might be found in the etiquette letters found in the etiquette manuals called *shuyi* and in the related short letters such as those written by the famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi.

The emergence during the Song dynasty of the type of *chidu*-writing' which is recognisably the predecessor of the *chidu* of the late Ming and early Qing period, is the focus of Chapter Two. My aim is to examine the types of *chidu* which were written during this period, to describe how they seem to have begun to become an object of literary appreciation, and to try to explain why *chidu* might have become an object for preservation during this time.

We then turn to the late Ming and early Qing period. Chapter Three is a survey of the range of *chidu* collections which were produced from about the middle of the sixteenth century until the beginning of the eighteenth century, focussing on the types of collections which were published and their compilers' motivations in publishing them, as well as on the backgrounds of the compilers themselves. This leads naturally to Chapter Four, which discusses the theories about the history and functions of *chidu* advanced by the compilers of *chidu* anthologies and those who wrote prefaces for them. I argue that most of what was written was based upon uncritical use of sources whose relevance to the actual practice of *chidu* writing in the seventeenth century was at best slight and often non-existent. Their real motivation was to lend respectability to a genre which did not have easily identifiable classical antecedents, both to justify their own dabbling in it, and to assuage any discomfort readers might have felt in taking an interest in such a genre. This chapter is brief because there is so little writing on the genre. Although the number of *chidu* collections published was significant, many of them (especially collections of model letters) either had no prefaces at all, or prefaces which concentrated more on the compilers or some other subject than they did on making considered statements about *chidu*. I have been further hampered in my investigations by the fact that the writers who can be identified as major practitioners of *chidu* did not write anything *about* the genre, even though they might have

written in it constantly. Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610), the leader of the Gongan school, is a good example of this.

The final four chapters of this thesis are devoted to the case study for the practice of *chidu* writing and collecting during the late Ming and early Qing, *Chidu xinchao*, compiled by the scholar-official Zhou Lianggong (1612-72), and published in Nanjing in 1662. I have chosen this collection because it seems to have been one of the most popular *chidu* collections of the period, and is certainly representative of the better quality collections. Moreover, this collection is particularly interesting because of the life of the compiler, which seems to encapsulate the experiences and thoughts of the scholar-gentry during the turbulent last decades of the Ming and the early years of the Qing. Chapter Five looks at the life of Zhou Lianggong up until the compilation of *Chidu xinchao* and at the process of compilation, including Zhou's ideas about the genre inasmuch as can be gleaned from his essay on the editorial principles used in compiling the collection. Zhou has already been the subject of a detailed biography by Kim Hongnam in her study of Zhou as a patron of the arts¹, so I have concentrated just on those aspects of Zhou's life which have a bearing on his compilation of *Chidu xinchao*. It should also be pointed out that the *Chidu xinchao* I am examining is in fact the first in a series of three anthologies of *chidu* Zhou published, the others being published in 1667 and 1670. However, the first anthology itself contains nearly a thousand letters, which more than suffices for the purposes of this study, and in any case, my readings of the other two collections indicate that there is nothing in them which would cause me to change my arguments; in fact they appear to strengthen them.

The examination of *Chidu xinchao* will demonstrate that Zhou was in most ways typical of the compilers of *chidu* anthologies discussed in Chapters Three and Four. He made little attempt to define *chidu* in a meaningful way, and used the essay on epistolary writing from *Wenxin diaolong* as the preface to the collection, rather than write or commission a new one, claiming that there was nothing later writers could add to the ideas expressed in it. However, we are in fact struck by the lack of interest he, along with other compilers, had in tackling issues relating to the definition and development of the genre critically and in depth, which suggests their real interests lay elsewhere.

In the last three chapters I try to suggest what some of these interests

¹ Hongnam Kim. *Chou Liang-kung and his "Tu-hua-lu" (Lives of Painters): Patron-critic and Painters in Seventeenth Century China*. PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1985.

might have been, which takes us to the heart of the issue of the functions of *chidu* in late Ming and early Qing times. Obviously a very important reason for the popularity of *Chidu xinchao* was its function as a form of genteel entertainment. However, while I think we can presume that for many readers they were basically a form of light reading, in this thesis I will examine two aspects of *chidu* which, while not unique, nevertheless serve to underline how the position of the genre outside the canon had the potential to make the genre more attractive to educated audiences at the time than would be immediately apparent, and thereby explains why some scholars compiled anthologies of them despite the minor status of the genre: in other words, what the some of the deeper motives of compilers and practitioners of *chidu* might have been.

The first of these, which is the subject of Chapter Six, is how the relative lack of definition of the genre, its non-canonical status and its supposed intimacy might have made it an attractive vehicle for literary experimentation and self-expression. I will argue that the position of *chidu* outside the literary canon and, in theory at least, the public sphere potentially gave writers greater freedom to express themselves, and it was this which attracted them to it. However, although many writers do seem to have cultivated a *chidu* style, and we certainly do find examples of relatively intimate expression, it appears that the writers whose works were included in *Chidu xinchao* were still constrained by the broader literary tradition in which they had been trained, and by Confucian rules of social propriety which governed their social exchanges. Often writers seemed more concerned with achieving a certain literary effect than with writing in a straightforward manner about themselves.

Chapters Seven and Eight are essentially two parts of the same argument, which is that the marginal position of *chidu* and *chidu* collections in fact made them an ideal avenue for the expression of one's ideas about matters which for various reasons could not be expressed openly in, or were not suitable for expression in the canonical genres. I will argue that Zhou Lianggong used the letters in *Chidu xinchao* to explain his own position regarding two issues which were of crucial importance to him at the time *Chidu xinchao* was being compiled, but which could not easily be written about in genres which had been legitimised by tradition and thus carried significant weight as part of a writer's 'official' works. The first of these issues relates to Zhou's being charged with corruption in 1655, and

will be dealt with in Chapter Seven. After a trial lasting six years, Zhou was found guilty and sentenced to death, which was commuted to exile, before escaping punishment in the amnesty which followed the death of the Shunzhi emperor. Although Zhou was able to escape punishment, and what evidence there is suggests he was not actually guilty, he nevertheless felt a strong need to defend his reputation. However, since many of Zhou's difficulties seem to have been caused by the machinations of factions in government opposed to him, and because the political situation following the death of Shunzhi was for a time fluid, Zhou did not try to proclaim his innocence directly. Instead he used the letters included in *Chidu xinchao* to protest his innocence, by including both letters which reminded his readers of his association with the morally upright Fushe of the late Ming, and letters by officials who felt themselves to have been treated unjustly by their superiors, thereby drawing parallels with his own situation.

The second issue which Zhou deals with through *Chidu xinchao* is that of his attitude to the fall of the Ming dynasty, which he had served well during its final four years, before deciding to collaborate with the alien Manchus after they captured Nanjing in 1645. A great deal has been written on the Ming-Qing transition, and it is not my intention to repeat that work in this study. However, in a number of ways Zhou epitomised those who lived through the transition, especially those who had served the Ming, then collaborated with the Manchus despite the Confucian dictum that an official should die when the house which he served fell, or at the very least go into retirement and refuse to serve the new rulers (all the more so when the new rulers were not ethnically Chinese). A characteristic common to many of these officials was that despite working hard for the new rulers, they felt a strong sense of nostalgia for the Ming, and for Ming culture in particular, a sense which was sharpened if they suffered setbacks in their careers under the Qing. I will argue that in *Chidu xinchao* Zhou is working through his feelings about the fall of the Ming dynasty. *Chidu xinchao* is itself a work of preservation, since the majority of the *chidu* included in it are by Ming writers and writers who claimed to be Ming loyalists, even though they might never have served the Ming as officials. Furthermore, I believe there is enough evidence to argue that Zhou used the letters in *Chidu xinchao* to suggest that he was still loyal to Ming ideals and sympathised with the strong anti-Manchu feelings amongst the gentry in Jiangnan at the time. There is no evidence that Zhou was some kind of

'born-again' loyalist - he did serve the Manchus again soon after *Chidu xinchao* was published - and in any case there would have been little benefit in him becoming one: he would probably have been greeted with derision by those around him, if he had managed to avoid the ire of the Manchus first. It seems that most of his friends understood his decision to collaborate in the same way that they understood his commitment to Ming culture. But the minor status of *chidu*, and the fact that he was hinting at his views through a mostly randomly arranged anthology of other people's letters, made *Chidu xinchao* an ideal means through which he could signal his loyalty to the Ming ideal, and exhibit some sympathy with those who felt regret at the fall of the Ming, without exposing himself to either danger or ridicule. I do recognise that *chidu* collections were unlikely to be widely used to such ends, but the example of *Chidu xinchao* serves to illustrate the potential *chidu* had as a minor genre for this kind of self-expression, a feature it shared with another 'minor' genre, namely fiction.² And it was precisely the genre's minor status which gave it this capability.

Clearly the modern scholar researching *chidu* faces a number of difficulties, not the least of which is the lack of writing about the genre at any time in Chinese history. I have tried here to assemble what direct evidence I have been able to discover, but clearly there is plenty of scope for further research. Another fairly obvious difficulty is that after three or four centuries, it is impossible to establish the contexts in which many of the letters were written, which inevitably introduces a large element of guesswork, and in some cases letters have become nearly impossible to understand. No doubt there are many hidden references in the letters which are by now impossible to locate too. In this thesis I have just dealt with those I feel confident about, while recognising that there is probably a great deal I have missed. However, this is inevitable in any pioneering study, and I will be pleased if my work here leads to many more interesting discoveries.

² Compare for example with Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Re/Presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel*, pp. 8-9.

Chapter One

Early Chinese Letter-Writing and *Chidu*

In any group of a hundred people one meets, there will only be one or two writers of poetry, rhapsodies, classical prose, drama and unofficial histories. In the case of chidu, on the other hand, even one as exalted as the emperor might write letters enquiring after the health of one of his officials, and there is hardly a commoner who does not write letters to his associates. Indeed, one cannot but write them; they are the most basic of literary genres.

- Li Yu, 'Editing Principles', *Chidu chuzheng* (1660)

Although the term *chidu* dates from the Han dynasty, it was almost certainly not used to refer to a distinct genre till the Song dynasty, and even since then it has not been applied consistently. However, there is little doubt that by the late Ming there was a relatively broad understanding of what a *chidu* was. The *chidu* in most of the collections which were published during the late sixteenth and seventeenth century share enough broad characteristics to demonstrate that the compilers and the writers of the *chidu* which were included in the collections had a common understanding.

However, despite the popularity of *chidu* during the late Ming and early Qing, the fact remained that the genre did not have a readily identifiable ancient pedigree. The late Ming period is generally thought to have been one of the most creative and intellectually adventurous in Chinese history, but this did not obviate the need for literary genres to have such a pedigree if they were to be accepted by conservative scholars, who were still very influential despite the attacks made on them by reform-minded writers. Therefore most of the compilers and those who wrote prefaces for *chidu* collections utilised the essay on letter-writing in *Wenxin diaolong* and other references to letters in early canonical works to try to show that *chidu* actually had the requisite roots in antiquity. We will discuss the validity of these assertions in Chapter Four, but before we can do this, we need to examine those early texts, which I do in the context of an

examination of the early development of letter-writing in China. My examination is relatively brief, since pre-Han and Han letters have already been studied in considerable detail by Eva Chung¹, and my primary aim is to provide important background to the focus of this study, namely Ming and early Qing *chidu*. I will argue that in classifying letters, the compilers of *Wenxin diaolong* and *Wen xuan* seem to have been trying to impose some coherence on fluid and indistinct groupings of writings. In *Wenxin diaolong* in particular, Liu Xie tried hard to establish a pedigree for letters stretching back to a golden antiquity. However, I will demonstrate that much of Liu Xie's argument in the chapter on epistolary writings in *Wenxin diaolong* was based on an uncritical use of unverifiable secondary sources and on questionable assertions. In *Wen xuan*, the only feature common to all the texts included under the heading *shu* is that they are all written to equals or inferiors; otherwise they are written in a wide range of styles and perform a wide range of functions. Crucial changes in the function letters performed, in particular the transition from performing purely official functions to serving purely personal ones, were completely overlooked.

In the final part of this chapter, I look at the etiquette guides (*shuyi*) that were published during the Six Dynasties and Tang periods. These guides contained many models for the short letters which were written in fulfilment of the requirements of social ritual, and I suggest that these letters could have been the ancestors of later *chidu*, though direct evidence is difficult to find. However, I support this with the example of Wang Xizhi (303 or 321-379), whose short letters, although originally preserved for their calligraphy, later came to be appreciated as literature, and which I suggest are a freer version of the *shuyi* models.

¹ See Eva Yuen-wah Chung, *A Study of the 'Shu' (Letters) of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - A.D. 220)*. Chung covers the area very thoroughly, with detailed examinations of the origins of the word *shu*, the technology of letter-writing, categories of letters and so on. However, I would suggest that Ms. Chung is perhaps a little too accepting of traditional sources such as *Wenxin diaolong*, and her interpretation of what constitutes a personal letter is broader than mine. Although Chung makes the distinction between official and personal letters (pp. 112-13) and devotes considerable space to a discussion of examples of personal letter-writing from the Han (see all of ch. 5), on one hand the significance of the emergence of letters not written in direct performance of a political task is not clearly noted, while on the other hand she is quick to label as 'personal' letters which were most likely meant for wider circulation, even though they might have been written to a single addressee. This is to a large extent a question of definition, of course, but in view of the importance of self-expression in this study, it is necessary for me to adopt a narrower view of what constitutes a 'personal' letter.

Early uses of the term *chidu*

Somewhat oddly, the earliest use of the term *chidu* is never referred to in later writings on the genre, despite being the only instance I have been able to identify where the use of the term is accompanied by the text of the *chidu* to which it refers. The term and the accompanying letter appears in the *Shi ji* by the great Western Han historian Sima Qian (145-86 BC). In the biography of the doctor Chunyu Yi (i.e., Cang Gong, b. 205 BC), it is recorded that in 176 BC, a charge was laid against Chunyu, and as it involved a breach of criminal law, he was required to go to the capital, Chang'an, to face trial. One of his daughters, Tiyang, went with him, and presented this written submission to Emperor Wen (r. 180-157 BC):

My father is acclaimed throughout the state of Qi for his honesty and fairness as an official, yet now he has been found guilty of a crime and will be punished. It wrenches my heart to think that those who die cannot come back to life, and there is no way one can replace a limb once the penal amputation has been carried out. Even if one wishes to mend one's ways and start afresh, there is no way one can achieve this aim. I am willing to be made a government slave in order to redeem my father from mutilation, so that he might change his behaviour and make a new start.²

In his commentary at the end of the biography, Sima Qian wrote, 'Tiyang wrote a *chidu*, and as a result her father escaped punishment.'³ Clearly this document is really a kind of petition to the emperor, and we may also presume that it is not complete, as the ritual forms of address and signing off are missing. Most likely it is because this is so obviously a petition that later writers on *chidu* chose to ignore it.

However, there seems to be general agreement that the origin of the term *chidu* is demonstrated in a passage in the first chapter on the Xiongnu in the *Han shu* by Ban Gu (AD 32-92). There an exchange between Emperor Wen of the Han and the Chanyu (Khan) of the Xiongnu, Jizhou, is recorded as follows: 'The Han court sent a letter (*shu*) to the Chanyu on a *du* one *chi* and one *cun* in length which read, "The Emperor respectfully trusts that the

² *Shi ji*, p. 2795.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 2817. This appeal contributed to Emperor Wen's decision to abolish punishments involving severance of parts of the body.

Great Chanyu of the Xiongnu is well", to which the Chanyu replied with a similar letter one *chi* two *cun* in length.⁴ Although the letter itself is referred to as a *shu*, the words *chi* and *du* appear together in a way which suggests the origin of the term *chidu*. According to the Han dynasty dictionary *Shuowen jiezi*, a *du* was 'a strip [of wood] for writing on', and a *chi* was a unit of measurement of length, usually translated as 'foot'.⁵ The letters exchanged between the Han emperor and the Chanyu are obviously very short, and their main function appears to have been as an instrument of official communication rather than personal communication. Amongst the later writers on *chidu* who referred to this exchange as evidence for the origin of the term were Wang Shizhen (1526-1590) in his preface to the expanded version of his influential *Chidu qingcai*⁶ and Yuan Mei (1716-1798), one of the great Qing practitioners of *chidu*-writing, in a note in his *Suiyuan suibi*. Yuan says explicitly that, "These days the term *chidu* refers to informal writings (*bian wen*)."⁷ Although letters such as this one are probably related to the letters in the *shuyi* which we will discuss later in this chapter, they can safely be said to have had no bearing on later *chidu*-writing.

In addition to the *Han shu* providing evidence of the origin of the term *chidu*, the term itself is used in the biography of Chen Zun (d. ca. AD 25) in the 'Biographies of Knights-Errant'. Chen's prowess as a letter-writer is often referred to in later writings on *chidu*, but unfortunately there are no extant examples of his letters for us to analyse. Although his reputation in later times can in part be attributed to the relative detail of the account of his letter-writing in the *Han shu*, the fact that he is mentioned along with Mi Heng (173-198) in *Wenxin diaolong* as being particularly talented in the art of writing *chidu* cemented his place in the *chidu*-writing tradition.⁸ The passage in the *Han shu* reads:

⁴ *Han shu*, p. 3760. There were protocols regarding the length of the *du*, and in this case it seems that the Chanyu acted arrogantly in replying on a *du* that was longer than the one which the Han emperor had addressed to him. A *du* should be distinguished from a *jian*, the latter being narrower. A *chi* in Han times was approximately 23.75 cm, and there were ten *cun* (inches) to a *chi*. See Loewe, vol. 1, p. 32. This incident is also referred to in the Sui dynasty *leishu Beitang shuchao* compiled by Yu Shinan (558-638) under the heading *du*. See ch. 104, section 51, p. 8b-9a (pp. 436-7).

⁵ Xu Shen, p. 318.

⁶ *CDQC*, 1571 preface, 4a.

⁷ Yuan Mei, *Sui Yuan suibi*, 27.1a. Yuan erroneously attributes this to the *Shi ji*, but it is clear he is referring to this incident in the *Han shu*.

⁸ The old reading of the character of Mi's surname was Ni, but in this dissertation I am using the modern pronunciations of all characters except when quoting from other sources. Ji Kang's surname was pronounced Xi.

Chen had an interest in annotating the classics, and was an accomplished composer of *belles-lettres*. He was a gifted calligrapher, and whenever he wrote a *chidu*, the recipient would put it in his collection and regard it as a honour to have such a piece...⁹

[After going out to take up a post as governor of Henan commandery] Chen summoned ten proficient scribes before him, and proceeded to write private letters (*si shu*) to thank his friends in the capital. Chen leant on a stool and dictated to his scribes, while at the same time attending to administrative matters. He produced several hundred of these letters, each with its particular meaning reflecting the closeness of the recipient's relationship to Chen. Everyone in Henan was astonished.¹⁰

The implication of the first quotation is that Chen's *chidu* were valued for their calligraphy. The second quotation makes it clear that he excelled at writing letters, but there the word *shu* is used for the letters rather than *chidu*. There is no indication that his letters were valued as literary works.

The description in the *Hou Han shu* of the episode in Mi Heng's life which Liu Xie refers to in *Wenxin diaolong* does not use the term *chidu*, but records that when Mi Heng came into the employ of Huang Zu, the Governor of Jiangxia commandery, 'Mi Heng wrote letters (*shuji*) for him [Huang]. He was able to phrase all of them in perfect accordance with the importance of the matter at hand, and in the manner appropriate to the relative social distance of the recipient. Huang took his hand and said, "I am very pleased with these. They say precisely what is in my mind."¹¹ This passage would seem to confirm that Liu Xie saw *chidu* as a term for any kind of letter, because he calls it a *chidu* in his essay, even though the word *chidu* does not appear in his source. The word used in it for the documents Mi Heng wrote, *shuji*, is the same word Liu uses to head the essay in which he discusses letters.

That the term *chidu* had, by Eastern Han times, a very general meaning

⁹ *Han shu*, p. 3711. A description of letter-writing practices during this period can be found in E. Chung, ch. 6. At the time, replies were usually written on the same *du* as the original letter. It was only if the calligraphy or prose of the original was particularly good that it was kept and the reply was written on a fresh *du*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3711.

¹¹ *Hou Han shu*, p. 2657.

would seem to be confirmed in two final examples I will cite before proceeding to discuss *Wenxin diaolong*. The biography of the Eastern Han dynasty official and writer Cai Yong (132-192) records Emperor Ling's (r. 168-189) interest in learning:

Emperor Ling was interested in learning, and had himself written a work entitled *Emperor Fuxi* in fifty chapters. Thus he decided to call for all those scholars who were good at writing prose and rhapsodies. At first he mostly summoned those who were scholars of the classics, but later he also called writers of *chidu* and calligraphers who were good at writing in the bird footprint style, until there were several dozen scholars in all.¹²

It is not clear what was meant by *chidu* here.

Liu Muzhi, who was one of Liu Yu's (363-422) principal advisors after the latter's defeat of the usurper of the Jin throne, Huan Xuan (369-404), in 403, is also said to have been an outstanding writer of *chidu*. In the *Song shu* it is recorded that in the years 410-11, by which time Liu Yu was the most powerful man in the empire as a result of his military successes, Liu Muzhi and another official named Zhu Lingshi often sat by Liu Yu and wrote the replies to the letters Liu received. Liu Muzhi is said to have been given a hundred letters to reply to in one morning and was able to answer them all. while Zhu Lingshi was given eighty, but the *Song shu* doesn't state whether he too was able to deal with them as quickly as Liu could.¹³ Again none of Liu Muzhi or Zhu Lingshi's *chidu* survive, so we do not know exactly what the content or style of these letters was, but the context suggests they were on official and military matters.

There is no indication in either of the above chapters as to what these letters were for. Emperors and powerful generals needed the assistance of people specially skilled in the art of writing them, but that does not necessarily mean that they were official documents. The account of Liu Muzhi's *chidu*-writing skills emphasises the speed with which he wrote them, which suggests they were relatively short. If the letters Chen Zun wrote to his friends in the capital were the same thing as the *chidu* people kept for the beauty of their calligraphy, that would provide further evidence that *chidu* were short. It would also suggest that *chidu* could have private

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 1991-92. The bird footprint style was so named because it looked like the tracks left by birds.

¹³ *Song shu*, p. 1305.

functions. However, there is no evidence that the word *chidu* here meant anything other than 'letter'.

Letters in *Wenxin diaolong*

Most of the arguments in the prefaces to Ming and Qing *chidu* collections and other later writings on *chidu* were strongly influenced by the essay on letters in *Wenxin diaolong*. Zhou Lianggong actually used Liu Xie's essay as the preface to his *Chidu xinzhao*, saying that there was nothing later scholars could add to the ideas contained in *Wenxin diaolong*.¹⁴ As I have said already, however, the *Wenxin diaolong* text was used mainly as a tool for the legitimation of the collections of *chidu* published in the Ming-Qing period, as the relationship between the letters in these collections and the ideas and letters discussed in *Wenxin diaolong* is a distant one. Furthermore, many of Liu Xie's arguments are problematic, as I will demonstrate below. However, the basic premises underlying the essay were never seriously challenged in later times, and the tension between Liu's essay and the actual development of letter-writing is yet another illustration of the problems of genre definition in Chinese literature.

It is very important for the discussion which follows that we understand what is meant by the word 'letter', and by the term 'personal letter'. Part of the confusion surrounding the idea of letters in Chinese literature is surely due to the tendency for later Chinese scholars to assume that the word *shu* is always the same thing as is understood by the modern term *shuxin*, and for Western scholars to automatically translate *shu* as 'letter', at least when it does not obviously mean something quite different like 'book' or 'to write'. As I will argue below, most, if not all pre-Han texts labelled *shu* were not what Western readers would think of as 'letters' at all, certainly not of the personal kind. Even more care has to be taken when using the term 'personal letter' (or 'familiar letter'). Of course the types of letters which could fall under this rubric is fairly diverse, and it is difficult to say at what point a personal letter becomes a public one. This is particularly so when discussing early Chinese letter-writing. However, for the modern reader the term 'personal letter' suggests intimacy and informality, without too much attention being paid to literary style, in theory at least. Such letters were not supposed to be read by anyone but the person to whom they were addressed, or the addressee's family or close friends at most. Therefore I

¹⁴ CDXC, 'xuan li', p. 5.

believe we must be careful about using the term 'personal letter', particularly when this study is interested in the development of self-expression and informality in letter-writing. For this reason, I have restricted the use of the term 'personal letter' to letters which I believe were meant primarily for the addressee's eyes only. Of course even this is problematic: I suspect that many of the ostensibly 'personal' *chidu* of the Ming and Qing were in fact written with possible inclusion in *chidu* anthologies in mind. And it is certainly not unknown in many cultures for public figures to write letters, as well as diaries and so forth, with future publication in mind.¹⁵

The *Wenxin diaolong* essay begins with a quote which typifies Liu's tendency to cite examples of dubious relevance: 'The great Shun said, "The function of *shu* is to keep records," that is, to record the events of the day. For *shu* is the general name for the words of sages and men of virtue.'¹⁶ To the modern reader, the connection between the early use of the term *shu* meaning 'to make a record' and the meaning of 'letter' is not obvious, and it is not at all clear upon what this assertion was based. The relationship between the term *shu* and the 'words of sages and men of virtue' is equally unclear. Liu continues in this vein, quoting the Han scholar Yang Xiong (53 BC- AD 18): "'Words are the sound of the mind; and the written word (*shu*) is its picture." When the mind's sound and written expression take form, we shall be able to see in them the character of the man, whether he is a man of virtue or a petty man.' Although later writers on *chidu* rarely cited this passage directly, there was a strong tradition of ascribing to the genre the function of being a channel through which men of virtue could exchange lofty ideas, as we shall see in Chapter Four.

Liu draws the conclusion from these citations that *shu* means 'to express', 'that is to express one's mind in words and put them down on bamboo or wooden slips'. He suggests that the character *shu* (書) meaning 'to record' and 'letter' is synonymous with the character *shu* (舒) 'to express'.

Liu continues by asserting that, 'This is the result of taking a suggestion

¹⁵ There is of course a similar problem in defining personal, or familiar, letters in European literature. We may also note that in the English tradition, for example, Horace Walpole's letters actually constitute his major contribution to the canon of English literature.

¹⁶ Vincent Yu-chung Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, p. 144. The translations in the following discussion are taken from Shih's 1959 translation, pp. 144-46, with minor changes. The Chinese text to which I have referred is the edition annotated and translated into modern Chinese by Lu Kanru and Mou Shijin, *Wenxin diaolong yizhu*, pp. 59-65.

from the hexagram *kuai*, which emphasises clear-cut lucidity above all else.' As with the comment about 'words of sages and men of virtue' above, there is no evidence of how Liu established the connection between the *Yi jing* hexagram and letter-writing, but the idea of lucidity also features prominently in the writings of later scholars on *chidu*. There is no reason why clarity should not be an important stylistic consideration in letter-writing, but Liu's explanation appears to owe more to a penchant for finding justifications for their arguments in the Confucian canon than to empirical evidence.

In the following section, Liu relates how, as relations between states became more complex during the Spring and Autumn period, so the need for skilled letter-writers and emissaries became greater. Later writers point to this as the period when letter-writing first developed in China. Liu cites four examples of letters mentioned in the *Zuo zhuan*, and concludes by stating that, 'Reading these four letters carefully, it is as though the author and recipient were talking face to face.' The concept that letters should read as if the correspondents were talking face to face was also influential in later times, as we shall see, but Liu's examples are again problematic. He cites the episode in the eighteenth year of the annals of the reign of Duke Wen (609 BC) in which the Qin official Rao Chao is trying to entice Shi Hui, an official of the state of Jin, to come over to serve the Qin. It says that Rao Chao presented Shi Hui, who by this time had declined Rao's offer, with a *ce*, but it is not clear whether the *ce* was a horsewhip or a kind of short letter.¹⁷ Even if it was a letter, the text is no longer extant, and presumably was already lost by Liu Xie's time, so it is not clear on what Liu based his claim that the letter was as if they were talking face to face. But as Vincent Shih points out, a horsewhip would seem to be a more appropriate gift to a departing man, and Fan Wenlan agrees.¹⁸

The other three letters are diplomatic missives. The missive written in 549 BC by Gongsun Qiao (d. 522 BC) in which he remonstrates with Fan Xuanzi (Shi Gai), the Chief Minister of the state of Jin, concerning the heavy tribute Fan is demanding from other states, is worth some attention here, because it was cited by a number of Ming and Qing writers as an outstanding example of early letter-writing. The main reason for this is that the letter-writing practice of Gongsun Qiao and his assistants in the government of Zheng was commended by no less an authority than Confucius himself. The

¹⁷ Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, p. 596.

¹⁸ Shih, *op.cit.*, p. 145n. Fan, pp. 461-62.

process for composing missives employed in the state of Zheng is described in the records for the 31st year of the reign of Duke Xiang of Lu in the *Zuo zhuan*:

Zichan (Gongsun Qiao), in the administration of his government, selected the able and employed them. Ping Jianzi was able to make perspicacious judgements on matters of great importance. Zitaishu (You Ji, ?-507 B.C.) was handsome and accomplished. Gongsun Hui was well informed on the activities of the surrounding states, and knew all about their officials, their clans, and ranks, whether they belonged to the nobility or were commoners, and whether or not they were competent. He was also skilled at writing diplomatic missives (*ciling*). Pi Chen was a skilful counsellor - skilful when he concocted his plans in the open countryside, but not when he did so in the city. When Zheng was going to have any business with the other states, Zichan asked Ziyu (Gongsun Hui) to brief him on the recent moves in the neighbouring states, then often asked him to compose missives (*ciling*). He then took Pi Chen in his carriage into the country, and asked him for his advice as to whether or not the plan outlined in the missive was feasible, after which he informed Ping Jianzi and solicited his judgement on the matter. When all this was done, he put the matter in the hands of Zitaishu, who presented the reply to the envoys of the other states. In this way it was seldom that any affair went wrong. This is what Beigong Wenzi meant in saying that Zheng observed the proprieties.¹⁹

According to the *Lunyu*, Confucius made the following comments in a discussion with his students:

In composing the text of a treaty, P'i Ch'en would write the draft, Shih Shu (Zitaishu) would make the comments, Tzu-yü, the master of protocol, would touch it up, and Tzu-ch'an of Tung Li would make embellishments.

Someone asked about Tzu-ch'an. The Master said, 'He was a

¹⁹ Translation adapted from Legge, p. 565, using Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, p. 1191.

generous man.²⁰

Although I wish to keep quotations from the letters mentioned by Liu Xie to a minimum, I will quote the letter written by Gongsun Qiao to Fan Xuanzi as it reinforces my argument that many of the things Liu says about letter-writing are not sound; that Liu is trying to establish linkages where they do not really exist. This is important in view of the influence this essay had on later writers, who generally accepted Liu's claims without question.

The administration of the government of Jin is in your hands. The neighbouring states all about do not hear of any display of admirable virtue, but they hear of the great tribute which is required of them, and it is this that perplexes me. I have heard that a superior man presiding over a state does not worry about the lack of gifts, but is deeply concerned that he might not have a good reputation.

Now, when the offerings of the various princes are largely accumulated in your duke's palace, those princes will become alienated from him. Moreover, if you seek only these things, the state of Jin will become alienated from you. If the vassals allied to Jin become alienated, Jin will go to ruin, and if Jin becomes alienated from you, your family will go to ruin. In what a fatal course you are proceeding! Of what use would the gifts be then?

A good reputation is the carriage in which virtue is conveyed about, and virtue is the sure foundation of a state. When there is a foundation, there is no crumbling to ruin. Is this not then of paramount importance? With virtue there is joyful satisfaction, a satisfaction that is permanent. The Ode says: 'Objects of joyful complacency are these officers / The foundations of my state,' and, 'Heaven is with you / Do not feel alienated.' - with reference to a good name. Strive with all your heart to make your virtue illustrious, and a good name will then carry the news of your virtue abroad, with the result that the distant princes will visit your court and those nearby will have peace of mind. Would it not be better to have men say of you, 'You sustain me in my life', than to have them say, 'You squeeze my lifeblood from me'? The

²⁰ *Lun yu, Xian wen*, 14.8, 14.9. Translation from D. C. Lau, *The Analects*, p. 125. Obviously there is some discrepancy between this and the *Zuo zhuan* account.

elephant has tusks to the destruction of its body, because of their use as gifts.²¹

Although this is a letter in the sense that a diplomatic missive is a kind of letter, there is no real resemblance between this and the *shu* of later times. It is difficult to imagine how this could read as if 'the author and recipient were talking face to face', unless Liu was referring to the very formal discussions held at court. The balanced structure of this letter, the careful use of allegory and its refined conciseness bears all the hallmarks of a carefully written document, but none of a face to face conversation. Furthermore, if the letter was written through the collaboration of the four officials of Zheng as described above, then the relationship between this kind of missive and personal letters of any kind is even more remote.

Liu cites two similar examples, then concludes that, 'From the existence of these examples, we know that words entrusted to envoys were often put down in the form of epistles.' In fact, the evidence presented above suggests that such letters are better thought of as missives between ministers of different states, which had little or no bearing on the later development of letters written between individuals.

Liu continues: 'The epistolary writings during the Seven States period [i.e. Warring States period, 475-221 BC] were clever and beautiful, and there were many of them. And the body of writing of this type dating from the time of Han presents a profuse variety of expression and styles.' This suggests that the letters of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods and those of the Han were more or less the same. However, Liu's own examples suggest that an important shift took place during the Han, though there is no indication that Liu himself recognised it. The four examples he cites are: Sima Qian's famous letter to Ren An following the historian's castration, Dongfang Shuo's letter to Gongsun Hong criticising the latter for his aloofness, Yang Yun's reply to Sun Huizong's letter censuring Yang's behaviour after he retired from office, and Yang Xiong's letter to Liu Xin on his texts of the classics. The important shift that has occurred is that these letters do not serve any obvious official function, and the authors are not writing them in any official capacity. This is not to deny the possibility that the authors had certain political agendas in mind, but the letters themselves are not part of the formal machinery of government.

²¹ Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, pp. 1089-90. Translation again adapted from Legge. Fan took Gongsun's advice.

These letters are not yet personal letters, however. I say this because all four letters seem to be appealing to a wider readership than the stated recipient alone. Sima Qian's letter to Ren An is more a confession and defence of his decision to be castrated so that he could complete his *Shi ji* rather than be executed, though this is not to deny the very powerful personal emotion that exudes from it. Dongfang Shuo's letter is probably the least public of the four, but it criticises Gongsun's public behaviour and suggests he be more humble. Yang Yun's letter is a defence of his decision to go into business after he left his official post, since Sun Huizong had reminded Yang that this was not something a retired official should do. Yang Xiong's letter explains why he won't accede to Liu Xin's request that Yang give him a copy of the philosophical work *Fayan* on the grounds that the work has not been completed to his satisfaction. With the possible exception of Dongfang Shuo's letter, all these letters represent long defences of a certain position, and none of them display characteristics of a distinctive letter-writing style. That is, if the opening and closing phrases were deleted, there is little to indicate that these were letters and not essays. Furthermore, that these letters all aim to persuade or explain indicates that the link between them and diplomatic missives was still strong. Liu says that these letters 'are all works characterized by grand ideas and a lofty spirit, each having its own particular pattern; each is an embroidery on a foot of silk, expressing all the moods and feelings of the author's heart'. This might be true, but there is little to suggest a style particular to letter-writing. The term a 'foot of silk' describing the material upon which letters were often written later became a synecdoche for 'letter', and the idea that letters should be an expression of what is in the writer's heart was important in later writing on letters. However, the formulation here is so broad that it could easily apply to other genres.

Liu then proceeds to discuss the letter-writing of the Later Han and Wei periods:

In the Later Han period, Ts'ui Yüan was especially good at the art of letter writing. During the Wei, Juan Yü was described as 'light and swift'. And the writings of K'ung Yung were all preserved, including fragments [in recognition of their excellence]. Ying Chü did much valuable scholarly work, and paid much attention to honing his epistolary skills, but he is not amongst the front rank of letter-writers. Hsi K'ang's letter severing friendly

relations [with Shan T'ao] is one marked by lofty ideas and a grand style. Chao Chih's letter [to Hsi Fan] depicting his sadness at separation is expressive of the eagerness and impatience of youth. As to the hundreds of letters dictated by Ch'en Tsun, each conveys his feelings in exactly the right measure, and as to those written by Ni Heng [for Huang Tsu], each is appropriate in expressing sentiments toward relations of all degrees of closeness. These two were especially talented in the art of letter writing [*chidu*]

In fact little is known about Cui Yuan's (77-142) skills as a letter-writer. His biography in the *Han shu* simply states that he was good at writing *shu*, *ji*, *jian* and *ming*.²² The one extant example of his epistolary skills is too brief to enable us to pass an independent judgement²³, and we must presume that Liu Xie knew little more about Cui's talents in this respect than we do.

Ruan Yu's letters were described as 'light and swift' by Cao Pi (Emperor Wen of the Wei, 187-226) in his famous letter to Wu Zhi (177-230).²⁴ Pei Songzhi cites an incident related in *Dian lüe* in which Ruan wrote a letter on horseback for Cao Cao, and when he completed it and gave it to Cao, Cao could find nothing to amend.²⁵ Only one of Ruan's *shu* survives in full, which is the one written on behalf of Cao Cao (155-220) to Sun Quan trying to persuade the latter to return to the Han fold. This letter can be found in *Wen xuan*.²⁶ However, this letter is a political missive, and we can presume it was for writing this type of letter that Cao employed Ruan's talents.

Liu's comment on Kong Rong (153-208) is based on information provided in Kong's biography in the *Hou Han shu*, where it says that Cao Pi so admired Kong's prose that after Kong was executed by Cao Cao for sedition, Cao Pi offered rewards for anyone who brought examples of Kong's prose to him. Although letters (*shuji*) are mentioned in the list of Kong's works collected by Cao Pi, they actually come at the end of the list, and no special comment is made about them. Therefore there would seem to be little justification for Liu using this source to say something about Kong's letters specifically. It is true that letters make up almost half of Kong's extant prose as included in *Quan Hou Han wen*.²⁷ However, many of these are

²² *Han shu*, p. 1724.

²³ *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, p. 717 top, 'To Ge Xi'.

²⁴ *Wen xuan*, p. 1897.

²⁵ Nienhauser, *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, p. 466. See *San Guo zhi*, p. 601.

²⁶ *Wen xuan*, pp. 1887-93.

²⁷ See *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, *op.cit.*, pp. 919-24.

fragments taken from later *leishu* like the seventh-century *Yiwen leiju* and the tenth-century *Taiping yulan*, and most of these are official letters.

All of Ying Qu's extant prose works are letters, either in the *jian* form (an official letter addressed to a superior who is not an emperor) or the *shu* form. Again many of them are fragments of longer letters. Most of Ying's letters are on scholarly subjects, or are non-official letters to friends and acquaintances. In this sense at least, Ying's letters are more like what we normally think of as personal letters, though stylistically there is nothing to distinguish them from other forms of prose writing. It is not known upon what Liu Xie based his comment that Ying's letters are not as good as some of the others he cites. A note in the *San guo zhi* biography of Wang Can mentions that Ying was good at writing letters (*shuji*)²⁸, but there is no qualifying comment.

Ji Kang's (223-262) letter to Shan Tao is one of the most famous in Chinese history, and was frequently alluded to and imitated by later writers when they were declining offers of official postings and claiming aloofness from worldly affairs. Ji begins by mentioning his previous acquaintance with Shan's family, but then immediately goes on to say that Shan Tao obviously doesn't understand him. At the end of the letter he talks of his family situation, but as another reason for not taking the post. Apart from these two rather formal 'personal touches', the letter is really a justification of his reasons for not serving in the government, and Ji surely meant it to be a public document. The prose style bears all the hallmarks of a treatise, with a clearly structured complex argument and frequent reference to classical examples.

There is disagreement over the authorship of the letter by Zhao Zhi to Ji Kang's son, Ji Fan, but that is not an important issue here.²⁹ Zhao wrote the letter after being sent to be a Retainer in Liaodong, far to the northeast of the capital Luoyang. It describes the harshness of the landscape he passes through on his journey, and how this brings home to Zhao the completeness of his separation from Ji. As an expression of personal experience and friendship, the letter is at least a little closer to the modern idea of a personal letter. However, the letter is in the ornate parallel prose style popular during the Six Dynasties period. Letters written in this style usually lack spontaneity because of the formal demands the style makes on

²⁸ *San guo zhi*, p. 604, citing *Wenzhang xulu*.

²⁹ Lu Kanru and Mou Shijin cite a study of this question by Dai Mingyang in which Dai asserts that the letter was written by Lu An, in accordance with an early explanation. See *Wenxin diaolong yizhu*, p. 63.

the author, and thus it is difficult to gauge the sincerity of feelings expressed in letters written in this style; even if the feelings are sincere, the elaborateness of the prose precludes many forms of individual expression. But some expression of individual emotion seems to be emerging, even though it is confined by the demands of prescribed literary style.

Liu Xie uses a number of different words for 'letter' with each group of examples, such as *bizha* (brush and small-wooden-strip), *chisu* (one-foot plain silk) and *chidu*. All of these words are synecdochic in that they use the names of the materials used to write letters with or on to describe the whole letter. *Chidu* is an obvious example of this. All of them were used in later times as alternative words for 'letter', but there is nothing to suggest that they referred to different kinds of letters.³⁰ This is important when we come to consider post-Tang uses of the term.

Liu summarises the *shu* genre as follows:

A general survey of the nature of *shu* reveals that its fundamental purpose is to state one's feelings without reserve, and its function is to unburden the mind of melancholy thought and to give expression to outstanding words and deeds. Therefore its style should be orderly and smooth, so the writer can give full rein to his spirit, and soft and pleasant to the reader. If the style in which they are written is lucid, letters are indeed the presentation of the sound of the mind.

What is most interesting about this paragraph is that, were it to be read out of context, it would be difficult to establish which genre it was describing. Perhaps most importantly, there is little sense of the existence of an intended reader in this passage, certainly not of the intimate kind which we usually associate with correspondence. When Liu writes 'soft and pleasant to the reader', it is not clear what he means. The phrase 'to the reader' does not actually exist in such a specific form in the Chinese text, though a 'reader' is implied. However, 'the reader' appears to be the general reader of the letter as a work of literature rather than the addressee of the letter. It is unlikely that Ren An found Sima Qian's distraught letter 'soft and pleasant', and 'soft and pleasant' hardly describes the often haughty tones of Ji Kang's letter to Shan Tao. Following on as it does from the comment that 'its style

³⁰ A detailed explanation of the terms used for letters can be found in Eva Chung, *op.cit.*, ch. 7.

should be orderly and smooth', the 'soft and pleasant' appears to refer to the quality of the words used and their arrangement rather than the effect the letter should have upon the addressee.

The idea that one should 'state one's feelings without reserve' in letters frequently appears in writing about letters, and was an important part of letter-writing theory. However, this quality hardly applies to letters alone. Again, Liu makes no mention of a recipient. It is also not clear why Liu singled out '*melancholy* thought' as the appropriate kind of thought to be expressed in letters. The phrase 'to give expression to outstanding words and deeds' could refer to a number of other genres. In other words, Liu Xie's summary of what he thought the qualities of the genre should be leaves the impression that, in early times at least, the idea of letters as a form of intimate communication between two individuals was weak.

The lack of a clear demarcation between official and personal letters in *Wenxin diaolong* underscores this point. Indeed, the fact that *shu* and *ji* are discussed in the same chapter, and that *shuji* was actually a term for letters, indicates that the official/private distinction was not an important one. The preface and particularly the actual letters included in *Wen xuan* generally reinforce the conclusions we have drawn so far about *Wenxin diaolong*, but there are some significant differences.

Letters in *Wen xuan*

Xiao Tong's preface to *Wen xuan* is one of the most significant essays on literary and genre theory in Chinese history. It was not without precedents, however. Cao Pi had written an essay on literature, and Lu Ji (261-303) had followed almost a century later with his *Rhapsody on Literature*. Although both texts are primarily concerned with what makes good writing, both list only prose genres and give a very brief description of what the major attributes of writing in that genre should be. Letters, however, receive little attention.

Cao places the term *shu* with the term *lun*, essay, and says that both should be 'logical'. This suggests that he saw *shu* as a genre for the presentation of structured arguments. Some of Cao's letters read like essays, but others do not, so it is not clear what kind of letter Cao had in mind when he used the term *shu* in this essay on literature.

Lu does not use the term *shu* at all, though he does use *lun*. Hightower suggests that Lu substituted *shuo* (discourse) for *shu*, though it is not

absolutely clear that this is so. If Hightower is correct, however, it is further evidence that *shu*, in theory at least, were thought of as another discursive genre.³¹

As in Cao and Lu's works, little is said in the *Wen xuan* preface about individual genres. In most cases they are simply part of a list Xiao provides. The place of *shu* in this list is significant, as it comes right in the middle of a group of official documents: memorial (*biao*), proposal (*zou*), report (*jian*), memorandum (*ji*), letter (*shu*), address (*shi*), commission (*fu*), and charge (*xi*).³² This suggests that Xiao probably thought of them as diplomatic missives of the sort discussed earlier in this chapter. Certainly this would be a strange place to list the genre if it was considered a type of personal correspondence, however formal.

It is difficult to identify much stylistic and functional consistency among the twenty-four texts included in *Wen xuan* under the heading *shu*. Some of the letters have a clear official and diplomatic function. Ruan Yu's letter on behalf of Cao Cao to Sun Quan is clearly an example of this. Qiu Chi's (463-508) letter to Chen Bozhi exhorting Chen to surrender to the Liang is another. Other letters are basically political, too. Zhu Fu's letter to Peng Chong defending his decision to give government grain to his friends and relatives was written as a result of Peng's decision as Governor of Yuyang to refuse to carry out Ji's orders (Ji was Regional Governor of Youzhou). Sima Qian and Li Ling's letters are written in a personal capacity, but comment strongly on the politics of the day.³³ Many of the other letters are on literary matters, or are expressions of friendship and the like. One or two are distinctly unfriendly, such as Kong Zhigui's (448-501) unusual letter, if that is what it is, to Zhou Yong accusing Zhou of hypocrisy in posturing as an eremite but accepting an official post. What is clear from this is that the *shu* included in *Wen xuan* were not necessarily of a diplomatic or even political nature. The relationship between them and the placement of the *shu* genre in the list of genres in Xiao Tong's preface is difficult to reconcile.

³¹ James Hightower, 'The *Wen hsuan* and Genre Theory', p. 514. There is evidence that later scholars thought *shu* and *shuo* were the same thing. The Qing scholar Yao Nai (1731-1815), in his note in the table of contents of his *Guwenci leizuan*, argues that *shu* was the written form of *shuo*, the latter being discourses presented in person at court, while *shu* were sent to officials in other states. Yao Nai, 'Preface and Table of Contents of *Guwenci leizuan*', p.8.

³² The translations are from Hightower, *op.cit.*, p. 525-6.

³³ There is considerable doubt about the authenticity of Li Ling's letter to Su Wu.

Wenxin diaolong, Wen xuan and the Emergence of Personal Letters in Early China

The discussion so far indicates that it is difficult for us to perceive any pattern in the letters which were included under the rubric of *shu*. The relationship between the rubric *shu* and the kinds of texts which appeared under it was fluid, and as time passed, the relationship between *shu* as they were written and their supposed ancestors became increasingly distant.

There seems to me to be little reason to dispute that the *shu* of post-Qin times were descendants of the diplomatic missives of the pre-Qin period. It is not difficult to imagine that officials who normally wrote diplomatic or other government letters might gradually begin to write letters of a more personal nature, even though these letters might be heavily influenced by the very formal style of their progenitors. These changes surely reflect the sweeping political and social changes that had taken place in China since the Warring States period. Although a full investigation of the relationship between letters and socio-political change in early China is beyond the scope of the present study, the trend towards letters of a non-official nature is highly significant. David Pollard, in his book on Zhou Zuoren, notes how in the Six Dynasties period, when ruling houses did not last long, the 'object of address' in poetry, which in earlier times had been clearly identified with the state, became less certain, 'and the individual cathartic function of literature should conversely have assumed greater importance.'³⁴ Pollard cites the author of the *Song shu*, Shen Yue (441-513) who asserted that 'it was only in the Chien-an period (A.D. 196-220) that self-conscious literature, that is, the deliberate framing of personal feelings in an aesthetically satisfying form, came into being'.³⁵ Although Pollard is mostly interested in poetry here, the trend he identifies is also apparent in letters.

I would like to suggest that the decline of the state as the 'object of address' in literature probably originated in the late Han dynasty, and became more rapid in the turmoil which followed that dynasty's collapse. The late Han was also a period of great instability, and some social developments during that period might also help to explain the emergence of non-political letters. In her essay on the social history of the later Han in the *Cambridge History of China*, Patricia Ebrey describes how patron-client relationships became increasingly significant in the social life of the Later Han upper class, and suggests that this might be 'one aspect of a general

³⁴ David E. Pollard, *A Chinese Look at Literature*, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7. The words are Pollard's.

trend whereby private ties and institutions came to assume greater importance, while official and public connections were being taken less seriously'.³⁶ The group that called themselves *shi* (gentlemen) grew rapidly as a result: 'Despite their geographic separation and the local focus of most of their activities, they came to see themselves not merely in terms of their own community, but also as participants, even if very indirectly, in national literary, scholarly, and political affairs.'³⁷ Such a trend would almost certainly encourage non-official writing and the expression of personal emotions in literature.

A second factor which probably exacerbated this trend was the crackdown on the partisan movement between 166 and 184. Those gentlemen who joined the partisans - organised political factions within the government - already felt themselves to be 'reponsible for the moral guidance of the country'. When the ruling house began persecuting the partisans, many were pushed out of office, this 'undoubtedly increased the self-consciousness of these men.' The loss of political status 'created a large body of articulate, energetic, politically interested men who could no longer hold office'. No longer working as part of the government organisation, 'Their sole surviving role was social and cultural, as the leaders of their communities and upholders of the values that had been fostered in them.' Importantly from the point of view of this study, this loss of a role in the government did not force these gentlemen into isolation in the localities where they lived. 'The partisans maintained their contacts all over the country without the mediation of official relations.'³⁸ This situation would seem to be fertile ground for the emergence of letter-writing whose focus was not on politics. Clearly more work is needed to put this hypothesis on firmer footing, but the factors outlined above seem to me to provide a framework for explaining this shift in letter-writing practice.

Where the work of Xiao Tong and Liu Xie is problematic is that they do not recognise this change. A missive written to a minister of a foreign state and a letter to a friend expressing sorrow at their separation are very different things, even if one might be descended from the other and written in a style that is more formal than later readers would expect in a letter. Early letters discussing literature share with diplomatic missives an expository style, but their purposes are very different. Writers in Later Han

³⁶ Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe ed., *The Cambridge History of China: Volume I: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.-A.D. 220*, p. 641.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 646.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 646.

and Six Dynasties period were probably only dimly aware of the shift in the function of *shu*, and their education would have seen to it that the style in which they wrote to their friends was still heavily influenced by the conventions of earlier *shu*. However, the inability of theorists to recognise or acknowledge such major changes is a crucial reason why Chinese scholars traditionally had so much trouble defining genres. As we shall see in the chapters to come, this prevented the adequate definition of letters and types of letters in later times. Of course, Chinese scholars' vision in this respect was also blinkered by the imperative of finding classical roots for the genres with which they were working in order to give them respectability. We will see examples of this later, too.

This lack of rigour, this tendency to take sources at face value, is clearly demonstrated by Liu Xie's essay on *shuji* in *Wenxin diaolong*. In the discussion above I have already pointed out many of the errors and weaknesses in his assertions. The prominence Liu gave to the relationship between the use of the word *shu* by the sage emperor Shun and the idea of Yang Xiong on one hand, and letters on the other is based on very shaky grounds. That later writers on letters almost never mentioned this suggests that even they thought Liu had gone too far. Most of the comments Liu makes on the letter-writers he mentions are based on other people's writings in the standard histories and elsewhere, rather than on his own observations. In some cases we can be fairly sure that Liu had never seen examples of those writers' *shu*. To put it succinctly, almost all of Liu's essay on *shu* is based on questionable assertions or secondary sources. Although the importance of *Wenxin diaolong* has been exaggerated in recent times, it is quite clear that Ming and Qing writers borrowed from it very heavily as a source for their ideas on letter-writing.³⁹

Xiao Tong's placing of *shu* amongst a list of official documents is probably another example of genre classification being made with more regard to history and tradition than to the realities of contemporary practice. The only consistent factor in the *shu* anthologised in *Wen xuan* is that they are all addressed to equals or inferiors, and it is this which seems to distinguish them from the genres adjacent to them in the list in Xiao's preface.⁴⁰ As demonstrated above, although some of the letters in *Wen xuan* exhibit qualities that we would expect a letter to have, many of them read

³⁹ For the place of *Wenxin diaolong* in the history of Chinese literary criticism, see Nienhauser, *op.cit.*, p. 889.

⁴⁰ Hightower, *op.cit.*, p. 526n.

like essays with greetings and a signing off attached. This of course is true of a great many of the *shu* of later times, and Hightower is justified in saying, 'There are a few traces in these letters of what was to become a distinctive epistolary style...' for this reason.⁴¹ However, the purpose and style of these texts is so varied that Xiao's grouping of them is ultimately unsatisfactory, and appears to be more an attempt to impose coherence rather than describe it.

Wenxin diaolong and *Wen Xuan* were both influential in later discussions of letter-writing, but the discussion above shows that these works underline the problems of genre definition far more than they clarify them. I believe that this accounts for much of the lack of clarity in the definition of various forms of letter-writing in later periods. The early *shu* serve a range of quite different purposes, and there seems to have been practically no consciousness of a distinction between official, public and private functions, a fact itself socially significant.

We have established that *chidu* was not recognised as a distinct genre. However, there is one kind of letter-writing, hinted at in the discussion of the exchange between Emperor Wen of the Han and the Chanyu of the Xiongnu, which we have not mentioned so far, and that is the short, ritualised letters written in fulfilment of social etiquette. Concrete evidence for the connection between this and Song and post-Song *chidu* is generally lacking, but I suggest that they could have been a predecessor of an independent *chidu* genre. However, it would require a very thorough search through Tang sources to establish this link, and must be left for another study.

Short letters in fulfilment of social etiquette

From at least as early as the Han dynasty, it was the practice among the upper classes and other literates to exchange short letters in fulfilment of

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 526n.

social and official etiquette.⁴² They wrote these letters to express congratulations and condolences, to pay compliments, to express concern and so on. Although mastery of them was considered important enough socially to warrant manuals (*shuyi*, Etiquette for letter-writing and other occasions) being written to instruct inexperienced writers in their composition, in most cases little literary value appears to have been attached to them. They seem to have been referred to only as *shu*, which reinforces the argument above that little attempt was made to distinguish different types of *shu* in early times.

Patricia Ebrey's article on Tang *shuyi* discovered at Dunhuang covers the issues that are of concern here very well.⁴³ Although Ebrey deals mainly with the earliest surviving examples of *shuyi*, which date from the Tang, she notes that the earliest recorded *shuyi* was compiled by Wang Hong (379-432), a contemporary of Liu Muzhi. Examples of the kind of letters which appeared as models in the *shuyi* have also been found at archaeological sites dating from the pre-Tang period, which is further evidence for their existence before the Tang, and therefore of the appropriateness of discussing them here.⁴⁴ *Shuyi* contribute to this study in two ways: the models in them represent a quite different type of letter-writing from that discussed so far in this chapter, and there are interesting points of comparison between the *shuyi* and the model letter manuals of the Ming and Qing.

Etiquette letters were not an avenue for the display of the writer's literary skills. Ebrey argues convincingly that this was because of the requirements of social ritual, of which these letters were a form. They were an act of affirmation of a social relationship: 'For condolence letters were gestures, like bows, intended not so much to be read as to be recognised.' The purpose of letters written on such occasions which did not use the accepted formulas might have been misunderstood, and quite inappropriate.⁴⁵ These

⁴² 'Upper classes' is used here as a term of convenience. There has been considerable debate over the translation of terms like *shi*, *shidafu* and so on, but the proper description of Han and Six Dynasties society is not the subject of this essay. Al Dien's introduction to the book he edited, *State and Society in Medieval China*, gives an indication of the complexity of the problem. I have added 'literate' here to include people such as local functionaries and the like, who were often in a position to have to write such letters, and possibly benefitted the most from the advice in the *shuyi* because of their relatively low level of education.

⁴³ Ebrey, 'T'ang Guides to Verbal Etiquette', pp. 581-613.

⁴⁴ The books containing reproductions or transcriptions of Han and Six Dynasties *jian* that I have surveyed contained very few examples of the *shuyi*-type letters. Lin Meicun's *Loulan-Niya chutu wenshu* contains transcriptions of some, mostly in fragments, dating from at latest the early fourth century. See the Introduction, p. 5, and pp. 28-29, 34-37 and 80-81.

⁴⁵ Ebrey, *op.cit.*, p. 612.

letters were a substitute for a visit in person to offer congratulations, condolences and so on, visits which in themselves were highly ritualised and usually short. People making such visits said what was expected of them, then left. They did not normally linger to discuss the events of the time, or literature, philosophy and the other weighty matters which scholars discussed on other occasions. The letters of the *shuyi* type, which were written when such visits were not possible or not strictly required, were similarly to the point and followed the formats prescribed by custom. Thus they are quite different from the letters discussed earlier in this chapter.

Naturally the precise structuring and phrasing of these letters varies depending on the social relationship between sender and recipient and the purpose of the letter. Since Ebrey has already discussed this, there is no need to go into detail here, except to remind ourselves of the great importance attached to the correct acknowledgement of social rank and degree of kinship in Chinese society. However, it will be useful as a point of comparison for discussions below to look briefly at the structure of such letters in very broad terms. Though somewhat oversimplified, a common pattern in the model letters in the *shuyi* might appear something like this: humble address - comment on weather/expression of respect - phrases expressing purpose of letter, couched in appropriate terms - apology by the writer for some failing - comment that the letter does not express all - signing off in humble terms. Not only was the structure of these letters more or less fixed, but the phrases which could be used in each section of the letter were also limited, and it was in the correct use of these phrases which the *shuyi* aimed to guide the student of letter-writing. The writer was not free to write whatever he liked about the weather, for instance as there were set phrases for each season. Interestingly, Ebrey notes that the Japanese monk Ennin (794-864) 'referred to the similarity between the phrases used by the monks for their winter congratulations and the models in the *shu-i*'⁴⁶, which is perhaps evidence that the phrases used in the *shuyi* were also used in actual visits. It also reinforces the idea discussed above that when Chinese wrote about letters as being like 'a face-to-face meeting', they were thinking more in ritual terms than in the intimate terms that the phrase suggests to a modern Western reader.⁴⁷

More evidence of this comes from Yan Zhitui (531-c. 590). Ebrey draws

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

⁴⁷ It is interesting that the meaning of *miantan* in modern Chinese is 'an interview', and not something less formal. I presume this is a coincidence, and of course *miantan* in classical Chinese cannot be regarded as a compound noun.

our attention to a saying quoted in Yan's *Yanshi jiaxun* which went, 'A letter or note is the face-and-eyes a thousand *li* away.' The annotations to the Wang Liqi edition cite further examples along the same lines.⁴⁸ However, another passage in *Yanshi jiaxun* cited by Ebrey underlines the social function of many, or most, letters:

In the South, if friends living in the same city do not go to condole with someone in deep mourning within three days, the friendship is severed. After the mourning is over, the former friend is avoided out of resentment for his lack of sympathy. Those who are prevented by long distance or other reason can send a letter. Without a letter, they too would be avoided.⁴⁹

Although these two quotes appear in different parts of *Yanshi jiaxun*, they suggest that the 'face-and-eyes' referred to one's presence in a ritual sense. Generally speaking, the idea of letters being like talking face-to-face in the intimate sense seems to have been a later development. There is, however, some evidence which indicates from whence the development of more intimate forms of short letter-writing might have originated.

Some variants - the letters of Wang Xizhi

From the discussion so far in this chapter, it appears that there was no room for informality in letter-writing in early medieval China. Letters were either thinly-disguised essays, or short, highly ritualised messages written in fulfilment of social requirements. Even when the Chinese letter-writer wrote to a friend expressing the depth of their friendship, literary considerations were uppermost. The letter could be moving, but never relaxed.

There is evidence, however, that although most letter-writing was formal, by Eastern Jin times at the latest, less formal correspondence had also begun to emerge. The range of subjects upon which one could write informally was still narrow, but informality was possible. The best examples of this which occur in any number are the letters of the calligrapher Wang Xizhi.

The first thing to emphasise about Wang's letters is that most of them survived because of Wang's calligraphy, and not because they were admired

⁴⁸ Ebrey, *op.cit.*, p. 606. Wang's annotations can be found in *Yanshi jiaxun jijie*, p. 568.

⁴⁹ *Yanshi jiaxun jijie*, p. 587.

for their literary style, in earlier times at least. They are usually referred to as *tie*, a word used for specimens of calligraphy. Many examples of them are included in Yan Kejun's (1762-1843) *Quan Jin Wen* under the heading *za tie*, or 'assorted *tie*'.⁵⁰ There is not a lot of direct evidence of appreciation of Wang's short letters in later imperial times, though Wang Shizhen includes a great many of them in *Chidu qingcai*.

Significantly, although Wang Xizhi did use some of the phrases found in the *shuyi*, there were a number of other phrases which he liked to use in his letters. For example, *shuyi* letters usually end with phrases like '*bu xuan*', which means the letter 'does not express all'. Wang frequently ends with phrases which mean the same thing, but the wording is different. Some favorites included '*bu fu yi yi*' (I won't repeat the details one by one), '*bu ju yi yi*' (All the details are not recorded here), and '*li bu yi yi*' (Much is left out). The Southern Song scholar Che Ruoshui, in his book *Jiaoqi ji*, suggests that some of these phrases were Wang's own.⁵¹ Wang's letters also shared structural features with the *shuyi* models, but again only in broad terms. A typical example of Wang's letters in what we might call the more restricted style is:

On the 27th day of the eleventh month, Wang Xizhi reports: I have received your letters of the 14th and 18th. I am comforted to know that you have enquired after me. The cold is piercing. Has all been well with you recently? I have been worried for a long time that you might be anxious and stressed. I've got no appetite, and feel very poorly. Therefore I thank you, Commander, for your letters, and do not express all. Xizhi reports.⁵²

This letter contains thanks for the recipient's letters, a comment on the weather, an enquiry as to the recipient's health and an expression of his own concern for the recipient, a comment on his own situation (Wang seems to have been continually ill!), and a closing comment that the letter does not say all he wants to say. So although it is not worded with quite the standard phrases of the *shuyi* models, the similarities are obvious.

While remembering that there are many letters like this one amongst

⁵⁰ See *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, pp. 1582-1609 passim. There is debate about how many of the *tie* attributed to Wang Xizhi are genuine. While many are probably not Wang's work, there is no doubt that the majority of them are genuine.

⁵¹ I found this reference in *Hanyu dacidian*, vol. 1, p. 395, but have not been able to see the original work.

⁵² *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, p. 1602.

Wang's *tie*, there are also many which contain small but significant variations. Many of the formal requirements remain, but Wang often introduces an idea of his own where the *shuyi*-type letters would have stopped at a short, standard phrase. These elaborations give us a glimpse of Wang's personality which the ritual *shuyi* letters do not. Zhou Zuoren, in a 1927 article entitled *Riji yu chidu* (Diaries and *Chidu*), quotes two of Wang's *chidu* (Zhou's term) as examples of this:

There has not been a single day recently on which I have felt well, and each day new symptoms of old age appear. In the summer heat I have no appetite, yet there is still work I have to do. How wretched I feel.⁵³

I don't know how you have been lately? Have many people been to visit you? Are you going to pick chrysanthemums on the ninth? I very much hope we can go on an outing together, but I don't know when the weather will clear.⁵⁴

Although the first letter is a variation on the comments on the writer's own health found in the *shuyi* models, and the second on the enquiries after the recipient's health, both go beyond the formal requirements of etiquette. In the second example in particular, we get a glimpse of the daily lives of the two friends which we do not in the *shuyi*-type letters.

Most of the other *tie* by Wang in *Quan Jin wen* follow patterns similar to those quoted above, and there is no need to quote more of them here. The value of Wang Xizhi's short letters here is that they point to the opening up of a space where people could write simply about themselves, where they could indulge themselves a little. The space is hardly more than a chink, and the view of themselves offered is still restricted by many conventions, but it is there. It is unlikely that Wang Xizhi was the inventor of this way of writing; its development is more likely to have been gradual, and Wang was simply one of the better-known practitioners of this kind of writing. The origins of this way of writing letters could be well worth tracing in a separate study.

The significance of Wang's short letters for this thesis is that they point to an antecedent for the informal letters which many scholars from about

⁵³ Zhou Zuoren, 'Riji yu chidu', p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

the eleventh century onwards called *chidu* or *shujian*. I have not found any evidence of a direct relationship, except in Ming collections of *chidu* from ancient times up to the Ming, but as we shall see, classifications in these collections are not very reliable. However, the space for brief informality which has opened up in the letters of Wang Xizhi suggests the much wider space which opened up in the *chidu* of the Song and beyond.

In this chapter I have provided the background for the issues which will be discussed in the following chapters. I have demonstrated that definitions of the *shu* genre in early China were problematic in a number of ways. In particular, a significant discrepancy developed between the theory of letter-writing as expressed in influential works like *Wenxin diaolong* and the practice of letter-writing, especially from Han times onwards. As we shall see, this discrepancy was never resolved; indeed the authority of the *Wenxin diaolong* essay on *shiji* was such that it probably helped perpetuate the discrepancy. We have also seen that the term *chidu* originated in the Han dynasty, but once it lost its earliest meaning of 'a letter written on a foot-long piece of wood', it did not refer to any specific kind of letter; it was just another word for 'letter'.

This last fact would have remained a philological footnote, except that the term was given a special significance later in Chinese history, when it came to refer to a kind of usually short and informal letter. Not all scholars were interested in or accepted this distinction that came to be made between *shu* and *chidu*, but it is highly significant that the most active practitioners and collectors of *chidu* after the Song who had reasons to be looking for more informal vehicles of expression did acknowledge it. In this chapter we have seen that letter-writing in early China was generally very formal. Either letters were long and essay-like in their discussion of the subject at hand, or they were very short and formulaic, written in fulfillment of social etiquette. There is evidence, however, that some writers were not completely bound by the requirements of literary or social form, and introduced elements of informality into their letters.

In the next chapter, we will look at how *chidu* emerged as an independent sub-genre during the Song dynasty, before going on to examine the *chidu* genre in its full flowering in the late Ming and early Qing.

Chapter Two

The Forerunners of Ming and Qing *Chidu* - *Chidu* in the Song Dynasty

In the first chapter we saw how letter-writing between individuals in China probably developed from diplomatic and other forms of official letter-writing, encouraged by the growth of a sphere of gentry activity outside government especially in the Later Han. We also saw how the most influential theoretical texts on letter-writing, *Wenxin diaolong* and *Wenxuan*, were not particularly satisfactory in their definition and treatment of the *shu* genre. In the chapters that follow we will see how these inadequacies were a factor preventing later writers from developing more satisfactory descriptions of letter-writing practice.

To leap from the Six Dynasties straight to the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) is to ignore one of the most important periods in Chinese literary history, namely the Tang dynasty. A great many letters survive from the Tang, and Tang letter-writing is surely deserving of more attention than it has so far received.¹ However, from the point of view of investigating the development of *chidu* as a sub-genre which a writer could use to express himself less formally than in other types of letter-writing, the Tang does not seem to have brought any significant new advances. There is no evidence that the term *chidu* was anything but a synonym for *shu*; in fact, there is clear evidence that *shu* and *chidu* were still interchangeable.² The range of letters that were included under the rubric of *shu* appears to have been very great, and many of them were quite informal. However, no attempt seems to have been made to further divide non-official letters into sub-genres. In view of the fact that there seems to be little material which throws more light on the development of *chidu* in the Tang sources I have examined, I will not discuss the Tang further in this study, though I am inclined to think that there is much interesting material awaiting research into change

¹ Some Tang letters have received scholarly attention for their literary value as well as their value as a source for history. See for example Victor Mair's essay 'Li Po's Letters in Pursuit of Political Patronage', pp. 123-53.

² Liu Zongyuan (773-819), in his famous 798 letter to students of the Imperial University expressing support for their protests against the banishment of Yang Cheng (736-805), the Director of Studies at the Imperial University, calls his own letter a *chidu*, but the term doesn't appear to denote a particular category. See *Liu Hedong quanji*, p. 356. The letter is mentioned in Jo-shui Chen, *Liu Tsung-yüan and Intellectual Change in T'ang China, 773-819*, p. 62.

in letter-writing practices during the Tang.

Before we proceed to look at the emergence of *chidu* as a separate genre, we should first deal briefly with the question of *shuyi* in the Song, since I argue that *chidu* might be an offshoot of the kinds of letters that we find in the *shuyi* discussed in the previous chapter. In actual fact the best known of all *shuyi* was written by Sima Guang (1019-1086), and another *shuyi* was written by the scholar Hu Yuan (993-1059).³ Ebrey also notes that *shuyi* were still being written in the early Ming.⁴ This of course means that the *shuyi* type of letter was still being written. However, the section devoted to 'private letters' (*sishu*) and 'family letters' (*jiashu*) in Sima Guang's work only occupies about half of one chapter of the ten-chapter work, far less than in the earlier works discussed by Ebrey.⁵ To my mind, this, along with the dropping-off in the number of new *shuyi*, indicates that the kind of letter for which the *shuyi* provided models slowly slipped from use, and that the social uses of letters had widened. Of course, there was still a demand for model letter manuals to show the inexperienced how to write the kinds of letters that were now required of them, and we shall look at these in the next chapter.

The emergence of *chidu* as a separate genre in the Song dynasty

The emergence of *chidu* as a distinct form of letter-writing occurred only gradually, and it is not clear how widely the new genre was recognised by the Song scholarly community. I have not yet found any discussion of *chidu* (also called *shujian*) dating from the Song, which makes it difficult to establish the extent to which the distinction between *shu* and *chidu* was made consciously. That the distinction was made seems to be beyond doubt, however, as in the collected works of several Song writers, the two forms of letter-writing appear in separate sections under separate headings.

As is common for such nascent genres, these *chidu* were often collected privately at first, and included in that writer's collected works later. This is what happened in the case of Fan Zhongyan, the first writer for whom a separate *chidu* collection is recorded. The collection is still extant in several editions. The earliest record of a collection of Fan's *chidu* is in the Southern Song catalogue *Zhizhai shulu jieti*, compiled by Chen Zhensun,

³ Ebrey, *op.cit.*, pp. 612-13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

⁵ See *Siku quanshu*, vol. 142, pp. 462-67. Sima's *Shuyi* is the only *shuyi* to be included in *Siku quanshu*.

which lists a book *Fan Wenzheng chidu* in five chapters. There is a comment that the collection had been passed down within the Fan family separately from his published works.⁶ Tianyi Ge, the famous private library in Ningbo, once held a Song edition with the same title in three chapters⁷, and a *Fan Zhongyan chidu* in two chapters is mentioned in the bibliographical treatise of the *Song shi*.⁸ The earliest extant edition of Fan's *chidu* is an edition published in 1264 by a descendent named Fan Wenying, presumably using the collection held in the family.⁹

We do not know how or why Fan Zhongyan's *chidu* came to be published. It is hardly likely that the Fan family was the first to preserve the informal letters of a famous son, but Fan's outstanding position in the history of Chinese literature and his establishment of a charitable estate for the Fan clan in Suzhou would have been good reasons for the family to keep all of his works, and eventually to publish them.¹⁰

The first chapter of the three-chapter edition consists of letters to other members of the Fan clan (*jiashu* or 'family letters'). These are far removed from the letters of Wang Xizhi discussed in the previous chapter. Although Fan uses some standard opening and closing phrases, they are hardly more formulaic than the kinds of openings used in many modern letters to friends and family. Nor are the contents necessarily tied to the kind of ritual occasions which demanded letters such as those used in the *shuyi*. In some of the letters Fan discusses the matters relating to the clan properties, including the purchase of the charitable estate mentioned above.¹¹ In other letters Fan gives advice on a range of topics from diet to handling relationships in the capital.¹² Indeed, all of Fan's *chidu* serve some practical purpose: there are no discussions of literature, philosophy or political theory, and the language employed is simple and unadorned. They are more elaborate than Wang Xizhi's, but they were clearly not written as a form of literary dabbling as many of the late Ming and Qing *chidu* were.

The second chapter of the collection of Fan's *chidu* consists of letters to Han Qi (1008-75), a close friend of Fan's who was appointed Military Commissioner in Shaanxi at the same time as Fan was sent there. The

⁶ *Zhizhai shulu jieti*.

⁷ *Tianyi Ge jiancun shumu*, p. 190.

⁸ *Song shi*, p. 5363.

⁹ The 1264 edition is held in the National Library of China in Beijing. Another edition was printed in 1834, apparently by a descendent, and a modern edition is available in the *Guoxue jiben congshu*. I have used this last edition in preparing this discussion.

¹⁰ For a description of the establishment of this estate, see Nienhauser, *op.cit.*, pp. 374-75.

¹¹ See for example *Fan Wenzheng Gong ji*, pp. 382-83.

¹² For example, see *ibid.*, pp. 382 and 388.

letters mostly date from the period when the two men were in Shaanxi, and largely contain descriptions of the conditions in the areas in which Fan was working, his duties and the things he had been doing in his leisure time, as well as some discussion of his and other's political fortunes. Despite the predominance of letters related to Fan's official duties, the letters were clearly not written as part of those duties, but were written as letters between friends. Of course the rules of etiquette are always followed. There are still standard forms for opening and closing letters, for asking after the recipient and for responding to certain situations in which a form of ritual response is required, but even then more flexibility is possible. Obviously the letters were still a very important way of maintaining social contacts. However, it is equally clear that these letters were by now a means through which real news was exchanged, rather than just the 'news' and 'feelings' ritually appropriate to the circumstances in which the letter was sent. Even the shortest letters amongst those from Fan to Han contain some descriptions of Fan's circumstances at the time of writing, or of the circumstances in the area in which he was working.

The third chapter consists of letters to other friends. The letters appear to have been collected rather randomly, since there are usually only one or two to each recipient, and their contents are similar to those in the letters Fan wrote to Han. Again these are solid, practical letters. Although the primary reason for writing them might have been to fulfil some social requirement, Fan usually includes some news about his recent activities or plans. Most of the letters are short, no more than two hundred characters, though there are a few which run to three or four hundred, so clearly Fan did not intend the letters to be the primary means by which he conveyed news about himself to friends. However, in contrast to the *shuyi* type letters discussed in the previous chapter, the news Fan provides is clearly specific to his circumstances at the time of writing, and is not merely the right thing to say in the circumstances.

Compared to the *chidu* which appeared in the Ming and early Qing *chidu* collections which are the focus of this thesis, Fan's letters are still restricted in scope. A key difference is that Fan does not use his *chidu* to display his literary skills or wit. He does not discuss literature or other such topics at length. Whereas for a Ming writer to receive some poems from a friend would be a pretext to write a short letter on some aspect of literature, Fan would just express his thanks, pay a very brief compliment, then go on to tell of some of his recent activities. Although Fan's letters are written in a

much freer style than Wang Xizhi's for instance, it is still not difficult to see a relationship between the two. In both cases *chidu* are almost always written to fulfil some requirement of social etiquette, even if that is little more than keeping in touch. Although the structure is not quite so rigid in Fan's letters as it is in the Six Dynasties letters we have discussed, Fan does tend to use certain phrases over and over again, especially in the opening and in other parts where ritual functions are being performed.

Although I have not been able to find any examples of later commentaries on the *chidu* of Fan Zhongyan, his letters suggest a link between the rigid pre-Tang forms of short letter-writing discussed in Chapter One, particularly those of Wang Xizhi, and the freer forms which appeared under the rubric of *chidu* in Ming times. Fan's role in this was probably negligible, as he was unlikely to have 'invented' the form which letters such as his took. Most likely these changes were gradual ones which took place over centuries, and it is just that Fan's *chidu* happen to be the earliest extant collection with the word *chidu* in the title apparently referring to a particular form of letter. Indeed, it is not certain that those who put the collection together meant the term *chidu* to have a specific connotation, though when added to the evidence below, that seems quite likely.

If Fan Zhongyan's place in the development of *chidu* owes more to an accident of history than his influence on later writers in the genre, the place of Su Shi is more assured. Although direct evidence in the form of quotations is limited, that Su Shi left so many *chidu* quite possibly contributed to the revival of *chidu*-writing in the late Ming. Certainly his *chidu* seem to have been reprinted more often than those of any other writer. Ronald Egan, in his article 'Su Shih's "Notes" as a Historical and Literary Source', points out that the late Ming scholar Jiao Hong (1541-1620) compiled a book consisting solely of Su's *chidu* and *ci* poetry entitled, in Egan's translation, *Venerable Su's Two Marvels (Su Changgong er miao ji)*. Jiao's point in publishing this book was that he considered Su's writing in these two 'minor' genres to be his greatest achievements.¹³ We can also suppose that the prominence of Su's *chidu* amongst his collected works influenced later scholars who admired him, causing them to deliberately cultivate the *chidu* genre. For example, one of the features of the Gong'an school at the end of the Ming was their admiration for Su Shi.¹⁴ This might

¹³ Ronald Egan (1990), 'Su Shih's "Notes" as a Historical and Literary Source', p. 563.

¹⁴ See Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School*, pp. 21 & 31-35.

explain why the collected works of each of the three brothers who led the Gong'an school, Yuan Zongdao (1560-1600), Yuan Hongdao and Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1624) all contain *chidu*¹⁵; in Yuan Hongdao's case in particular, *chidu* constitute a large proportion of his prose works, and there is at least one recent and fully annotated edition of his *chidu* which attests to their continuing popularity.¹⁶ As we shall see later in this thesis, Zhou Liangong was also an admirer of Su Shi's prose, though it is admittedly difficult to trace any relationship between this and Zhou's interest in *chidu*. Other seventeenth-century compilers of *chidu* collections were also admirers of Su Shi and Song prose in general.

Most broad questions about the compilation and contents of collections of Su's *chidu* have been dealt with by Egan in his article, so below I will only touch upon those details which are most important here. Despite Su's place in the development of the *chidu* genre, it is not at all clear how his *chidu* came to be gathered together. The earliest collection of Su's letters we know about is one entitled *Dongpo xiansheng hanmo chidu*, a fragmentary copy of which is held in the National Library of China.¹⁷ The 1,300 *chidu* in this collection are arranged by recipient, and the letters to each recipient are arranged in chronological order wherever possible. Two late Ming collections of Su's *chidu*, the section containing *chidu* in Kang Piyang's 1608 *Chongbian Dongpo xiansheng wai ji* and the *chidu* in Jiao Hong's 1621 *Su Changgong er miao ji*, are clearly based on *Dongpo xiansheng hanmo chidu*.¹⁸ However, the circumstances of the compilation of this collection remain obscure. Kong Fanli suggests that there were other similar collections, but his grounds for saying this are not clear.¹⁹ The early Ming catalogue *Wenyuange shumu* records two fragmentary copies of a collection called *Dongpo chidu*, which were probably Yuan or even Song editions if they were fragmentary by the early Ming, and perhaps these are the sort of thing to which Kong is referring.²⁰ In any case, these details alone demonstrate that despite a growing interest in *chidu* during Song times, the

¹⁵ See Yuan Zhongdao, *Bai-Su zhai lei*, pp. 201-235 (the letters are called *jiandu*, but they are no different in format to the other brothers' *chidu*); Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao*, pp. 201-312, 479-516, 733-94, 1321-1382 and 1594-1629; Yuan Zhongdao, *Kexue zhai ji*, pp. 969-1103.

¹⁶ Fan Qiao & Zhang Minggao ed. *Yuan Zhonglang chidu*, published in 1991.

¹⁷ See Egan (1990), *op.cit.*, pp. 562 and 564. Egan draws upon an article by the Japanese scholar Murakami Tetsumi entitled 'So Toba shokan no denrai to *Tobashu* shohon no keifu ni tsuite', which appeared in *Chukoku bungaku ho*, 27 (1977): 61-64.

¹⁸ Kong Fanli, ed. *Su shi wenji*, 'Dianjiao shuoming', p. 3. Kong says the compiler of the *Su Changgong er miao ji* was one Xu Xiangyun.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁰ Yang Shiqi, ed. *Wenyuange shumu*.

preservation of a famous writer's *chidu* was not assured, and his *chidu* were still not usually published along with the writer's more important works.

What then were Su's *chidu* like, and how are they different from the short letters of pre-Tang times, and from those of the late Ming and early Qing? As Egan points out, 'Su's notes often provide insight into levels of mundane life that are seldom if ever illuminated in his more formal writings'.²¹ In other words, most of Su's *chidu* were written for some practical reason, ranging from thanking someone for a gift, to trying to secure certain government appointments for friends, to trying to settle various problems within the Su clan, and many other things besides. A relatively simple letter might read like this:

(To Wu Tzu-yeh, from Huang-chou:) The various kinds of Fu-chien tea you so kindly sent are all of the highest quality. Where you are it is hard even to get tea for oneself, and now you have sent me some as a gift. I am ashamed, truly ashamed! The shark and red carp are also great delicacies. I cannot adequately express my gratitude. As for the 'strengthening ointment', I am not sure exactly what it is. I will store it safely away, but I do not know how to use it. Please instruct me in detail the next time you write.

Nearby there is a landscape painter named Li Ming who has recently begun to acquire a fine reputation. His use of ink shows an uncommon talent. I asked for a work of his, and got a very long horizontal scroll, so long that it could be a screen around a large four-poster bed. I have given it to the messenger to take to you. I am greatly ashamed to say that this area still produces nothing which I can send you in return.²²

Although this is a straightforward letter of thanks, it is considerably different from letters performing similar functions in the pre-Tang period. Apart from some of the phrases expressing thanks, which appear in many letters, Su writes in a very natural style, free of clichés and with no unnecessary elements, far removed from the kind of letters which appeared in the *shuyi*. At the same time, there is none of the literary dilettantism which is common in later writing of this sort.

²¹ Egan (1990), *op.cit.*, p. 562.

²² First paragraph from *ibid.*, p. 571; the rest translated by the author. (*Su Shi wenji*, p. 1735).

A similar directness is evident in the letters Su wrote trying to secure employment for friends and acquaintances. In Ming *chidu* written for this purpose, it was common for the author to write at considerable length about the character and talents of the person on whose behalf the request was being made, or even of the person to whom the request was being made. Su, however, goes straight to the point:

(To Chang Tzu-p'ing, from Hang-chou:) I have few obligations just now, and decided to try to get in touch with you. In Ching-k'ou there is a prefectural degree holder, Ch'en Fu-chih, whose learning and conduct are superior and whose poetry and prose are also extraordinary. He is extremely close to Wang Ching-kung (An-shih), but when Ching-kung was in power, Fu-chih had nothing to do with him. After Ching-kung retired to Chin-ling, Fu-chih matched poems together with him day after day. Fu-chih is a solitary man and has few friends. He did not marry and did not enter government service. He is like the ancients and acts in any way he sees fit. Nevertheless, he is extremely poor, and has inadequate means to support himself. I thought that perhaps if your prefecture does not yet have an education official you might employ this man. How would that be? Please let me know what you think. How much is the monthly salary? If you think it would be adequate, then you might send a letter asking him. If you already have someone else or if there are other impediments, then let's just drop the matter. Pitying him for being so alone, proud and impoverished, I have brashly spoken out here on his behalf. Forgive me, forgive me.²³

Naturally this letter contains praise of Chen's talents, but the praise is restrained, and Su doesn't attempt to hide aspects of Chen's character that some people might see as negative. Su sticks to the practicalities of the matter, and is realistic. Of course there are simple *chidu* recommending people for posts, especially minor ones, in later times, but few of them are so detailed in their treatment of the practical aspects of the recommendation, or so natural.

Although this is not the place for it, Su's *chidu* certainly deserve much more attention, not just for their value as a historical source, but also for

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 567-68. (*Su Shi wenji*, p. 1641).

their place in the history of Chinese letter-writing. Few other writers who cultivated a *chidu* style were able to combine mundane affairs with restrained grace in the way that Su did. As we shall see when we turn to examine Zhou Lianggong's *Chidu xinzhao*, perhaps greater consciousness of *chidu* as a literary form in the late Ming and early Qing actually prevented most scholars from attaining the refined practicality that is a feature of Su's *chidu*. Although Su did not invent this kind of writing - we have seen that Fan Zhongyan wrote similar letters - from the limited evidence available, it seems that he more than any other made it possible for later writers to recognise the potential of *chidu* as a literary genre, and to make the genre an object of literary appreciation rather than just one performing social functions.

However, Su was not the only Song writer whose *chidu* were recognised in later times as outstanding examples of the genre. His close friend, Huang Tingjian, has also been regarded as one of the finest writers of *chidu*, and some twelve hundred of his *chidu* are extant today. As in Su's case, the preservation of so many of Huang's *chidu* was no doubt to a large degree a result of his fame as a calligrapher, which would have meant that connoisseurs would have kept even the most insignificant examples of his calligraphic skills. However, there is even less information about how Huang's *chidu* came to be collected than there is in Su's case. Most editions of Huang's collected works do not include his *chidu*, though the *Siku quanshu* does.²⁴ Although Huang's *chidu* do not seem to have been reprinted as often as Su's, their letters have been published together on several occasions since the late Qing at least.²⁵

The case of Ouyang Xiu's *shujian* further illustrates both the uncertain status of *chidu* in during the Song on the one hand, and the increased recognition of the genre on the other. In the edition of his own works Ouyang compiled late in his life, he did not include any of his *shujian*, perhaps because he considered them unfit to be placed alongside his writings in the major genres.²⁶ However, the complete works of Ouyang Xiu compiled by the Southern Song scholar Zhou Bida (1126-1204) do contain a few hundred of Ouyang's *shujian*²⁷, which are similar in style to those of Su

²⁴ See *Siku quanshu*, vol. 1113, *Shangju ji*, pp. 665-818.

²⁵ The library of Peking University holds an edition entitled *Su-Huang liang xiansheng chidu* in 18 chapters published in 1860, which is a reprint of an earlier edition. In 1933 the Shanghai Dazhong Shuju published another edition entitled *Su-Huang chidu hekan*. This edition contains notes which suggest it was meant to have some pedagogic function.

²⁶ Ronald Egan (1974), *The Literary Works of Ou-Yang Xiu (1007-1072)*, pp. 10 and 30.

²⁷ See *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, ch. 6, pp. 73-187.

and Huang.

The four writers we have discussed so far in this chapter have several things in common as regards their letters. In no case were their *chidu* (by whatever name) included in the early editions of their collected prose. In Fan and Ouyang's case it was left to family and an admirer respectively to collect and publish their *chidu*. Su Shi and Huang Tingjian had to wait considerably longer, and it is not clear in either case just when a concerted effort to collect and publish a large number of their *chidu* was made. However, in all cases, when their *chidu* are published, they are published separately from their *shu* and greatly outnumber them. I have noted earlier in this study that up till the present day there has not been general agreement that *shu* and *chidu* are different forms of letter-writing, but in the case of these writers, it is easy to tell which is which. There must have been a recognition that the two were different even amongst the compilers of the collected works which did not include their *chidu*, or they would have put them all in together. The letters appearing under the heading of *shu* in these writers' works are generally much longer. More importantly, they are really essays dressed in the costume of a letter. The greetings which are common in the *chidu* are usually left out in the *shu*, and the language is much more formal. *Shu* almost invariably contain elaborate discussions of literary, political or philosophical topics, and in many cases it is easy to forget that one is reading a letter. Of course this also explains why there are so many more *chidu* than *shu*: *shu* were really carefully composed essays, and as such were written when the writer wished to present his considered views on a topic of wide consequence. Such essays were written only occasionally, and since the *shu* genre was sanctioned by time as one of the genres upon which one's literary skill would be judged, they were not written lightly.

Chidu on the other hand were, at that time at least, a very practical form of writing, probably written on an almost daily basis. Though they had broken out of the mould of formality and cliché cast around such short letters up till the Tang dynasty (as far as we can tell), they were not yet considered a true literary genre. The easy refinement of these writers' *chidu* suggests that they took some care over the style that they used, but then such was the literary skill of these men that we can presume that such elegance came to them quite naturally. Appreciation of their *chidu* as literature came later, and would probably have been something of a surprise to the writers. But however unintended their reputations in this regard, that the *chidu* of

some of the greatest writers in Chinese history survived in significant numbers, and were written in a way that must have made later writers realise the potential of the genre as a new avenue for self-expression, was surely a major factor in the flowering of the genre in the late Ming and early Qing.

It is necessary, though, to put this in perspective. Compared to the myriad anthologies of these writers' poetry and prose that have been published over the centuries, the number of collections of their *chidu* is miniscule. I have not yet found a dictionary of Chinese literature which mentions these writers' *chidu* under their respective entries. Scholarly writing on letters of any kind is comparatively rare, and focuses on the formal *shu* variety. For instance, Chu Binjie in his authoritative book on Chinese genres, *Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun*, has a chapter entitled *Shuduwen*, but he concentrates entirely on the formal *shu*, with the exception of the family letters of the Qing poet-painter Zheng Xie (1693-1765), which he discusses briefly at the end. Like many other Chinese scholars, Chu contends that the terms *shu*, *shudu*, *shujian* and *chidu* are in fact synonyms, which is more or less the traditional Chinese view. Chu mentions Su Shi and Ouyang Xiu wrote famous letters, but says nothing about these letters, and it is clear from the context that he is referring to their *shu*.²⁸ There is some recognition of the emergence of *chidu* during the Song dynasty in scholarship in English, but again it is limited. Apart from Ronald Egan, Stephen Owen in his recently published *Anthology of Chinese Literature* writes: 'Since the Song Dynasty, informal letters to friends and family had been treated as a form separate from the stylized literary letters that an author would preserve in his collected works.'²⁹ Although Owen doesn't refer to *chidu* by name, there would seem to be little doubt that that is what he is referring to. However, he doesn't translate any Song letters.

The Northern Song period may thus be seen as the period during which the *chidu* began to emerge as a genre of literature in its own right, and during which some of the greatest *chidu* were written. However, this change was very gradual, and for the most part went unnoticed.

There is one other collection which is particularly significant, namely *Chidu Neijian* in ten chapters by Sun Di (1081-1169), an official in both the Northern and Southern Song courts. This collection was compiled from

²⁸ See Chu Binjie, *Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun*, pp. 387-403.

²⁹ Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, p. 813.

Sun's originals by his student Li Zuyao, who then annotated them.³⁰ Thus it is the first *chidu* collection to be so annotated, and the earliest evidence we have for the literary appreciation of *chidu*.

It is clear after even a superficial survey of Sun's *chidu* that Sun's style is less natural than that of the four writers we discussed above. His *chidu* are more difficult to read, and his letters are strewn with literary allusions, which are what most of Li Zuyao's annotations set out to explain. It is this which caused Zhou Zuoren to write:

Chidu...were originally private letters not intended for publication, and were only a few sentences in length. In some the writer might express his innermost feelings, in others he might talk about certain events, and one could get a glimpse of his personality from just a few words. This is the special characteristic of *chidu*. However, only Su Shi and Huang Tingjian really had the talent to achieve this. Beginning with Sun Di, whose *chidu* already show signs of affectation, *chidu* changed, and by the time of *Qiushuixuan chidu*³¹, such affectation had become the natural way to write them.³²

It is difficult to bring out the affectation in Sun Di's *chidu* in translation, but I will quote just one letter as an example, and note the source of each allusion in smaller print:

(To Vice Director Zhou:) My desire is to retire from government service and return to the fields (*chidu* by Su Shi to one Chen Fuzhi), away from the world of honour and disgrace (*Xici* section of the *Yijing*), but I fear people will make groundless accusations if I do (*History of the Jin Dynasty, i.e. Jin shu*). Recently the winter cold has arrived, and I hope you are well. I am at the end of my life, no longer do I have the ambition or the fortitude I once had: I am not the person I once was (*shu* by Su Shi to one Li Duanshu).
The only thoughts which are still clear and bright in my twilight

³⁰ See the editors' *tiyao* to *Chidu Neijian* in the *Siku quanshu* edition, vol. 1135, pp. 467-68.

³¹ *Qiushui xuan chidu* is a collection of letters by one Xu Xiacun, a native of Shanyin (Shaoxing), first published in the early nineteenth century. It later practically became a textbook for letter-writing in the late Qing and early Republican period. In recent years Shanghai Shudian has reprinted a 1930's edition of the book. Zhou Zuoren mentions it in several essays, most notably in 'Guanyu chidu' in *Guadou ji*, pp.178-189.

³² Zhou Zuoren, *Zhou zuoren shuxin*, preface p. 2.

years are those of my old friends (poem by Du Fu).³³

There is no way of knowing the circumstances in which this letter was written, but after a long political career in which he served both the Northern and Southern Song courts, Sun was found guilty of corruption and spent the rest of his life living in retirement by Lake Tai.³⁴ This letter possibly dates from around the time of his dismissal. If it does, then it is typical of fallen officials trying to make their disgrace seem as if it was a lofty choice on their part. In any case, the sentiments expressed in this letter are not very convincing, and the sprinkling of unnecessary literary allusions only adds to the air of insincerity about it.

One very interesting feature of this letter is that the first allusion comes from a *chidu* by Su Shi. In fact, the note by Li Zuyao calls this letter a *tie*, the same word used to describe Wang Xizhi's short letters, denoting that the piece was thought of as a piece of calligraphy. However, since this letter appears amongst the *chidu* in Su's collected works, I have taken the liberty of calling it a *chidu* in the note above.³⁵ This indicates that Su's *chidu* were in circulation amongst the literati quite soon after his death, though we don't know in what form. We can surmise, however, that given the increasing popularity of printing during the Song, it is quite possible that some of Su's *tie/chidu* were in print. If Sun was trying to imitate Su, however, he was a poor imitator. Compare Sun's letter above to the one by Su to which he alludes:

(To Chen Fuzhi, while returning north from Huangzhou:)
Yesterday you kindly came to visit me, but because I was very ill, I was unable to come out receive you. How ashamed I feel! It is very hot, so how are you feeling? I have survived being flung to the four corners of the earth, but now when I wish to retire from government service and return to the fields, I fall ill and worry that I might never get up again. Is this not fate? If only I could get a break from my travels, and have a laugh together with some old friends. But that would be too much to hope for. My illness has weakened me, so I will just write these few words.

Su uses much simpler diction, and we know his sufferings while Governor

³³ Sun Di, *Neijian chidu*, p. 502 top.

³⁴ *Nan Song wen fan, zuozhe kao* (authors' biographies), *shang* 8b.

³⁵ See *Su Shi wenji*, p. 1726.

of Huangzhou were real. Furthermore, Su's letter was prompted by a specific situation, namely his inability to receive Chen, which makes the laments which follow appear more believable. Of course, since Su did in fact continue his political career, we have to admit that his wish to retire was short-lived, but the tone of the letter is less affected than the ornate protestations of Sun.

While this is not the place for a long discussion of the relative merits of various *chidu* writers, I have briefly touched upon these issues here because they provide a point of comparison for later *chidu*. As we shall see, it is difficult not to agree with Zhou Zuoren that, broadly speaking, most later practitioners of *chidu* were unable to match Su for naturalness and sincerity. The artifice of Sun's *chidu* became the norm. In any case, *Neijian chidu* is significant in this study for two reasons. Firstly, it indicates that by the Southern Song, some writers at least were consciously cultivating a *chidu* style. It is clear that Sun Di studied the *chidu* of earlier writers, and the artifice of most of his letters, along with the lack of any obvious practical function in many cases, is evidence of this. Secondly, it demonstrates that there was by the Southern Song a nascent appreciation of *chidu* as a form of literature. We don't know whether Sun wrote his letters with an eye to later publication, but the fact that Li Zuyao went to considerable trouble to annotate them in a manner appropriate for a literary work suggests that this might have been the case.

There are other collections of *chidu* dating from the Song period, though some of them now exist only as entries in catalogues. For example, the bibliographical treatise of the *Song shi* records a collection by the Northern Song writer Xie Yi entitled *Xi tang shiyou chidu* (*The Chidu of the Master of Xi Tang to his Teachers and Friends*).³⁶ A collection with a similar title is listed in the Southern Song catalogue *Zhi zhai shulu jieti*, namely *Ting zhai shiyou chidu*, or *The Chidu of the Master of Ting zhai* (one Zeng Jili) *to his teachers and Friends*.³⁷ However, we do not know what the letters in these collections were actually like.

Zhi zhai shulu jieti also notes that *shujian* were attached to *Dong tang ji*, the collected works of the Northern Song poet Mao Pang.³⁸ The editors of

³⁶ *Song shi*, p. 5401.

³⁷ Chen Zhensun, *Zhi zhai shulu jieti*, 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 15.

Siku quanshu note this³⁹, and put them in with the rest of the collection under the heading of *shu*. There is good reason for this, as Mao's letters are in fact the long and formal kind, and not the short, informal letters that we have been discussing so far. This reminds us that although we can confidently say that for many writers the term *chidu* (or *shujian*) had begun to take on a special meaning, for many others the term was still just another word for a letter.

Another important *chidu* collection can be found in the collected works of the Southern Song philosopher Lü Zuqian (1137-1181). Lü's *Donglai bieji* contains five chapters of *chidu*⁴⁰, and a few additional ones appear in *Donglai waiji*.⁴¹ They are generally in a more formal style than those of Su Shi or Huang Tingjian, but still conform to the the idea of *chidu* as private correspondence, as they are relatively short, and contain details of his recent activities, the doings of friends, and so on.

The evidence given in this chapter demonstrates clearly that the origins of *chidu* as a literary genre can be traced to the Song dynasty. Several major writers composed a very large number of *chidu*, and there were scholars who felt them worthy of collection and publication. Importantly, in a number of cases, these letters were published separately from the more formal *shu*, which means that in the minds of some scholars at least, *shu* and *chidu* (or *shujian*) were no longer interchangeable terms.

The question which remains is: why did scholars begin to take an interest in *chidu* during the Song dynasty? Ronald Egan gives three reasons why so many *chidu* were preserved: the interest of Song scholars in historiography, their appreciation of calligraphy, and the spread of printing.⁴² No doubt the three are interrelated. Calligraphy had been the object of artistic appreciation for a very long time, so this itself was not new. As early as the Han dynasty people who received *chidu* from Chen Zun would keep them for their calligraphy. But none of Chen's *chidu* survive. It is true that many of Wang Xizhi's *chidu* survive, but this is no doubt due to his position as China's most famous calligrapher, which means that his letters were copied over and over again. However, on the whole, few *chidu* of this type survive before the Song. With the availability of printing though,

³⁹ Editors' notes to Mao Pang's *Dong tang ji*, *Siku quanshu* edition, vol. 1123, p. 696 top. Mao's letters can be found in pp. 761-800.

⁴⁰ *Siku quanshu* edition, vol. 1150, pp. 222-305.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 419-29.

⁴² Egan (1990), *op.cit.*, p.562.

calligraphy could be reproduced in printed form relatively easily and economically, which increased the number of copies available dramatically, and thus increased both their circulation and the probability that they would survive the ravages of time. However, if the only thing to be admired about these *chidu* was their calligraphy, then why were woodblock editions in standard typeface printed even as early as the Song dynasty? Part of the reason must be historiographical, that scholars were interested in anything which provided information about the life of these famous figures. However, it is very likely that Song scholars found something in them to appreciate from a literary point of view. Certainly Li Zuyao did, even though that is to some extent to be expected since he was a student of Sun's. For men like Su Shi, writing *chidu* might just have been part of life, but his talent as a writer is bound to be reflected in whatever he wrote. Although Zhou Bida was probably trying to produce as complete a collection of Ouyang Xiu's writings as he could, he still must have thought the *chidu* had some literary value.

Although the reasons we have looked at go a long way towards explaining why *chidu* first came to be collected in relatively large quantities during the Song, the only one of the three conditions that could not have existed in earlier dynasties was the admittedly crucial widespread availability of printing. As pointed out above, the appreciation of calligraphy was hardly new. And if in earlier times *chidu* had been perceived as having some literary or historical value, surely at least some people would have arranged to have them copied. So it appears to me that the question of why *chidu* first came to be collected during the Song is more complex than suggested above.

There are two further key questions which are very difficult to answer. Firstly, it is not clear where this form of writing came from. I have argued that it possibly evolved from the *shuyi*-type letters of the Six Dynasties and Tang period, as writers included more and more personal information and did away with many of the clichés. However, a full answer to this question, if it is possible to answer, would require a dedicated study of Tang, Five Dynasties and early Song sources, which is outside the scope of the present study. My own survey of the collected works of a number of prominent Tang writers failed to produce any evidence at all for the origins of the kind of *chidu* that Su Shi and Huang Tingjian wrote.

Following on from this, why was it in the Song that at least some

scholars came to regard *chidu* as a separate genre? It appears from studying the *chidu* of the writers mentioned in this chapter that, despite stylistic differences, they were all writing in the same genre. There is, for instance, a remarkable homogeneity of length, more so than in the Ming *chidu* which we shall examine later in this thesis. Certain structures are common, as are various phrases. The function of these letters is also broadly similar, especially in the way they deal with relatively mundane matters with a degree of informality that is rare in other genres. But the questions of where the genre came from, and how it came to be regarded as a separate genre, must await further study if a fuller answer is to be found.

Chapter Three

Ming and Early Qing *Chidu* Collections

After the end of the Song dynasty, *chidu* virtually disappeared as a published genre until the mid sixteenth century. Presumably the disruption caused by the Mongol invasion was a major factor in the decline in interest in the genre, and literary trends during much of the Ming period were not conducive to its revival. In particular, the institution of the eight-legged essay as the primary means of assessing candidates in the civil service examinations discouraged informal personal expression. The style, structure and content of the eight-legged essay was highly regulated and thus required attention to form. Furthermore, since the eight-legged essay was an instrument of state ideology, it encouraged conformity. Even the reaction to this in the early sixteenth century from the Archaist school known as the Former Seven Masters itself led to conformity to another standard - the prose of the Qin and Han periods. Although some writers displayed originality, most of the followers of the school did little more than imitate the great masters of the Qin and Han, even to the extent of lifting phrases verbatim from these early writers' works and stitching them together to form a work of their 'own'.¹ In this environment few writers displayed an interest in genuine self-expression, and genres that were not a part of the classical canon were largely ignored.

The reaction to this came in the late sixteenth century, led by the Gonggan school. This school, so named because its leaders, the brothers Yuan Hongdao, Yuan Zongdao and Yuan Zhongdao, came from Gonggan county, denounced the way in which Archaist writers plagiarised Qin and Han writers without putting in any thoughts of their own. They called upon writers to use a language more appropriate to the late Ming to express their own ideas and feelings. Furthermore, the writers of the Gonggan school tended not to write a great deal in the major established genres, and when they did, they tended to try to write in a fresh style. One of the genres many of them cultivated was the *chidu*.

However, though the Yuan brothers probably did play an important role in the re-emergence of the *chidu* genre as an object of writers'

¹ See Chou, Chih-p'ing, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-2. and 5-14 for a succinct discussion of early Ming literary trends and the Archaist movement in the sixteenth century.

cultivation, the reasons for the re-emergence of *chidu* cannot simply be explained by the fact that one literary school seemed to favour it. Although the Gongan writers left a considerable body of *chidu*, I have not discovered any theoretical writings about *chidu* by them, and thus it is difficult to say with any certainty why they liked the genre. Furthermore, the anthology of *chidu* which seems to have played a major role in the revival of interest in the genre was a compiled not by a follower of the Gongan school, but by Wang Shizhen, the foremost writer amongst the Latter Seven Masters. Therefore any explanation for the re-emergence of *chidu* cannot simply be based upon the literary debates of the period, though these are important. A fuller explanation would probably lie in social changes which took place towards the end of the Ming. I will deal with the backgrounds of some of the compilers of *chidu* anthologies later in this chapter, but the question is too complex to be investigated in detail in this study.

The next two chapters will look at how late Ming and early Qing compilers of *chidu* anthologies and others who wrote on the genre tried to define the genre both through the anthologies they produced and in their theoretical pronouncements upon it. As we shall see in the remainder of this study, the *chidu* of the late Ming and early Qing period were in a number of ways different from those of the Song described in the previous chapter. However, both the gap in the production of collections of *chidu* between the Song and the Ming and the lack of discussion of Song *chidu* by late Ming and early Qing writers makes it difficult to establish how and why these changes took place. Furthermore, as the following discussion will show, there was still no unanimity as to what a *chidu* actually was. While many compilers seem to have understood a *chidu* as a short informal letter, usually not more than four or five hundred characters long, at the same time there was still a number of compilers of *chidu* anthologies who included many longer, formal letters, and a survey of a sample of the collected literary works of the writers of the period indicates that the degree of consensus amongst the literary community as a whole was considerably less than amongst those with an active interest in *chidu*.

In order to gain an impression of the motivations and practices of those who compiled *chidu* anthologies, we shall look at a collection that was perhaps never meant to be published at all, *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, or *Letters Kept at the Home of the Yan Family*. The process by which this collection

came to be published is the best documented of any of the collections discussed in this thesis, and the sources provide a fascinating insight into how *chidu* collections could come into being. It is perhaps all the more interesting because the collection that will be the case study for this thesis, *Chidu xinchao*, was also a collaborative effort to some extent, though documentation is more limited, and the main collector was also the publisher. As we shall see, *Yanshi jiacang chidu* was not actually published until the late eighteenth century, but the letters in it all date from approximately the period 1660 to 1686.

In the winter of the thirty-ninth year of the Qianlong reign (November 1774 - January 1775), a group of scholars met in the home of Weng Fanggang (1733-1818), a well-known calligrapher, evidential scholar and expert on epigraphy. In this erudite atmosphere, they pored over a collection of letters assembled towards the end of the previous century by Yan Guangmin (1640-1686, a descendant of Yan Hui, Confucius's closest disciple) which one of their number had brought along. About half a year later, Weng wrote a poem, to which he added the following colophon describing his feelings upon seeing the collection for the first time:

One day last winter, the tribute student Gui Fu brought a collection of letters (*chidu*) that belonged to the provincial graduate Yan Chongju (b. 1741, the great-grandson of Yan Guangmin) to my home and asked me if I might write a colophon for them. At the time, Qian Zai, an Academician of the Grand Secretariat from Xiushui, and Zhu Yun, a provincial education commissioner from my home district of Daxing, were also in my study, and looked over the collection with me. Mr. Qian wrote a few words by way of a colophon first, but before Mr. Zhu could write one, Mr. Yan, the owner of the collection, had to depart from the capital. The sincere friendship between us, reminiscent of the ancients, was such that we could hardly bear to part. In the manner of our ancestors, we presented Mr. Yan with seven copper seals from my collection, a colophon from a sacrificial vessel, and three examples of the calligraphy of my fellow townsman, Mr. Zhang Lie.² One day I should write another colophon and have it mounted on a scroll, and ask Mr. Qian and Mr. Zhu to make their contributions, and thus properly accomplish that which till now

² Zhang Lie was a student of Yan Guangmin.

has remained but good intentions. One admires the ancients, who often presented each other with gifts as a means of mutual encouragement. How ashamed I feel!³

Probably just after Gui Fu (1736-1805) had approached Weng Fanggang, he sought another such inscription from a calligrapher of some note named Pan Chengya. Pan responded with a poem, in which he relates his more private experience in reading the letters Gui had brought to him:

Alone I sit in my mountain abode,
Almost midnight on this starry night.
The rustle of the forest sends a chill down my spine,
Old letters strewn across my desk.
Epistles exchanged in a bygone time,
Between famous scholars across the land.
Noble men and eremites,
Deep in the mountains or among vast marshes.
The vast sea has no limit,
Resurging billows swallow the Milky Way.
Frustrated I read the long letter you shouldn't have needed to
write,
Deeply moved, my heart is filled with longing.
For twenty years we have been at opposite ends of the earth,
Not even a chance to talk about meetings and partings.
Strolling beneath the moon on a cool night,
In my sadness, I long to hear the cries of the letter-bearing wild
geese.
Who was it who said that to read letters of the ancients,
Was as if meeting them face-to-face?
My candle burning out, I face the cold window,
If only the wind could carry me lightly to your door!

At the end of that winter, probably in January 1775, Gui Fu, who played an important role in the final editing of *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, wrote the following note which he attached to his original colophon:

I began this task in the autumn of 1770, and had produced

³ *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, p. 240.

eight or nine bound volumes, when Yan Chongju made two visits to the capital, bringing with him more letters for the collection. The total was three times the original number, so many in fact that I have been unable to arrange them in any particular order. Initially I cut away the signature and the seal, but soon came to regret it. In his *Bie ge tie*, Liu Qianfu wrote, 'In the past, when people mounted calligraphy in an album, they would rather the number of lines on each page varied considerably than cut and paste. Only in that way would they preserve the original appearance of the piece.' Written to record my mistake.⁴

While we must allow for a degree of poetic licence in the first two pieces above, they nevertheless demonstrate some of the themes that recur in the letter collections which we are examining here. The first example does not provide much information about the letters or the collection, but we can see in it how this group of scholars saw themselves as carrying on the traditions of the friendships that were expressed in the letters written by the friends of Yan Guangmin. Although the collections of 'letters to teachers and friends' mentioned in the previous chapter are no longer extant, we can surmise that concern to preserve the refined exchanges between scholars and friends prompted the publication of the Yan collection and many others. Weng Fanggang saw the Yan letters this way, and tried to present the circle of friends who were gathered when Gui Fu brought the letters as being of a similar sensibility.

Pan Chengya continues this theme with his references to the 'noble men and eremites' who exchange their wisdom through letters. As we shall see in the next chapter, this idea was referred to in several of the essays on the ideals of the *chidu* genre which accompanied collections published in the seventeenth century. In the middle of the poem, he refers to another obvious theme, that of friends being separated by long distances and letters being the link between them. The final reference, 'to read the letters of the ancients / Was as if meeting them face to face?' is also a recurrent theme dating at least from *Wenxin diaolong* as we saw in Chapter One.

Gui Fu's colophon is interesting for us as it gives us some information about the process by which the editing was done. The fact that Yan Chongju brought the letters to the capital over three trips could suggest that they were spread around the Yan mansion in Qufu and Yan had to rummage around

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

to find them, or perhaps that Yan did some selecting of his own before passing them on to Gui. The second half of the colophon would seem to imply that Gui was initially interested in the letters for their content, and while he was clearly aware of the calligraphic value of most of the letters, it was only later that he really decided that the letters were a complete form of expression with which it was best not to tamper.

The originals of these letters are said still to be extant, but are not available for public view.⁵ The National Library of China holds a hand-copied edition, the origin of which is unclear, but which seems to have been done by one of the people associated with the Gui Fu version. In this edition, the letters have been copied out in neat regular script (*kaishu*), and the format of a letter has been preserved, although it is different to the original letters. We know this because in the margin beside each letter, there is a note as to the size and style of calligraphy of each letter. In some cases Yan Guangmin must have noted the date on the original letter, which has also been copied down. For example, in the margin besides the first letter in the collection, by Feng Pu (1609-1691), is written, 'Seven *cun* three *fen* long, six *cun* nine *fen* wide, In regular script, eighteen lines. The Director of the Bureau of Evaluations [Yan Guangmin] has written a note at the side saying the letter dates from the fourth month of the year *jiwei* (May, 1679).' In addition to notes like this written beside each letter, stuck to the top of the first page of each person's letters is an often rather scrappy piece of paper upon which is written the biography of the writer. These biographical notes appear in the '*xingshi kao*' (biographical information) which is appended to later printed editions of *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, though it is not clear who wrote them.

Despite the work that was put into this version, *Yanshi jiacang chidu* did not see the printing blocks for another seventy years, when the bibliophile Pan Shicheng, a descendant of the prominent Cantonese hong merchant Pan Zhencheng (1714-1788, known to Westerners as Puan Khequa), included it in his *Haishan xianguan congshu*.⁶ Pan says in his preface that the collection had been in his hands for about a year, and he was about to give it to a friend, but before doing so, he had the whole collection copied out into a book of four chapters for inclusion in the *congshu*. *Yanshi jiacang chidu* was reprinted in *Congshu jicheng* published by the Commercial Press

⁵ Librarians in the Shanghai Municipal Library told me that the originals are held there, but at the time I visited, they were being repaired and I was unable to see them.

⁶ This has been reprinted in Taiwan as part of *Baibu congshu jicheng*, edited by Yan Yiping.

in the 1930's.

Over one hundred and sixty years passed between the death of Yan Guangmin and the printing of *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, and few such letter collections had to travel such a tortuous path before publication. Many factors in the process by which *Yanshi jiacang chidu* came to be published were not typical; in particular, most collections were made much more deliberately than this. However, the documents which have become attached to this collection give us an insight into why some scholars found *chidu* interesting, and we are given more information about the process through which the collection came to be published than is the case with most other collections. With this in mind, we may now move on to look at the range of *chidu* collections which were produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

***Chidu* collections - an overview**

The second half of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century witnessed a flurry of activity in the collection and publication of *chidu* unequalled in previous times. Collections of the *chidu* of individual writers were published as they had been in Song times. A number of collections of model letters were published, though unlike the letters in the *shuyi*, these models were not so obviously formulaic, and it was much more common for the compilers to use actual letters by renowned writers. Two new developments were collections of *chidu* from ancient times to the Ming, such as Wang Shizhen's *Chidu qingcai*, and anthologies of contemporary or near-contemporary *chidu* published for their merit as examples of *chidu* per se. These two types of *chidu* collection are particularly important in the context of our investigation, as their appearance confirms that by this time *chidu* were appreciated for their literary qualities.

In the sections below, I will look at the various types of collection that appeared during the late Ming and early Qing period, placing particular emphasis on the factors that motivated the compilers to produce the collections, how they presented their collections and what they felt a *chidu* was.

Collections of letters to and from individuals

In purely numerical terms, collections of letters by or to individual scholars were easily the dominant type of collection published during the

period in question. These generally seem to have been compiled by the family, friends or students of the writer concerned, though occasionally the author or recipient himself published them. The prefaces to these collections tend not to be very helpful in the context of this study, since more often than not they focus on the virtues of the author rather than on the *chidu* themselves. This would seem to confirm that many people still saw publishing *chidu* primarily as a way of displaying the writer's virtue and learning than as examples of skilful letter-writing. Unfortunate for the modern reader too is the fact that most of these collections would have been carefully edited, so that unguarded moments, gossip, trivial but interesting details of daily life and so on are generally absent. There are very few letters like those of Su Shi. Of course, this poses the much larger question of how much of this kind of material was actually written: it is difficult to believe that it wasn't. One reason why *Yanshi jiacang chidu* is in some ways more interesting than many of the more deliberately compiled collections is that, as far as we can tell, the letters in it were never meant to be published, and thus we perhaps get a better idea of the range of correspondence that was exchanged between friends at that time than we do from the 'literary' collections. A similar situation exists in European letter-writing, where it may be argued that some of the most interesting of the collections of the personal letters that have come down to us are interesting precisely because they were not meant to be published. Cicero's letters breathe much more the life of ancient Rome than do the self-consciously wise letters of Seneca. Dorothy Osborne and Mme. de Sévigné's fireside letters appeal to us because of their unguarded and highly personal nature, while reading Chesterfield's lectures to his no doubt bewildered six-year-old son on such things as the art of oratory is, for us at least, more humorous than the polished humour of his letters to adult friends and associates.⁷ And although Thomas Gray's letters are still interesting, the decision of the first editor of his letters, William Mason, to doctor those letters which he considered unfit for a poet of Gray's reputation, make those letters less interesting.⁸

In any case, the letters in these collections often do have some literary

⁷ Chesterfield, Fourth Earl of, (Phillip Dormer Stanhope), *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to his Son*. See p. 56 for a letter to the son on oratory.

⁸ Mason wrote, 'I will promise my reader that he shall, in the following pages, seldom behold Mr. Gray in any light other than that of a Scholar and Poet.' Mason omitted passages, inserted phrases of his own, 'corrected' Gray's colloquial style, and otherwise changed anything which did not conform to the image of Gray which Mason wished to portray. See the Introduction to Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley ed., *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, pp. xiii-xvi.

merit, and as we shall see in our case study of *Chidu xinchao*, the editors of *chidu* collections often lifted a number of the better examples from these collections of the letters of individuals and included them in their anthologies. In a number of instances it is possible to compare the edited version as presented in a later anthology with the original.

It never became very common for *chidu* to be included in the earliest edition of a writer's collected works, and it appears that in most instances the *chidu* collections were first published separately and only later included in expanded editions of a writer's collected works. Sometimes this did not happen until modern editions were published in the People's Republic. Significantly, most of the writers who wrote a large number of *chidu*, and whom we can presume to have particularly favoured this form of writing, do not seem to have written many *shu*. We have already mentioned the three Yuan brothers, whose collected works contain large number of *chidu* but no *shu*. There are no *shu* in the collected works of Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), but there are six chapters of *chidu*.⁹ The collected works of the itinerant essayist Song Maocheng (1572-1622, or 1569-1620), whose *chidu* were obviously highly regarded by Zhou Lianggong, contain but one *shu* and over a hundred *chidu*.¹⁰ The various editions of Wang Siren's works also contain *chidu* but no *shu*.¹¹ Curiously, the many *chidu* by Qi Biaoja (1602-45), famous for his memorials, his treatises on gardens and on drama, and for his familiar essays (*xiaopin*), seemed to have been largely ignored by posterity, but at least they have survived, whereas if he wrote any *shu*, they haven't.¹² The fact that the *chidu* of so many writers were preserved, and in most cases published, even if they did not appear in the earlier editions of their authors' collected works, would seem to establish that in the eyes of many scholars, *chidu* had become a significant genre. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that in most of the collected works of individuals, *chidu* were not included, though it is usually possible to find at least a

⁹ See Tang Xianzu, *Tang Xianzu ji*, pp. 1219-1456.

¹⁰ See Song Maocheng, *Jiu yue ji (Jiu yue bie ji)*, pp. 235-62.

¹¹ See Wang Siren, *Wenfan xiaopin*, pp. 7-23, and *Wang Jizhong shi zhong*, which doesn't contain letters of any kind.

¹² The National Library of China holds hand-copied versions arranged under a number of headings, probably by Qi himself. Some of these appear to be Qi's original drafts, and are thus particularly valuable. These have recently been published in facsimile form in the 3-volume *Qi Biaoja wengao*, pp. 1589-2386. Unfortunately the editors did not provide detailed tables of contents, which makes finding anything very difficult, and the quality of the printing is often poor, so texts are often hard to read even if one does succeed in finding them.

couple of *chidu* by any reasonably well-known writer in *chidu* anthologies, which confirms that they did write them (one presumes a literatus in China at the time couldn't have got through life without writing them).

Furthermore, in many instances, no real distinction was made between *shu* and *chidu*, and all a writer's letters were lumped together under a single heading, usually *shu*, which some editors obviously still regarded as a generic term, or under an all-inclusive heading such as *shudu*. Very often one can observe a gradual 'degeneration' of the letters in the chapter(s) devoted to '*shu*' in such collections, from very long and formal letters to well-known dignitaries at the beginning of the chapters, to short, obviously less carefully composed letters, at the end. So the appellation *shu* in the title of a letter, which was of course added later, does not automatically imply that the letter was a longer formal letter.

As we shall see presently, Wang Shizhen, the leader of the Archaist school known as the Latter Seven Masters, published one of the most influential collections of *chidu*, *Chidu qingcai*. However, Wang's concept of what constituted a *chidu* was looser than most other compilers of *chidu* collections, and it is not surprising that in his own collected works, *Yanzhou shanren sibugao* and its supplement *xugao*, published in about 1577, all of the several hundred of his letters are grouped together under the title *shudu*, though the letters vary greatly in length and cover a wide range of topics.

Lastly, two collections related to Zhang Chao (1650-after 1707), a bibliophile renowned for several publications of *congshu* and for the book *You meng ying*, are worth some consideration. These two collections were published by Zhang himself in about 1684, judging by the dated preface by Cai Fangbing. One of them, *Chidu yousheng*, consists of the letters friends wrote to Zhang, while the other collection, *Chidu oucun*, contains Zhang's letters to his friends. The preface by one Chen Zaidao describes how in the course of his scholarly activities, Zhang wrote and received many letters, and decided to publish a selection of them. The collections which resulted provide a fascinating insight into the work of a seventeenth-century bibliophile, and are an excellent resource for scholars working on the literary activities of the period.¹³ Because most of the letters are practical ones relating to things like borrowing books and specific publishing activities,

¹³ For example see the article by Gu Guorui and Liu Hui, "'Chidu ou cun', 'You sheng' ji qi zhong-de xiqu shiliao", which examines these collections for the information they contain on early Qing drama, especially relating to Kong Shangren (1648-1718), the author of the famous opera *Taohua shan* (*The Peach Blossom Fan*).

Yousheng and *Oucun* lack the literary variety of most of the other collections discussed here, but their refined practicality is perhaps more reminiscent of the letters of Su Shi than most of the more consciously literary *chidu*. There are also a few unusual letters, such as Zhang's letter to 'the Western Scholar Bi Duomin' in which he asks Bi to explain the strange things he has heard about Western scientific understanding of the earth.¹⁴

Zhang Chao's collections can be further distinguished from most of the other collections of the *chidu* of individuals in that the prefaces written for them do actually say something about *chidu*-writing. What is said is fairly conventional, but it at least demonstrates that Zhang and his associates were conscious of *chidu* as a genre.

Generally speaking, however, the collections of the *chidu* of individuals do not directly tell us a great deal about what seventeenth century literati thought of the genre, though we can deduce a few things from them and their relationship with writers' 'official' collection works. Undoubtedly most literati wrote *chidu*, since they were a necessary tool of social intercourse, but *chidu* found their way into only a small number of the collected works of individual writers, and there are not a great deal more separately published *chidu* collections to supplement these. This indicates that in the eyes of the majority of the literati of the time, *chidu* were still a minor art, and they did not think to place them alongside the more substantial genres when compiling the collections that would represent the literary achievements of individual writers. However, beginning in the sixteenth century, there are more and more cases of scholars' *chidu* being published in some form, which corresponds to a greater recognition of the value of more personal forms of writing.

Collections of model letters

Manuals on letter-writing were not new, as we have seen, but the manuals that were published in the Ming and early Qing period were much more varied than the *shuyi* of earlier times. The primary purpose for publishing the *shuyi* seems to have been to help people write letters that properly fulfilled the requirements of social etiquette, with literary skill and personal expression being rather secondary considerations. This was also true in the Ming and Qing letter-writing manuals, but the range of

¹⁴ I have been unable to ascertain who Bi Duomin was, but most likely he was a Jesuit working in the Jiangnan area.

situations covered was generally much broader, and the styles much more varied. Other model collections were apparently meant not so much to help scholars deal with the practicalities of polite correspondence as to show them examples of good letter-writing in all the areas in which a cultivated person was supposed to be conversant. Writers were encouraged to lace their letters with flashes of wit and 'invention' in the appropriate places, unlike in the *shuyi* which encouraged the use of ritualised formulas.

At the simplest level, the letters which were included in these letter-writing manuals can be divided into two types: those in which the authorship of the letters is attributed, or authentic (presumably) letters, and those in which the authorship is not attributed to anyone, and which we may presume to have been composed for the purpose. Of those collections where it is clearly stated that the book is primarily meant to provide models, or, in the absence of editorial comments, where the book is clearly laid out in the style of a manual, collections such as *Han hai*, *Chidu chuzheng* and *Xie xin ji* can be said to belong to the first type, where actual letters are used, while *Tongsu yunjian*, *Ru mian tan* and *Chidu shuangyu* are of the second composed-for-the-purpose type. *Tongsu yunjian* is attributed to the writer and painter Xu Wei (1521-1593). There is no preface or other introductory piece to this collection, nor any indications of date, and the print is poor, all of which are classic marks of spurious texts. Xu's reputation would make his name an ideal one for unscrupulous publishers to use. However, it is not entirely unlikely that he compiled *Tongsu yunjian*, since he published another collection of *chidu*, namely *Gujin chidu zhenya yunjian* in ten chapters, probably printed before 1620¹⁵, and was a very prolific writer and compiler. *Ru mian tan*, on the other hand, is almost certainly one of the many spurious works attributed to Zhong Xing.¹⁶ However, even if both collections are spurious, this does not disqualify them from this discussion.

One of the most common distinguishing features of all types of these model collections is the way in which letters are grouped under certain subject or function headings. The simplest method of doing this was to group all the letters on a certain topic or performing a particular function under a general heading, which usually constituted a chapter. Chen Mei's *Xie xin ji* is an example of this. Chen has divided the letters in his collection up into sixteen categories, with headings such as 'Congratulations and

¹⁵ See Xu's biography in *DMB*, p. 611. It is also listed in the *Rare Books Catalogue of Beijing University Library*, but I was unable to see it.

¹⁶ See the biography of Zhong Xing in *ibid.*, p. 409.

Condolences', 'Officialdom', 'Literature and Art', 'Invitations', 'Expressing One's Feelings' and 'Letters of Recommendation'. However, apart from using the traditional method of highlighting the passages to be noted in each letter (putting a dot beside each character), there are no other instructions, comments or sub-classifications.

Further evidence that *Xie xin ji* was meant as a manual is that the only other book I have been able to find by Chen, (*Ping shan ge*) *Liuqing guangji*, is a kind of etiquette manual containing prose models written by contemporaries in the register that social etiquette would have demanded, as well as guidelines on a range of questions about which a scholar would be expected to be conversant. It contains a chapter on letters, arranged by category, and therefore I feel it is justified to surmise that the two *Xie xin ji* might have been an expansion of the idea behind *Liuqing guangji*, which was published before *Xie xin ji*. A survey of the letters in *Xie xin ji* would seem to confirm this, as most of the letters are relatively brief and seem to deal with specific occasions.¹⁷

Tongsu yunjian provides more for the budding letter-writer. Each letter is given a heading which states the situation for which the letter is applicable, such as 'On appreciating the moon', 'Congratulations on building a new study', or 'Thanks for a gift of peonies', and indicates who the writer and recipient might be, for example 'To a censor', or 'From an elder brother away from home, to his younger brother'. The outstanding parts of the letter are marked, and the top margin contains further notes on situations for which the letter is suitable, on the style, and on which references are important. Following each letter are textual notes which explain such things as the usages of certain characters or the sources of literary allusions. Detail such as this was very rare in the model letter collections of the Ming and early Qing, though it became more common when more model letter manuals appeared in the late Qing and Republican period. Indeed, *Tongsu yunjian* would be an excellent subject for further study, albeit somewhat hampered by the lack of information on the background to the collection.

Li Yu, the great novelist and dramatist, produced at least two, and perhaps three collections of *chidu*. *Gujin chidu daquan* is an anthology of

¹⁷ Little is known about Chen Mei except that he was a native of Hangzhou and at some stage during the 1660's lived 'temporarily by the Zhu River' (presumably Guangzhou). ('Preface' *Xiexin er ji*, by Zhang Guotai, approx. 1696, p. 2) A copy of *Liuqing guangji* is held in the library of Nanjing University. The *Zhongwen da cidian* records a book entitled *Liuqing xinji* in 30 chapters, which must be related to *Guangji*. The 1680 preface to *Xie xin ji* by Lin Yunming mentions 'all the *Liuqing* editions', which confirms that there was more than one edition.

letters from ancient times up to the late Ming, and we shall look at this presently. *Chidu chuzheng* is a collection of *chidu* by Li's contemporaries.¹⁸ Both were meant to provide models, but this is more apparent in *Chidu chuzheng*, where Li has used an innovative table of reference. In his statement of editorial principles, Li criticises the practice of arranging letters by category:

In the past, editors of *chidu* anthologies have arranged the letters by category to assist the reader searching for a particular type of letter. However, irrespective of which system of categorisation has been used, they have all been generalised and vague, with the result that each time the reader finds an example of the kind of letter he is looking for, he must miss out on many other letters of the same type. Furthermore, the editor's decision as to which category a certain letter belongs is often open to

¹⁸ The question of the publication of *Chidu erzheng* and *Gu jin chidu da quan* is interesting, but rather problematic. There is considerable evidence that *Chidu erzheng* was in close to publishable form before Li died, but there are no extant copies, and no references which state or prove categorically that it was printed. Three letters in Li's collected works refer to it. In a letter to the poet Cao Erkan (1617-1679), Li urges Cao to send his contributions to him because he can't wait much longer. No letters by Cao appear in *Chuzheng*, so either they were put into *Erzheng*, or Cao never sent them (or if Li was still working on *Erzheng* when he died, it is possible that Cao died before submitting them, as Cao died a year before Li) - see 'To Junior Compiler Cao Gu'an', in *Liweng wen ji*, 3.17b-18a, in *Li Yu quanji*, Helmut Martin ed., pp. 438-9. In a letter to another poet, Du Jun (1611-1697), Li says that he has included eight of the nine letters Du submitted (interestingly, Li says the letter he omitted was "too contemptuous of people, and likely to offend), but these do not appear in *Chuzheng*, so must have been meant for *Erzheng*. - see 'To Du Yuhuang', in *ibid.*, p. 3.18a, (p. 439). Li also solicited letters from Wu Weiye. In the statement of editorial principles for *Gujin chidu daquan*, Li says that he has not included anything that was included in *Chidu chuzheng* and *Erzheng*, which implies that he knew what was in *Erzheng*, although it could conceivably just mean 'of the type of letter in those collections.' (This statement of editorial principles is undated.) A note at the beginning of *Gujin chidu daquan* by Shen Xinyou, Li's son-in-law, says that 'It is long time since Mr. Li's *Chidu chuzheng* was published, and *Erzheng* will be finished very soon...', but this too is undated. The catalogue card for *Gujin chidu daquan* in the Beijing University Library says that it was published in 1688, but there is no internal evidence for this. If 1688 is correct, then obviously Li died before *Erzheng* could be published, and Shen was planning to publish it for him posthumously, in the same way as he published *Daquan*. In Appendix 2 of the book *Li Yu* by Liu Ts'un Yan and Nathan Mao, which lists all the books Li edited and wrote, 1688 is given as the date of publication for *Da quan*, though again no evidence is provided for this (p.144). Liu and Mao have listed *Erzheng*, but give the publication date as unknown. In his book *The Invention of Li Yu*, Patrick Hanan discusses *Chuzheng* but says *Erzheng* 'never appeared', though he provides no evidence for this (pp. 24-25). Hanan seems to have been unaware of the existence of *Daquan*. So unless further evidence comes to light, it is difficult to ascertain just what happened to *Erzheng*, and how *Daquan* came to be published. I am grateful to Mr. Huang Qiang of the Chinese Department of Yangzhou Teachers College for his kind assistance in trying to solve these mysteries. See his article 'Li Yu "Gujin shi lue", "Chidu chuzheng" yu "Yi jia yan" shukao', in *Wenxian*, 1988.2, pp. 52-62.

dispute. I believe that amongst all literary genres, only letters cannot be slotted into categories. If one tries, one will have to chop the individual letters up and separate all the bits into the various categories.¹⁹

Li's solution, then, is to provide a reference table of subject headings, with the letters relating to that subject listed under each heading. There are about 140 of these subject headings, although in most cases there are only between one and three letters under each heading, the notable exceptions being 'Literature' and 'Condolences'. Each subject heading is highlighted by being enclosed in a rectangular border. Below each heading, printed in the standard character size for the book, is the title of the letter, 'To Li Houru', 'Reply to Gu Xiuyuan', etc., below which, in half-size characters, is the chapter (*juan*) and page number where the letter is to be found. In many cases, a section (*duan*) number is also provided. This refers to an especially unusual innovation of Li's.

When reading the letters in *Chidu chuzheng*, one will notice one or more small L-shaped markers inserted in various places through the text, especially in the longer letters. These are the section (*duan*) markers which indicate a change of topic within the letter, and are Li's way of dealing with the shortcomings in other categorisation schemes which he identified in the passage quoted above. In the most common method of classification, the editor would place each letter under a particular heading on the basis of which of the topics covered in the letter was dominant, or what the main function of the letter was. Under such a scheme, the only way one could find all the letters that touched on a particular topic was to read the entire collection, since the headings would only lead the reader to those letters where the topic he was interested in was the main one. Under Li's scheme, if an example of the topic one is looking for is indicated in the index as being in the third section of a particular letter, one finds the letter in question, then looks for the second L-shaped marker in the text of that letter, and what follows thereafter is the third section, which will be on the subject the reader is interested in. Thus all letters which touch on a particular topic can be found without the editor having to resort to cutting the letter up.

Li's collection seems not to have been greatly successful, despite the work he put into it. *Chidu chuzheng* has apparently never been reprinted, and copies of it are held in only a few libraries. In this respect it compares

¹⁹ Li Yu, *Chidu chuzheng*, 'fan li', item 2.

unfavorably with *Chidu xinchao*, which was first published just a couple of years after *Chidu chuzheng*. *Chidu xinchao* has been reprinted several times since the 1660's, and many major Chinese and overseas libraries hold copies of the original edition. There is seemingly no documentary evidence as to why this is so, but there are at least two possible explanations. The first explanation lies in the person of Zhou Lianggong himself. Zhou was a central figure in the literary world of the time, and was himself regarded as one of the most outstanding writers of the period. He had the financial means to patronise many poorer poets, writers and artists. In this position, it was not difficult for him to gather letters by renowned figures of his time, and eventually Zhou and his friends were able to produce three collections of *chidu*. However, Zhou had had a particularly tumultuous political career, having served both the Ming and the Qing. In the year before *Chidu xinchao* was published, Zhou only escaped exile to Manchuria because of the amnesty granted upon the death of the Shunzhi emperor, having being found guilty of excessive cruelty as an official in Fujian. Interest in what sort of letters Zhou would publish would have been a strong attraction, and as I will demonstrate later in this thesis, he seems not to have disappointed his readers.

Li, on the other hand, was not so wealthy, and was often in the position where he had to ask for support from others. Many of his projects were frowned upon by conservative writers. Nor was he the centre of a large circle of scholar-writers, and his life had been a relatively uneventful one, from a political point of view at least. Thus it was unlikely that *Chidu chuzheng* could command the same degree of literary and political interest as *Chidu xinchao*.

Secondly, accomplished writers interested in *chidu* would quite probably read them for the expression of personal sentiments and the use of language, and would consider a scheme such as Li's, so obviously meant to help less skilled writers, as beneath their dignity. Students of *chidu*-writing, on the other hand, might have found Li's system too cumbersome, especially because of the daunting number of items in the index.

An example of the attitude that many scholars might have had towards such classification systems can be found in *Chidu lanyan*. The compilers, Huang Rong and Wang Weihuan, in their statement of editorial principles, dealt with the categorisation question in the following way:

There is nearly always more than one topic discussed in any given letter. If we insist on classifying it, it would involve cutting it up and forcing it into categories. However, since our erudite readers are able to classify the letters in their own minds as they read them, what need is there for us to trouble with this classification business!²⁰

Chidu lanyan was more clearly intended to present *chidu* for their literary qualities rather than offer models for students of the genre to study, and comments such as this support the argument that such categorised letter-writing manuals were regarded as an insult to the intelligence and cultivation of a true scholar. The low esteem in which letter-writing manuals were held could also explain why so few copies of these collections survive: they were simply utilitarian publications not worth preserving. As we shall see in our study of *Chidu xincha*, it appears the seventeenth-century literati preferred their letter-writers to come across as gentlemen-amateurs, refined but not giving the appearance of being too bookish or of having put in too much effort, in the same way that scholar-painters avoided showing off their skill with the brush.

The question of the relationship between *shuyi* and these kind of collections, especially one like *Tongsu yunjian*, would be a fascinating one to explore. Questions we could ask include: were collections like *Tongsu yunjian* supposed to be a replacement for the *shuyi*, or did they exist side by side at least for a period? Did the users of these manuals belong to a similar social group? Does the change reflect social change? (I feel certain it must.) When Ming writers wrote letters demanded by social ritual, such as letters of condolence, were they supposed to display some literary skill, or was strict conformity still the norm? However, these questions must await further study if we are to arrive at satisfactory answers.

Since there was a demand for such model letter manuals, and since the subject matter of the model letters in them was not purely functional as in the *shuyi*, it seems safe to conclude that by the late Ming there was growing interest in cultivating a *chidu* style as an avenue of literary expression, even in letters written on a daily basis. That many scholars looked down on such letter-writing manuals is further evidence that one was supposed to be able to express one's feelings or opinions in a creative way, without imitating

²⁰ *Chidu lanyan*, 'fan li', item 6.

others, which is in turn evidence of a greater appreciation of *chidu* as a form of literature.

Collections of letters ancient and modern

Although most of the collections which appeared during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were collections of the letters of their compilers' contemporaries or near contemporaries, a number of anthologies of *chidu* from ancient times up to about the time of publication also appeared. The most influential of these was *Chidu qingcai*, compiled by Wang Shizhen. We have already mentioned Xu Wei's *Gujin chidu zhenya yunjian* and Li Yu's *Gujin chidu daquan*. Many libraries hold an anthology entitled *Han hai*, compiled in about 1630 by one Shen Jiayin, with a preface by Chen Jiru. The letters in this anthology have also been divided into categories, with each of the twelve chapters constituting one category, which in turn is divided under a number of subheadings. For example, Chapter Four is headed 'Social Intercourse', and the letters within are arranged under such headings as 'Expressing thanks for a letter', 'Presenting gifts', 'Expressing thanks for a gift' and 'Declining a gift'. Other chapters contained letters of more practical application, such as Chapter Eleven, 'Administrative Affairs', under which appears such subheadings as 'Taxes and corvee', 'Relieving famine', 'Military preparedness', and 'Water conservancy'. Clearly this collection was intended to serve as a manual, but the letters in it were genuine letters from the Han up to the Ming.²¹

Judging by the fact that it was mentioned by the compilers of a couple of later *chidu* collections, and clearly 'borrowed from' in at least one instance, Wang Shizhen's *Chidu qingcai* seems to have been one of the most influential *chidu* collections of the period. In fact it is a greatly expanded version of an eight-chapter collection of the same name compiled by Yang Shen (1488-1559).²² Wang's sixty chapter edition begins with *ciming* from the *Zuozhuan*, and finishes with letters by his contemporary and fellow Archaist, Li Panlong (1514-1570). However, the emphasis of Wang's *Chidu qingcai* is clearly on the pre-Tang period, as there are forty-eight chapters of letters from the period before the Tang, then just three from the Tang, four-

²¹ This collection is held in a number of libraries. There is a woodblock edition, presumably the original one, dating from 1630, which was reprinted in Shanghai in 1876 by Shenbao guan (this edition claims Chen Jiru was a co-editor). Chen Jiru also edited a collection entitled *Chidu shuangyu*.

²² Yang's version uses the character 赤 rather than 尺 in the word *chidu* in the title, but this is just a variant.

and-a-half from the Song, and five of letters from the Ming (including one whole chapter of letters by Li Panlong). Obviously this is a result of his admiration for the prose of the Qin and Han period. However, as a result of this, Wang might have been partly or largely responsible for the insistence by a number of later writers on *chidu* that the *chidu* of the late Ming and early Qing were descended from the *ciming* and other letters of pre-Han times. This was certainly Wang's view, and he begins his preface to *Chidu qingcai* with a clear statement to this effect.²³ However, it is clear that the foundations upon which this claim was based were weak.

Many if not most of the examples quoted in *Chidu qingcai* are actually excerpts from longer letters. This is in fact announced by the title, as the term '*qingcai*' means 'pure cuttings'. I shall discuss the significance of this below, but let us first look at the letters which Wang included.

It is clear that Wang Shizhen took a very broad view of what a *chidu* was, and this led to justified accusations of indiscipline, as we shall see below. *Chidu qingcai* contains many 'letters' by emperors, but these are mostly taken from the dynastic histories, and are almost invariably related to the recipient's duties in some way. Perhaps they are not as formal as actual edicts, but they are still related to administration, and are quite different even from the short letters of Wang Xizhi, let alone those of Su Shi and the *chidu* of the late Ming and early Qing. Many of the letters written by officials are also obviously written in connection with their duties. Of course there are letters which possess some of the characteristics of Song and post-Song *chidu*, but the difficulty with many of those is that they are drawn from *lieshu* such as *Beitang shuchao*, and as such are mostly excerpts from longer tracts, many of which have since disappeared. One is inclined to doubt whether some of these were really letters at all. Wang includes many 'letters' by Wang Xizhi, but in quite a number of cases it is difficult to see how Wang Shizhen was sure they were letters. Though the titles were of course added later, only some of them indicate clearly that the text was a letter. Most of the titles are either the first characters of the text, or an indication of the contents. Of course, many of these do appear to have been letters, but quite a few could have been other occasional pieces. On the other hand, Wang includes one text which is clearly a letter, but which is only six characters in length, and as such hardly seems worth inclusion.²⁴

Two examples from the chapters on the Tang dynasty in *Chidu qingcai*

²³ *Chidu qingcai*, 1558 preface, p. 1a.

²⁴ *Chidu qingcai*, 25.6a.

further illustrate how Wang used longer letters. Wang includes three letters by Han Yu, one to Feng Su, one to Yuan Zhen (779-831) and one to Cui Qun, but these too are excerpts from longer letters. The letter to Feng is a discussion of literature, while that to Yuan Zhen discusses An Lushan (d. 757). Han's well-known letter to Cui Qun conforms much more to our idea of a personal letter than the other two (though it is obviously carefully written), but Wang includes only the last quarter of it.²⁵ The second example is that of the letters of Bai Juyi, from which Wang quotes two excerpts from Bai's letters to Yuan Zhen. The first of these is Bai's famous letter describing his abode at Mount Lu, of which Wang quotes only about a fifth, while the second consists of just a couple of lines from the very long letter discussing poetry.²⁶

Wang's treatment of the *chidu* from after the Tang period is more consistent. For instance, the letters by Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi he includes do come from the *chidu/shujian* sections of their collected works. However, in quoting Su's famous letter to Qin Guan (1049-1100), Wang quotes only about one quarter of the letter (which is very long by *chidu* standards).²⁷ The first of two letters from Su to Chen Zao in *Chidu qingcai* is not very long, but Wang quotes just the first sentence.²⁸ The second is a longer letter, and Wang just quotes two lines (out of twelve in the modern edition).²⁹

The conclusion we can draw from the way Wang has compiled *Chidu qingcai* is that Wang meant it to provide models of how *chidu* should be written. His taking of excerpts from letters rather than quoting them in their entirety (unless the original was already short), and his lack of fastidiousness in judging whether or not some of the texts he included were really letters, suggests that he was more interested in providing models for the kind of language one might use in a letter than in producing a collection of letters simply for literary appreciation. I would also contend that Wang's placing so much emphasis on pre-Qin and Han '*chidu*' is an attempt by him to forge a connection between the *chidu* of his own times and the prose of the Qin and Han period which he so admired. However, it is clear, despite Wang's

²⁵ *Chidu qingcai*, 51.2a-3a. The full letter to Feng can be found in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, p. 115, that to Yuan on pp.128-9, and that to Cui Qun on pp. 108-110.

²⁶ See *Bai Juyi ji*, pp. 972-3 'Yu Weizhi shu' for the letter about Mount Lu, and pp. 959-67 'Yu Yuan Jiu shu' for the letter on poetry. 'Yu Weizhi shu' has recently been translated by Stephen Owen, *op.cit.*, pp. 603-05. Owen describes it as 'an early example of the Chinese informal letter'.

²⁷ *Chidu qingcai*, 52.7b-8a. The full letter can be found in *Su Shi wenji*, pp. 1535-37. I am grateful to Professor Robert Entenmann of St. Olaf College, Minnesota, for bringing this letter to my attention.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.8b. The full letter is in *Su Shi wenji*, pp. 1569-70.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.8b-9a. The full letter is in *Su Shi wenji*, p. 1570-71.

indiscipline, that he did see a difference between *shu* and *chidu*, since he very rarely includes excerpts from the long, essay-like *shu*, and when he does, he takes the less formal parts which might be instructive to those trying to develop a *chidu* style. Of course, the effect of producing a collection of excerpts such as *Chidu qingcai* would be to encourage writers to create patchworks of phrases from famous *chidu* rather than expressing themselves in their own words. This was precisely what the followers of the Archaist school were most strongly criticised for doing, and stands in pointed contrast to the practice of many other prominent *chidu* writers from the period.

It is interesting, then, to compare *Chidu qingcai* with Li Yu's *Gujin chidu daquan*. Both *Chidu qingcai* and *Gujin chidu daquan* are arranged in chronological order, but otherwise the two collections are different in some basic ways. The most striking is the difference in emphasis, which would seem to reflect the two scholars' different ideas about literature. Pre-Tang *chidu* fill only about one and a half chapters of Li's anthology (Li's chapters are much longer). Li has removed almost all the letters written by emperors and other members of ruling families, with the exception of a few by Han emperors, and even these, comparatively speaking, look a little more like personal letters than most of the ones that appeared in *Chidu qingcai*. In *Gujin chidu daquan* there is instead greater emphasis on Song and Ming authors. Li includes sixty-seven letters by Su Shi, against Wang's fifty-four, thirty-six by Huang Tingjian against Wang's twelve, and twenty-one by the philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200), whereas Wang includes only two. Li has not used any of Li Panlong's *chidu*, but he has included thirteen of Wang Shizhen's, which is more than for any other Ming author except Wang Shouren (or Wang Yangming, 1472-1528), Gao Panlong (1562-1626) and Wang Ruozhi (d. ca. 1645).

However, it is clear in quite a number of places that Li did in fact borrow from Wang, as there are many letters in common. Furthermore, not only did Li use the same letter, but in cases where Wang had just printed an excerpt from a much longer letter, Li prints exactly the same excerpt. An example of this is Bai Juyi's letter about Mount Lu written to Yuan Zhen which we mentioned above, where both editors just quote the section in which Bai describes the setting of his dwelling.

One area in which the two collections would seem to be different is in stated intent. In his statement of editorial principles, Li makes rather a large

point of the edifying nature of the *chidu* he has included in the collection, for example claiming that he has 'made it a priority to include everything that would be of benefit to body and soul, family and country, or that is related to the "three bonds and five constant virtues" and the "doctrine of the names"'.³⁰ However, in another item, Li makes the dual purpose of the collection clear, as he refers to both the morally uplifting nature of many letters in the collection, and to the collection's function as a reference for letter-writers:

Of the letters in this collection, those which are suitable for practical purposes have been included irrespective of who their author is, but there are also those which have been selected because of the person who wrote them. For instance, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian both had unique skills, while Confucian scholars such as Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming and Luo Hongxian and Gao Panlong excelled in expounding upon matters of morality, and often discussed some of their own philosophy in their letters. Therefore, I cannot but include enough to give a rounded view of their ideas, and should not gloss over them just because they are *chidu*.³¹

If we consider this in the wider context of Li's published works and known interests, it would seem a little unusual that moral concerns would be the main reason for compiling such an anthology. But he is persistent: he contrasts the lofty philosophical strain of many of the letters in *Gujin chidu daquan* with the novel styles of the letters in *Chidu chuzheng* and *Chidu erzheng*, and the number of letters by outstanding moral philosophers included in *Gujin chidu daquan* would seem to lend some credibility to Li's claim. We will return to this question in the next chapter.

However, the comment about 'practical purposes' to my mind reveals the true nature of the collection: that he meant the collection to be a reference tool, albeit interlaced with some edifying material so the collection would not appear to be catering to vulgar tastes. Possibly there had not been a very positive reaction to his complex indexing system for *Chidu chuzheng*, as that made it very obvious that that collection was meant as a

³⁰ *Gujin chidu daquan*, 'fan li', item 1. The 'doctrine of the names' (*mingjiao*) refers to Confucian teachings relating to the doctrine of the rectification of the names (*zheng ming*).

³¹ *Ibid.*, item 3.

kind of manual. As we shall see in the next chapter, practically everyone who wrote on *chidu* was at pains to assert the respectability of the genre, which did not have a place in the classical canon. Therefore any collection which was seen as blatantly catering to popular tastes ran the risk of rejection by 'serious' writers, and Li tried to avoid this by emphasising the edificatory function of many of the letters. The profit motive was an important element in Li's work. Li, as Patrick Hanan has described, was often in financial trouble and published many books with the aim of making money.³² A substantial proportion of his publications were in areas where there was a considerable popular market, and *chidu* was of those areas. No doubt there was a demand for collections of model *chidu*, but it seems very likely that, in order to capture the widest possible market, the trick was to produce a collection of model letters without making it too obvious that that was what it was.

There is one other collection which is not of exactly the same type as those discussed above, but in which there are some interesting comments on other collections, *Chidu qingcai* in particular. *Mingren chidu*, published in 1705 by Wang Yuanxun and Cheng Hualu of Changshu and Xiuning respectively, is a collection of *chidu* from the Ming dynasty. It presents a wide selection, particularly from the latter part of the Ming, arranged in chronological order. According to those associated with its publication, *Mingren chidu* was an attempt to break with what they saw as increasing vulgarity in the *chidu* collections of previous decades. Wang Yi (first in the palace examinations of 1700, d. 1706) wrote a short yet incisive introduction to this collection in which he drew attention to the problems in *chidu* collections which had appeared in the preceding 150 or so years:

Since the Ming dynasty, there have been several dozen collections of *chidu* published, but good ones have been extremely rare. In most cases the selections have been too diverse, so the purpose is unclear. Their style is easy, but they lack substance. This is the disease affecting most scholars...Only Yang Shen in *Chidu qingcai* showed a good grasp of the principles of selection. Wang Shizhen followed in his steps, adding those that Yang had omitted, but regrettably in this collection Wang has displayed wide erudition without being able to refine it to include just the

³² Hanan, Patrick, *The Invention of Li Yu*, ch. 1.

quintessence.³³

Of Wang and Cheng he attests that, 'They deplored the way in which this genre has become corrupted, and wanted to clean it up. Therefore they have collected the works of Ming worthies into an anthology. The selection has been done painstakingly, and not thrown together to please vulgar tastes.'³⁴ Surveying the collection as a whole, it appears that the editing has been tighter than in many other collections, and that Wang Yi was not just flattering the editors in the manner that was so common in prefaces. The quality of the printing in *Mingren chidu* is probably the best of any of the collections surveyed in this study of which I have been able to view the original edition, and the selection appears to be balanced and reasonably representative of the literary talent of the Ming. In most cases they include between one and five letters by each author, with just four exceptions: the playwright Tang Xianzu, Gui Youguang (1506-1571), Wang Heng (1601 *jinshi*) and Qian Qianyi (1582-1664). Of course one could always argue with the selection, but on the whole the editors seem to have been trying to present the 'quintessence' and done so with a clear objective in mind.

Whatever the shortcomings of Wang Shizhen's *Chidu qingcai*, it was easily the most influential of the collections of this type. None of the other anthologies mentioned in this section seem to have had such a significant impact, and very few copies of them are extant today. This is not surprising. In any society, books written or compiled to serve some sort of educational function rarely have any long term value, and are soon disposed of to make way for something new. Therefore, these texts were unlikely to be widely preserved past the period for which they were produced. Li Yu probably recognised this when he wrote the principles of selection for *Gujin chidu daquan*, but he was not respected by many of the literary authorities of his time, and they were unlikely to be convinced by his arguments that *Gujin chidu daquan* was more than just another book of models with which he hoped to make money. This impression was probably reinforced by the publication of *Chidu chuzheng*, which was quite clearly meant to provide models for less accomplished writers. Possibly Xu Wei's *Gujin chidu zhenya yunjian* suffered the same fate, though there is so little information about the collections attributed to him. *Han hai* is more obviously a collection of

³³ *Mingren chidu*, p. 1a.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 'xiao yin', p. 1.

model letters, and nothing is known about its compiler, so it is little wonder that no other writer even mentions it (though many copies have survived). The relative obscurity of *Mingren chidu* is perhaps more difficult to explain, since it does seem to be the result of a genuine attempt to produce a quality collection, an anthology of fine *chidu* writing, and one has the impression that the compilers would have been mortified if anyone had suggested that their collection was in the same category as Li Yu's collections of model letters. It may be that the obscurity of the compilers was a factor as it was for *Han hai*, and another possibility, judging by the quality of the printing, is that it was a rather expensive publication of which only a small number of copies were produced. Another less tangible element accounting for this might be that interest in *chidu* had passed its peak, which in turn possibly reflects increased conservatism in scholarly circles under Manchu rule. The relative conservatism and scholarly rigour in the prefaces of *Mingren chidu* is perhaps indicative of this trend.

Chidu qingcai, on the other hand, was effectively the work of two of the most authoritative figures in Ming dynasty literature, Yang Shen and Wang Shizhen. Wang in particular dominated the literary stage of his day, and anything he produced was certain to be taken seriously. As we have seen, Wang's claim that the *ciming* and other letters of pre-Han China were the ancestors of the *chidu* of Song and Ming times was a dubious one. The criteria by which he decided what was and what was not a *chidu* were not particularly rigorous. Despite this, many scholars seem to have taken *Chidu qingcai* as the starting-point for their own work. Wang was quoted, 'borrowed from' and disagreed with, but no other work seemed to have the same authority. Pan Lei's preface has the air of the work of a historian, but neither Pan nor *Chidu lanyan* seem to have attracted much notice from others with an interest in *chidu*. The only other collection which is mentioned several times by other writers is Zhou Lianggong's *Chidu xinzhao*. However, although some later compilers might have drawn material from it, Zhou did not contribute much to the discussions about *chidu* and *Chidu xinzhao* was not used as a reference in debate about *chidu*.

Collections for the entertainment of the gentleman scholar

As we shall see in the next chapter, many of the arguments the compilers and those who wrote the prefaces for *chidu* collections put forward were mostly concerned with assuring readers that the genre had a

fine classical pedigree and a well-established function as a vehicle for virtuous men to exchange noble ideas. The *chidu* genre was therefore worthy of the interest of a cultivated gentleman, and the collections were a contribution by the compilers to the promotion of classical values. In almost all cases, there was little attempt to try to examine the development of the genre based on actual practice over the centuries, and little was said about the contemporary practice or apparent popularity of the genre. However, it would seem highly unlikely that so many of these collections would have been published if there was not a readership for them, and the fact that collections like *Chidu xinchao* and *Chidu xinyu* ran to three series suggests there was no shortage of people willing to buy good collections of *chidu* and, for that matter, to contribute to them. It seems equally unlikely that those who did buy the collections did so out of a fervent desire to read the noble and virtuous words of worthies past and present. A much more plausible explanation was that *chidu* were an interesting source of less formal writings on the issues of the day, and at the same time had the sort of charm which appealed to the gentleman-amateur ideal of the late Ming period. Collections such as *Chidu xinchao*, *Chidu lanyan* and *Chidu xinyu* seem to fit this explanation well.

One collection which, although divided up into categories, does not seem to have been primarily a letter-writing manual, is *Chidu xinyu*, which was published in three installments (*chubian* in 1663, *erbian* in 1667, and *guangbian* in 1669). The chief editors were Wang Qi (1605?-after 1668), a merchant, and Xu Shijun (1602-81) a scholar and dramatist who appears to have had wide contacts throughout the Jiangnan region. This collection has already been the subject of a study by Ellen Widmer entitled *The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China*, so I shall be brief here.³⁵ Each collection is divided into twenty-four categories (the same in all three collections), and each category is prefaced with a short piece giving literary and historical background to the issues discussed in the letters in that category. Each letter is followed by a short note as to the literary or other qualities of that letter written by Wang, Xu or one of their associates. The categorisation and notes suggest that the compilers meant the collection to function at least partly as a kind of guidebook, but the collection is too varied for it to be just that. Wang Qi was a merchant, and as Widmer has suggested, he and his associates were probably trying to cash in on the

³⁵ See *Late Imperial China*, 10, no. 2, December 1989, pp. 1-49.

popularity of letter collections during the seventeenth century. Indeed, if the collection was just intended as a manual, it is unlikely that it would have provided the interesting material that Widmer drew on for her study. As we have seen, generally speaking the manual-type collections seem not to have been big sellers, though there was undoubtedly some money in them. Anything that was too heavy-going was unlikely to please a wide audience either. So Wang, Xu and their associates seem to have aimed to provide texts that were accessible, of human and literary interest.

Chidu lanyan, published in 1681, is perhaps the anthology most similar to *Chidu xin chao*. Its compilers, Huang Rong and Wang Weihan, were minor scholars in Suzhou. Huang was a keen taker of notes on things he saw³⁶, and Wang Weihan was for a time an instructor in a state-sponsored school in Wangjiang, Anhui.³⁷ Both men were clearly aware of the popularity of *chidu* anthologies, as they write in their statement of editorial principles that '*Cangju ji* and [*Chidu*] *xinchao* were published in Nanjing, [*Chidu*] *chuzheng* and [*Chidu*] *xinyu* came out of Hangzhou, and all were snapped up with relish and became popular everywhere. Only Suzhou has failed to produce a printed collection of letters.'³⁸ They also highlight the fact that seven-tenths of the letters in the collection had never been published before, adding that 'some letters by eminent people who have since passed away, which have not previously been published, are brought to light in this anthology.'³⁹ Huang and Wang were at pains to emphasise the quality of the letters in the collection:

Once it [*Lanyan*] was completed, we read it over and thought about it, and now have the confidence to say that the aforementioned 'delicate matters of the soul, the finest principles, and agreeable things' can be found as soon as one opens the book, while those letters written to perform trivial social functions or written in an outmoded style have been excluded.⁴⁰

Coupled with other comments in the same preface criticising vulgarity in letter-writing, this seems to demonstrate again that the compilers of *chidu* collections were keen to present *chidu* as a respectable genre. In the final

³⁶ Li Mingwan, Feng Guifen et al. ed., *Suzhou fuzhi*, 106.18a.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.35a, under the entry for his son, Wang Liang.

³⁸ Huang Rong and Wang Weihan ed., *Chidu lanyan*, 'fan li', item 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, items 1 and 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, editors' preface.

line of their preface, they write, somewhat optimistically, 'If it can join the ranks of such books as *Yulin*⁴¹ and *Shuoyuan*⁴², and be passed down from generation to generation everywhere, how very fortunate we will be.'⁴³ However, obviously the compilers were conscious of the popularity of the other collections, and there seems little reason to doubt that commercial success was a motivating factor. Interestingly, the concern to publish mostly letters which have not been published before and to exclude letters written in an outmoded style was also expressed by Zhou Lianggong in his statement of editorial principles written two decades earlier, and generally Huang and Wang seem to have been greatly influenced by *Chidu xinzhao*.

Certainly the calibre of the writers whose works have been included in *Chidu lanyan* is high, with several contributions each by such notable figures as Mao Qiling (1623-1716), Gong Dingzi (1615-73), Wei Xi (1624-1681), Qian Qianyi and Wu Weiye (1609-1671), to name but a few. Letters by at least some of these writers found their way into most *chidu* anthologies, but rarely was such a range assembled into one anthology. Letters by Wei Xi and Mao Qiling, for instance, were rarely anthologised, in Mao's case perhaps because he managed to offend, either deliberately or unwittingly, many of those with whom he came into contact.⁴⁴ *Chidu lanyan* also includes several rather long letters which one would normally think were more in the *shu* style; the first letter in the collection is a long one by Wu Weiye to members of the Fushe (Trust Society, not Restoration Society).⁴⁵ No system of classification has been used in *Chidu lanyan*. So it may be concluded that this collection was meant to be popular, while at the same time seeking respectability.

A final anthology worth mentioning here is *Chidu xinbian*, though it was never published. It was compiled by Yang Bin of Shaoxing, possibly in the 1680's. Yang was a poet, classical essayist and calligrapher of some note, and was renowned for his exemplary acts of filial piety following the exile of his parents to Ningguta in Manchuria when he was about thirteen.⁴⁶ The only copy of this that I have been able to locate is a manuscript one held in the National Library of China. There are two possible explanations for this

⁴¹ There are a number of books with this title. The editors of *Chidu lanyan* are either referring to the one also known as *Tang yulin* by Wang Dang of the Song dynasty, or to one by Pei Qi of the Jin (265-420).

⁴² By Liu Xiang (77-6 B.C.).

⁴³ Huang Rong and Wang Weihuan, *Chidu lanyan*, editor's preface.

⁴⁴ See 'Mao Ch'i-ling' in *ECCP*, pp. 563-4.

⁴⁵ This letter appears in the chapter for *shu* in Wu's collected works. See *Wu Meicun quan ji*, pp. 1086-88.

⁴⁶ *Qing shi lie zhuan*, p. 5739.

collection: (i) Yang copied the letters for his personal pleasure from a variety of sources, as this practice was a common way of gathering literary works for one's own library, or (ii) that it was a draft for a planned publication. A number of factors seem to make the second explanation more likely. The anthology has been divided up into five sections, to which titles have been given, and in the case of the third and fourth sections, further subdivisions have been made. If *Xinbian* was a draft of a planned anthology, it must have been no more than an initial one, as the classifications are rather simple and lack organisation, but presumably this wouldn't have been done at all if Yang meant it for his private use only. Another somewhat curious feature is that most of the letters contained in it seem to have been taken from anthologies already published, including *Chidu xinchao* and *Chidu lanyan*. Perhaps it was a project that Yang started out of personal interest or as an attempt to make money (Yang seems to have lived in poverty for much of his life: he was responsible for looking after his grandmother and raising his younger brothers and sisters following his parents' exile), but never completed, possibly because he lacked the resources. In any case, it is an interesting insight into how a *chidu* anthology might have come into existence, and again suggests a scholar dabbling in a genre which although not one of the canonical genres, offered the sort of refined charm and human appeal that attracted many literati in the late Ming and early Qing period.

The Backgrounds of the Compilers

If we consider the backgrounds of the compilers of the *chidu* collections discussed above, we will discover that none of them was an active official at the time they produced their collection, and most of them were minor figures in the literary world of the time. Some are by now quite obscure. Part of the significance of this is that it underlines the status of *chidu* as a relatively unimportant genre in which serious scholars normally declined to dabble. However, it also suggests that scholars who had either failed in their attempts to enter into an official career, who had given up trying, or who had suffered setbacks to their career found *chidu* an attractive alternative to the official genres.

By now we know little about Chen Mei, Wang Yuanxun, Cheng Hualu, Shen Jiayin, Huang Rong and Wang Weihai, and can presume that they

were minor literati for whom compiling such collections was a form of polite entertainment, and possibly a way to earn some extra money. Scholars such as Li Yu and Chen Jiru were very well known in their day, but gave up on pursuing an official career. Li had failed several attempts to pass the provincial examinations before the fall of the Ming, and gave up altogether afterwards. Chen Jiru famously burnt his Confucian scholar's robes before he was thirty years of age, and devoted himself to a life of writing.⁴⁷ Although Zhang Chao would briefly hold a minor post later in life, at the time he produced *Chidu yousheng* and *Chidu oucun*, he was just a well-known bibliophile. Xu Shijun lived the life of a recluse following the fall of the Ming, and apparently lived in considerable poverty, but gained some fame for his dramas, painting and poetry.⁴⁸ Xu Wei failed eight attempts at the provincial examinations⁴⁹, and thereafter led a restless life in which he lived mostly by his writing and painting. Gui Fu, though much later, also fits the pattern, as by the mid 1770's when he was working on *Yanshi jiacang chidu* he was forty years of age and had yet to pass the top examinations. The political careers of Yang Shen and Wang Shizhen, the two compilers of *Chidu qingcai*, were similar in some ways. Yang Shen was exiled to Yunnan for life after offending the emperor. At the time Wang produced the first of his expansions upon Yang's original edition, he was Vice Commissioner of the Qingzhou Military Defence Circuit, which was effectively a form of punishment for his having offended the Grand Secretary Yan Song (1480-1569), since Qingzhou was noted for its lawlessness.⁵⁰ When he produced the final edition in 1571, he was at home in mourning following the death of his mother. Of all the compilers mentioned here, Wang had the most successful official career, but it was a career frustrated by frequent transfers due to the animosity of Yan Song and later Zhang Juzheng (1525-1582) towards him.⁵¹

It is also interesting to note that Li Yu, Xu Shijun, Xu Wei and Gui Fu all wrote for the theatre, which suggests that scholars who had an interest in one of the non-canonical genres often had an interest in others. But it is quite clear from this brief survey that *chidu* seemed to have a special attraction for scholars who either shunned the career of an official, or who had been frustrated in their ambitions and turned to less weighty genres as a

⁴⁷ See Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, p. 637.

⁴⁸ See Ma Liangchun, Li Futian ed. *Zhongguo wenxue dacidian*, p. 4875.

⁴⁹ *ECCP*, p. 609.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1400.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1401.

focus for their scholarly interests.

Coming after almost four centuries during which interest in *chidu* seems to have been weak, the comparative flood of collections which appeared during the period covered in this chapter is quite remarkable. I will say more about what late Ming and early Qing scholars might have found attractive in the genre below. In this chapter I have simply aimed to describe the range of collections that was published, the forms they took, what sort of people compiled them, and some of the more obvious motivations for their publication. In addition to describing an area which has not been described in any detail before, this chapter forms the basis for the discussion of the compilers' and other writers on *chidu's* claims regarding the status and functions of the genre in the next chapter, and the context for the case study to be examined in the last four chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Four

Theories of the Place and Purpose of *Chidu* in the Late Ming and Early Qing Period

As we have seen in the first two chapters, there was no theoretical writing on the *chidu* genre before the Ming. The earliest essays I have discovered which specifically discuss *chidu* are Wang Shizhen's prefaces to *Chidu qingcai*. After that there is a thin sprinkling of other writings up until the beginning of the eighteenth century, but in comparison with most genres, theorising on *chidu* is rare. Almost all of the writing on the genre that I have been able to find occurs in the prefaces to the collections discussed in the previous chapter.

This lack of discussion serves to underline the minor status of the genre, despite its being a form which most writers probably practised as a part of their daily lives, and despite the relative proliferation of *chidu* collections beginning in the sixteenth century. The scholars who did write on *chidu* in prefaces recognised this. Wang Shizhen, in his short preface to the expanded version of *Chidu qingcai*, described the paradox of *chidu*-writing in the following way: 'In the context of literature as a whole, *chidu*-writing is but a minor art, but even talented writers find it difficult to compose letters of substance and discipline, let alone run-of-the-mill writers.'¹ This view was reiterated and elaborated upon by later writers, who pointed to the necessity and profusion of correspondence in this form in most literate sectors of society. Li Yu's view has been quoted at the very beginning of this thesis,² and in his preface to *Chidu lanyan*, Huang Rong repeats Li's ideas in a way which suggests he might just have put Li's observations into his own words.

Theoretical discussions of *chidu* focused on three broad areas: (i) the status of the genre in literature, and its ancestry, (ii) the function of *chidu*, and (iii) what constituted a good *chidu*. Of course the three areas are interrelated, and the first two received by far the most attention.

The status of the *chidu* genre was a major preoccupation of those who wrote about it, so much so that to a large extent it determined their views on

¹ *Chidu qingcai*, 1571 preface, p. 3b.

² *Chidu chuzheng*, 'fan li', item 1.

function and quality as well. This I believe was the result of two things, both of which have been suggested above. Firstly, the *chidu* genre as it was practised in the Ming did not have easily identifiable classical antecedents. *Chidu* did not appear as a separate genre in authoritative early works such as *Wenxin Diaolong* and *Wen xuan*. It should have been obvious to Ming and Qing writers on the genre that before Song times there was little evidence as to what a *chidu* might have been, and that the kind of letters which had emerged under the label of *chidu* or *shujian* beginning in the Song were plainly different from the letters which were called *shu*. However, few writers admitted this in their public writings. We are instead left wondering at how they generally managed to avoid discussing Song and Ming *chidu* at all, while the same time writing at length about alleged antecedents whose relationship to the letters that were included in the collections for which they wrote their prefaces was at best slight.

Secondly, the compilers of these *chidu* collections were concerned that the collections might be seen as catering to vulgar tastes. Although there was obviously a market for collections of model *chidu*, since quite a number of unabashedly manual-type collections were published, any scholar who wished to avoid a reputation for frivolity could not be seen to be pandering to the needs of the less talented. Thus the compilers were at pains to assure potential readers that the material they were about to read was worthy of their attention as serious scholars.

The claimed ancestry of *chidu*

The most common approach taken by the compilers of *chidu* collections to assert the respectability of the *chidu* genre was to argue that the earliest antecedents of the *chidu* they were including in their collection could be traced to the Warring States period. In claiming this, they drew heavily on the essay on letters in *Wenxin diaolong*. This is almost inevitable, since that essay was the only detailed discussion of letters available. Furthermore, Wang Shizhen clearly draws on it in his original preface to *Chidu qingcai*, and since later writers obviously borrowed at least some of their ideas from Wang, his use of Liu Xie's essay was bound to be reflected in later writer's work as well. Naturally the actual letters included in *Chidu qingcai*, which we remember begins with 'letters' from the *Zuo zhuan*, would have reinforced this view. However, in Chapter One I have already demonstrated the many problems with the arguments in the essay

in *Wenxin diaolong*, and the relationship of the type of letters it discusses to the *chidu* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is very distant.

Wang begins his preface with the statement that 'Letters (*shu*) are the descendants of *ciming*.'³ The word *ciming* does not actually appear in the *Wenxin diaolong* essay, but Wang's discussion of the way in which messengers carried messages between states clearly borrows from Liu Xie's idea. Wang does not mention any of the missives of the pre-Han period by name, but Pan Lei states that the diplomatic missives in the *Zuo zhuan*, and those of Gongsun Qiao in particular, represent the earliest forms of the genre. (Interestingly, no-one restates Liu Xie's opening statements about the meanings of the word *shu*.) However, in our discussion of the letters written by the officials of Zheng under Gongsun Qiao in Chapter One, we saw that the kind of missive they wrote was very different from the letters of later times. Pan Lei, in his preface to *Chidu lanyan* also cites the *ciling* (same as *ciming*) and the missives of the officials of Zheng as the progenitors of *chidu*.

In his editor's statement in *Gujin chidu daquan*, Li Yu makes even greater use of the *ciming* idea. Significantly, Li begins his statement with the phrase '*Chidu* are the descendants of *ciming*.' which is almost word for word how Wang Shizhen began his preface, except that Li has substituted the term *shu* with the term *chidu*, and omitted the grammatical particles with which Wang begins and ends his sentence. Li then proceeds to invoke no less an authority than Confucius. He refers to Confucius's commendation of the officials of Zheng, as did Wang, then cites the line from *The Analects*, 'It is enough that the language one uses gets the point across.'⁴ Li's cousin Shen Zhengchun, in his preface to the collection, discusses the same line, but Shen is in fact just adapting Su Shi's argument in his letter in reply to Xie Julian regarding the meaning of 'the language one uses gets the point across' (*ci da*). Shen writes, 'If the language (*yan*) one uses is not apposite, the principle one is trying to explain cannot be said to have been communicated (*da*). If what one says (*ci*) is not suitable to be put into practice, one cannot be said to have communicated effectively.'⁵ Of course there is no relationship between this quote from Confucius and the writing of *chidu*, but the connection was no doubt made as part of an attempt to give *chidu* greater respectability. Finally, Li cites the line in *Mencius* in which Confucius is quoted as saying, 'Wo yu ciming, ze bu neng ye,' which Li seems to suggest

³ *Chidu qingcai*, 1558 preface, p. 1a.

⁴ '*Ci da er yi yi*.' *Lunyu*, 15.41. Translation by D.C. Lau, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

⁵ See 'Da Xie Minshi tuiguan shu', in *Su Shi wenji*, pp. 1418-1419.

means 'Writing *ciming* (diplomatic missives) is something I am not good at.' In other words, *ciming*, and by implication *chidu*, require such skill that even the Foremost Sage himself was unable to write them well. However, both the gloss to the passage in Chinese, and the translation by D.C. Lau suggest this is not what it means at all.⁶ Lau's translation of the whole passage reads, 'Tsai Wo and Tzu-kung excelled in rhetoric; Jan Niu, Min Tzu and Yan Hui excelled in the exposition of virtuous conduct. Confucius excelled in both and yet he said, "I am not versed in rhetoric."' In fact, *ci* refers to rhetoric, and *ming* can be said to refer to teaching. Thus this passage is demonstrably irrelevant to a discussion of *chidu*, so its only function in Li's preface is to lend greater respectability to *chidu*.

Yanshi jiacang chidu provides us with another example of the lengths to which scholars went to give respectability to the *chidu* genre. Of course *Yanshi jiacang chidu* is a special case in this regard, partly because the colophons attached to it were written much later, but more particularly because of the special place of the Yan family in the Confucian tradition and the family's residence in Qufu, Confucius's home town, a connection which the other anthologies could not claim. Not surprisingly, the colophon writers made use of this connection to extol the virtues of the letters contained in the collection, and most conspicuous in this regard was Zhu Yun. Zhu argues that many of the quotations in *Kong cong zi*, a collection of sayings and deeds spuriously attributed to Confucius and some of his disciples, would in Zhu's own time be regarded as *chidu*, but it is difficult to see any basis for this claim at all. Zhu also attributes the very survival of the letters collected by Yan Guangmin to the proximity of the Yan family residence to the residence of the descendants of the Sage.⁸

These examples strongly suggest that most people who wrote on *chidu* not only saw no reason to challenge the view of Liu Xie that there was a close relationship between the diplomatic missives of the Spring and Autumn period and later personal letters, but actually developed the idea further, and applied it to *chidu*, whose relationship to the ancient missives was even more distant than that of the *shu*. The only scholar to challenge this view was Wang Yi, who in his criticisms of Wang Shizhen which we mentioned in the previous chapter wrote: '*Ciming* from the *Zuo zhuan* and edicts from the Han have found their way in [to *Chidu qingcai*], but they are

⁶ For the Chinese gloss, see Jiao Xun, *Mengzi zhengyi*, p. 213.

⁷ D.C. Lau trans. *Mencius*, p. 78.

⁸ *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, p. 242. Despite the fact that *Kong cong zi* is almost certainly spurious, it was included in such authoritative *congshu* as *Siku quanshu* and *Sibu congkan*.

actually quite different.⁹ Indeed, it would be surprising that not more scholars questioned the claim that sixteenth and seventeenth century *chidu* were descended from the *ciming* of the Zhou, except that there was a pressing need on the part of the compilers and the scholars whom they asked to write prefaces to justify their interest in the genre by emphasising its ancient pedigree.

The edificatory function of *chidu*

A second way in which those associated with *chidu* collections tried to assure the reader of the respectability of the genre was by claiming that *chidu* could be a source of edification. In the previous chapter we saw how Li Yu professed the importance of moral concerns in his compilation of *Gujin chidu daquan*, and Li was not alone in this. Of course, moral edification was a commonly recurring theme in the prefaces to a wide range of literary works, but its appearance in several prefaces to *chidu* collections is perhaps surprising in view of the minor status of the genre and the lack of any long tradition of writing about it. Early in his preface to *Chidu lanyan*, Pan Lei says, 'The friendships presented here are of the kind one finds amongst just and upright men and those renowned for their attainment of the Way, or between fellows in scholarship and philosophy, or hermits living in the mountains.' Pan goes on to assert that *chidu* are in fact an important tool in the cultivation of the Way:

...When serving at court, one might discuss [in letters] the proper administration of justice and the rectification of corrupt trends with a colleague, and together share the anxieties of the world. If one is so lucky as to find the world at peace, one may then share the joy of the world. If, on the other hand, one is living in retirement, one may pass on to a friend one's expectations in cultivating lofty ideals and the perfection of one's character, or elucidate upon profound scholarly matters, all with learned and refined air, expressing noble thoughts and recording virtuous deeds.

Pan then proceeds to paraphrase the great Tang writer Han Yu:

⁹ *Mingren chidu*, 'xiao yin', p. 1a.

It is perhaps as Han Yu once wrote: 'Seek to understand matters of state in times past; examine all aspects of the wise philosophers' lives and thoughts' in order to 'bring into play the hidden light of latent virtue'; give expression to one's happiness 'in the vast and silent countryside' and 'by the lonely waterside'.¹⁰

Pan continues by emphasising the role letters have played in preserving the wise thoughts of the ancients, and in serving as a record of the admirable friendships of days gone by, then closes with a remark that 'there is no reason why this book (*Chidu lanyan*) may not follow the letters in the *Zuo zhuan*, and of the Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, Tang and Song dynasties, and be passed on to posterity'.

Although the colophons and the poem attached to *Yanshi jiacang chidu* were produced about a century later, it is worth recalling part of the poem written by Pan Chengya which I quoted in the previous chapter:

...Old letters strewn across my desk.
Epistles exchanged in a bygone time,
Between famous scholars across the land.
Noble men and eremites,
Deep in the mountains or among vast marshes...

The parallels between this and some of Pan's ideas are striking, and strongly suggest that such notions about letters were commonplace amongst the literati of the early and mid Qing.

To be sure, some *chidu* collections do seem to have been genuinely concerned to present writings that would be of moral and educational benefit to their readers. *Fengjiao yunjian*, compiled by one Huang Heqing in 1585, is a case in point.¹¹ It is clear from the preface to this collection that moral and educational concerns were paramount in its compiler's mind, and in general the contents of the letters included in that collection tally with this stated aim. However, in addition to letters by Wang Shouren, Chen Xianzhang (1428-1500), and others best known for their contributions to Neo-Confucian philosophy, there are a large number of letters by members of the archaist school known as the Latter Seven Masters, which

¹⁰ See Han Yu, 'Letter to Cui Lizhi', in *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu*, pp. 96-8.

¹¹ This Huang Heqing is obscure. There is another person of the same name from Nan'an in Fujian who passed the Metropolitan Examination in 1502, but it cannot possibly be the same person. See *Guochao lieqing ji*, 83.5108.

suggests literary motivations as well.

Literary function and literary style in *Chidu*

Another ideal claimed for *chidu*-writing, and one which finds greater expression in the reality of letter-writing in the Ming-Qing period, is the role of *chidu* in unburdening the mind and conveying one's feelings. This feature was implicit in the quotation from Pan Lei's preface above concerning those serving at court and those in retirement. Its origin can again be traced back to *Wenxin diaolong*, part of which Pan quoted verbatim: 'In summarising the epistolary genre, it may be said that its fundamental purpose is to lay bare one's feelings in their entirety. One writes to unburden oneself of pent up emotions, and as a way to express these feelings graciously and elegantly.'¹² Wang Shizhen cited two of the most famous examples of this in his 1558 preface: 'Li Ling, writing down his melancholic thoughts in his tent out amongst the nomads, and Sima Qian, giving vent to his feelings from the post-castration chamber, were both good at expressing their perceptions of their place in the world without restraint.'¹³ Other writers restated this theme in various ways, and Huang Rong drew attention to the joy of receiving such letters:

The special function of letters amongst all the arts is to give expression to one's moods and innermost thoughts, and to affirm friendship when one is separated from loved ones. When, in troubled times, the mountains and rivers are impassable, to receive a letter unexpectedly is a great cause for joy.¹⁴

This last purpose for writing *chidu* was also closely related to the question of letter-writing style. Again, we may recall that *Wenxin diaolong* set the standard in this respect: 'Therefore the style should be orderly and smooth, capable of expressing the spirit of the writer, easy, soft and pleasant to the reader. It is indeed the presentation of the heart.'¹⁵ The language employed in such letters should at the same time be 'as if talking face to

¹² *Wenxin diaolong*, p. 59-60.

¹³ *Chidu qingcai*, 1558 preface, p. 1a. Li Ling's letter is not mentioned in *Wenxin diaolong*, but it is in *Wenxuan*, as pointed out earlier. Wang must have been aware that the letter is almost certainly spurious.

¹⁴ *Chidu lanyan*, editors' preface, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Wenxin diaolong*, p. 59. Translation from Shih, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

face'.¹⁶ However, we have already seen that there are many problems with Liu's formulation here, and that when he wrote of the idea that the missives of the Spring and Autumn period read 'as though the author and recipient were talking face to face', he was probably not thinking of an intimate discussion between friends, but rather a very formal exchange between officials at court. Of course, such an interpretation was hardly relevant by the sixteenth century, and it seems clear that Ming and Qing writers took it to mean that letters should be written as if the author and the recipient were really engaged in a conversation. In Wang Shizhen's metaphor, 'the tip of the writing brush should be one's tongue, and the ink on the paper should take the place of one's face.'¹⁷ This idea was given further expression by Yan Yudun (1697 *jinsi*, aged ca. 50) in his preface to *Mingren chidu*: 'One writes down whatever comes to mind, giving the brush free rein, with one's tears and laughter all laid out to be read. It is like hearing the author's voice and seeing him in person. This is the highest achievement in writing, and the mark of a truly learned man.'¹⁸ Such emphasis on intimacy and spontaneity is reminiscent of the ideals espoused for European letter-writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Certainly Yan Yudun's formulation seems more relevant to the practice of *chidu*-writing in the late Ming and early Qing, though as I will demonstrate when we come to discuss *Chidu xinchao*, it is doubtful that most writers really wrote in the completely spontaneous fashion which 'one writes down whatever comes to mind' suggests. Allowing for some hyperbole, Pan Lei's more considered approach was perhaps closer to the norm:

In quietude one gathers one's thoughts; in one's mind one races through the centuries and gazes across thousands of miles. With these thoughts in one's mind, one then seeks to link them line by line into a concise piece. This can be called the 'presentation of the heart' and an exchange of inner thoughts.¹⁹

Such an approach allows prior formulation of one's thoughts and a deliberate process of composition, which Yan's does not. But all writers who discussed the way in which *chidu* should be written asserted good *chidu* flowed from the pen, and were not produced by drafting and revision. Chen

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 59.

¹⁷ *Chidu qingcai*, 1558 preface, p. 2a.

¹⁸ *Mingren chidu*, 'colophon' (*ti ci*), p. 1a.

¹⁹ *Chidu lanyan*, Pan Lei's preface.

Jiru, in his preface to *Han hai*, also refers to the need for naturalness and flow in letters. Chen Zun and Liu Muzhi were often referred to as exemplars of the ideals of *chidu* writing for their ability to write *chidu* rapidly while at the same time producing letters that were expressive and which were tailored to the situation of each individual recipient.

So how was one to cultivate an epistolary style that was suitably profound, yet natural and graceful? The writers of essays on letters provided no easy answers or specific guidelines, but rather saw innate talent, learning and experience of life as the main prerequisites for successful *chidu*-writing. Although the collections of model letters might have been useful for an inexperienced student feeling his way in both letter-writing and society in general, we have already seen how orthodox scholars regarded such collections of model letters as vulgar, and in fact an obstacle to the cultivation of an ideal style, since their use precluded naturalness and the true presentation of the author's character.

In the opinion of Huang Rong, one did not need to cultivate specific skills in order to write *chidu* well, but general literary talent was important:

Letters are not like poetry, rhapsodies or classical prose, which require one to be skilled specifically in their composition before anything true to the genre can be written at all, but they do require a skilled writer if they are to be of any quality. Disjointed ramblings of petty and vulgar content that make one nauseous as soon as one begins to read, can, by the hand of a great writer, become marvellous pieces of timeless significance despite being but a few sentences in length.²⁰

Wang Yi concurred: 'The writing of *chidu* is a minor art, but those who are not well versed in classical traditions will not be able to write them.'²¹

Literary talent coupled with thorough classical learning were the keys to becoming a fine writer of *chidu*.

In one of the few letters which actually discusses letter-writing, Mao Xianshu (1620-1688) identified experience of life as a decisive factor in whether one would be able to write good *chidu* or not. In a letter to Xu Shijun, Mao argues that the reason Su Shi and Huang Tingjian were better writers of letters than the foremost letter-writers of the late Ming and early

²⁰ *Ibid*, Huang Rong's preface.

²¹ *Mingren chidu*, 'xiao yin', p. 1a.

Qing, Wang Zhideng (1535-1612) and Chen Jiru, was that the latter had no experience of the wider world and affairs of state.

Su and Huang both served at court in their early years, and although their later letters [written from exile] were full of isolation, grief and yearning for family and friends, they always showed concern for matters of government. For this reason they wrote in an unaffected style, their letters all move the reader and are of permanent worth. Wang and Chen, on the other hand, were but two commoners, and what they wrote inevitably reflected their situation in life. Since they had nothing of import to write about, they had no choice but to fall back upon sensuousness (Wang) and charm (Chen). They were not as talented, and had seen less of the world.²²

This letter again demonstrates the concern of most of those who wrote on *chidu* that these letters should discuss matters of import, and that anything else was mere dilettantism. Of course this is not true. Many of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian's *chidu* are on quite trivial matters, but that doesn't mean they have no value. Mao's observation that Su and Huang's *chidu* were unaffected and moving is quite correct, and it is true that by and large Ming *chidu* were more artificial, but this had little to do with their writers' interest in, or experience of, government.

What has clearly emerged from the discussion in this chapter so far is that the men who wrote about *chidu* generally took a too conservative view of the genre, by which I mean that they were disinclined to challenge the arguments of earlier writers. Not surprisingly, Wang Shizhen was preoccupied with the genre's supposed origin in Zhou and Han times, and Pan Lei's vocation as a historian is reflected in his writing on the subject (though he didn't always apply a historian's critical eye to theories about the development of letter-writing, and that of *chidu* in particular). It is more surprising that Li Yu, a much freer spirit than the other aficionados of *chidu*, should broadly follow them in his statements about the origin and purpose of the genre (we have seen, however, that there might have been commercial considerations at play here). Nearly all the discussion of *chidu* is based on early texts, especially *Wenxin diaolong* rather than contemporary

²² *Chidu xinyu guangbian*, ch. 3, 'Letters on prose'.

practice. In late Ming and early Qing texts debating major prose genres and poetry, even if an author thought contemporary practice was worthless and was keen to extol the literary virtues of some ancient worthies, he usually included some discussion of recent writers. This is largely absent from discussions of *chidu*.

Precisely because of the lack of writing on the *chidu* genre, it is extremely difficult to say why they ignored practically all recent writers whose ideas and practice would seem to have fitted most closely with the ideals of expression and intimacy they talked about in their prefaces. Earlier in this chapter I described how free expression of feelings, spontaneity and intimacy were all regarded as the main qualities good letters should have, and that the source of these ideals was mostly *Wenxin diaolong*. What strikes me as extraordinary is that none of the writers on *chidu* even so much as mentioned the Gong'an school, or any other contemporary writer who held similar views on expression in literature. The three Yuan brothers were prolific *chidu*-writers, yet not only were they not mentioned in any of the prefaces I have read, but their *chidu* also do not figure prominently in any of the collections I have seen. Of course Wang Shizhen's *Chidu qingcai* was published before the Yuan brothers became famous, and although, as Chih-ping Chou has illustrated, the Archaist school which Wang led and the ideas of the Gong'an school were not as diametrically opposed as later writers would have us believe²³, the profile of letters in *Chidu qingcai* is such that we can assume that Wang would not have included many examples of the Yuan brothers' *chidu* anyway. Li Yu in *Gujin chidu daquan* includes two *chidu* each by Yuan Zongdao and Yuan Zhongdao, and eight by Yuan Hongdao, a healthy but not particularly outstanding amount.²⁴ *Mingren chidu* has two examples of Yuan Zhongdao's *chidu* and seven by Yuan Hongdao.²⁵ Apart from these, the Yuan brothers are largely ignored. It is the same two collections, *Gujin chidu daquan* and *Mingren Chidu* which included letters by other expressionist writers like Xu Wei, Li Zhi (1527-1602) and Tang Xianzu. Of course, some of the late seventeenth century collections concentrated mainly on the last years of the Ming and the early Qing, which explains why these writers *chidu* did not appear in some collections. The initial conclusion I have come to is that by the time most of the collections for which we have prefaces were published, the Gong'an

²³ See Chih-p'ing Chou, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-14.

²⁴ See *Gujin chidu daquan*, ch. 7.

²⁵ See *Mingren chidu*, chs. 3 & 4.

school had been in decline for some time²⁶, and literary debate had shifted to other things. Fairly or not, the Gong'an authors had been labelled frivolous and vulgar. In the scholarly atmosphere of the last years of the Ming and the early Qing, during which the foundations for the revival of classicism (albeit a less imitative form) were being laid by writers like Ai Nanying (1583-1646)²⁷, few writers were likely to brave the trends of the times and openly espouse the ideals of the Gong'an school.

However, I believe that there is a more mundane, yet probably more important reason for the lack of reference to contemporary theories which advocated greater self-expression, and indeed for the lack of rigorous theorising on the *chidu* genre generally. Quite simply, the compilers of the collections were not particularly interested in theorising about the genre. While the Yuan brothers and their followers might have been very influential in the rise in popularity of 'familiar essays' (*xiaopinwen*), of which *chidu* were one form, by the early Qing, when most of the prefaces we have discussed were written, such *xiaopinwen* were simply popular because the literati enjoyed reading them. Several collections contain calls for readers to submit examples of their own *chidu* for inclusion in further editions, which indicates that there must have been a sizeable body of readers actively interested in the genre. (It also raises the possibility that some writers might have written *chidu* directly for inclusion in collections, without ever intending to send them to anyone.) Furthermore, scholars compiling collections of prose in the canonical genres would have been unlikely to add such notes to their 'serious' works, since such works would have been published for the purposes of literary debate and so on. Adding such notes seems to me to suggest that the compiler knew that there was a market for such collections, and that he hoped to capitalise on it as much as he could. Obviously there were a lot of people interested in reading other people's letters, just as there were in England in the eighteenth century. There seems to me to be little doubt that *Chidu chuzheng* was meant as a commercial publication, as were the collections in the *Chidu xinyu* series. I see little reason to doubt that many of the other collections which were published during the period were similarly commercial. Further evidence of this is that most of the compilers of *chidu* collections, if they were not

²⁶ For discussion of the decline of the Gong'an school, see Richard John Lynn, 'Alternate Routes to Self-Realization in Ming Theories of Poetry', pp. 336-7, and Chih-P'ing Chou, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-119. However, neither account is particularly detailed.

²⁷ For a discussion of Ai's ideas, see Guo Shaoyu, *op. cit.*, pp. 452-62. As Guo points out, Ai had many ideas in common with Qian Qianyi, and for that reason they are discussed together.

downright obscure, were at least relatively minor players in the literary world of the day. While their literary biases were reflected in the letters these compilers chose for inclusion, it is much more realistic to picture them as minor literati dallying in a genre whose 'unbuttoned' nature allowed writers both to write without the constraints which the canonical genres imposed, and to read as entertainment both as literature and for the human interest that the letters contained. To see them as champions of self-expression taking on the big guns in national literary debate seems an unlikely scenario.

Like fiction and drama, *chidu* were probably something which many scholars read, but which did not have the respectability of the traditional genres (though fiction and drama could claim a much greater body of considered theoretical writing than *chidu* could). Therefore, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, the compilers and those who they asked to contribute prefaces were forced by the marginal nature of the genre in which they were working to seek justifications in antiquity for what they were doing. Their failure to openly question many of the arguments put forward by Liu Xie, or indeed to question the relationship between the letters Liu discussed and those they were including in their collections, and the way in which they cited classical sources which in fact had no relevance to letter-writing whatsoever, indicates that they were both desperate to find a respectable pedigree for *chidu*, while at the same time they were disinclined to engage in serious evaluation of the history of the genre, since this would have meant exposing the fallacies in their own arguments. Thus in *chidu* we have an excellent example of the tension in Chinese literature between the need for literary genres to have a clear classical pedigree, and new genres which satisfied the needs of writers at the time they appeared and flourished, yet which could not satisfy the demand that they be sanctioned by tradition.

Although I believe *chidu* were deliberately cultivated as a new avenue for self-expression in opposition to the stultifying influence of the dominant Archaist school by only a few writers, such as Yuan Hongdao, I believe it is also true that many writers cultivated the genre not so much for ideological reasons as because it satisfied a certain need. That is to say, the traditional genres could no longer meet all the expressive needs of many writers, and while practically all writers continued to cultivate the traditional genres as their main site of literary activity, genres like *chidu* did provide an alternative avenue for self-expression, precisely because it was relatively

unencumbered with the burdens of history that weighed down on them when they wrote in other genres.

Chapter Five

Zhou Lianggong and the Compilation of *Chidu xinchao*

Read casually, *Chidu xinchao* appears to be a random collection of letters on a diverse range of topics of interest to the cultured élite of mid seventeenth-century China. There is no obvious attempt to arrange the letters in any way, nor any stylistic consistency. The earliest writers whose letters appear in the collection were dead before the end of the Wanli reign, yet there are also many letters by writers who were just at the beginning of their literary careers in the early 1660's. Letters by the most prominent writers of the period can be found side-by-side with letters by men who might otherwise have slipped into complete obscurity but for Zhou Lianggong's interest in promoting writers and artists whom he felt were deserving of wider recognition. However, if we look more closely, we find that there are in fact a number of themes running through the collection, and that all these themes are the product of the experiences and beliefs of Zhou Lianggong.

This in itself is not surprising. We have seen in Chapter Three how other *chidu* collections were shaped by the views of their compilers on literature. However, *Chidu xinchao* holds a particular fascination for us because of the position of Zhou Lianggong at the time the collection was compiled. Zhou's life has been described in detail in Hongnam Kim's dissertation; here I will just highlight those aspects of his life which are most relevant to the arguments I will advance relating to the compilation of the first of the *Chidu xinchao* series. I have drawn on Kim's work, supplemented in some places by my own reading of the biographies appended to Zhou's collected works *Laigutang ji*, and other sources as footnoted.

Zhou Lianggong was born into a lower gentry family in Nanjing in 1612. His father, Zhou Wenwei, never rose above the rank of Government Student, but did serve as Assistant Magistrate in Zhuji, Zhejiang, for two years in the early 1620s. Zhou Wenwei appears to have been a strict Confucian type who explained his decision to serve in this lowly post as a desire to serve the people, and his biography in the local gazetteer of Zhuji suggests that he was a dedicated and capable administrator. Indeed, his

diligence resulted in his offending the local gentry: he was eventually demoted, whereupon he resigned, never to serve again.¹ Despite this lack of success, Zhou Wenwei maintained his belief that to serve in government was a gentleman's duty. There would be several occasions during his son Zhou Lianggong's own political career when retirement would have been a very tempting alternative, yet on each occasion (except the last in 1670) Zhou chose to return to government service. This firm belief in the importance of government service was almost certainly due to the influence of his father, and would play a determining role in Zhou's life.

Since Zhou's family was neither wealthy nor prominent in any other way, Zhou was excluded from the society of famous scholar-officials, though he did establish a local reputation as a poet while still in his teens. In 1630, Zhou became a founding member of the Xingshe, or Star Society, established by Wu Fei. Huang Zongxi, in his *Sijiu lu*, says that this society was called the *Shiwenshe*, or 'Eight-legged Essay Society' (literally: Current-Style Essay Society), which makes the aims of the society quite clear.² Since Wu was a member of the Fushe (variously translated as the Restoration or Revival Society), as were several other members of the Xingshe such as Huang Zongxi, we can assume that the Xingshe was one of the many societies which came under the Fushe umbrella. Certainly Zhou's contacts with Fushe members began to grow after this time. As we shall see in later chapters, Fushe members figure prominently in *Chidu xinchao*, and the many letters which discuss the last decades of the Ming do so from a Fushe point of view. Thus Zhou's joining an organisation attached to the Fushe should be seen as one of the determining events of his life, even though he was not a prominent member.

Although Zhou Lianggong was born in Nanjing, the family was registered at Xiangfu, or modern Kaifeng in Henan. The Zhou family had resided in Jiangxi since the Song dynasty, but Zhou Lianggong's grandfather had taken the family to Xiangfu. Zhou's father brought the family to Nanjing before Zhou was born, but did not change its registration. This had serious implications for Zhou's progress in the civil service examinations. Although Zhou had obvious talent as a writer, there was opposition to

¹ See Hongnam Kim, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-8.

² Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji*, vol. 1, p. 358. Of course the vertical line beside the characters *Shiwenshe* in this edition is a modern addition, and the text could be taken to mean that Wu 'established a society for the cultivation of the eight-legged essay'. Huang's short 'biography' of Wu is reproduced in *Fushe xingshi zhuanlüe* 4.2a, but the character *shi* 'current' has been omitted, which leaves us with the less pragmatic-sounding 'literary society'.

scholars who were not registered inhabitants of Nanjing being passed in local examinations, so when Zhou came first in the district examinations of 1631, his name was removed from the list of successful candidates after local families objected.

As a result of this setback, he had little choice but to go to Xiangfu, the 'home town' to which he had never been, to try to pass the examinations there. The Zhou family seems not to have been well off at this time, as Zhou needed to support himself. Therefore he stayed with the family of Zhang Minbiao (d. 1642), a prominent local scholar and friend of Zhou's father, and was employed as tutor to the Zhang family. Zhang and Zhou became very close, and Zhang probably taught Zhou the principles of military strategy which would serve him so well later in his official career. During this time Zhou also met the then magistrate of the area, Sun Chengze (1592-1676), who was so impressed by Zhou that he bought him some land to help him out financially, and would later be one of Zhou's supporters under the Manchus. In any case, now that Zhou no longer had to contend with the prejudices of the Nanjing élite, and because the competition in the examinations in poorer Henan was not so fierce, Zhou now made steady progress up the examination ladder. He passed the Palace Examination in 1640, and in the following year received his first appointment, as District Magistrate in Wei County, modern Weifang in Shandong.

Zhou showed early promise as an official. In 1642 he led the defence of Wei County against the marauding Manchu armies, and Wei County was the only town in the area not to fall. In recognition of this, in late 1643 he was made Investigating Censor for the Zhejiang Circuit, but in April 1644, ten days after he arrived in the capital to take up his post, the city fell to Li Zicheng.

According to Zhou's chronological biography, Zhou contemplated committing suicide, but heard that the emperor had fled south, so instead slipped out of the city amongst refugees and made his way to Nanjing. In actual fact, as Frederick Wakeman has pointed out, the number of officials who committed suicide was relatively small; most fled south, while some served the Shun government under Li Zicheng.³

Once in Nanjing, Zhou became embroiled in the intrigues in the Southern Ming court. He was at first imprisoned because of allegations that he had surrendered to Li Zicheng, but was later acquitted. Then he sought a

³ Frederick Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China*, pp. 267-74. Most of those who committed suicide were relatively senior officials who had served the Ming for a long time.

new appointment in the Southern Ming government, but when Ruan Dacheng (d. 1646) demanded that Zhou impeach the former Donglin activist and prominent philosopher Liu Zongzhou (1578-1645) as a condition for receiving an official appointment, Zhou decided to have nothing to do with the court in Nanjing, and with his family withdrew to Mt. Niushou outside the capital, reportedly 'never going near the city or its environs'.⁴

Nanjing fell to the Manchus without a fight on June 8th, 1646. Since Zhou was not a serving official, he was not among those officials who came out of the city to surrender to Dodo, but he came to Nanjing to surrender soon after. We will probably never know for certain why Zhou decided to serve the Manchus. The reason given by the bibliophile Huang Yuji, one of Zhou's biographers, is that Zhou wanted to help the common people. Although this sounds like a good Confucian excuse, surveying Zhou's career as a whole, Zhou does seem to have had a genuine commitment to improving the lot of the common people and to helping them rebuild their livelihoods after the devastation caused by the wars of the late Ming and the Manchu conquest. Zhou also hoped to use his position to protect Fushe friends and other loyalists; many loyalist painters and writers came under his patronage in the early Qing, and Zhou's relationship with most loyalists seems to have been good. Hongnam Kim even cites a painting by Chen Hongshou (1599-1652), one of Zhou's closest loyalist friends, in which Chen seems to be warning Zhou not to make his loyalist sympathies too obvious.⁵ There is also evidence that some loyalists whom Zhou must have protected, the painter Gong Xian (1618-1689) in particular, were grateful, though precisely how Zhou protected them is not known.⁶

A closely related reason for Zhou's collaboration was his desire to preserve Ming culture. This might seem paradoxical, but cultural preservation required both money and influence, and these could best be gained through an official career. This was particularly true of someone like Zhou, who did not have much by way of independent means. The income of officials was of course much greater than the basic salary paid by the government, as they received much more in the form of bribes, fees and presents.⁷ With this income, Zhou was able to print the works of poor

⁴ LGTJ, 'xingshu', p. 41b.

⁵ Hongnam Kim, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁶ Frederick Wakeman, *op. cit.*, p. 1001, citing Jerome Silbergeld, 'The Political Landscapes of Kung Hsien in Painting and Poetry,' in *Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the University of Hong Kong* 7.2, p. 564.

⁷ Craig Clunas's *Superfluous Things* contains an excellent discussion of the relationship between officials' earnings and their art collecting practices. See for example pp. 130-32.

writers, buy paintings and seals and so on, something which most loyalists were unable to do. This would, of course, be a major argument in justifying his collaboration, and was a way of hinting that he was really a loyalist at heart. I will demonstrate how this is reflected in *Chidu xinchao* in Chapter Eight.

Both the above motivations are relatively noble ones, but as Hongnam Kim rightly argues, it had not been easy for Zhou to become an official: 'Unlike literati from wealthy elite families, Chou endured considerable hardship and sacrifice in his advance into the ranks of scholar-official class and was obviously loath to give it all up at the very beginning of his career.'⁸ The improved financial position of Zhou's family owed itself entirely to his becoming an official; to abandon his career now would have been a major blow. Having seen first-hand the disarray of the Southern Ming court in Nanjing, and aware of the strength of the Manchu army from his time in Wei county, Zhou must have concluded that the Ming cause was a hopeless one not worth sacrificing his family's new-found prosperity for. Furthermore, he had been promoted just before the Ming fell; no doubt he considered he had a good chance of further promotion under the Qing. The decision must have been a difficult one to make, but personal and family needs, supplemented by the justifications discussed above, were most likely the main reasons prompting his surrender.

Zhou was first appointed to positions in the Huai-Yang region, where he spent two years working to rebuild the local economy following its devastation during the Manchu invasion. In 1647, the thirty-five year-old Zhou was promoted to Surveillance Commissioner for Fujian, where he would stay until 1654. His main responsibilities were for judicial matters and surveillance, but during his time there he also had responsibilities for education, and for defence. Although it is unclear whether he had direct command over troops, his biographies indicate that he spent much of his time assisting in quelling loyalist rebellions, seeking out bandits and dealing other forms of unrest. His performance must have pleased the Manchus, as in 1650 he was promoted to Right Provincial Administration Commissioner.

In 1654, Zhou was again promoted, this time to Left Vice Censor-in-Chief in the capital, where he arrived in February 1655. Unfortunately for Zhou, just before he arrived, the faction at court which would most likely have supported him fell from power. Chen Mingxia was executed, and Sun

⁸ Hongnam Kim, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Chengze and Gong Dingzi were demoted. Thus Zhou arrived in the capital to find the court dominated by hostile elements. Zhou was transferred twice within a short space of time. Then, in the autumn of that year, the new Governor-General of Fujian and Zhejiang, Tong Dai (d. c. 1657) impeached him on charges of corruption and cruelty.

The trial was a very complicated one, and we shall never know precisely what happened. In any case, it seems fairly certain that there was not much substance to the charges, and that they arose from jealousies certain people had towards Zhou. Zhou was arrested and taken back to Fujian for trial. After initially declaring him guilty, in 1658 the judges reversed their verdict. (In the meantime, Zhou was once brought out of prison to help defend Fuzhou against the armies of Zheng Chenggong. Once the attack had been successfully repulsed, Zhou was flung back into prison. Tong Dai was also removed following a series of military setbacks.) Since bribery was now suspected, all involved in the case were arrested and taken to the capital. The case dragged on for another two years, not least because the emperor seems to have found many inconsistencies in the evidence produced over the course of the trial. However, in the end the Judicial Office confirmed the original judgement, and in early 1660, Zhou was sentenced to beheading and confiscation of property, but with a stay of execution until after the Autumn assizes. This was the beginning of an extraordinary run of luck.

Before the time arrived for Zhou's execution, the court celebrated the Empress Dowager's birthday. As part of the celebrations, it was announced that all punishments would be commuted by one degree. In Zhou's case this meant that he escaped the death penalty; he was now to be exiled to Ningguta in the bleak northeast, and judging from a series of poems in Zhou's collected works, his exile must have been imminent.⁹ Then, on the 5th February, 1661, the Shunzhi emperor died. Before he died, he issued an edict of amnesty for prisoners, including a special order for the release of Zhou Lianggong.¹⁰ A month or so later, Zhou was set free, and made his way back to Nanjing.

While Zhou was in prison, both his parents had died, so upon his return he buried them and went into mourning. For the two years thereafter, he stayed in and about Nanjing mixing with poets and painters, expanding his collections of paintings and seals and carrying on his literary

⁹ *LGTJ*, 10.4b-6b.

¹⁰ Hongnam Kim, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

activities. It was during this period that he compiled the first collection of the *Chidu xinchao* series, the preface to which was written the summer of 1662.

As he was working on *Chidu xinchao*, several factors must have influenced the shape of the collection. Most important among these were the psychological effects of his trial and brush with death. Although Zhou was finally declared innocent by the court during the time he was in Nanjing and thereafter accepted a new appointment, he was obviously embittered by the traumas of the previous six years. The dangers of an official career in a political system in which factions played such an important part would have been foremost in Zhou's mind, in particular the way innocent people could lose their lives simply because they did not have support in the right places in the bureaucracy. No doubt Zhou felt his reputation had been slighted, and was keen to portray himself as an upright person who had suffered a grave injustice. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, *Chidu xinchao* was one avenue Zhou used to express his feelings in this respect.

Another effect of his trial would have been a strengthening of his commitment to Ming culture. This is not the same thing as saying Zhou actually became a 'born-again' loyalist, since he seems to have had no hesitation in taking up a new post when appointed to one in 1662. However, Zhou had been accused by a Chinese Bannerman, and that his case developed to the point that he faced imminent execution seems in large part to have been due to the reversal in the fortunes of collaborators in senior positions in the government at the time. Back in Nanjing, Zhou was again in the company of many loyalist painters and writers, and preserving the idea of Ming culture was a major motivation in his activities during this period of his life. This included preserving the material culture of the late Ming, recalling its great writers, and invoking the memory of those who had come to be regarded as examples of righteousness amidst the decay of the last decades of the Ming, namely outstanding members of the Donglin party and the Fushe. These themes also find abundant expression in the letters included in *Chidu xinchao*, and we shall examine them in Chapters Seven and Nine.

Zhou Lianggong's Ideas on Literature

Although by the time of his release from prison Zhou was regarded as a

literary figure of national standing¹¹, he cannot be said to have influenced the development of Chinese literature to any significant extent. Of course a great deal of his oeuvre was lost when he burnt his books and the woodblocks for them in a remarkable incident in 1670, but his surviving works of poetry or prose in the canonical genres, for which he was best known at the time, suggest that Zhou was a good writer without being a great one. Although he was more eclectic in his views on literature than many, he did not make any major new contributions to literary theory. At a fairly young age he had come under the influence of the Jiangxi writer Ai Nanying (1583-1646), as well as Qian Qianyi. These two men vigorously opposed what they saw as the corrupt trends that had been introduced into literature by the Former and Latter Seven Masters, in particular the blind imitation of the great writers of the Qin and Han dynasties, as well as the abstruse writing of the followers of the Jingling School. Both men believed that the writing of followers of these schools was not unlike the prose of the Six Dynasties period: laden with ornamentation and abstruse phrases, but lacking substance. Instead Qian and Ai looked to the prose masters of the Tang and Song as models of solid and elegant writing, though writers were supposed to learn from their spirit rather than simply imitate the phrases they used, as had been the case with the followers of the Former and Latter Seven Masters. Both Qian and Ai advocated *shixue*, practical learning, as the panacea for the ills of late Ming literature and society in general.¹² According to Ai, at the beginning of the Ming, the best writers had continued in the tradition of Tang and Song scholars such as Han Yu and Ouyang Xiu. In their essays, these early Ming writers wrote about affairs of state and other substantial matters, never following vulgar fads. However, beginning in the late fifteenth century (i.e. with the Former Seven Masters), 'heretical theories' began to appear, and the trend of imitation and plagiarism began. For literature to regain its strength, writers had to write about practical matters in a style that was direct and simple.¹³

Although Zhou broadly agreed with Ai in this analysis, he had a more forgiving attitude; he could find positive things to say about most of the literary trends of the Ming, while at the same time recognising their weaknesses. This in itself was an unusual stance at the time, as late Ming literary debates were noted for the vicious and uncompromising stands

¹¹ Hongnam Kim, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

¹² The discussion above is based on Guo Shaoyu, *Zhongguo wenxue piping shi*, pp. 452-62.

¹³ See Ai Nanying, 'Preface to the Reprinted Edition of *The Works of Luo Wensu gong*' in *Tianyongzi ji*, 4.32a-33b.

taken by many participants.¹⁴ However, like Ai, Zhou was especially critical of the cobbling together of essays using phrases from Qin and Han classics by followers of the Archaist School, and of the trend towards using obscure words and abstruse phrases typified by the Jingling School led by Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun. Indeed, Zhou has included a considerable number of letters in *Chidu xinchao* which criticise and mock Zhong and the Jingling school. Amongst his contemporaries, Zhou particularly championed a group of writers from Jiangxi who broadly followed Ai Nanying. These included Chen Hongxu (1597-1665), Xu Shipu (1607?-1658?), Wan Shihua and others, all of whom figure prominently in Zhou's essays on literature and in *Chidu xinchao*.

If disdain for the shallow, imitatory trends of the late Ming writers whom he criticised was the negative expression of Zhou's views on literature, his advocacy of the concept of *xingqing* represented the positive side. *Xingqing*, and the related term *xingling*, meant slightly different things at different periods in Chinese history, but they can broadly be said to refer to the direct expression of one's personal nature and spirit. Zhou applied this idea to all major forms of artistic endeavour, as demonstrated by Hongnam Kim¹⁵, and the expressive qualities which this term implies seem to explain Zhou's interest in *chidu*, as we shall see in the discussion of Zhou's editorial preface below. However, Kim also points out that Zhou's view of *xingqing* was classicist in origin, and in this respect was different to the iconoclastic view of *xingqing* held by Qian Qianyi. Zhou saw art as didactic: it should serve as a vehicle to inspire moral improvement in its audience. An extension of this idea was that art could be used as a form of political censure, a theme which certainly finds expression in *Chidu xinchao*, though this is not stated in the editorial preface.¹⁶

Interestingly, it is Zhou's less formal works, such as *Duhua lu* (Biographies of Painters) *Shuying*, and *Chidu xinchao* which have been most widely read in later times. *Chidu xinchao* in particular has been reprinted a number of times since it was first published, the most recent edition being a simplified character edition published by Yuelu Shushe in Changsha in 1986, which was reprinted in 1990.

The Compilation of *Chidu xinchao*

¹⁴ Wu Guoping, Wang Zhenyuan, *Qingdai wenxue piping shi*, pp. 158-9.

¹⁵ See Hongnam Kim, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-7, and 105-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, especially pp. 107-9.

Although we do not know when or how Zhou became interested in *chidu* or how he got the idea of publishing collections of them, there are two obvious explanations as to why *chidu* appealed to him. One, mentioned above, is that *chidu* was a genre which naturally lent itself to the expression of the self, or *xingqing*. The second explanation is provided by his son, Zhou Zaijun in his biography of his father. Zhou was a keen observer of the people, places and events around him, and was very loyal to his friends. He kept all the works he could of those whom he thought deserved recognition, 'unable to bear losing even a word or a line, and if he discovered authors whom he felt worthy of commendation to the wider literary community, he would find ways to publicise them.'¹⁷ Following on from this, Zhou Zaijun wrote:

In the case of the *Chidu xinchao* anthologies, he would include any letter he felt worthy, even if it was just a few lines long. In many cases even the name of the writer was not familiar to him. My father was most anxious to encourage talented scholars, and even if such a person was only skilled in one area, my father would be concerned lest that talent go unnoticed and be forgotten.¹⁸

Huang Yuji, after saying very similar things about Zhou Lianggong's love of talented men, his going out of his way to seek them out, and his efforts to publicise their skills, goes on to say that 'the contribution of the three *chidu* anthologies in this regard is particularly great.'¹⁹ So the public reasons why Zhou compiled *Chidu xinchao* were to pay tribute to his friends and as a means of publicising the talents of some of the people he met.

It is possible that the idea of compiling a *chidu* collection came to him while he was working on *Yinshuwu shuying* in prison, since many of the quotations in that book are actually taken from the *chidu* which appear in *Chidu xinchao*. In any case, there are a couple of interesting parallels between the circumstances of the compiler of *Chidu xinchao* and the compilers of the two versions of *Chidu qingcai* which might be no more than coincidental, but which should not be left unmentioned. Zhou compiled *Chidu xinchao* following a close call first with death and then with

¹⁷ Zhou Zaijun, 'xingshu', *op. cit.*, p. 55b.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55b.

¹⁹ Huang Yuji, 'xingzhuang', *op. cit.*, p. 35a.

exile for life, quite possibly as the result of political intrigue, and was at the time in mourning for his parents. Yang Shen, as we have noted earlier, was exiled to a remote outpost in Yunnan for life as the result of his role in the Great Ritual Controversy of 1524, and it was in Yunnan that he compiled the original edition of *Chidu qingcai*. Wang Shizhen published his first revision of *Chidu qingcai* after being demoted to Vice Commissioner of the notoriously lawless Qingzhou Military Defence Circuit (neighbouring on Wei County, where Zhou would hold off Manchu marauders some eighty years later, and in a very similar post to the one that Zhou would hold in Qingzhou following his rehabilitation by the Kangxi emperor), and published the expanded edition while at home in mourning for his mother following seven years at home after the execution of his father. These coincidences do seem to lend support to the idea that the informal and expressive nature of *chidu* appealed to people who had suffered setbacks, if only temporarily, in their official careers, and were looking for a space outside the official canon to express their frustration with legitimate forms of authority.

Editing Principles

As pointed out in Chapter One, the so-called 'preface to *Chidu xinchao*' is in fact the essay on letters in *Wenxin diaolong*. Zhou Lianggong explains the reason for this at the end of his statement of the editing principles: he felt it was the ultimate authority on letter-writing and said all the essential things there were to say about the art. No later essays on the subject had added anything important, and anything he might say would be trivia, simply expanding on the ideas of Liu Xie. We have seen in Chapters Three and Four how the compilers of other collections used the *Wenxin diaolong* essay as the basis for their prefaces, and although we might be disappointed that Zhou chose not to write a version of his own, he seems to have realised that all that the others were doing was plagiarising Liu Xie, and saw little point in doing the same himself. This, along with some of the arguments he puts in his statement of editorial principles, indicates that he accepted the traditions of *chidu*-writing in much the same way as the others did.

There are no other prefaces of the type that usually introduced such literary works, so the long editor's preface written by Zhou himself explaining the principles used in the compilation of *Chidu xinchao*, dated 29th July 1662, is the only other evidence we have of Zhou's thoughts on the

matter. Since this editor's preface is about 1,800 characters long, I will just quote the most important parts, summarising the rest.

Zhou begins by saying that formal essays are the staple of a scholar's interest, whereas letters between friends are the product of a flourish of a writing-brush, and therefore should be fresh and devoid of worn-out language. For this reason he has not included letters which have already been published in other anthologies.²⁰ This is one point where *Chidu xinchao* differs from most of the other collections: the compilers of *Chidu lanyan* seem to have been proud of their claim that 70% of the letters in their collection had never been published before. Otherwise, with the exception of *Chidu xinchao*, it is easy to find letters which appear in more than one of the collections discussed in Chapter Three.

In the next section, he notes that many other anthologies begin with letters from as far back as the edicts and diplomatic missives of pre-Qin times, and comments rather sarcastically that 'they are only concerned with going as far back in time as possible, which has nothing to do with the quality of the writing.' For this reason, Zhou has only included letters from the previous few decades: 'In the last few decades, this genre has flourished, and there are many talented writers whose writing in this area has not received adequate recognition. Gems by the finest writers remain uncollected, and there are many hidden treasures which nobody has sought out. Now that they have all been brought together, naturally the result is a magnificent collection, rich in fine writing. Collections which mix ancient and modern always seem to lack focus.' This confirms what Zhou Zaijun had to say about his father's motives for compiling *Chidu xinchao*.

Zhou Liangong then proceeds to outline his view of the development of the genre in more recent times. He says that *chidu*-writing is a minor art, with its origins in friendly social exchanges, and therefore they contain much flattery. He then relates how the various literary schools of the Ming, such as the Former and Latter Seven Masters and the Gongan school, successively rose and declined, each bringing new ideas but then becoming

²⁰ All the following paraphrasing and quotations are taken from the 'xuan li' (Editing Principles) in the Shanghai Shudian edition of *Chidu xinchao* (1990), which is itself a reprint of the Shanghai Zazhi Gongsi's October 1935 modern print edition. However, the 'xuan li' in this edition seems to have been based on an older edition in which a page was missing (which the printers didn't notice), as two whole items are missing, and the items immediately preceding and following these two sections have been run together, with the last half of the first item missing, and the first three quarters of the second item (about women) missing, so there is a sudden change of topic. In this case, I have based my work on the simplified character edition published by Yuelu Shushe in Changsha in 1986, and the woodblock edition.

stale. In contrast to this, 'The letters in this collection have no fixed style, and are in different formats. The most important thing is that they serve as an avenue through which writers express their feelings (*shuxie xingqing*), and show true inspiration (*xinghui*)...' This last sentence, although brief, is strong evidence that Zhou saw *chidu* as an excellent vehicle for the expression of *xingqing*. And although Zhou does not make the connection explicitly, his words seem to reflect the conclusion of the *Wenxin diaolong* passage we discussed in Chapter One:

'A general survey of the nature of *shu* reveals that its fundamental purpose is to state one's feelings without reserve...Therefore its style should be orderly and smooth, so the writer can give full rein to his spirit, and soft and pleasant to the reader. If the style in which they are written is lucid, letters are indeed the presentation of the sound of the mind.'

This example reminds us that like other compilers of *chidu* collections, Zhou failed to distinguish between *shu* and *chidu* when discussing theory.

In the following couple of sections, Zhou explains that works on Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian philosophy are collected in other dedicated anthologies, and with a few exceptions, he has left them out of *Chidu xinchao*. 'How could [the great ideas of Su Shi and Han Yu] be expressed in a minor genre such as *chidu* without being restricted.' However, he is quick to point out that the letters in his collection still conform to high moral standards, while at the same time avoiding pedantry; the fact that he has not included many letters about philosophy does not mean that corrupt and vulgar writings have been allowed in. This too echoes the comments made by the compilers of the other *chidu* anthologies as they sought to stake the claim of *chidu* to being a genre worthy of the respect of gentlemen, and recalls the line in the same passage in *Wenxin diaolong* quoted above: that letters should 'give expression to outstanding words and deeds'.

The mention of Su Shi here, and Zhou's claim that *chidu* were inadequate to express the complexity of Su's thought, raises the issue of whether Zhou's interest in *chidu* was influenced by Su in any way. Zhou was an ardent admirer of the Eight Great Prose Masters of the Tang and Song, and we can be fairly sure that Zhou had read Su's *chidu*. However, it has to be said that there is no evidence at all that Su's *chidu* were in any way responsible for Zhou's own interest in the genre. One would have expected

that if Su had been influential in this respect, Zhou would have said so; the passage cited here seems to suggest the opposite.

The compilers of anthologies arranged by category come in for some rather scathing treatment in the section which explains why Zhou declined to use such arrangements:

The range of matters that might be touched upon when expressing one's ideas is almost limitless. In many of the *chidu* anthologies that have been published to date, letters are just slipped into a category, as simple as that. However, this is just so hackers of little learning can plunder them whenever they so require. It seems never to occur to these compilers that one letter can touch upon several subjects, and therefore how can they say to which category each letter belongs? Even if it is possible to roughly slot the letters into categories, it will still be difficult to bring everything together neatly. If one wants to borrow part of a letter to put in one's own writing, then one still has to rely on one's own talent; a poor writer will find it difficult to do it properly, and no fine writer would blemish his writing with such warts anyway. This collection is for talented and learned scholars, and presents the finest examples of the art for their appreciation. If you need to borrow text to patch over a lack of learning and sophistication, there are simple collections to suit such vulgar needs.

Thus, in one sardonic sweep, the categorised collections are branded 'vulgar', and their users dismissed almost as semi-literates. It is likely that this was a direct attack upon *Chidu chuzheng*, which had been published just two years before, though Li Yu was unlikely to have been particularly ruffled by it.²¹ Zhou was obviously seeking to set his collection above most of the other

²¹ It is not clear that the two got on all that well anyway. In 1667, Zhou wrote a preface for a collection of legal cases that Li had compiled, in which he said, 'Critics say that Liweng's profligate abuse of his talents in his early writings has been replaced by a dignified and righteous manner.' (Patrick Hanan, *op. cit.*, p. 24) Hanan goes on to comment that Zhou 'then proceeds to deny the charge of inconsistency with an argument quite as ingenious as it is unconvincing.' Hanan notes that Zhou Lianggong attended a performance at Li's Mustard Seed Garden in early 1672, (*Ibid.*, p. 213, n17) but at the same time there are no poems or letters to Li in Zhou's collected works, or in the works of some of Zhou's closest friends. (*Ibid.*, p. 227, n27) We have noted earlier that there are no letters by Li in any of the *Chidu xinchao* collections. In the quotation cited here, the word I have translated as 'plunder' in the clause 'this is just so hacks of little learning can plunder them whenever they so require' is *yu-lie* (fishing and hunting) in Chinese, and it is possible that this was a deliberate reference to Li's given name.

chidu collections which had been published at the time by claiming that only his avoids catering to vulgar tastes in any way. In effect he is telling his prospective readers: since I myself dislike all such vulgarity, readers of my collection can be assured that the letters within will measure up to the high standards of a refinement, and therefore readers of my collection need not fear being seen to indulge in the vulgar pursuits of the uncultivated. In fact, Zhou's strategy here is practically identical to that employed by the compilers we discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

Towards the end of the statement of editing principles, Zhou discusses a related issue, that of the order of presentation:

All the letters by one person must be put in the same chapter, so that one can discern the development of that person's style and judge the quality of his letters. However, apart from that, we did not follow any set guidelines in arranging the letters, but just put them in the order we selected them in. This is not an attempt to lay out a literary genealogy...and it was not our aim to divide the authors up according to rank or otherwise... Therefore, there has been no attempt to arrange the letters in any particular order.

Actually, the first statement is not entirely true, as letters by Wang Duo (1592-1652) appear in Chapters 1, 5 and 10. In each case, Zhou has given us Wang's style and home town, but in the first two cases he also gives us the title of Wang's collected works, not mentioned in the Chapter 10 entry. This is a little puzzling, but is the only instance. Letters by Hu Jie appear in two places in Chapter 5, though why is not clear. His style, home town and the title of his collected works are written below his name in the first appearance (just one short letter), and below his name in the second appearance (11 longer letters) is written '*zai jian*', or, roughly, 'see previous entry', which at least proves that the editors were aware of this (which makes one wonder about the Wang Duo case). Otherwise, Zhou's claims that the letters were not deliberately arranged seems generally to be true, though the fact that the collection begins with letters by Gao Panlong (1562-1626) and ends with letters by Wei Dazhong (1575-1625), both Donglin stalwarts who died as a result of the purge of Donglin partisans directed by Wei Zhongxian (d. 1627), the powerful eunuch of the Tianqi period, would seem to be no coincidence.²² Other Donglin activists feature in this collection, and in the

²² Gao committed suicide before he could be arrested, but Wei was tortured to death.

later *Chidu xinchao* collections, and we shall return to this question in Chapter Seven.

One feature of *Chidu xinchao* is that many of the letters in it have actually been edited, and in quite a number of cases it is possible to compare the original as it appears in, for example, the author's collected works, with the version in *Chidu xinchao*. In the next item, Zhou explains his reasons for taking the liberty of cutting some of the letters:

Chidu are the product of a flourish of the writing-brush, and as such are not considered important works. Perhaps because they are written on the inspiration of a moment, they are sometimes excessive in their use of language, or because of the complex nature of some of their contents, they tend to ramble on for pages. Even in letters famed for the excellence of expression, there are sometimes minor weaknesses which detract from the overall quality of the piece, and in such cases there seems to be no harm in omitting these blemishes, on the condition that this does not adversely affect the letter as a whole.

Modern aficionados of letter-writing would probably take Zhou to task on this. It can be argued that part of the value of letters in relation to other more formal types of prose is that they reveal the idiosyncrasies of the writer, and it is precisely these idiosyncrasies and blemishes which give letters their more personal flavour. These excesses or blemishes could be viewed as the writer's expression of *xingqing* at the time. The next item in Zhou's editorial preface further reveals the tension between stylistic demands on one hand and self-expression on the other. Zhou informs us that he has not included any letters written on behalf of someone else, as this is like trying to establish the writer's inner feelings through a 'membrane', and in any case, 'one cannot express oneself without inhibition through the pen of another.' Surely Zhou's stylistic interventions are imposing at least a very thin 'membrane' between the writer's inner feelings and the reader. Of course, this introduces the complex question of the concept of 'the original'. Modern Western scholarship is generally very keen to preserve what it believes to be the 'original' of a text, but it has been demonstrated that this is actually a comparatively recent phenomenon.

The following two sections talk about how the collection came to be

compiled, and we shall return to these later in this chapter.

The theme that recurs throughout this statement of editing principles, that this is a serious collection of letters for refined scholars to appreciate, and not a popular collection catering to vulgar tastes, is reinforced in the final sections. Zhou declares that no letters which might stir up controversy or which might be seen to damage the reputation of others have been included in *Chidu xinchao*, certainly a contrast to many of the popular letter collections that appeared at a slightly later date in Europe, for which scandal was a major selling point. Scandal sold many cheaper books in China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries too. However, I have not yet discovered any letter collections which use scandal as a selling point, and I have not found any references to compilers fabricating letters and attributing them to famous people, though it is hard to believe it never happened. Whole books were spuriously attributed to people who did not in fact compile them. In Chapter Three we saw how this was possibly the case with the collections attributed to Zhong Xing and Xu Wei, so it is not difficult to imagine that some letters were forged with the aim of increasing sales.

Finally, Zhou tells us that he has deliberately excluded letters by women, with two exceptions whose letters can serve as models. His reason for this is that most letters by women are either expressions of the grievances of young ladies, or are notes exchanged to arrange secret trysts. Literature should not incite people to immorality, he says, so he has preferred to err on the side of strictness in this regard.

Taken together, the general thrust of the items in Zhou's statement of editorial principles largely conforms to that of similar collections discussed in earlier chapters. His thinking on *chidu* was largely based on the ideas put forward by Liu Xie over a millenium earlier. He too sees *chidu* as a means through which virtuous gentleman can express their thoughts and feelings to each other. However, Zhou is more vigorous than the others in trying to set *Chidu xinchao* above what he sees are the more vulgar trends of his time. He does not want his collection to be seen as a book of models for young scholars to study, and is scornful of collections which lay their claim to respectability by going back in time as far as possible. He is keen to portray his collection as presenting the thoughts of virtuous and talented men of his own era, which is in line with his own classicist ideals of literature as a vehicle for the upholding of moral standards, and the ideals espoused in regard to letter-writing by Liu Xie. However, as we will see in the chapters which follow, the rationale behind this is more complex than it first appears.

Gathering the letters - sources for *Chidu xinchao*

The factor which complicates any analysis of the process of the compilation of *Chidu xinchao* is the way in which the letters for the collection were gathered and assembled. It was not unusual to gather letters through friends, and it was not unusual to have assistants to help put the collection together; Wang Qi certainly had such help when compiling *Chidu xinyu*.²³ However, in the first collection of the *Chidu xinchao* series, Zhou gives the friends who helped him special prominence. At the beginning of each of the twelve chapters, Zhou lists the names of two men whom he says were responsible for 'selecting' the letters for that chapter. All of these twenty-four men were friends of Zhou's. He explains the compilation process as follows:

In producing a book such as this, one must spread one's net as widely as possible. Otherwise, not all the outstanding exponents of the genre will be represented, and how then will one be able to claim that one is presenting a comprehensive range! My main resource has been the libraries of twenty-two of my friends, so my sources have been very rich indeed, and I have selected and copied all the letters I could find in their libraries. I have supplemented these with rare letters kept by old established families, and the remnants of older anthologies left lying around in baskets, which I have sought with the utmost zeal. I have even asked friends to turn their drawers upside down looking for letters between friends, be they just half a page here or a few words there, so I could copy them and bring to light hidden gems. It takes the fur from many foxes' bellies to make a coat, and the pollen from countless flowers to make honey. Over the past few decades there has been an abundance of friendships between the famous and the illustrious; however, there are those amongst them who unfortunately are not represented because they did not send letters to their friends. If you do not mind sharing fine examples of letters that you might have, I would be grateful if you would kindly send them to me, so that they might go into a second anthology. I respectfully await your responses.

Investigating all the phenomena in the world cannot be done

²³ See Widmer, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

in one day, and hundreds of pounds cannot be lifted by one arm. I began this work in the spring, and completed it in the autumn.²⁴ It is true that I have contributed to some extent in the compilation of this collection, but I cannot allow this to overshadow the contributions of those who helped me compile this book. Each person's contribution was limited to one chapter, so they had to evaluate all the letters they had, then carefully choose the best of them. Each chapter was to contain no more than a hundred letters, so it was difficult to judge which were worthy of inclusion. All strained their mental energies to the limit in cutting out the dross so as to highlight the outstanding. Therefore, I have put the names of those who edited each chapter at the head of the chapter for which they were responsible, so that their labours might not be forgotten.

Zhou's modest claim that he 'contributed to some extent in the compilation of this collection' need not be taken too seriously, as it is clear from the first paragraph that he did spend a great deal of time searching through friends' libraries and collecting letters from various sources. It seems that he was at least responsible for deciding the initial pool of letters from which the final selection would be made. This would ensure that the collection broadly reflected Zhou's beliefs and preoccupations. Furthermore, it is likely that the friends who assisted him shared similar beliefs and would in any case defer to him. How much influence he exerted after that is impossible to tell. My impressions here are to some extent confirmed by a letter Zhou wrote to Zhang Yi while he was compiling the third collection in the *Chidu xinzhao* series, *Jielin ji*.²⁵ The letter, which appears in the Chapter devoted to *chidu* in *Laigutang ji*, was probably written in the autumn of 1670.

In my very low spirits, I pass my days selecting *chidu* [for a new collection]. What am I to do when people send me several dozen letters to consider, yet none of them are worth putting in?

²⁴ The references here are to *Shi jing*, 'Songs of Bin: The Seventh Month', but it appears just to be a literary way of saying that the work took a long time, something like cultivating a crop.

²⁵ Zhang Yi, also known as Zhang Luzheng, was a native of Nanjing. He had escaped from Beijing with Zhou when Li Zicheng took the capital in 1644 (see *LGTJ*, *nianpu*, 5a). After the fall of the Ming, Zhang went to live in a temple on Mt. Qixia outside Nanjing, never entering the city, and mixing with very few people. He died at the age of 87. See *Ming yimin lu*, p. 136.

However, in your case, there is not a word I can leave out. If all the letters that have been sent to me were as good as yours, wouldn't this be the salvation of my project! Among the letters which did not make their way into *Cangju ji* [the second collection in the series], there are quite a few which were worth keeping. I am so bedazzled by them that I could not help but wrong some of my friends by holding on to their letters for such a long time. But now my mind is in such a state that I cannot possibly read them all again, so I would ask you to look through them, twelve volumes in all, and highlight in red ink the ones you think must be included. Amongst these letters are some that have since been included: you need not worry about whether they have been included or not, but just highlight the good ones, and I will copy them out. At the moment you have plenty of free time, and although this task brings no benefit at all, the letters have a touch of refined charm about them, far removed from the vulgar affairs of the aggressive, tumultuous world out there. I know you will not be pleased at my presumption in asking you to do this for me.

The letter by Shigong is wonderful, and I have already had the woodblock for it prepared. I thoroughly detest the recent works of Wugong: every time he writes that Buddhist stuff I want to throw up.²⁶ The letter by Sheng Yusi you copied for me is outstanding, and his letters are rather rare. I've copied this one down too. Shigong is now living a long way away, so I can't go and seek letters from him. If you happen to know someone going his way and are writing to him, I would appreciate it if you would mention this. Recently I received more than twenty letters by the monk Bo'an, but they have none of those monkish airs about them, and are really worth publishing. When the woodblocks are done I'll send them to you to read. Is there anything in the published works of writers of recent times which you think might be worth considering for inclusion? Even if you don't have the book yourself, I would hope that you would at least be able to send me the table of contents, and I will ask people to look for the book.²⁷

²⁶ I have not been able to identify who Shigong and Wugong were.

²⁷ LGTJ, 20.14b-16a.

Although by the time of the compilation of *Jielin ji*, Zhou seems to have been working mostly with letters sent to him, this passage suggests that Zhou did in fact play an important role in deciding which letters were to be included. For example, he states that he has already included some of the letters he is sending to Zhang in the collection, which indicates that Zhou did include letters without consulting his assistants. Indeed it is unlikely that Zhou would have let letters that he really wanted to include be removed by his friends. We can presume that Zhou's tastes and preferences were well known to his friends in any case. Another factor which needs to be considered is that so many of the letters in *Chidu xinchao* are written to Zhou himself, so we can presume that Zhou at least made a preliminary selection from amongst these letters before passing them on to his friends to cull further.

This letter to Zhang Yi was written about eight years after the first of the *Chidu xinchao* series was published, the words 'the letters have a touch of refined charm about them, far removed from the vulgar affairs of the aggressive, tumultuous world out there' are also significant. In the final three chapters I will discuss some of the more overtly political themes in *Chidu xinchao*, but at the same time we should not forget that most of the letters in *Chidu xinchao* were not obviously political. However, literary escapism, if we call it that, was itself a form of political expression, in that scholars who took an interest such genres can be seen as seeking something deliberately apart from legitimated forms of expression. Thus *chidu*, being 'far removed' from 'vulgar affairs' were likely to be particularly attractive to officials out of favour and others who wished to view themselves as outside the political mainstream, even though the contents of most of the *chidu* they read might have had no obvious political content at all. We will return to this idea in the next chapter.

Zhou's assistants in the compilation of *Chidu xinchao*

If we examine the backgrounds of the men who helped select letters for *Chidu xinchao*, we find that, as a group, they are very similar to the compilers of the other *chidu* collections we discussed in Chapter Three. Although some had had limited official careers, only one was a serving official at the time, and even he seems to have been between two appointments when Zhou asked him to help. Most of the other friends were poets and painters living in or around Nanjing. Some of these people are

rather obscure, and we know little about them. Luo Yao was a close friend of Zhou's from his youth, as was Wu Zongxin, but neither of them seems to have gained any independent reputation. Of Wang Yan'ge, Wang Yuanheng, Wang Tingdong, Jiang Bin and Xu Yanshou we know little, except that the first two passed the Palace Examination in 1652, and there is a poem by Zhou written when these two men, along with Wu Zongxin, visited him in prison upon the completion of *Shuying* (there are also other poems written by Zhou with these two men).²⁸ The last two were natives of Houguan, a county of Fuzhou, and were possibly friends Zhou met while an official there, and who had since travelled to Nanjing. Gao Zhao, Xu Mei, Chen Yunheng, Hu Jie, Ji Yingzhong, Xu Fang and Wu Jiaji are usually classed as loyalists, and passed most of their lives in the Jiangnan area writing poetry, painting and scrounging a living, usually with some support from wealthy officials like Zhou Lianggong and Gong Dingzi. Chen Yunheng did sit the provincial examinations in 1654, but regretted it and went back to a loyalist lifestyle.²⁹ Xu Fang passed the Palace Examination in the same year as Zhou, and was the only one of the selectors to have actually served the Ming (as Subprefectural Magistrate for Zezhou in Shanxi).³⁰ The others had been Government Students who gave up their studies after the dynasty fell. Wu Jiaji was exceptional: he came from a poor family living amongst the salt pans of eastern Jiangsu, and lived in extremely straitened circumstances for much of his life. It was only through his 'discovery' by Zhou Lianggong, Wang Shizhen (1634-1711, the Qing poet) and others that he became more widely known. Zhou is first mentioned in Wu Jiaji's chronological biography in 1661, when it says: 'Zhou Lianggong was released from jail, and returned south via Yangzhou... That winter, Zhou invited Wu to come to Yangzhou, which he did.' (In August of the same year a tidal wave swept Dongtao, Wu's home town, and many homes were destroyed. Wu was also very ill after he arrived in Yangzhou in the winter. We get an idea of Wu's problems from these records, and it is a wonder that he was able to participate in the selection of letters for *Chidu xinchao*, which was published the following year.)³¹ There are many references to Zhou after that, and Zhou published Wu's poems in the early Kangxi period.³²

Gao Fu and Wu Jin had minor reputations as painters and

²⁸ LGTJ, 10.2a.

²⁹ QSJS, p. 949.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 672.

³¹ *Wu Jiaji shi jianjiao*, p. 551.

³² *Ibid.*, editors' guidelines, p. 1. No precise date is given.

calligraphers, and Gao was one of Zhou's old friends. Mei Lei was the grand-nephew of the famous dramatist Mei Dingzuo (1549-1615)³³, and had some reputation as a poet. Xu Bi passed the provincial examinations during the Shunzhi years (possibly under Zhou), and became Magistrate of An County in Sichuan. He lived in Beijing at some stage, and was good friends with Wang Shizhen.³⁴ Chen Run was a descendent of a long line of scholars; his father was the respected Fujian writer Chen Kan.³⁵ At the time *Chidu xinchao* was being compiled, Wang Ji's career had not really begun (he would later take the *Boxue hongci* examination in 1679, work on the compilation of the *Mingshi*, and make a well-known official visit to the Ryukyu islands in 1682³⁶), but he already had a reputation as a poet, and his poetry was often cited along with that of Wu Jiaji and Sun Zhiwei (1620-1687). Huang Yuji was the son of Huang Juzhong (1562-1644). Huang Juzhong had at one stage been Proctor in the Directorate of Education at Nanjing, and subsequently moved from Jinjiang to settle in Nanjing. He collected books all his life, and at the time of his death, his library, *Qianqing Tang*, held about 60,000 volumes. Huang Yuji continued in his father's footsteps, and after becoming a Government Student at the age of fifteen, gave up studying for the examinations to dedicate himself to preserving and expanding the family library. The collection was increased to 80,000 volumes, and was used as the basis for the 'Bibliographical Treatise' in the *Mingshi*, which Huang was called upon to edit in the early 1680s, despite having no degrees and having missed the *Boxue Hongci* examination owing to the death of his mother. Huang Yuji also had some reputation as a poet, but this was greatly overshadowed by his reputation for learning.³⁷

Of all the selectors, Li Shihong had the most outstanding official career, despite never passing the Metropolitan Examination. He passed the Shuntian (Beijing) Provincial Examinations in 1654, aged thirty-six, after spending 'twenty years at home in the mountains [in Fujian] studying, attending to his parents and mixing with friends.'³⁸ During this time he made the acquaintance of the well-known Fujian writer, Zeng Yizhuan (1591-1641?), and Xu Shipu, the prose writer from Jiangxi. Specific dates in

³³ *Anhui tongzhi*, 226.8a 'Wenyuan'.

³⁴ *QSJS*, pp. 2239-40.

³⁵ *CDXC*, p. 3, and Qian Qianyi, *Lie chao shiji xiao zhuan*, p. 635. There are letters by Chen Kan in *CDXC*, pp. 3-5.

³⁶ *QSG*, p. 13351. Also Dou Zhen ed., *Guochao shu-huajia bilu*, 1.35a.

³⁷ 'The Huangs and the *Qianqing tang shummu*', in Zheng Weizhang, Li Wanjian, *Zhongguo zhuming cangshujia zhuanlüe*, pp. 81-83. Also *QSJS*, pp. 2890-91, and *QSG*, p. 13360.

³⁸ *QSG*, p. 10201.

biographical sources for Li Shihong are scarce, but soon after becoming a Provincial Graduate, he was made a Judge in Guangxin in eastern Jiangxi. After bringing local tyrants and corrupt officials to heel, he inspected documents relating to previous judgements, and released several hundred people whom he found to be in fact innocent of the crimes with which they were charged. He was then put in charge of reconstructing Yushan, a county belonging to Guangxin, which had been reduced to 'thirty-two families and grass three feet high' following fighting in the area.³⁹ After this he was made Magistrate of Yongxin in the far west of Jiangxi, where he petitioned to have the tax burden lightened to give the local people some breathing space.⁴⁰ His next posting, in 1662 or 1663, was as Subprefectural Magistrate for Ganzhou in Gansu, and later he was made Prefect of Changzhou in Jiangnan. He took part in the battles against Wu Sangui (1612-1678) after that general rebelled in 1673, and retired three years later, spending the rest of his eighty years at home. He most probably helped Zhou select letters for *Chidu xinzhao* between his leaving Yongxin and going to Gansu. One of Li's best-known poems, 'Upon Arriving in Nanchang and Hearing that Zhou Liyuan (Lianggong) is Safe, and Receiving a Letter from Him', would seem to have been written in 1661, since from the contents it is clear that this refers to Zhou's release, and was probably written as Li was on his way back from Yongxin.⁴¹ Possibly Li then went to Nanjing and spent some time there, and selected letters for Zhou then. He certainly couldn't have done it after going to Gansu.

Of Wang Shiyun we know very little. He appears in none of the standard Qing biographical sources, and we are indebted to a short biography in *Yanshi jiacang chidu* for the little we do know. Wang seems to have come from the large Huizhou (Anhui) Wang clan, but like many of his fellow townsmen, he lived in Nanjing. He became a Metropolitan Graduate in 1654, and was made a Judge in Quanzhou, Fujian. It was in this position that he became entangled in Zhou's case, as he was one of the judges involved in assessing the matter and reporting to the Surveillance Commissioner. Since these judges findings were at variance with the earlier judgements (that Zhou was guilty), Wang must have been taken to the capital while the matter was investigated, and possibly accompanied Zhou back to Nanjing after the amnesty, though it is not known what happened to

³⁹ This is mentioned in Struve (1984), *The Southern Ming, 1644-1662*, pp. 68-9.

⁴⁰ *QSLZ*, p. 6096.

⁴¹ *QSJS*, p. 1879.

Wang during the trial.⁴²

Finally, Lin Sihuan is perhaps one of the most interesting selectors from the point of view of this discussion. Lin was from Jinjiang in Fujian, and became a Metropolitan Graduate in 1649. He rose to the post of Surveillance Vice Commissioner for Guangdong, with concurrent responsibilities for the Military Defence Circuit and the duties of the Provincial Education Commissioner (very similar to Zhou's posts). He was based in Qiongzhou (Hainan) where discipline amongst troops on his own side seems to have been as much, or more, of a problem than rebel troops of any sort. His biography states how an attempt by him to discipline soldiers who had beaten some locals resulted in the soldiers turning on him, and Lin had literally to stick his neck out to avert the crisis. A later dispute led to Lin's demotion and eventual arrest. Li had been on good terms with a Regional Commander surnamed Gao, but once at a banquet at Gao's residence, when Lin discovered that the singers and dancers provided to entertain them were natives of Qiongzhou, Lin broke down in tears. When asked what the matter was, Lin replied that his host was humiliating him, as the dancers, being natives of the area which Lin administered, were 'his own children', and therefore to make them dance in front of him was humiliating. Lin then got up to leave. The upshot of this was that both men were demoted four ranks, and were later taken to the capital for trial. There Lin was imprisoned in the cell next to Zhou Lianggong's, though they had known each other before this. The two men are said to have exchanged poems by slipping them through the cracks around the doors. Later Lin was sentenced to a beating and exile, but was released in the same amnesty as Zhou. Therefore the two men had very much in common. Following his release, Lin went to live in Hangzhou, where he resided until his death, probably in the early 1670s. His paintings and calligraphy were greatly sought after, but he refused to entertain the requests of officials for examples of his work, and he died in poverty.⁴³

That Lin had an ongoing official career at the time *Chidu xinzhao* was compiled actually serves as a foil highlighting the fact that almost all Zhou's other assistants were writers and artists living independently of government, and the vast majority of them do not appear to have harboured political ambitions (apart from the dream of restoring the Ming).

⁴² See *Yanshi jiacang chidu*, p. 283. The part about the trial is quoted verbatim from *LGTJ*, 'nianpu', p. 7b.

⁴³ *BZJ*, pp. 2223-24.

Many of them probably relied at least in part on the support of patrons like Zhou for their livelihood. Although some were well-known as practitioners of poetry or prose, none of them could be said to be a leading figure in the literary debates of the time. Unrestrained by the duties and obligations of the life of an official, and in most cases perhaps disinclined to spend time cultivating many of the mainstream prose genres, these men probably spent much of their time dabbling in the leisurely pursuits which were popular amongst the Jiangnan literati of the time. While some of them seem to have cultivated a *chidu* style with some success, at least judging by the inclusion of examples of their *chidu* in *Chidu xinchao*, for most of them selecting letters for inclusion in Zhou's collection was probably just the sort of pleasant pastime Zhou suggested it could be to Zhang Yi: '...the letters have a touch of refined charm about them, far removed from the vulgar affairs of the aggressive, tumultuous world out there'. Indeed, although most of the literati who assisted Zhou in this project would, as part of their education, have read a great deal in the canonical genres, and presumably had varying degrees of proficiency in at least some of them, for a person living the leisurely cultural life of Jiangnan at the time, these genres were quite probably inadequate as a vehicle to express those things which had the most meaning for them in the context of their day-to-day lives. In contrast, the contents of many of the *chidu* which Zhou gave to them to choose from, relatively unencumbered as they were by the formal requirements and literary seriousness of the canonical genres, probably expressed many of their own feelings about the world they lived in at the time, be that their thoughts on poetry, or their attitude towards the decline and fall of the Ming, much more adequately.

In view of this, it seems reasonable to argue that, whatever their actual influence upon the eventual shape of *Chidu xinchao*, Zhou's assistants largely conform to the profile of people likely to be interested in *chidu* that we identified amongst the compilers of *chidu* collections discussed in Chapter Three. Furthermore, although Zhou was considerably more eminent than any of them, as an official contending with both the moral problem caused by his collaboration, and the aftermath of his trial and brush with death, he found in *chidu* an excellent outlet for his frustrations, and thus there was considerable common ground between him and his assistants. Thus although *Chidu xinchao* might be seen as primarily the vision of one man, it was a vision that was easily shared, both by his assistants and, we presume, a significant proportion of the literati

population at the time.

Before we proceed to look at the *Chidu xinchao* in detail, there are two other questions which need to be dealt with: Zhou's own letters, and the comments which appear above many of the letters in the collection.

A case of false modesty?

In Chapter Twelve of *Chidu xinchao*, there are thirty letters by one Zhou Yin, who according to the note under his name was styled Bai'an, and was a native of Fuzhou in Jiangxi. His published collected works were published under the title *Changshi tang ji*. Despite the number of letters by Zhou Yin, there is no biographical information available on him. When his letters are compared with those of Zhou Lianggong, however, we discover that Zhou Yin is in fact Zhou Lianggong, appearing, for reasons of modesty it seems, under another name. I have not been able to establish whether the false name, native place and title of works was entirely made up, or whether these fictions would have pointed knowledgeable readers to Zhou in some way. Certainly there is a connection between Fuzhou and Zhou, as his ancestors had resided there for several centuries. One suspects that even if these details were entirely invented, many people would have recognised them as Zhou's letters. The question is then, why did Zhou do this? If modesty was a concern, one would think that he would leave his own works out altogether. Many scholars had published collections of their own works, though that is a bit different to putting one's own letters in a collection of letters that are supposed to be among the best of the period the collection covers. One possible explanation is that his friends insisted that he include letters of his own, and as a kind of compromise he included them, but tried to hide whose they were.

The other point to note here about Zhou's letters concerns their classification. The thirty letters here are of course in a *chidu* collection. However, in Zhou's collected works, compiled by his sons after his death, some of Zhou's *Chidu xinchao* letters were included in Chapter 19 of *Laigutang ji* which is the chapter for Zhou's *shu*, while the others can be found in Chapter 20, the chapter containing Zhou's *chidu*. For example, the letter to one Mr. Huang, styled Jishu, discussing seals appears in the *shu* chapter, as does the letter to Gao Fu, which I have translated in Chapter Six below. On the other hand, the letter to Wang Yuanheng, also translated below, does not appear in *Laigutang ji* at all, though why this is so remains

unclear.

The comments on the letters

The final issue which we need to deal with relating to the compilation of *Chidu xinchao* is that of the comments made in the top margins above the letters. Unlike *Chidu xinyu*, there are not comments on every letter, and probably not over even the majority of letters, and the contents of the *Chidu xinchao* comments are more varied than those in *Chidu xinyu*. Of course the majority of the notes are either in praise of the style of the letters, or elaborations upon the contents, often with the commentator giving his point of view on the matter discussed therein. Some comments provide background information or biographical details in the case of writers who were not well known.

Although it is not possible to say with certainty that Zhou wrote them all, there are some quite definitely written by him, and given that the notes are generally quite consistent both in style and in the kinds of comments they make, it would seem reasonable to conclude that he wrote most of them. Above a letter by his mentor in Xiangfu, Zhang Minbiao, is written, '...Unfortunately all his manuscripts were lost in the flood. Although I (*xiaozi*) later printed them, I only managed to save about one in every hundred, which is not enough to show posterity what he was really like'.⁴⁴ Zhou wrote a biography of Zhang in which he says he gathered as many of Zhang's works as he could and published them, so the *xiaozi* here is obviously Zhou referring humbly to himself.⁴⁵ A similar note appears above one of the letters by Wang Chi (1611?-1644?): 'He left very few works when he died, but I printed those that survived in Nanjing. However, they were not sufficient to show all facets of the man.'⁴⁶ Zhou met Wang while he was a student in Xiangfu, and wrote a biography of him which appears in *Laigutang ji*,⁴⁷ and did publish his works. Thus the 'I' must be Zhou referring to himself. There are no notes which he clearly didn't write, except, one would presume, those above his own letters. Given that one note claims that his *chidu* are a model for the times, one would hope he didn't write that about himself. The subject of the note is referred to as *xiansheng* (master), the same word Zhou uses in referring to Zhang Minbiao. Most of the time the authors of the letters being commented on are referred to by

⁴⁴ CDXCwb, 9.5b.

⁴⁵ LGTJ, 18.4a-4b.

⁴⁶ CDXCwb, 9.8b.

⁴⁷ LGTJ, 18.4b-5b.

their style or other name. Incidentally, the inclusion of Wang Chi and Zhang Minbiao's letters is further evidence that Zhou had a significant say in what was included, because Wang and Zhang were not well known outside Henan, and it is not likely that Zhou's assistants would have known them.

Chidu xinchao can be seen as the convergence of Zhou's ideas on literature and his position at the time he came to compile the collection. Already an advocate of the importance of *xingqing*, or the direct expression of one's personal nature, Zhou seems to have found *chidu* an excellent vehicle through which this ideal could be expressed. However, the genre must have seemed even more attractive to him as he tried to work through the complex emotional aftermath of his personal experiences of the previous few years. I have demonstrated that Zhou has much in common with many of the other compilers of *chidu* collections, in that he had reason to want to find an avenue of self-expression apart from the canonical genres which were the dominant form of literary expression in China at the time. These canonical genres were not only laden with formal requirements, but their status was such that a writer's ability to express himself in ways not sanctioned by the traditions of the genre was severely restricted. Furthermore, one's writings in these genres would be accorded much more 'value' than those in genres which did not have the same degree of legitimacy. On the other hand, while Zhou dabbled in the minor genre of *chidu*, he found in the traditions of *chidu*-writing, and especially in the essay on letters by Liu Xie, sufficient grounds to assure both himself and his readers that what he was working with was in fact legitimised by tradition as something worthy of the attention of the serious scholar.

Chapter Six

Chidu and Self-Expression

Although most writers in the late Ming continued to write in the genres whose canonical status had been established by centuries of tradition and perhaps by sanction in such classics of literary theory as *Wenxin diaolong* and *Wen xuan*, as part of a search for new ways for expressing themselves, many writers also tried their hand at genres whose legitimacy was less well established. Less encumbered by the rules and conventions which restricted the scope for experimentation in literary expression, genres like *chidu* and other forms of *xiaopinwen* offered writers who wanted them opportunities to write more freely and to express themselves more directly.

This trend towards greater self expression in the late Ming was seized upon by writers in the early Republican period as a native model for writers seeking modes of expression suited to a modernising China. *Chidu* were championed by Zhou Zuoren in particular, who wrote many articles on *chidu* and on the *chidu* collections which he read. In English there have been some excellent studies of the emergence of more self-expressive modes of writing, in poetry especially, of which work by Chih-ping Chou, Jonathan Chaves and Richard John Lynn on the Gong'an school is perhaps the best known.¹ However, apart from Ellen Widmer's study of epistolary writing amongst women, there has been little attention paid to the *chidu* of this period in scholarship either in English or Chinese in recent decades.

My purpose in this chapter is to identify some ways in which writers might have used the *chidu* genre to express themselves differently from how they expressed themselves in other prose genres. In particular, I will seek to establish whether writers were able to reveal a more intimate picture of themselves and their relationships with the recipients of their letters than was normal in other long-established genres. Of course fuller answers to these questions must await studies of a much broader range of *chidu* and *chidu* collections than is possible here. Furthermore, the sheer number of letters in *Chidu xinchao*, let alone other collections, makes it impossible to discuss the full range of letters in the collection, so we must necessarily restrict ourselves to a few examples. However, I believe the examples below

¹ Chih-p'ing Chou and Richard John Lynn's work have been cited elsewhere. See Chaves, Jonathan, 'The Panoply of Images: A Reconsideration of the Literary Theory of the Kung-an School'.

will give a good indication of what those answers are likely to be. But first I will make some general remarks about the letters in the collection as a whole.

Generally speaking, the writers of the letters found in *Chidu xinchao* do not write about the details of their everyday lives. Despite the two instances of reverence for Su Shi's *chidu* described earlier, there is practically no one in *Chidu xinchao* who writes letters of the kind Su did. Few of the letters deal with the mundane issues that Su's usually did, and even when they appear to, the author adds literary touches to it. This seems to indicate that the writers were much more self-conscious about their *chidu*-writing, and this self-consciousness seems to have been a result of their consciousness of the genre as literature, a consciousness that Su, Fan and the other Northern Song writers apparently did not have. Another indicator of the *chidu*'s development into a more self-consciously 'literary' genre is that the subject matter increasingly converges with that of other more public literary genres, such as the preface and the colophon. Partly because many of the *chidu* in *Chidu xinchao* do discuss literature and art in a style similar to that of prefaces and colophons, I have not dealt with them in detail in this study, but it is important to note that such letters did in fact constitute a significant proportion of the letters in *Chidu xinchao*.

However, I don't believe this reduces the significance of *chidu* as one of the genres in which late Ming writers searched for new ways of expressing themselves. The informality of the genre meant writers could put forward ideas without having to follow conventional patterns and without having to provide elaborate arguments. Indeed, we will see that *chidu* were very amenable to the expression of wit, be that in the form of striking images, clever turns of phrase and so on. That the letters were supposed to be intimate exchanges between friends in theory at least also paved the way for correspondents to present their 'unbuttoned moods', to borrow a phrase which Lin Yutang used when advocating *xiaopinwen* some three hundred years later.²

Nevertheless, the examples below will also suggest that despite the opportunities *chidu* offered, most writers had difficulties expressing themselves naturally in their *chidu*, and the 'selves' which they presented were all too often constructions. Quite understandably, writers found it difficult to break free of the expectations that the society in which they lived

² Lin Yutang, 'Lun xiaopinwen bidiao', in *Renjianshi*, no. 6, 1934, p. 10.

and their education had placed upon them. The characters they gave themselves in their letters generally matched one or other of the models history had passed down: they were eremites, upright officials, wronged officials, admirers of Du Fu or Sima Qian, gentlemen of leisure or men thirsting for action. To the modern reader, much of what they write will appear as mere posturing, but by the standards of the time, these represented significant steps towards the expression of the writers' true selves.

Reading, writing and art

Although there are a great many letters about literature and art in *Chidu xinzhao*, the content of most of them is not greatly different from that found in other genres. The main difference between letters on literary and artistic topics and other forms of writing on literature and art is that in letters the author frequently does not present a carefully constructed argument, but instead makes his argument through a clever metaphor or other display of wit. Some letters appear more intimate, as the writer mentions his own experience in reading or writing, but in the end they still seem unable to break free of the expectations of Chinese literary tradition.

A good example of how writers seemed unable to present themselves in a truly natural manner is a letter by Zhou Lianggong himself. It is one of several to his friend Huang Jing, a painter, calligrapher and seal carver.³

Last night I had a few drinks with Wu Zongxin, and later became very drunk. Under the lamplight, writing down whatever came to mind, I composed a colophon for your album. When I realised that what I had written made no sense at all, I could not but burst into unrestrained laughter. The part about Wu Qi might seem trivial. However, in the writings of the ancients, it is precisely where they write about the most minor details that they portray themselves most vividly. Although I am a lesser man than they, I humbly aspire to attain their skill in this way. I know you will not be offended.⁴

At first we might believe that Zhou really wrote a nonsensical colophon

³ Zhou wrote a biography of Huang which appears in *Du hua lu*, p. 25-6.

⁴ CDXC, p. 302.

while drunk, a charming admission from a man of Zhou's stature.⁵ However, the second half of the letter betrays the deliberate intent of Zhou's writing the colophon in the way he did: he had a point to make, and was consciously imitating 'the ancients'. At the same time, this letter also suggests why Zhou might have been attracted to *chidu*: because in *chidu* writers often write about 'the most minor details', and thus provide a more vivid picture of themselves. Vivid this letter by Zhou might be, but unaffected it is not.

The only letter actually on letter-writing in *Chidu xinchao* compares the recipient's solid *chidu* style with the long, embellished letters of many of their contemporaries. This appears to be in line with Zhou's conviction that too much of the writing of the previous decades concentrated on imitation and ornamentation at the expense of substance. The letter was written by one Xiao Shiyu, a native of Taihe in Jiangxi, to a brother: there is a reasonably good chance that this is Xiao Shiwei, seventeen of whose letters can be found in Chapter Eight of *Chidu xinchao*. The letter reads:

When other people write letters, they write all day but write nothing solid. It is if they are juggling pearls and bells: the bells neither hang in the air nor fall to the ground, nor stay in the hands, and this is regarded as clever. Your letters are like beating the head of a stone man, pounding out solid matters, even if you hurt your hand before you even start.⁶

The comment in the margin above it largely repeats the content of the letter:

In recent times when people write to each other, they pour out a torrent of words, but when one looks over them carefully, one has no idea what they are supposed to mean. They are all like jugglers. When one beats the head of a stone man, the thumping sound is as beautiful as beating percussion instruments.⁷

⁵ This admission is all the more amusing in view of the 'Forty Signs of a Fortunate Household', basically a list of precepts for the maintaining of a respectable household, written by Zhou's father and inserted at the very beginning of *Shuying*. An annotation following a precept that servants and the master should be ready to receive guests early in the morning sternly warns against drinking at night, especially as servants might make use of the opportunity provided by the master's intoxication to get up to no good. See *Shuying*, p. 2.

⁶ *CDXC*, p. 122.

⁷ *CDXCwb*, 5.16b.

Understood in the context of the collection as a whole, Zhou's agreement with the view expressed in this letter indicates that Zhou liked letter-writers to get to the point, rather than show off frivolous literary skills. This did not mean that letters had to be short, but they did have to get their point across as directly as possible. Nor did it mean that writers should not use clever metaphors and other literary devices of wit; in fact the collection as a whole suggests that Zhou admired writers who were able to use such literary devices if using them helped the writer get his message across effectively.

Presuming the brother to whom Xiao Shiyu is writing is Xiao Shiwei, it is worth taking a look at two examples of his letters to see what 'pounding out solid matters' might mean. The first example is one of many in which the writer, having failed in early attempts to pass the civil service examinations, claims no longer to be interested in an official career.

Living at home, there is nothing much to do but feast on the green mountains about me and lie listening to the flowing stream. From now on I just wish to plant millet and distill wine, and be like the immortal in ancient times who raised thousands of chickens.⁸ If a man takes a shot at the exams and misses out, he should smash his teeth in order to extinguish any further such desires. Why should one revive oneself and try again?⁹

The comment compares Xiao's writing to a beautiful lady who has tired of her embroidery: her simple beauty makes one feel sorry for her.¹⁰ This weariness with the world of competition for official postings and a love of the peace of life at home typifies Xiao's letters, and was no doubt another reason why Zhou was attracted to them. If this is an example of a 'solid' letter, then 'solid' would appear to mean that Xiao Shiwei restricts himself to just a single allusion to illustrate his point, rather than rambling on with countless allusions to immortals and emerites of ancient times.

Another letter by Xiao Shiwei, this time to Xiao Shiyu, which was heavily highlighted by Zhou treats the problem of having to face so many banquets with one's hosts when travelling:

⁸ According to the *Biographies of Immortals* by Liu Xiang of the Han dynasty, Zhu ji weng (the man who celebrated chickens) lived in what is now Luoyang and over more than a hundred years raised thousands of chickens, each of which had its own name. Here Xiao just seems to mean that he wishes to lead a farmer's life.

⁹ CDXC, p. 193.

¹⁰ CDXC*wb*, 8.3a.

The banquets one must attend while travelling cause one great suffering. The opera singers they put on for entertainment are like puppets, and they sing like cattle. One eats fatty and rich meats, and drinks tea that is too strong and wine that is too weak. Then when you have just put this food in your mouth, the people sitting around you will start interrogating you about everything under the sun. The whole time I feel very uncomfortable because I don't know them and I can't stand them.

For these people, all this food goes down their gullet like a light carriage down a familiar road. They all have the drinking capacity of a Xu Hui and the appetite of a Shen Fushi.¹¹ I don't know what good deeds they performed in their previous lives that they are now blessed with such extraordinary digestive systems.¹²

Again, the style of this letter is direct, with just two literary allusions to help drive home the point towards the end; the rest is straight descriptive prose. Xiao also makes use of a device which we will see is common in the *chidu* in *Chidu xinchao*, the witty expression to conclude the letter. However, neither of Xiao Shiwei's letters quoted above - and they are typical of his style - seem like the kind of letter one person might write to another, especially a brother, as part of one's everyday activities. They are clearly the result of the deliberate cultivation of a *chidu* style, and while this does not necessarily detract from their charm, it does make their spontaneity seem forced.

Even if we accept Xiao Shiyu's comments about the 'solid' nature of Xiao Shiwei's *chidu*, sometimes writers seem, from the modern point of view at least, to be trying too hard to achieve an original turn of praise, especially when seeking to compliment the recipient. Examples of this can be found in the letters of a painter named Song Zuqian. There are twenty-one letters by Song in *Chidu xinchao*, mostly about painting and calligraphy, though there are also some letters which compliment the recipient's literary

¹¹ According to the Tang writer Zhu Kui in his *Xiexue lu* (Record of Funny Stories): 'Xu Hui drank heavily every day, but it never did him any harm. Shen Fushi could eat enough to feed four or five people without ill effect.'

¹² CDXC, p. 195. There was a note above this letter, but only a blurred character remains.

talents.¹³ His letters are short, and his favorite techniques were to cite what somebody else said about a certain topic, then develop that idea with a display of wit, or to use a clever metaphor to describe the recipient's works. Although Song's comments on painting seem to have been an important reason why so many of his letters were included, Zhou no doubt considered them to have literary merit, and they again typify the kind of 'clever' letter which was so common in the literary *chidu* collections of the time. One example of Song's style is a letter to a Mr. Hu, styled Yuanqing, probably a relative of the painter Hu Yukun, another of the painters Zhou patronised and a friend of Song's:

Su Shi once said that when writing calligraphy, the meaning one wishes to convey should be clear after the first brushstroke. In your paintings, however, before the brush has even touched the surface, the meaning is already there. This is where you are different to those who place so much emphasis on one's skill with the ink.¹⁴

Even though the contemporary reader might find the compliment contrived, Song employed such devices quite commonly, and they are at least effective in catching the reader's attention. The first letter of four to Zhou Lianggong, in which Su Shi is again cited, is typical of his metaphorical style:

This album of yours is like a nugget of gold discovered under sand. Su Shi once wrote, 'If I pick up this stone to take back with me, it is like having the Eastern Sea in my sleeve.' Other people have albums piled up all over the place, but they are no more than the pellets of dung made by dung beetles. Although they have a lot, what is the point?¹⁵

The letter evidently refers to an album of paintings that Zhou had acquired. According to the painter Gong Xian, who was also Zhou's neighbour, Zhou

¹³ We do not know much about Song Zuqian. He was a native of Putian in Fujian, though he almost certainly lived in Nanjing. He was the nephew of the calligrapher Song Jue, and seems to have been one of the painters in Zhou's circle, as most of the letters included in *Chidu xinzhao* are to other members of that circle. He does not appear in Zhou's *Du hua lu*, however.

¹⁴ *CDXC*, p. 17.

¹⁵ *CDXC*, p. 18.

had 'ten thousand hanging scrolls and a thousand cases of [album] paintings'¹⁶, though presumably they were not 'piled up all over the place' and did not constitute 'the pellets of dung made by dung beetles'. In any case, Zhou did not find the metaphor distasteful, as it is that part of the letter which is highlighted. In most of Song's letters, it is the final part of the letter, the part in which Song presents a metaphor or at least his own comment, which has been highlighted.

Zhou Lianggong wrote a letter about seals which makes similar use of metaphor. It is to the painter Wang Yuanheng, who was one of the selectors for Chapter 7 of *Chidu xinchao*.

You are no less obsessed with seals than I am. Although there are not as many in your collection as there were in mine, three thousand crack troops will defeat a hundred thousand tired ones. Most of my collection has become scattered around the homes of the distinguished, and you would do well to guard yours carefully and ensure you don't lose any. When you open this album¹⁷, it will be like walking into the most luxurious garden villa, and it will remind you of my simple, secluded cottage.¹⁸

Zhou's metaphors are perhaps more elegant than Song's, but his approach to the subject is basically the same, as he seeks to pay a compliment to someone with a small but fine collection of objects of art through the clever turn of phrase.

The final example we will look at in this section is a letter by the writer who has more letters included in *Chidu xinchao* than any other, Song Maocheng (1569-1620, or 1562-1622). The letter is the second of two written 'in jest' to one Mr. Lu:

For the last year or so I have been unable to concentrate my mind. As soon as I have read something, I forget it, though I do very much want to digest it. It is like holding some delicious morsel in one's mouth and being unable to bear swallowing it. My approach to reading is to taste and no more.¹⁹

¹⁶ Quoted from Gong's colophon on the fifteenth leaf in the album which belonged to Zhou's collection. The text is translated by Hongnam Kim, *op.cit.* pp. 191-2, and full bibliographical details are given in 11n on p. 202.

¹⁷ Probably of the impressions of seals in his collection.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 297-98. This letter does not appear in *LGTJ*.

¹⁹ *CDXC*, p. 45.

The editors' comment above this letter says that it 'contains the true seeds of reading'²⁰ and the highlighting of the last two sentences in the translation above indicates that the editor was impressed by the clever metaphor as well. It is doubtful that Song meant the letter to be taken seriously, but it is a good example of how *chidu* appealed to writers as a kind of playground for literary games.

In this first section, I have presented examples of *chidu* which tell us something about writers' approach to *chidu*. Admittedly this is a highly selective sample, and I have not dealt with the large number of letters which discuss specific questions of literature and art. However, if we were to look at such letters in another study, we would find that similar techniques are often employed to deliver the writer's view on a particular topic. We also need to remind ourselves that there are many serious letters on literature as well, but such letters do not help us discover where the potential for *chidu* to be different from other genres lay. In the next section, we will examine letters in which some potential for intimacy appears to exist, and see how *chidu* might or might not have been unique in this respect.

Oneself and one's friends

The main feature which distinguishes letters from other prose genres is that letters were, in theory at least, only meant to be read by the addressee, and perhaps by a small number of people close to him. This means that the writer need not consider how the reading public at large might judge his work, and may write about personal matters which he would not normally present to the reading public. The results of this should be that in the letters less attention is paid to style and arrangement, and that we will get a glimpse of the everyday, personal affairs of the writer and the recipient. However, I have already suggested that in the letters in *Chidu xinchao*, writers struggled to achieve this natural, 'unbuttoned' style. Indeed, in many cases they might not even have aimed for it. Below I have selected some letters which were written in situations in which we might expect to find some intimacy: we will now look at how their writers dealt with them.

Although there are of course many letters in *Chidu xinchao* in which the writer talks about his circumstances or aspirations, it is only in very few

²⁰ CDXCwb, 2.19a.

of them that we feel we are seeing something of the 'real' person. In most cases, the aspirations the writers express are relatively standard ones: a desire to live in retirement, a desire to achieve eternal fame through their writings, and so on. When a writer describes his surroundings, for instance, the images he presents are mostly stock ones often employed in poetry, travel notes and so on. Song Maocheng wrote a letter, the longest of all the letters by him in *Chidu xinchao*, describing how he passed several days in rain-induced isolation. The letter is addressed to one Mr. Fan:

Rain has come to the village in which I am living, and there is nobody about. Apart from paying my morning and evening respects to my parents and accompanying them at mealtimes, I scarcely see even my wife and children. Slender bamboo grows in my garden, from amongst which the songs of birds can be heard. Low walls and wooden railings suggest I am near a mountain cave. During the day I annotate books on history, while in the evenings I sleep on a simple bed. I abstain from all fatty and sweet food, and keep away from strong wines. My mind free of other thoughts, I understand the reasons for the successes and failures of the past and present, but the emotions this revelation stir up soon fade away.

I shall be able to live like this for a few days, but eventually the sky will clear, people will begin arriving at my door, and I will have to go out. But these few days should not be forgotten, so I sit here under the lamplight and write the experience down.²¹

While I do not doubt that Song did have something like the experience he describes, Song has clearly dressed it up. The letter has a carefully balanced structure: his experience is neatly bracketed between the onset of the rain and the realisation that this idyllic period must come to an end when the rain clears. Within these brackets, Song presents a series of concrete images of the way in which he passed the time, each one adding to the sense of detachment from worldly desires, until he achieves a level of detachment which enables him to 'understand the reasons for the successes and failures of the past and present', but even this fails to excite him for long. However, it is at this point that the letter appears most artificial. In fact, there is nothing in the letter which indicates that it is in fact a letter. There is no

²¹ CDXC, p. 45.

reference, even indirectly, to a recipient. Thus, although this letter has an undeniable charm, the author's presentation of himself is a construction for which the letter is simply a vehicle.

Du Jun (1611-1687), a poet and close friend of Zhou's, lived in considerable poverty following the Manchu conquest and his subsequent decision not to seek to serve the new régime (though he had only been a Government Student under the Ming). Apparently the essayist Wang Youding (1598-1662) wrote a letter to Du enquiring about the state of Du's poverty. Du replied like this:

You have asked me how my worries about my poverty compare with before. It can be put like this: my poverty in the past was such that times when I could not get a meal together were rare; but my poverty now is such that it is rare if I can. This is the difference.²²

Whereas Su Shi would have described his difficulties during his exiles with some more concrete and matter-of-fact descriptions, Du uses a clever, yet not altogether convincing, contrast to describe his. This again points to the difficulty many writers had in writing about themselves without resorting to literary artifice.

Although some of the statements and imagery in the following letter by the Ming writer Xie Zhaozhe (1567-1624) are conventional, and we must suspect some hyperbole, his description of Beijing in the 1610's is vivid and humorous:

In Beijing in the spring, the ground thaws and plants can grow again as the soil quickens and warm vapours rise up through the earth. At this time, the drains and ponds outside people's houses are cleaned out, so slime lies everywhere. The muck is spread out on the streets, so people and horses sink into it, clothes rot, and one's body stinks so much that even a month later the stench is still there. It invades the nostrils and gets into one's throat; everybody becomes dizzy and sick, until eventually an epidemic breaks out.

From early summer onwards, one has to bear the searing heat. My tiny room feels like an oven, and the bed and chairs are

²² *LGTJ*, p. 48-9.

almost too hot to touch. If I strip to the waist, take off my shoes and lie down, then the blowflies start to buzz around and irritate me. When, with servants waving fly-whisks and fans over me, I am finally able to close my eyes, I hear a knock on the door...

There is absolutely nothing in all this government work that I can really get interested in. Instead, one is endlessly paying visits of respect to one's superiors, holding banquets and attending those held by others, day in day out without respite. I have never liked mixing with the exalted members of society, nor have I ever enjoyed those decorous formal banquets, yet custom attaches much importance to such matters. If one tries to distance oneself a little from these things, one immediately makes enemies. So I feel like a small bird, terrified of the traps that might await me before they have even been set. Every time I think about it, I become despondent, as though I have lost something precious.

Life is simply to be enjoyed. Now that I am over fifty, my hair and beard have slowly become speckled with grey, and time flies like lightning. How can I afford to wait about for something which might never happen! Stranded and bound like a crane in a cage or a whale in a swamp, impatiently looking all around me, unable to soar up into the clouds or rove the seas, what can I do?²³

Xie is of course best known for his books on the customs of the areas in which he lived and worked during his official career, the most famous of which is *Wu za zu* (*Five Assorted Offerings*). This letter is a good example of Xie's powers of observation and description. Although he mainly uses four and six-character phrases, the language is not particularly difficult, and his description of Beijing in the spring and summer is vivid and realistic. However, his claim to dislike the socialising which was a necessary part of the life of an official in the capital, and his desire to be free of it all, is conventional and makes the letter a bit less personal. And like Song Maocheng's letter quoted above, there is no mention of a recipient, so although his description of his life in the capital might be relatively convincing, we are still left with little impression that this is a personal letter between friends.

There are many letters of invitation and thanks in *Chidu xinchao*, and

²³ CDXC, pp. 15-16. This translation has been published in *Renditions* (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

the very nature of these letters means that there will be more evidence of the relationship between the writer and the recipient. But at the same time, such letters provided an excellent opportunity for writers to exhibit their literary skills. The results are often charming, but one is never sure how much of the real person is expressed in them.

A good example of such letter is one by the calligrapher, painter and collaborating official Wang Duo. In it, Wang describes a scene near his home and wishes his friend could enjoy it with him. It is typical of what might be termed Wang's landscape letters, of which there are quite a number:

Now the willows by the Yellow River are sprouting new leaves, and spring mists lie at the foot of the mountains. The peach blossoms at the Cave of the Queen Mother of the West²⁴ and the flowers on the apricot trees by the tomb of Emperor Guangwu²⁵ vie in their fresh colour with the fragrant wine by my couch. If you cannot come and raise your winecup with me between the bright moon and the emerald river, my disconsolation will be more than I can bear.²⁶

Here Wang, who was from Mengjin on the south bank of the Yellow River not far from Luoyang, invokes two of the famous sites associated with his home town to encourage his friend (the letter is addressed merely 'to an intimate friend') to join him in these idyllic surroundings. While we might not be able to learn anything about Wang and his 'intimate friend', Wang's ability to evoke this idyllic scene in so few words typifies a quality much admired in *chidu*, and is no doubt a reason why so many of his letters found their way into *Chidu xinchao*.

Above a letter written by the Qing poet Wang Shizhen to his close friend Wang Wan (1624-1691), Zhou has written: 'Among today's masters of *chidu*-writing, Wang Shizhen and Wang Wan are considered the most accomplished. It is much to be regretted that I have not been able to read Wang Wan's letters, and therefore there is an important gap in this

²⁴ I have been unable to discover this place, presuming it does, or did, exist. The Queen Mother of the West is said to have planted peach trees which were later named after her. It is said that these peach trees grew in the Hualin Imperial Garden in Luoyang during the Northern Wei, but this garden was destroyed in 535.

²⁵ Liu Xiu (6-57 A.D.) re-established the Han dynasty in 25 A.D. following the Wang Mang interregnum. He ruled for 32 years, and was given the posthumous title of Emperor Guangwu. His tomb is situated in Mengjin county.

²⁶ CDXC, pp. 109-10.

collection.²⁷ Certainly Wang Shizhen stands out for the way in which he is able to express friendship and compassion for others in a way that is moving and relatively convincing. The best example of this is his letter to Zhang Yihu. Wang and Zhang had both passed the Metropolitan Examination in 1658, and Wang had been appointed a judge in Yangzhou in the following year. Since the letter says it is two years since they had last seen each other, this letter should date from about 1661. While Wang had been appointed to one of China's wealthiest and most culturally vibrant cities, Zhang had been given a post in Yunnan, which was effectively the end of the earth. Wang encourages Zhang to look on the bright side:

It seems only yesterday that, on that windy autumn night in Beijing, together we sang impassioned, mournful songs; then, with the moon still in the dawn sky, we watched the boats moored on the Lu River²⁸, our hearts sad at the thought of our imminent parting. Yet since then two years and a thousand miles have separated us. While I remained in the capital, you were roaming about the mountains and forests. Later, when you rushed back to your home in the south, I was scurrying between government rest houses. Indeed, how much we seek to be together, yet how rarely are we able to meet. Why should our Maker begrudge us seeing each other!

Since mid autumn I have been plagued by illness which has so tired and weakened me that I have often thought that I was near my end, and it is only thanks to the kind attentions of my mother that I have been able to stay alive.

It was in the list of official appointments that I first learnt you had been appointed to a post in Yunnan, famous for the picturesque Diancang Mountains and the lakes about Kunming. There one may look for the sites of Zhuang Jiao's exploits²⁹, or

²⁷ *CDXCwb*, 1.36b.

²⁸ The part of the Grand Canal that leads east out of Beijing.

²⁹ A general of the state of Chu during the Warring States period, active c. 279 B.C., when he took an army through Guizhou to Kunming. Later the state of Qin took the Guizhou area and Zhuang was cut off, after which he declared himself King of Dian (approximately modern Yunnan).

ponder the great achievements of Ma Yuan.³⁰ For it is characteristic of men like us to 'read thousands of books and travel thousands of miles'. If we recall what we have read in the histories about when Guizhou and Yunnan were first opened up, we are reminded that the weather there is very changeable, windy one moment and foggy the next, and pestilences are a constant cause of anxiety. Therefore, one must always carry medicine and pay close attention to the condition of one's boat or carriage. We, your friends, toss and turn all night with worry, unable to set our minds at ease. However, Pu Zongmeng was inspired by the mountains and rivers when he painted³¹, and Su Shi's writings from his period of exile in Hainan have been passed down to posterity. Is there any reason why the modern should not measure up to the ancient? Thus the mystery and beauty of Mount Biji and Mount Jinma³² will be captured in your poems, and from your writing-brush will flow descriptions of the lofty ranges by Lake Er.³³ Then one day when you head north again, or a messenger comes south from the capital to call you to a new post, your works will have greater depth and polish as a result of your distant travels, and you will be renowned for your distinguished service at the most distant frontiers. Thus you will reach the pinnacle of scholarly achievement, and your deeds will bring joy to us all.

I have said all I wanted to say in these hastily written lines. However, the debt of poetry I owe you cannot be written off. Last year I wrote more than two hundred new poems. I feel my style has improved a little. When recently I happened to pass through Zhenjiang I visited the three famous hills there. I composed about forty poems, of which I think I can be proud. Heaven might be

³⁰ Both Ma Yuan and Lu Bode were given the title *Fubo* for their achievements in bringing and keeping the area that is now northern Vietnam under Chinese control. Neither ever went to the Yunnan area, but Ma fought in the Five Streams area (modern western Hunan and north-eastern Guizhou) mentioned later in this letter, so the reference is almost certainly to him. See *Han shu*, p. 2493, and *Hou Han shu*, p. 841, for references to Lu Bode, and *Hou Han shu*, pp. 838-44 for Ma's exploits in Vietnam and Hunan.

³¹ Pu Zongmeng, also known as Yan Gong, was an official active during the middle of the eleventh century. The reference in this passage is to a colophon written for one of Pu's paintings by Su Shi in 1073. See *Ba Pu Zhuanzheng Yan Gong shanshui* (Colophon on a Landscape by Pu Zongmeng), in *Su Shi wenji, op. cit.*, p. 2212. Pu's reputation as a painter does not seem to have survived independently of Su's colophon.

³² Both mountains are near Kunming, and sacrifices to spirits believed to dwell on these mountains were conducted in Han times.

³³ A lake about 275 km. west of Kunming.

able to force us into the uncomfortable position of having to bow to others and serve them respectfully, but how can Heaven deny us the possibility of eternal fame! As long as we have our writing-brushes in our hands, even Heaven with all its cunning cannot hurt us.

I am sending you some of my poems from my trip south of the Yangtze River, as well as four or five other poems, as a substitute for a face-to-face meeting. Every word of the letter you sent me was full of expressions of friendship towards me. The generosity and affection brought me to tears. As I look south towards Mt. Jiuyi and the Sanmao Lakes³⁴, they seem not so far away after all.

It will soon be New Year, and it seems likely that at about the time of the Lantern Festival a couple of weeks after that I will be able to travel south of the Yangtze again and relax for a while, but that is not yet certain.³⁵

Stylistically this letter can be divided into two parts, with the dividing line falling at the end of the paragraph which ends 'your deeds will bring joy to us all'. The longer first part is written in a more formal style, with many four and six character phrases, and liberal use of historical allusions. Obviously Wang's aim in writing this way is to inspire Zhang to look at his time in Yunnan as an opportunity to achieve greatness both as an official and as a poet and painter. Although in the second part Wang still talks about 'eternal fame', he tells of his own recent activities and plans for the future, the more down-to-earth nature of which counterbalances the grand images of the first part. By itself, the formality and grandeur of the first part would indicate the relationship between Zhang and Wang was not very close. However, the last part serves to close this gap through the exchange of poems and passing on of personal news. Although this letter is still very self-conscious from a literary point of view, with great use being made of the

³⁴ Mt. Jiuyi is in the south of modern Hunan and is traditionally held to be the burial place of the legendary sage-king Shun. From Wang's vantage point in Yangzhou, Yunnan could be said to lie beyond Mt. Jiuyi. The Sanmao Lakes were situated near Zhang's hometown of Huating, but have now mostly been reclaimed for use as farmland.

³⁵ CDXC, p. 29. The translation of this letter has appeared in *Renditions* (1994), pp. 116-17, though I have made some alterations. Zhang did publish an anthology of poems entitled *Poems Written in Yunnan and Guizhou (Dian-Qian shi)*, though it did not win him the fame Wang hoped it would. Lynn Struve notes that Zhang returned to Songjiang soon after 1661, 'and subsequently provided writings about conquest affairs in southern Huguang, Sichuan, and Yunnan to Ye Mengzhu, who used them to write the *Xubian suikou jiliu*'. See Struve (1989), 'Early Qing Officials as Chroniclers of the Conquest', p. 11.

tools of rhetoric, Wang does leave one feeling that the letter was more than just an excuse to show off his literary skills.

From the evidence we have in *Chidu xinchao*, the writer and poet Zhuo Fazhi seems to have deliberately cultivated a *chidu* style, and twenty-five of his letters have been included in the collection. He came from Hangzhou, where there seems to have been a significant Zhuo clan³⁶, and had a substantial garden at the foot of Qingliang Hill in Nanjing, the 'sixteen views' of which the painter and later Southern Ming official Yang Wencong (d. 1646) had painted, and the poet Xue Cai had eulogised in poetry.³⁷ It would seem certain, then, that Zhuo was a member of Zhou's literary circle, and this would help explain why so many of Zhuo's letters appear in the collection. The poet Zhuo Renyue, five of whose letters follow Fazhi's in *Chidu xinchao*, was Fazhi's son.

Though there are examples of the witty turn of phrase in the *chidu* of Zhuo Fazhi, generally speaking he displays a varied style, and his letters vary in length from less than fifty characters to over five hundred. There are also many comments made by the compilers about Zhuo's letters, which help us understand what it was they found to admire in the letters of this relatively obscure man. His letters are unaffected, and often have a touch of sadness. One of his finest letters recalls a temple where he and the recipient, a certain Mr. Ding who was, or had been, an official in the Ministry of Works, used to spend many happy hours in the past.

Another two years have passed since we last had any news of each other. In the spring of this year, I returned to the provincial capital, and had occasion to pass by the old temple we used to frequent. It is now deserted, with not a monk to be seen; the latticed window-frames and railings, and the tiles from the rooves, have fallen off and lie decaying among the weeds which have taken over the grounds. Such sad emotions welled up in my heart as I looked over the decay of this place which is so dear to me. The boatman pointed to the land on the other side of the river and told us that it now belonged to another family. The trees around the halls appeared desolate, their branches close to breaking off. This place in which gliders now flit about and mice scamper here and there, where melancholy mists shed tears of

³⁶ MSJS says he came from Rui'an in southern Zhejiang.

³⁷ See MSJS, pp. 3274-75, where eleven of the sixteen poems are recorded.

dew, is the same place where the two of us would lie reciting poetry amid the spring flowers or below the bright autumn moon. That which gave joy in the past now brings sorrow. Someone has said that there is no joy or sorrow inherent in sound³⁸, and there should be no joy or sorrow inherent in this place either.

The young people who used to visit this place are mostly old by now, and some now lie listening to the wind blow through the graveyard trees. I do not know most of the youths at the nearby market. Are these emotions not enough to bring grief even to hearts of the hardest steel! I am not like a Buddhist who has returned here after a pilgrimage, no longer attached to this mortal world, and thus I cannot stop myself from recalling times past.³⁹

The note above this letter reads:

The element which makes an essay a fine one is the extent to which the feelings expressed in it are genuine. If the feelings are genuine, then a smiling face will appear when one writes something amusing, and there will be tearstains when one writes something sad. What do they know about emotions who write about joys and sorrows they don't really feel?⁴⁰

Unfortunately there is no way in which we can date this letter, but if it was written after the fall of the Ming, then it would sit well amongst the letters we will discuss in Chapter Eight as an example of how Zhou Lianggong used the collection to express his nostalgia for the Ming. However, even if it was written in the late Ming - destruction and neglect was common enough in the last years of the Ming - it is in any case an excellent example of how friendship can be expressed through memory. Through this poignant description of the ruined temple where he and Ding once passed pleasant hours in each other's company, Zhuo expresses the closeness of their friendship and his sadness that they have not been able to see each other for so long. Again this letter does not touch upon everyday matters, and the letter is obviously composed in a literary style, but as Zhou Lianggong notes,

³⁸ This is a reference to the third century scholar Ji Kang's essay on music, 'That Joy and Sorrow are Not Inherent in Music' in which Ji argues that music has an objective existence, and that there is no inherent causal relationship between the music and the emotions of joy or sorrow.

³⁹ CDXC, p. 90.

⁴⁰ CDXC*wb* 4.10b.

there is no doubt that the feelings in it are genuine, based on common experience at a time irretrievably past.

We know from the letters by Zhuo in *Chidu xinzhao* that two of his sons died at a relatively young age. However, one letter is about his grief at the death of a concubine, and is marked by a sincerity that is perhaps surprising given the subject. Zhou is writing to Xue Cai, the poet mentioned above, asking him to write a gravestone inscription for this dead concubine.

Since my son died last autumn, I have been staying in my home town. It has been like entering a deserted village overgrown with weeds. And now I have lost a woman who accompanied me in my seclusion from the world. It is as if a good friend at a banquet suddenly got up and left, with the result that the party broke up and all the guests left. When this happens, how can the host enjoy toasting himself and drinking alone? But with nobody around to accompany me, I have no choice but to drink and go on outings by myself.

From now on opportunities for us to spend time together will be few and far between. Or perhaps we should emulate the friendship of Wang Wei and Pei Di, catching a glimpse of each other by the cherry garden.⁴¹

When you come to write the gravestone inscription for my concubine, I ask that you work the words with all the skill you can bring to bear, creating in the text a world far above this one, a world that will make me tremble with fear, and thereby force the grief from my heart.⁴²

The note above this letter reads:

[One Mr.] Shen has said: when one who has studied the Way for at least thirty years is confronted with a situation like this, he should be cold like ice and snow. But I say that at such a time one should be deeply saddened and yet find great courage. If one is just like ice and snow, I am afraid this shows a thick skin and no sensitivity.⁴³

⁴¹ Wang Wei and Pei Di were two poets of the Tang dynasty whose close friendship was famous in later ages. However, I have not been able to find this particular reference.

⁴² CDXC, p. 94.

⁴³ CDXC*wb* 4.17a. Shen's style is printed poorly and I have been unable to identify him.

As in the note to Zhuo's letter to Mr. Ding, Zhou insists that one should express genuine emotions in one's letters, rather than pretending emotions one doesn't have, or remaining aloof at times of personal loss. However, although Zhuo's sincerity should not be doubted, this letter is perhaps less successful than the one to Ding because the metaphor of the banquet is a trifle too artful, whereas the intimacy in the letter to Ding is evoked through actual places and events in their common past. But that Zhuo should write about a concubine in this way at all does help demonstrate the capacity of *chidu* to accommodate writing on subjects that were less easily tackled in canonical genres.

I will conclude this chapter with three letters which are amongst the least affected of the letters in *Chidu xinchao*. In each the writer describes his situation at the time in a way which appears realistic.

I suspect that a result of Zhou Lianggong's interest in *chidu* was that his own letters are often too self-consciously constructed, as he rarely seems able to write without using rhetorical devices which detract from the naturalness of his writing. However, one of his best letters is one written to his close friend Gao Fu while besieged in Fujian early in his stay there:

After we parted on the banks of the Yangtse River [i.e. Nanjing], it was not until after the seventh day of the seventh month that we reached Fuzhou. As if a journey of thousands of *li* was not enough, we had to go via Hangchuan, some fifteen hundred *li* from Fuzhou.⁴⁴ All along the route there are ferocious bandits swarming about, and the territory adjoins the dangerous areas of Jiangxi and Chaozhou. On the day I formally began duties, the soldiers on the city walls were on full alert, and I wondered what sins I had committed in my previous life to deserve this. It seems I am inescapably destined to be trapped in besieged towns: all it takes is for me to lift a foot and here I am without even trying. If my destiny to have all the good things in the world - good wine, rare books, flowers in season and beautiful women - was as firmly rooted as my being inescapably destined to be trapped in threatened cities, and could be got just by lifting a foot

⁴⁴ The woodblock edition gives this as Hangchuan (*chuan* as in 'river'), while the Shanghai Shudian edition gives it as Hangzhou. If it is Hangchuan, then I have been unable to find out where it is, though it could refer to the Qiantang River which flows just south of Hangzhou. More likely, it is a printer's error in the original edition.

and not even trying, how wonderful that would be! But since this is not to be, what is the use of trying to look after myself, eating and resting properly? The beating of the night warning drums competes with the cawing of crows in making a racket, the little lights of the autumn fireflies can be seen here and there, the moonlight on the ground seems like frost, and poison arrows come as thick as hedgehog's prickles. As I, a lone scholar, think of my parents thousands of *li* away, of my wife and children staying back in Fuzhou, and of how it will be difficult for Luo Yao and Hu Yukun to come to see me, sadness wells up inside me, and tears start running down my face like rain, and the knives of anguish make cold stabs at my heart like blood or snow. Even if I was made of wood or stone, how could I stand this! Last night I climbed up to one of the turrets on the city wall and wrote four poems, and when you read them, you will understand the irrepressible wretchedness I feel. Please show them to your brother.⁴⁵

The comment above this letter, presumably written by one of Zhou's friends, has great significance for our discussion here: 'Writing in his own way without regard to convention, there is not a trace of one who deliberately cultivates a *chidu* style (*chidujia*) here. When one looks back over the past several decades, how can one not put the master forward as a model for this reason.'⁴⁶ The implication of this is that it should be possible to distinguish a writer who cultivates a *chidu* style. In the absence of any other information, we must speculate as to what this means, but given that this letter stands out amongst Zhou's for its relatively straightforward prose, we can surmise that the mark of a *chidujia* is the clever rhetoric and witty turn of phrase such as we have seen in most of the examples above. This in turn implies that, contrary to the impression one might gain from reading through a collection like *Chidu xinchao*, naturalness was valued in *chidu* at that time, though we would have to accept a wider definition of what was considered natural and unaffected than would be usual in the late twentieth century. We might consider parts of this letter melodramatic, but it cannot be denied that the picture Zhou offers of his plight, and the feelings it arouses in him, is probably fairly accurate.

⁴⁵ CDXC, pp. 298-299. This letter also appears in *LGTJ*, 19.5b-6b. Gao Fu's brother was the poet and painter Gao Cen, of whom Zhou wrote a biography which appears in *Du hua lu*.

⁴⁶ CDXC*wb*, 12.3a. We mentioned this note in the previous chapter.

Hu Jie (1616-1664) had been a Government Student under the Ming, but gave up his studies after the fall of that dynasty, and went to live some distance outside Hangzhou. He was a well-known writer, and many prominent figures in the literary world, such as Wu Weiye, Gong Dingzi and Zhou Lianggong himself cultivated a friendship with him. However, Hu became increasingly poor, and was forced to move to Hangzhou and sell medicine to try to make a living.⁴⁷ In this letter, Hu describes his difficulties to Zhou:

When I last saw you by the Yangtse River, the willows were just beginning to sprout new leaves, and since our hurried parting, a whole springtime has passed. When you appeared near death, I came to your bedside, held your hand, and asked after you, but after that I had to hurriedly bid you farewell. You have been on my mind ever since then; sometimes I ask for news of you from Zhu Jiuding, and I am greatly comforted to learn that you are eating and sleeping well, and generally feeling better.

Since I recovered from my illness, I have had further difficulties, so I planned to concentrate on finding a place to live and sell medicine so as to help my family settle down. But I never expected that just after I had found a small place to live, and before my medicine business was established, my debts had already mounted to half a string of cash. At New Year I was panic-stricken, but nobody helped me. Every time Zhu Jiuding visits, we can only and sigh at each other with worry. This spring officials came four times demanding rent, and I all I could do was quickly get out of my home before they arrived. I am at a loss at to what course to take, like a monk trying to take part in a conversation about bamboo combs: neither side of a comb is right for him. I can neither speak nor remain silent; I'm like a mouse crawling into an ox's horn: the further I go, the more squeezed I become. As I take a look at myself, I cannot help but laugh, and cannot bear to tell you about it.⁴⁸

This letter appears to be a request for Zhou to help him out, since Zhou was well known for offering financial assistance to writers and painters he

⁴⁷ See the biography of Hu by Lu Jiashu in Hu's collected prose, *Lütang wenji*.

⁴⁸ CDXC, p. 132.

admired, Hu amongst them. There is also a letter by the Hangzhou writer Zhang Bisun addressed to both Gong Dingzi and Zhou asking for them to help pay for Hu's burial, which is further evidence that he died in deep poverty.⁴⁹ Although the editors have highlighted the two metaphors at the end of the letter as being particularly worthy of readers' notice, the letter really stands out for its straightforward account of the author's financial difficulties, something which would have been difficult to write about without considerable literary 'dressing up' in other genres.

Another member of Zhou's circle, Gao Zhao, the loyalist poet who assisted Zhou compile Chapter Three of *Chidu xinchao*, wrote this letter to another loyalist poet and assistant in the compilation of *Chidu xinchao*, Ji Yingzhong:

Since I last said farewell to you, my recollections of our last meeting have been such that my black hair has almost turned white. How I regret that on that wet and windy day, I did not sufficiently treasure the time I spent with you, but threw that short time away frivolously chatting and laughing.

I visited Nanpu⁵⁰ and Hu Jie, and know that they have both written to you, but until now you have only received the one written at Fusha Rest House. Doesn't this make one begin to resent the mountains and rivers! I guess that at this time you will be tending your chrysanthemums in Zhenleng Hall, so you shouldn't be lonely. But when the fathers, sons and brothers of the Stone family visit you all the time wanting to see patterned rhinoceros horns and turtle shells from the South Seas, I don't know what you will show them.

Here things aren't particularly good. Mr. Zhou Lianggong's visit on the first day of the eighth month, and receiving Hu Jie's letter of mid summer, have been the only bits of good fortune. The people of this home town of mine are becoming increasingly tiresome. After my younger sister has been married at the end of winter, and I have buried my parents in the spring, I will leave here. I would appreciate it if you could arrange for me to see my good friend Dong Han as early as possible.

⁴⁹ See *Chidu xinbian*, *jia*.2. One wonders if Hu was caught up in the Manchu government's efforts to force members of the southern gentry to pay taxes they owed the government. See the discussion of the Tax Arrears Case in Chapter Eight.

⁵⁰ I have not been able to establish who this refers to.

Have you been travelling lately? When are you likely to see Hu Jie? I would be pleased if you could show this note to him. I often write poetry, but I have been unable to write a satisfactory poem about seeing you off, just as I have been unable for three years to write a poem about my thoughts of Hu Jie. When feelings of friendship are genuine, one feels it is difficult to put them into words, but one still ought to do it.⁵¹

Predictably, the editors have highlighted the last sentence, and the part at the beginning where Gao expresses his regrets about his last meeting with Ji. The sentence about the 'Stone family' has also been highlighted, but it is not clear what this refers to.⁵² However, this letter stands out for its straightforward, unaffected style. Unlike most of the other letters in the collection, there is little trace of conscious construction and display of literary talent. Indeed, Gao jumps from topic to topic, and recounts his recent activities and plans for the future in plain language. Gao's letter may be said to epitomise Zhou Lianggong's comment about the ancients in the letter we cited earlier in this chapter: 'it is precisely where they write about the most minor details that they portray themselves most vividly'.

The examples presented in this chapter suggest that, relatively unencumbered by the rules and traditions of the canonical genres, *chidu* did provide writers with an avenue through which they could explore different ways of expressing themselves and writing about their relationships with others. Clearly many writers enjoyed the opportunity *chidu* gave them to display their wit, to make comments upon matters which interested them without needing to back them up with an elaborate arguments, or to apply their inventive skills to comments about the recipient or the relationship between the correspondents. This is in itself enough to ensure the place of *chidu* amongst the genres in which late Ming and early Qing writers strove to break free of the imitatory trends of much of late Ming literature, and seek more direct ways of expressing their selves. However, we have also seen that although the lack of clear models for *chidu* potentially gave writers great freedom to experiment with new forms, and the supposed intimacy of the genre could have paved the way for unadorned personal

⁵¹ CDXC, p. 116.

⁵² It could also be a humorous reference to the decorative stones in Ji's garden, or even to a collection of seals. The Chinese work I have translated as 'Stone' is the colloquial one, *shitou*.

revelation, in practice it would appear that literary tradition it would appear that literary tradition and social custom circumscribed both experimentation and intimacy.

Chapter Seven

Chidu xinchao as an Assertion of Integrity

In the next two chapters I will demonstrate how the non-canonical status of *chidu*, and their relative informality, could make collections of *chidu* a potential avenue for the subtle expression of ideas that could not perhaps be so easily expressed in other more formal prose genres. As I have mentioned earlier, a number of themes are easily identifiable in *Chidu xinchao*, and most of them are to be expected in a collection of letters by so many writers of the late Ming and early Qing period: views on literature, on painting and so on. That a collection of *chidu*, a relatively marginal genre, could be used to articulate the compiler's position regarding sensitive and important questions, is perhaps not what we would at first expect. However, I argue that it is precisely the lack of status and the informality of the genre, along with the apparent lack of deliberate arrangement of the letters in the collection, which made it an ideal vehicle for Zhou Lianggong's purposes.

At the time *Chidu xinchao* was being compiled, there were two areas in which Zhou's integrity could be open to question. The first of these related to Zhou's decision to collaborate with the Manchus in 1645. The second was the result of the fact that although he had been released in an amnesty, he had still not been cleared of the corruption charges, and no doubt their were differing views in the scholar-official community as to whether he was really guilty or not. We will examine how Zhou used *Chidu xinchao* to articulate his feelings about the fallen Ming dynasty in the next chapter, but his assertions of integrity in relation to the corruption case, and his argument that his decision to collaborate with the Manchus could be justified on moral grounds, are obviously interrelated.

Broadly speaking, Zhou's adopts two approaches in his attempts to assert his integrity in the wake of his trial. One of these is to invoke his association with the Fushe and its predecessor the Donglin group during the last years of the Ming dynasty, and thereby assert his commitment to integrity in government. By extension, he also projects an image of himself as a man of action, a man interested in solid administrative practice, opposed to 'quick fixes' for the empire's problems and the bookish sophistry that was allegedly so common in late Ming politics. The corollary of this is

that he was not the type to stoop to the corrupt practices of which he had been accused. The second line of argument which can be identified in Zhou's protestation of innocence is that he was the victim of factional struggles, which as we have seen was in all likelihood true. There are many letters in *Chidu xinchao* in which the author complains of being the victim of factional struggles, unfair treatment and the like, and we shall examine some of them presently.

We should also mention that there are a great many letters in which the author proclaims a wish to live out his life in retirement, far from the dangers and vicissitudes of official life. Of course such ideas were very common amongst officials who had suffered setbacks in their official careers, and Zhou was no exception as he lived in forced retirement in Nanjing and worked on *Chidu xinchao*. Zhou's eldest son, Zhou Zaijun, claimed that Zhou was always in two minds about being an official, and though he cites some evidence for this, any desire Zhou might have had to live in retirement seems to have been no more than the standard protestations made by many scholar-officials during Chinese history; the pattern of Zhou's life suggests that he was in fact a committed official.¹ However, because such letters were so common, I will not examine them here. But this is yet another example of the themes which can be identified in *Chidu xinchao*.

Zhou Liangong and late Ming political righteousness

Although Zhou's name does not appear in the mid-Qing compilation of biographies of Fushe members *Fushe xingshi zhuanlüe*, there is little doubt that Zhou was at least indirectly a member through his membership of the Xingshe, and his views on government were very much in line with those of the Fushe and the Donglin before it. As Charles Hucker has pointed out in his article 'The Tung-lin Movement of the Late Ming Period'², it is

¹ In this respect, there is evidence from Zhou Zaijun that Zhou was a reluctant official. Of course, we have to view claims of not wishing to serve as an official with some degree of scepticism, as these are very common, even from men who served almost all their adult lives. *Chidu xin chao* contains many such letters, as we shall see. Nevertheless, Zhou Zaijun says of his father: 'When he was an official, he hung a painting of Tao Yuanming [the Eastern Jin recluse and poet, 365-427] in a side room, onto which he had himself copied Tao's *Rhapsody on Returning Home*, and he would make ritual offerings to it. Although [my father] was an official for thirty years, there was not a day when he did not think of retiring to the countryside. Chen Hongshou of Kuaiji wanted to paint two paintings [of my father], in one as an official, and in the other as a recluse. In the former he would represent him as Zhuge Liang, and in the latter as Tao Yuanming. My father politely declined saying he didn't have time.' (Zhou Zaijun, 'xingshu', in *LGTJ*, p. 54b).

² Hucker, C. O., in J.K. Fairbank ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, pp. 132-62.

difficult to ascribe a particular programme to the Donglin partisans, other than a general aim of removing from power all those who they felt to be morally deficient so that a system of government could be established 'that would permit men of integrity to serve uprightly in the company of like-minded gentlemen.'³ However, tracing the precise details of any Donglin programme was not Zhou's main concern. Much more important was the Donglin partisans' general reputation for moral uprightness, and the widely held belief that the aims of the Donglin faction and the Fushe to bring clean and upright government to the empire were thwarted by the machinations of treacherous men like Wei Zhongxian and Wen Tiren, which in turn led to the fall of the Ming dynasty. By invoking the memory of Donglin and Fushe stalwarts, Zhou sought to remind readers that he had been connected with them and remained committed to their ideals, and thus he could not have been guilty of the corruption with which he had been charged because he firmly opposed such behaviour on moral and political grounds.

The arguments advanced in the many letters in *Chidu xinchao* which refer to the Donglin and the Fushe generally revolve around a small number of common themes, and it would be repetitive to discuss a large number of them here. Instead we will look at a few representative examples, before going on to see how Zhou used the collection to protest his innocence in more direct ways.

Initial evidence that Zhou consciously used the collection for these ends can be found in the arrangement of some of the letters related to this theme. *Chidu xinchao* begins and ends with letters by the prominent Donglin martyrs Gao Panlong and Wei Dazhong respectively. Whatever Zhou says about *Chidu xinchao* being arranged in no particular order other than that in which the letters were selected, we can be fairly certain that this was no coincidence, especially as the second collection, *Cangju ji*, begins with letters by another Donglin stalwart, Zhao Nanxing (1556-1627), and the third collection, *Jielin ji*, begins with letters by Liu Zongzhou, a Donglin member who memorialised against Wei Zhongxian and Madame Ke and lived to tell the tale (he was made a commoner for his troubles), and who was, in Lynn Struve's words, 'a super-righteous censor-in-chief' in the early Hongguang administration, later driven to resign in protest at the malfeasance of Ma Shiyong (in the context of which, we recall, Zhou Lianggong chose to have nothing to do with that administration).⁴

³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁴ See Lynn A. Struve (1984), *op.cit.*, pp. 28 and 30.

One letter by Gao Panlong points very clearly to the pro-Donglin persuasion of the collection because it is written in praise of the person whose letters begin the second collection in the series, Zhao Nanxing. Zhao had been one of the examiners who passed Gao in the Metropolitan Examinations of 1589, but although Zhao always appeared at the top of the lists of the people who supposedly belonged to Donglin 'party' which its enemies drew up, Zhao never actually went to the Donglin Academy in Wuxi. However, there is no denying that Zhao identified strongly with their aims, and remained a highly respected figure amongst the inheritors of the Donglin tradition.⁵ Gao's letter reads:

Minister of Personnel Zhao is outstanding among his generation. Every time he does something out of the ordinary, the incompetent become silent and dare not move, while the virtuous know they are celebrating too loudly but cannot restrain themselves. Give him one more year at the job, and his achievements in reforming the bureaucracy and improving the lives of the common people will be truly impressive. He likes to say: 'When a virtuous man is working to bring the people out of hardship, as long as this cannot be done, his task cannot be said to be completed.' This is indeed so, but perhaps it can still be done. If one cultivates the primary essence, and brings the *yin* essence and the *yang* essence of heaven together to form the essence of harmony, then disaster will become good fortune. But these are the wild daydreams of a fanatic.⁶

This letter both recalls one of the most admirable of the Donglin figures, and stresses the need for dedication to one's task if the weaknesses in

⁵ Zhao Nanxing was from Zhending near Beijing, and passed the Metropolitan Examination in 1574. During the years 1575-1593, he held a number of posts in which he tried hard to bring order and discipline to the appointment and evaluation of officials, and to clean up other forms of corruption, but became entwined in the factional politics of the time, and was eventually stripped of all rank and made a commoner. He stayed at home for almost thirty years, during which time he wrote and taught. In 1620 he was again called to government service, and was immediately made head of the Censorate. Two years later he was made Minister of Personnel. In both positions he continued the sorts of policies he had carried out in the earlier phase of his career, and the early 1620's were the apogee of Donglin fortunes. However, after Yang Lian launched an attack on Wei Zhongxian, with whom Zhao had managed to co-operate, Wei counterattacked, and Zhao was exiled as a common soldier to northern Shanxi, aged 76, after finding the money to pay a fine which enabled him to avoid execution. He died in exile about two years later. See *DMB*, pp. 128-31.

⁶ *CDXC*, p. 2.

government administration are to be overcome. The image of an official working tirelessly and humbly for the common good no doubt conformed to Zhou's image of himself, and it was an image which Zhou wished to project to society at large as testimony of his rectitude.

In the last letter of the collection, Wei Dazhong, writing at about the same time as Gao, sees the impractical bookishness of the southern literati (though Wei himself was a southerner) as one of the main problems facing the government in the late Ming. He was one of the most active of the Donglin group, and his career was studded by memorials censuring those he felt were morally unfit to hold the posts they did. Less tolerant of Wei Zhongxian than Zhao Nanxing seems to have been, he naturally came into conflict with the so-called eunuch faction around Wei Zhongxian, and was eventually tortured to death after being arrested on the orders of the eunuch.⁷ His letter to a Mr. Xiao, styled Yuanheng, reads as follows:

Every time deliberations at court are disrupted by stupid and dangerous ideas put forward by blustering high officials, it is no surprise to find that those same officials are cited in district schoolrooms as being able writers. They compete with each other in putting forth new and ingenious proposals, pour all the resources of their intellect into petty pyrotechnics and create discord with their superficial and caustic sophistry. Is it any wonder that they deviate from what is proper! And the competition in which they noisily try to outdo each other is to find unpronounceable words and produce incomprehensible phrases. Scholars who throw their books aside and fritter away their time in the pursuit of leisure at least do harm only to themselves, whereas those who are able to write fine prose bring harm to the whole empire. The examiners for the civil service examinations read hundreds of papers every day, all of which are written by those who have thrown their books aside and fritter away their time in the pursuit of leisure, so when they read one or two novel and ingenious papers, naturally they think highly of them and cannot promote them quickly enough! It has perhaps not occurred to them that the men selected in this way are precisely those who bring harm to the whole empire. The trend among the southern literati is to vie with each other in using

⁷ Hucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

obscure language, and those who place great importance on rhetorical skills, in their role as assessors of examination essays, think that they will find them in those who write in novel ways. Thus they particularly select those which deviate from what is proper, then praise them, then promote them. In times past, the selectors of officials would ask for the students of Hu Yuan, and the prosperity they brought to the empire was great.⁸

Wei came from a very poor family, and like Zhou had to struggle hard to pass the examinations and become an official.⁹ His thinking was probably formed by the hardship of his upbringing, and he clearly had little time for dilettantes who could not contribute in a practical way to the government of the empire, instead devoting themselves to petty infighting and obtuse rhetoric. Interestingly, this letter appears in the section entitled 'Literati Harming the State' in *Xiawai junxie*, compiled by the Qing scholar Ping Buqing.¹⁰ Zhou shared Wei's concern that corrupt trends in literature were a sign of moral decadence which in turn led to corruption and ineffectual government, and in ending *Chidu xinzhao* with this letter, Zhou wished to emphasise that he was different, that he was a man of action in the Donglin tradition.

Although I have not been able to find concrete evidence that Liu Rongsi (1616 *jinshi*, d. c. 1636) was a member of the Donglin faction, internal evidence in his letters suggests that he at least sympathised with their aims, and that he was a victim of those who were regarded as enemies of the Donglin. We shall look at more of Liu's letters when we come to discuss Zhou's more direct protestations of innocence, but one of them echoes the concerns expressed by Wei Dazhong above. This letter dates from about 1638, just after Zhu Youjian had taken the throne as the Chongzhen emperor. Liu's position at the time is unclear, but the recipient of the letter is almost certainly Cheng Jiming (d. 1635, also known as Cheng Jingzhi), who was associated with the Donglin. At the beginning of the Chongzhen reign, when the letter below was written, Cheng was made Left Vice

⁸ CDXC, p. 325. Hu Yuan (active mid eleventh cent.), was a teacher and an expert in the rites, especially music. He was a strict and thorough teacher, and was much loved and respected by his numerous students, many of whom became prominent officials. See *Song shi*, pp. 12, 837-38.

⁹ When Wei went to the capital to take up his post, he took just a servant, and left his family behind. Whenever he had to attend court, he locked the gate to his house and there was nobody left inside. *Ming shi*, pp. 6333-34.

¹⁰ I found this reference in the *Hanyu dacidian*, vol. 4, p. 1267, but I have not been able to see the original book.

Minister of Personnel. He was appointed a Grand Secretary at the very end of 1629, just as Manchu troops had broken through the Great Wall at Zunhua and the capital had been put on alert. When Yuan Chonghuan was falsely accused of colluding with the Manchus, who had threatened the capital's Desheng Gate, Cheng cautioned the emperor against hasty action against Yuan, though ultimately to no avail. Later, after the crisis passed and the alert was lifted, the emperor interviewed his officials, and stated his opinion that discipline in government was lax, and strenuous efforts were needed to improve the situation. Cheng counselled a cautious approach, saying that to sort out a tangle of threads, it was necessary first to find the ends. The emperor disagreed, but Cheng's biography adds: 'Later on, Wen Tiren led to emperor to undertake increasingly hasty measures, with the result that the empire fell into disarray.'¹¹ Although this letter predates this interview, there are parallels, and again the reader's attention is drawn to the kinds of bureaucratic laxity and scheming which Zhou and many others saw as the death of the Ming. Of course readers would also have been aware of the background, since the Yuan incident was a very well known one. Cui Chengxiu was one of the most notorious officials supporting the 'eunuch party', and Liu Yuliang was another enemy of the Donglin and later the Fushe.¹²

I have heard that the new emperor has been blessed with the intelligence to be a wise ruler. Whenever he holds court and feels that certain matters of state have not been properly addressed, he will ask the officials assembled before him for their opinion, but they say nothing that satisfies him. 'Is this what you call "an interview with His Majesty"!', he will say.¹³ 'It may truly be said that the ruler has no officials to assist him, and for this reason we shall have to wait till another time for the sage ruler to have wise officials to serve him. There is unlikely to be a great one from whom an age takes its name arising from among you lot.'¹⁴ Then

¹¹ Cheng's biography in *Ming shi*, pp. 6489-90.

¹² Cui's (d. 1627) crimes committed as Censor were exposed by Gao Panlong, and Cui was dismissed, but he was later reinstated with the support of Wei, and became Minister of War and Censor-in-Chief. After the accession of the Chongzhen emperor, Cui was arrested, and committed suicide.

¹³ An emperor's interview with officials in which he asked them to answer questions on matters of state was called a *zhaodui*.

¹⁴ This is a reference to *Mencius*, Book 2, B.13. 'Every five hundred years a true king should arise, and in the interval there should arise one from whom an age takes its name.' Translation from D.C.Lau, *Mencius*, p. 94.

he began talking informally with Liu Yuliang, discussing which officials might fit the bill for prime minister during such a period of wise rule, and when they mentioned you, they both turned down their thumbs, cast an unconscious glance at each other and smiled. Those who hold the reigns of power at present see a defeat as a victory. But why should we be surprised that they are faced with the situation confronting us now and do not know how to change their strategies! They fall at the feet of Wei Zhongxian and Cui Chengxiu, throw away their integrity and bring disgrace upon the empire, yet they know no shame! But the rays of the morning sun will soon appear, and although there are obstacles blocking them out, those obstacles will soon be destroyed. It would seem you will not have to wait long. The importance of lectures to the emperor on the proper way to rule should not be underestimated; a clear explanation of just a few words, and the barriers to true understanding will fall away of their own accord. The day when you will be able to resume your position at the reins of government is not far away!¹⁵

Zhou's comment in the margin above this letter reads, 'How can we not cry in pain at the lack of discipline in government at that time! For this reason we have specially included this letter. Letters in this collection which cannot be considered *chidu* are all like this one.'¹⁶ Precisely why Zhou did not consider this a *chidu* is puzzling, but the fact that he included it anyway is further evidence that Zhou was keen to find examples of letter-writers who criticised corruption and incompetence in government, especially from a Donglin/Fushe point of view, and thereby boost his own credentials as an upright official interested in promoting good government. Furthermore, Liu's citing the incident in which the emperor and Liu Yuliang dismiss Cheng as a candidate for Prime Minister could be seen as recalling Zhou's own falling victim to the plots of other officials.

A final example of the way in which Zhou used the collection to remind readers of his own Fushe connections and of his dedication to good government is in a prophetic letter¹⁵ by Chen Hongxu to fellow Fushe member Yan Du:

¹⁵ CDXC, p. 153.

¹⁶ CDXC*wb*, pp. 6.24a-b.

I don't know when the killing on the North China Plain will come to an end. His Majesty is beside himself with worry, like watching the sun setting before he can do what he must, while the rest of the empire seems in a leisurely stupor. North of the Yangtse River, the blood and guts of those killed in battle are strewn everywhere, while in the south people continue singing and dancing without a care in the world. As I see it, disasters will befall the empire one after another with increasing frequency...¹⁷

This letter could refer to the rebel armies of Li Zicheng or Zhang Xianzhong, or to the Manchus whom Chen fought when they made raids deep into the North China Plain in the early 1640's. Both Chen and Zhou were in charge of the defence of towns which successfully held out against the Manchus, and readers would have been aware of this as they read this letter. Thus Zhou would seem again to be reminding his readers that he had done the best he could to save the Ming, and the southerners who were enjoying themselves while Chen, he and others were fighting in the north were in no position to criticise him for what happened later.

Zhou as a victim: protesting innocence through others

The examples presented above - and there are many more - demonstrate how Zhou used *Chidu xinzhao* to remind readers of his integrity by recalling his own links with the 'righteous' elements in late Ming politics, and his contribution in trying to save the Ming. There are also many letters which discuss how to be an effective official particularly at the local level, which along with some of the examples cited above, are testimony to Zhou's desire to work for the benefit of the common people. This was of course his justification for collaborating with the Manchus after the Ming fell.

Zhou's interest in letters which depict honest officials falling victim to the plots of others is, however, a more direct protestation of his innocence, and is a purpose to which a collection of *chidu* was well suited. In view of Zhou's activities during the couple of years directly after his release, it seems unlikely that he was inclined to write anything formal protesting his innocence, and in any case, such an action might not have been wise given the narrowness of his escape and the unsettled court politics of the time.

¹⁷ CDXC, p. 75.

Instead Zhou chose to argue his case through others in a comparatively marginal genre.

Although suggestions of upright officials being targets of malevolent cabals can be found in many letters in *Chidu xinchao*, significantly all the letters devoted to this problem date from the Ming dynasty. It is quite possible that there were not many more recent letters of this type circulating at the time, or at least not ones that could be published, and in any case Zhou would have been keen to avoid trouble. By selecting letters from the Ming on this theme, the implied protestation of innocence remained more general. Moreover, the argument that Zhou meant to use *Chidu xinchao* in part to protest his innocence of the accusations laid against him is strengthened by the fact that most of the letters on this theme were written by relatively obscure writers from the Wanli reign or earlier. Since these letters would probably not have been readily available to Zhou, this again suggests that he was deliberately looking out for letters on this theme.

A good example of this is the inclusion of two letters by Zhi Dalun. Zhi passed the Metropolitan Examinations in 1574, which makes him one of the earliest authors whose letters appear in *Chidu xinchao*. Furthermore, although some information is available on Zhi, he is an obscure figure. After passing the examinations, he held a number of low provincial posts, mostly in Jiangxi, and Chen Tian notes that he had a frustrating official career, and he expressed this in his works.¹⁸ His 52-chapter collected works do not seem to have survived. The two letters selected in *Chidu xinchao* are amusing. The first one is to his son, and I have translated literally to preserve the effect of the original:

When a man meets men of influence in government, he needs hard feet (i.e. good fortune). When a remonstrating official, he needs a hard mouth (to say what he thinks). In the historiographical institute (Hanlin Academy) he needs a hard brush (he shouldn't be improperly influenced in the compiling of official histories). When he hears 'complaints for which he feels a direct sympathy', he needs a hard heart (he should not be swayed by personal sympathy). When he hears 'slanders which have been assiduously repeated'¹⁹, he needs hard ears (he needs to ignore

¹⁸ MSJS, p. 2446.

¹⁹ Both the phrases in quotation marks are from *Lunyu*, 12.6. I have used the translation by D.C. Lau, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

them).²⁰

The entire letter has been highlighted by the editors, though there are no notes in the margin. The letter is really one of advice to his son, and has two themes, one of sticking to principles and not bending under pressure, while the other refers to the dangers and unpleasantness of government service. The second letter, to a fellow graduate upon leaving the capital, draws a domestic analogy:

If a gentleman is by nature prone to act wilfully and speak his mind, and thereby offends some treacherous court official, the usual result is banishment to a post in some unheard-of place. It is like a grey-haired woman who has been daughter-in-law to several different parents-in-law in succession. Not only is it difficult for her to get to know each parents-in-law's likes and dislikes, with the result that animosities easily rise to the surface, but once her beauty fades, even if she does her best to be gentle and mild and to curry favour with her parents-in-law, and dedicates herself to the preparation of wine and vinegar and the making of clothes for them, they will still hate her. And neither can it be guaranteed that there will be no criticisms from the father-in-law's sisters and the husband's brothers. This is why, from ancient times to the present, those officials who are loyal in their hearts but who have gained the enmity of those in high places nurse grudges till their dying day, and scholars decide to go into retirement, building simple homes and watering their gardens.²¹

Clever metaphors like this one are common in *Chidu xinchao*, as we have seen in Chapter Six, but it is significant that these letters are by a comparatively early and obscure writer. Usually, however, in the letters about the dangers and unpleasantness of official life, the tone is much more serious. In Chapter Eleven of the collection, there is a series of letters by Song Zhizhen (1598 *jinshi*), a number of which express his negative experiences and feelings about government work. All I have been able to discover about Song, apart from his passing of the Metropolitan

²⁰ CDXC, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Examination, is that information which can be gleaned from *Chidu xinchao* itself, and from a comment above one of his letters in particular. He was a native of Liu'an in the Southern Metropolitan Area, and at one stage served in a judicial capacity in Fujian. He is supposed to have made many good decisions, such that his name was still mentioned there many years later. However, at the time, he offended some powerful official, and had to leave his post.²² Of the twelve letters by him in *Chidu xinchao*, perhaps the most representative is one to Hu Shouheng (d. 1642).²³ The letter dates from the time Hu was a judge in Huzhou.

...Every day I get to practise the duties of a low official, so day by day I become more familiar with them; but the more I do the work of a judicial official, the less I feel I know what I am doing. If one is not competent at one's work, then it is difficult for the Two Commissioners²⁴ to notice. But if one takes on matters not properly part of one's prescribed duties, then the the Provincial Administration Commissioner will be furious. I can work through a stack of documents relating to a case which I have to investigate for many nights, and still there will be no end in sight. In order to try and reach a decision upon a case of accumulated injustices, I can write ten memos, and still the matter will not have been cleared up. But I know that there are dangerous jackals in power, and I dare not run foul of them; I know there are wolves and rats who, as a members of cliques with powerful backers, make use of their connections to harm others, but I have no way to smash their lair. My loyalty is under question before I have even taken up my duties, and before they have even seen me they are already mixing truth with lies about me. So one must always be careful to look around warily if one has any hope of being able to escape from this pit of snakes, to get out of this sea of suffering.

It has been said that judicial officials suffer in four ways: we

²² *CDXCwb*, 11.5a.

²³ Hu was a native of Shucheng near Liu'an, and after passing the Metropolitan Examination in 1628, was appointed judge in Huzhou, Zhejiang. In 1634 Hu was made a Junior Compiler in the Hanlin Academy, but afterwards returned home to look after his parents. He was later killed by bandits who attacked Shucheng when he tried to lead the defence of his home town. See Xu Bingyi, *Ming mo zhonglie jishi*, ch. 6, p. 81. Hu's death is also mentioned in *Ming shi*, p. 7523.

²⁴ That is, the Provincial Administration Commissioner and the Provincial Surveillance Commissioner.

have to write reports on cases like horses galloping without rest: this is what is meant by 'suffering from overwork'. The salaries we earn are hardly sufficient to fill our stomachs, and the funds with which we are supposed to be paid with never reach our office anyway: this is what is meant by 'suffering from honesty'. One might pour all one's mental energies into hearing cases and reaching decisions upon them, till one becomes thin and pale with the effort, but in the end wise and incompetent decisions are all accepted in the same way: this is what is meant by 'suffering from anxiety'. When our work is done well, the rewards are given to the Two Commissioners, but if people covertly try to interfere in and frustrate our work, the complaints against us reach the highest echelons of the government. This is what is meant by 'suffering from injustice'. I have been wounded by all this, and now whenever I hear about the things that happen, I blanch with fear. I heard that the scenery of the southern Lake Tai region²⁵ has a clear beauty which stretches far into the distance. The people have a keen intelligence and are of gentle manner, but at the same time are fierce and obstinate, and have a way of secretly seizing upon your weak points or mistakes and using them to manipulate you. With their gentle manner, they easily become close with you, with their intelligence they can be very sharp, and when they are fierce and obstinate, then they easily break the law...²⁶

This letter encapsulates many of the problems of late Ming local administration. Offices were commonly understaffed, and many offices went unfilled, or were filled by men technically underqualified for the position (though this was not necessarily an indication of incompetence). This often meant that conscientious officials were overworked, and such was the decay in the late Ming bureaucracy and the desperate state of government finances that officials often were paid irregularly at best. However, the part with which Zhou no doubt identified most closely is Song's description of the no-win situation in which officials commonly found themselves, and the rival cliques of which one constantly had to be aware, which often brought officials who opposed them to grief. As we have

²⁵ The original refers to Zha Creek, which runs through Huzhou, and Mt. Bao, an island in Lake Tai north of Huzhou.

²⁶ CDXC, p. 274.

seen in Chapter Five, the indications we have from Zhou's biographers is that local cliques and factions in the central government in Beijing were largely responsible for the grief to which Zhou came at the end of his service in Fujian.

At this point we can return to Liu Rongsi, the ill-fated Director General of the Grand Canal whose conscientious efforts to solve a major problem along the canal resulted in his death in prison in the 1630's. His plight as he describes it in some of his letters seem to typify the difficulties and dangers of being an official as Song Zhizhen put them in the letter cited above. More importantly, the implication that Liu was the victim of the lackeys of powerful and evil ministers would seem to coincide closely with Zhou's view of the reasons for his own arrest and imprisonment, and by citing Liu's case, Zhou almost certainly meant to draw attention to the injustice of his own conviction.

Liu was from Quzhou in the Northern Metropolitan Area. He passed the Metropolitan examinations in 1616, and rose through posts in several ministries till he was appointed Director General of the Grand Canal with the nominal post of Minister of Works in about 1634. At the time, the dikes of the Grand Canal at Luoma Lake burst, and the canal became unnavigable, so Liu suggested a massive project to reroute the Yellow River down a new canal from Xuzhou to Suqian, a distance of over a hundred kilometres, so boats travelling along the canal could circumnavigate the lake. However, the stretch of the new canal around Pi county was formerly the course of the Yellow River, and therefore there was a lot of sand in the soil. Workers would get up in the morning to find the channel they had dug the previous day was full of sand again. When the canal was finally completed and the Yellow River water diverted into it, the same sand was swept down the canal by the sudden rush of water, and the canal soon became silted up and difficult to navigate. At the same time, the Luoma Lake section was opened up again, so few boats wanted to use his canal. Late in 1635, Liu was accused of wasting funds on ill-considered projects and thrown into prison, where he and his son died. Ironically, some time later the canal at Luoma Lake again became unnavigable, and boats all used Liu's new canal, 'and many thought of the great service Liu had rendered.'²⁷ Qian Qianyi was in the cell next to Liu's for over a year in 1637-38 and wrote the most detailed biography we have of Liu. According to Qian, water transport was not Liu's area of expertise, and the new canal idea came from his friends and

²⁷ *Ming shi*, pp. 2072-73

followers. Liu was a learned and refined man, loyal to his friends and a good poet.²⁸

In the fifth letter by Liu in *Chidu xinzhao*, he turns to his problems on the canals. He does not discuss technical issues, but describes the hardships he is experiencing supervising canal work. The recipient is Yang Yipeng (d. 1635), Director-general of Grain Transport with the nominal rank of Minister of Personnel and concurrently Left Censor-in-chief. Although the letter appears to be a standard letter of the type where the writer flatters the recipient and presents himself in the humblest of terms, when viewed in the context of what happened to Yang later, this letter appears to have been used ironically by Zhou to remind readers of the vicious factional politics of the late Ming. We must not forget that most of the collection's readers would have been familiar with the background to the letter.

My residence leaks and my boat leaks, which is appropriate for my situation. What a contrast this is to the magnificence of your army, with its banners and flags blocking out the sky, and bugles and horns resounding in the heavens! All the officers listen respectfully to your orders, and your wise and brave generals crush the enemies before them. Messengers bring news of victories to your headquarters, and triumphant songs ring out! How this contrasts with the weaklings at court, grovelling and timid, who once drunk forget about time, and who giggle or whine but have no courage. Only one in a thousand is worth any respect.

Meanwhile, here I am crawling around on the banks of the Yellow River. Whenever the oarsman reports that the water is half a foot deeper, I am overjoyed and relieved beyond measure. If I am able to buy a three-inch-long carp from a fisherman, my salivating mouth can hardly wait to swallow it. As soon as I stick my head out of the cabin window, my face is splattered with mud, and when I wipe my face with my sleeve, it becomes criss-crossed with streaks of grime. So how would I dare report to you, Sir, that all is well when it is not! Each day I await your return from the fighting, whereupon you will finish the official business related to

²⁸ See *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, p. 656. Poems that Qian wrote to the rhymes of poetry written by Liu while the two men were in prison can be found in Qian's collected works, *Mu zhai chuxue ji*, pp. 424-26. There are also poems written to Liu's rhymes on pp. 413-24, though it is not clear that all of them were written in prison.

your military campaigns and report to the emperor, then return to overseeing the canals in the north around Linqing and Dezhou, and play King of Yelang²⁹ among the assistants and aides of the lock administration.³⁰

Yang Yipeng, a native of Linxiang in modern Hunan, passed the Metropolitan examinations in 1610, and became an Assistant Minister in the Court of Judicial Review before being dismissed, presumably for his association with the Donglin faction. He was appointed to the Director-generalship and other posts in 1633, with command over four prefectures north of the Yangtse River (Fengyang, Xuzhou, Huai'an and Yangzhou). Both he and Liu were rewarded by the emperor for their work in repairing dikes at the beginning of 1634.³¹ In February 1634, the rebel army of Zhang Xianzhong (1606-1646) attacked the Fengyang Regency (the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398) was from Fengyang). Before the attack actually took place, the Minister of War, Zhang Fengyi (d. 1636) suggested that Yang's troops be moved to Fengyang to defend it against the rebel armies, but Wen Tiren, the Grand Secretary whom Donglin partisans and their progeny blamed for much of the final collapse of the Ming, is alleged to have shelved the suggestion.³² At the time Fengyang was attacked, Yang was in Huai'an some two hundred kilometres away, too far away to come to the rescue. When the emperor heard the news of the desecration of the home of the imperial clan, he was mortified, and Yang was arrested and executed. Since Liu had only been appointed Director General of the Grand Canal about a year before the attack occurred, this letter which both praises Yang in his military role and expressed the hope that Yang will soon be able to return to concentrate on his duties as Director-general of Grain Transport must have been written not too long before Zhang attacked Fengyang. As a letter between upright officials falling victim to the plots of their scheming

²⁹ This appears to be a reference to Duo Tong (active late 2nd cent. B.C.), originally the Marquis of Yelang. When the Southern Yue rebelled during the late Yuanding period (116-111 B.C.), Duo Tong at first leant towards the rebels, but when the Southern Yue was destroyed, Duo went to the Han court and had an audience with Emperor Wu, whereupon he was made King of Yelang. See *Han shu*, pp. 3841-42.

³⁰ *CDXC*, pp. 154-55.

³¹ *Ming shi*, p. 2072.

³² Whether Wen was as evil as most of the historical records allege is a moot point. Since most of the histories written in the early Qing were written by people in some way related to the Donglin and Fushe, whose influence Wen certainly tried to counter, we can expect them to present him in a bad light. For accounts of Wen's career, see *DMB*, pp. 1474-78 and Wakeman, *op.cit.*, 123-36 *passim*. Zhou Lianggong, who as we have seen was aligned with the Donglin tradition, would have taken Wen's evil character for granted, as presumably would most of his readers.

enemies, it functions on two levels. Though it doesn't mention the threat that Wen Tiren posed to Liu, in the context of the letters by Liu in *Chidu xinchao*, readers would have been aware of his eventual fate, which is one level. The ironic reference to Yang, a victim of the alleged machinations of Wen, provides its second level. Thus in one letter Zhou is able to draw attention to two cases of upright officials being wronged as a result of the attacks of their unscrupulous enemies.

The next letter in the series, to Lu Zhenfei (d. 1647), who attacked Wen Tiren on a several occasions, contains references to events and people of the time that are difficult for us to trace now, and in any case the precise details are not important here. Liu's main theme is that many things are decided by fate, and it is beyond the power of men to alter the course of that fate. He cites the examples of a Grand Co-ordinator of Grain Transport, who was arrested and escorted to the capital, but as a result avoided the fate of many others who were in Yingzhou, west of Fengyang, when it was attacked by Zhang Xianzhong, and of the Regent of Fengyang, Zhu Guoxiang, who temporarily took over the responsibilities of the Magistrate after the latter was impeached, only to be killed by Zhang's rebel army.³³

In the next letter to one Zhang, styled Hengshan, Liu returns to describing his own plight in administering the waterways, and this time directly expresses his fears of those in power at court, who, Liu alleges, are ready to swoop upon him as soon as they can find a pretext.

In my work in trying to control the Yellow River, I have produced no results, and have suffered all kinds of pointless hardships in the process. I make plans for all contingencies, and rush about everywhere. People bring me rumours every day. Fed on such a diet of gossip, I grow increasingly paranoid, so how can I not grow old quickly!

Fortunately the river has now been unblocked, and most of the tribute grain shipments are getting through, but I am still filled with anxiety. Censorial and judicial officials are happy to act as hunting dogs, so who said Grand Secretaries don't have any power! They have the tricks of a devil, and can bring one blessings or disaster like a god. They are geniuses at everything except

³³ CDXC, p. 155. The details of both stories are hazy. I have not been able to discover who the Grand coordinator of Grain Transport was, and in fact the term given for his post is unusual and its precise definition unclear. Some details of the attacks can be found in *Ming shi*, pp. 6745 & 7487. According to the latter, Zhu actually committed suicide when the situation became completely hopeless.

running the country properly. I very much regret not having put a great distance between them and me.³⁴

Liu was obviously well aware that people were out to trap him, and he makes no attempt to hide the fact that the mastermind is Grand Secretary Wen Tiren. His fear of censors was also quite justified, as it was a Transport-control Censor, Ni Yuyi, and a Supervising Censor, Cao Jingcan, who eventually impeached him. Both men have since become obscure, but we can presume that they were associates of Wen. It is not clear exactly why Wen and his supporters were so keen to trap Liu, though the underlying reason was probably Liu's Donglin sympathies. We know Liu associated with those who had been, and it is possible that Wen, who spent much of his time trying to weaken the influence of the 'righteous' elements in the government, included Liu among their number. In any case, this letter is yet another example of Zhou's indirectly asserting his own innocence through parallel examples expressed, or at least implied in, the letters he included in *Chidu xinchao*.

The final letter by Liu Rongsi which Zhou has included in this collection is again on the stated or implied theme of officials being treated badly. It is to one to Lian Guoshi (d. 1645), who passed the Metropolitan Examinations in the same year as Liu (1616), and presented many memorials seeking to rectify improper actions carried out by the supporters of Wei Zhongxian, with the result that he was associated with Zhao Nanxing and removed from all posts. Upon the accession to the throne of the Chongzhen emperor, Lian returned to his old posts and was soon made Assistant Censor-in-chief and Grand Co-ordinator of Shaanxi province. There he was occupied fighting rebels, which he did with varying degrees of success, at one stage in 1631 being charged with some offence after rebels who had surrendered again rebelled. However, after successes in the following year, the charges were dropped. In 1634, at about the time Liu was appointed Director General of the Grand Canal, the Supreme Commander in the area, Chen Qiyu (1616 *jinshi*), sought to lay the blame for military setbacks on Lian, to which Lian replied with a vigorous memorial stating how outnumbered Ming troops were, and suggested more troops be sent to assist. However, he was arrested in 1635, and exiled to Guangxi early in 1636. A few years later he was recalled. In 1644 he was appointed Vice Minister of Revenue in the Southern Ming administration, then Vice Minister of War,

³⁴ CDXC, p. 155.

and at the beginning of 1645 was made Minister. He died soon after. This letter seems to predate Liu's appointment as Director General of the Grand Canal, as in it Liu says that he is living at home. Although there is no evidence in the biographical sources we have, it might be that Liu was dismissed from whatever office he had during the Tianqi reign because of Donglin sympathies.

Our classmate Hou Xun has come and brought me your letter, and I am very grateful for the concern you expressed for me in it.³⁵ I have long become resigned to having misfortune fall upon me while serving as an official. When one is the victim of mudslinging, what is important is not the effect it has on one's official position, but rather the effect it has on one's reputation and integrity. If all of you, my upright friends, were not there to help me, what chance would I have of surviving all this! Now you are travelling about, and Hou Xun has left the capital. I have no time to worry about myself, but rather am very concerned about the direction in which the world is heading, and can never drive these thoughts from my head. People are accused of crimes but there is no investigation. They always say: compromise. I say: be impartial and just. How can men of integrity compromise with the petty-minded who try to have it both ways and not commit themselves clearly! But in the case of those who act in the name of impartiality and justice, everybody is clear as to what they are doing, and will respect his loyalty and uprightness. How can an upright man be happy dividing himself between incompatible categories, which like fire and water, cannot be mixed with each other...³⁶

Although this last letter in the series is not directly connected to the case which caused Liu's eventual demise, it summarises his position in the face of injustice, claiming a refusal to compromise principles, and a concern that the real problem that charges present to an upright man is not that he might lose his official position, but that people might believe that he is really guilty of the crimes of which he stands accused as a result of the conspiracies of the corrupt elements at court, and thus his reputation would be ruined. Zhou

³⁵ Hou Xun was the father of the famous writer Hou Fangyu.

³⁶ CDXC, p. 156.

no doubt intended that Liu speak for him. We may also note in passing that Liu expresses thanks to his friends, something that Zhou also wished to do, and which is said to have been one of the reasons for compiling *Chidu xinchao*.

Another letter which Zhou used to draw attention to the plight of those unjustly imprisoned is one by a relatively obscure late Ming scholar from Jiangyin named Liu Ruyi to his much better known brother-in-law Miao Changqi (1562-1626). Miao passed the Palace Examination in 1613, and as an Examining Editor in the Hanlin academy attracted the attention of the Donglin faction. After a period in retirement following an attack by one of the opponents of the Donglin, Miao was recalled to the capital in 1621 to take the post of Left Admonisher, and later Advisor, in the establishment of the Heir Apparent. However, when Yang Lian wrote his famous memorial censuring Wei Zhongxian in 1624, Miao was accused of composing it for Yang, and in any case he supported Yang's criticisms. As a result he was dismissed. In March 1626 he was again censured, this time for receiving guests dressed in official robes, and was arrested. Censured yet again, he was executed in prison on 24 May, 1626. This letter is the second of two letters in *Chidu xinchao* by Li to Miao, and in an unusual move, Zhou has added this comment below the title of the letter: 'At the time, Sir Wenzhen had been arrested.' (Wenzhen was the posthumous title given to Miao by Prince Fu during the Southern Ming.) Zhou's purpose in doing this must have been to draw the reader's attention to the parallels between Miao's situation and his own.

If one's death is as weighty as Mount Tai because one has reported the truth to the Emperor, this is called having one's proper fate befall one. If one's death is as light as a feather because one has followed tigers and wolves, that is also what is called having one's proper fate befall one. The outcome of a journey of a thousand miles is determined in an inch. All one has learnt in one's life is tested here. Wang Yanwu was concerned that he had failed Wen Tianxiang and wrote his famous essay, then pasted

copies of it everywhere he went.³⁷ Now I make good my promise and write this letter to you, daring to risk becoming implicated. How deep is my pain! I too cannot be much longer in this world.³⁸

Although this letter is not a direct protestation of innocence, it serves Zhou's purposes in several ways. First of all, it is another reminder of Zhou's Donglin/Fushe sympathies, since Miao was a very prominent Donglin member. Secondly, Miao was a righteous man who had been imprisoned unjustly as a result of the attacks of his enemies. Thus Zhou was drawing attention to the parallel he saw between Miao's case and his own. The letter also mentions the famous Song loyalist general Wen Tianxiang (1236-1283) and his follower, Wang Yanwu, one of the many hints of Zhou's sympathy with the Ming loyalists. Finally, Zhou would have appreciated Li's loyalty to Miao.

The penultimate example we shall look at here, again from the Ming dynasty, is a letter by Tang Shisheng (1551-1636), a native of Jiading. Although Tang did not pursue an official career, he was well informed about the affairs of the government, and expressed deep concern about the state of the empire at the time, military matters in particular.³⁹ The recipient, a certain Wang, styled Dansheng, is obscure, though from the title given to the letter we know he was an official in the Ministry of Personnel.

You are broadminded and magnanimous, and the way in which you seek out talented people and take seriously the

³⁷ Wang Yanwu, whose original name was Wang Dingweng, became a student in the National University during the Xianchun period (1265-74). After the Southern Song capital Lin'an fell to the Mongols in 1276, Wang became an assistant to Wen Tianxiang. Later Wang had to return home because his mother had fallen ill and his father had died but had not been buried. However, Wang felt that in leaving Wen he had not repaid Wen's kindness, and so he wrote an essay about Wen of the type normally written for a sacrifice to someone's spirit, then made dozens of copies, and pasted them everywhere he travelled. His hope was that Wen might see a copy and know Wang's feelings. (Wang's essay, 'Sheng ji Wen Chengxiang wen', is in *Wen Tianxiang quanji*, p. 513-15.) Soon after Wang heard that Wen had been captured by the Mongols, and thereafter he closed his door to visitors and devoted himself to writing. Many of his works express his refusal to serve two dynasties. *Zhongguo renming dacidian*, p. 103.

³⁸ CDXC, p. 199.

³⁹ Tang became a student of the famous advocate of Tang and Song prose styles Gui Youguang (1507-1571). Before the age of thirty, Tang gave up studying for the civil service examinations, and devoted himself to research. For most of his life he lived in relative poverty, and is said to have cultivated the fields behind his home himself. He met Wang Shizhen when the latter came to the Southern Capital, and Wang greatly admired him, but Tang refused to become a student of Wang's because he had been the student of Gui's, who had been one of Wang's strongest opponents in the debates on literary theory before Gui died. See *Ming shi*, p. 7391, and *LCSJXZ*, pp. 579-80.

responsibilities of your post truly makes you outstanding among our peers. However, I hope that whilst surrounded by all this flattery, you will at the same time be on your guard. Those from illustrious and influential families, the sons of the modern-day aristocracy, with their imposing manner, of course become famous at a young age, pass the highest examinations, and are appointed to the most important posts. Although they might seem to be self-effacing and giving full respect to others, in fact everyone is suspicious of them...There are people whose hatred is such that they make others cower with a glare that goes right to one's bones. I have heard that in the Ministry of War, colleagues live so much in an atmosphere of fear that they dare not become close with each other, and end up enemies. It would be to my good fortune if you were not to forget my humble warning.⁴⁰

This letter is self-explanatory, and points to the need to be careful of everyone about one, and especially of those who hold privileged positions but who seem modest and unassuming. We cannot know if Zhou hoped readers of this letter might draw a parallel between the élites of the past and the favoured classes under the new régime, which included someone like Tong Dai, a Chinese bannerman, or others who might have brought about his fall. In any case, the letter is yet another example of Zhou's preoccupation with people falling victim to the plots of others, and the implication that he himself was the victim of such a plot.

We will conclude this chapter with a letter that was written to Zhou by his mentor Zhang Minbiao, probably at the beginning of his official career. This important letter brings together the themes we have discussed in this chapter.

You can choose the heights you wish to attain yourself. I have often thought to myself: it is easy to take up an official post for the benefit of oneself and one's family, but it is difficult to be an official aiming to serve the emperor and the common people. All one has to do to further one's own interests is to find a powerful patron upon whose coat-tails one can ride, but I am not going to talk about that here. More than one or two people have become wealthy and influential in this way over the years.

⁴⁰ CDXC, pp. 112-13.

But should one wish to dedicate oneself loyally to the service of the empire, and carry out one's noble aspirations to bring peace to the populace, one will incur the jealous wrath of those around one, and will soon find oneself the subject of all sorts of accusations. The number of people who have lost their lives for this reason is far more than just one or two.

You know that the wise man who keeps his thoughts to himself and the upright man who lives in seclusion are of no benefit to the world. So why try to pretend that bitter vegetables are sweet? I know what your aspirations are.⁴¹

Through this almost clairvoyant letter, Zhou asserts that it was precisely because he was working selflessly for the good of the dynasty and the common people that he fell victim to the plots of others.

Zhou Lianggong was a man who valued his integrity highly. Indeed, much of Zhou's behaviour after he became a Qing official is in accordance with the general description of collaborating officials offered by Lynn Struve. It was probably precisely because his decision to collaborate with the Manchus placed his integrity under question that he was so keen to demonstrate that moral probity was important to him.⁴² It was for this reason that he worked so hard for the common people, and sought to advertise this. But it would have been difficult for him to try to claim integrity formally through the canonical genres because he would not have been able to avoid the question of his serving two dynasties. Through a collection of *chidu*, however, Zhou was able to imply his position through the letters in the collection. The relative lack of importance of the genre, its status as a kind of genteel entertainment (despite claims that it was more than that), and the largely random arrangement that a collection of *chidu* allowed made it an ideal vehicle for these purposes. For the same reasons, *Chidu xinchao* also allowed him to work through his attitude to the fallen Ming dynasty, and it is to this that we now turn.

⁴¹ CDXC, p. 219.

⁴² Lynn A. Struve (1989), *op.cit.*, pp. 4-6.

Chapter Eight

Chidu xinchao and Memories of the Ming Dynasty

Although Zhou Lianggong seems to have been nothing less than a conscientious and effective official for the Qing, genuinely committed to improving the lot of the common people after decades of war, there is also little doubt that Zhou in his heart remained loyal to the ideal of Ming rule. As we shall see presently, there is evidence that Zhou hoped one day for the restoration of native Chinese rule, though unlike many of his loyalist contemporaries, he was hard-headed enough to realise that this was impossible for the time being. Thus from 1645 onwards, Zhou seems to have performed a delicate balancing act, on one hand being a conscientious official for the new rulers, while on the other hand finding opportunities to express his dedication to the preservation of Ming culture and winning the confidence of loyalists. In my opinion, *Chidu xinchao* was one element in this balancing act.

The most striking example of Zhou's expression of sympathy with the loyalist cause is his *yuefu* poem 'Song of Old Crows', which was written as a colophon to a painting by Xu You while Zhou was in prison in 1659. It has been discussed by Hongnam Kim in considerable detail. The poem alludes to the collapse of the Ming, and to the inability of people like him to forget the native dynasty. There is an allusion to Zou Yan of the Warring States period, who was imprisoned by King Hui as the result of slander, an obvious reference to Zhou's own imprisonment. Yet at the same time that the poem expresses profound sadness, its most surprising element is that it appears to call upon those loyal to the Ming cause not to despair, but to work for the restoration of native Chinese rule.¹ In Kim's words, 'The poem suggests that Chou's loyalties and intentions, despite his collaboration, were not very different from his loyalist friends.' Kim also notes that when a group around Wan Shouqi was planning to raise a force against the Manchus after 1645, they remained in touch with Zhou even though he was already serving the alien dynasty. She then goes on to suggest that there is a 'possibility that there was a certain loose informal coalition between the so-called collaborators and some of the Ming loyalists which worked towards

¹ See Kim Hongnam, *op.cit.*, pp. 144-48. The poem appears in *Du hua lu*.

one common goal, the restoration of native rule.’² Personally I find this last point tenuous. Zhou was well aware both of the military might of the Manchu armies, and of the hopelessness of the Ming cause, which were primary reasons for his decision to collaborate anyway. While in his heart Zhou might have dreamt of the restoration of native rule, of which the ‘Song of Old Crows’ was an expression, his strong practical sense would have told him that there was no benefit to be gained from becoming mixed up in futile loyalist plots. This did not, however, preclude him occasionally hinting at ‘loyalist’ sympathies. We mentioned in the biography of Zhou in Chapter Five that Chen Hongshou had warned Zhou about expressing his political feelings too openly in his works. However, it seems that most of these have been lost, perhaps destroyed by Zhou when he burnt his books in 1670.

As I have already made clear, the nature of *chidu* and *chidu* collections made them an ideal vehicle for the expression of ideas that were not easily expressed in the more legitimated prose genres. Although the letters in *Chidu xinchao* that I will discuss below cannot be described as seditious, I believe they demonstrate convincingly that Zhou did use the collection to hint at his sympathy with the loyalists, and more obviously, to express his commitment to the preserving the memory and culture of the Ming.

The political background against which *Chidu xinchao* was compiled

In Chapters Five and Seven, and in the discussion above, I have described the factors in Zhou’s own experience which affected the compilation of *Chidu xinchao*. However, before we proceed to examine examples of letters related to Zhou’s treatment of his feelings toward the Ming dynasty, it is necessary to review some of the events which had a major impact upon the Jiangnan gentry at the time in order to fully understand the political context in which Zhou was working.

The years 1661-1663 were particularly heady for the Jiangnan gentry, and the problems began with the same event which gave Zhou Lianggong his freedom: the death of the Emperor Shizu, or Shunzhi, in February 1661. While Zhou escaped exile to Ningguta in the amnesty which followed the accession of the Kangxi emperor to the throne, a number of scholars who gathered in the Confucian temple in Suzhou to mourn the death of the Shunzhi emperor turned the event into a protest, which would eventually

² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

lead to their deaths. This would become known as the 'Laments in the Temple' case. The impact this case had on the southern gentry and their relations with the Manchu dynasty was compounded by the even more far-reaching 'Tax Arrears' case of 1661-1662, which resulted in thousands of gentry and officials being dismissed, imprisoned, stripped of titles and so on. A fuller account of these cases is provided by Lawrence Kessler.³ Zhou arrived back in Nanjing just as these cases were unfolding, and they continued to unfold throughout the period in which *Chidu xinchao* was being compiled. Though Zhou was not implicated - he had, after all, been in prison - his position as a collaborating official recently released from prison after a long case involving corruption would have been delicate. If he sympathised with the disaffection of the southern literati towards the Manchu regime too openly, he would have been taking a great risk, since the regents in the capital were trying to crack down on the expression of dissent in the Jiangnan region. We should remember that, at about the same time, the inquisition of Zhuang Tinglong, or rather of those associated with the publication of a history of the Ming dynasty initially carried out under Zhuang's direction (Zhuang had died in about 1660), was under way as a result of perceived slights to the Manchu regime contained within that work. Zhuang's father had been imprisoned, where he died.⁴ Although by the time *Chidu xinchao* was published these episodes had come to an end, for most of the time Zhou and his assistants were working on the collection, the relationship between the Jiangnan gentry and the Qing authorities was very tense. However, as Struve has pointed out, the Qing government never stated openly what sort of material was considered subversive, and there seems to have been no systematic attempt to uncover material of a loyalist slant. Often exposure occurred only because the writer became involved in factional struggles in government and enemies used the works to attack him. The Zhuang Tinglong case came to light because a former official who had a grudge against the Zhuang family alerted the government to the alleged slights. However, other potentially offensive works seem to have been able to circulate for years without their authors incurring the wrath of the authorities.⁵

³ Lawrence D. Kessler, *K'ang-hsi and the Consolidation of Ch'ing Rule 1661-1684* (1976), pp. 30-39. This is based on his article 'Chinese Scholars and the Early Manchu State' (1971), pp. 179-200.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-83, and *ECCP*, pp. 205-6.

⁵ Struve (1989), *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

Expression of loyalist sympathies in *Chidu xinchao*

We will begin with an example of how an apparently simple letter could be used to hint at sympathy with loyalist sentiments in Jiangnan at the time. Ji Yongren (1637-1676), a young scholar from Wuxi with a great interest in political gossip⁶, wrote the following letter to Huang Yuji, the bibliophile and friend of Zhou's mentioned earlier, about the critic Jin Renrui (Jin Shengtian):

Recently an extremely strange thing happened. Mr. Zhou⁷ was working on a case at Gengnan. He came to read Jin Shengtian's *Works by and for Men of Genius*, and was filled with admiration for Jin. Thereupon he sent a messenger with money to cover the expenses for Jin to come and visit him, but it happened that at the time Jin was busy compiling an anthology of Tang poems, so he didn't make the trip. However, Jin did intend to meet Zhou later.

In the following year, Mr. Zhou had a dream in which a man with long, dishevelled hair and bare feet jumped up on his desk, and covering his face and said crying, 'I am Jin Shengtian.' After Mr. Zhou got up in the morning, he said to a visitor, 'Jin Shengtian has left us.' He again sent a messenger to Suzhou, who found out that Jin Shengtian had died on the morning after Mr. Zhou had the dream. Strange indeed! I wrote a poem recording the dream, and a poem in memory of Jin, and ask if you would like to write one in response.⁸

On the surface, this seems to be little more than just another example of the fantastic stories which have been a part of Chinese tradition for centuries. However, there is a little more to this one. Jin Renrui came from Suzhou, and became widely known for his commentaries on the novel *The Water Margin* and the drama *The Western Chamber*, in which he expressed views considered controversial at the time. In May 1661, Jin was arrested for his part in the 'Laments in the Temple' incident and put on trial. Although the protest at the temple was mainly directed against the excessive methods

⁶ BZJ, p. 3465. Ji's residence in Wuxi was called 'Dongtian' (Eastern Fields) in reference to the old Donglin (Eastern Forest) Academy nearby.

⁷ He was styled 'Jibai', but I have been unable to identify him.

⁸ CDXC, p. 56.

employed by the magistrate of Wu county in collecting overdue taxes, loyalism became an issue both because the Governor reported to the court that the protesters had 'defiled the late emperor's memory'⁹, and because the case became linked to the trial of men who stood accused of assisting Zheng Chenggong when he attacked Jiangsu two years earlier. It also happened that at the time the regents ruling on behalf of the new emperor were looking to intimidate the southern gentry, many of whose loyalist sympathies had clearly not faded. In the end, eighteen of the accused were beheaded for treason on August 7, 1661, of whom Jin Renrui was the most famous. 'The execution of these scholars of Soochow was bitterly resented by the people of the province...'¹⁰ Thus there is more to this Mr. Zhou's dream than meets the eye, and of course to Zhou's inclusion of the letter.

In a note in the margin above this letter, Zhou Lianggong wrote: 'Shengtan had already published five-hundred pages of a book entitled *Model Essays of Talented Scholars from Previous Examinations (Like chengmo caizi shu)*. That there is now no-one to continue his work is much to be regretted.'¹¹ One suspects that as Jin faced the executioner, this was not uppermost in his mind, and one cannot help but wonder if Zhou did this deliberately as a kind of smokescreen for his true intentions in including the letter. Quite probably 'to be regretted' contained a *double entendre*. Furthermore, this letter, the only letter in the collection by Ji Yongren, contains no lines of obvious literary merit, yet the lines describing the dream and the discovery of what had happened to Jin on the morning after Mr. Zhou had the dream are highlighted with dots beside the characters.

There are two letters by Jin in *Chidu xinchao*. The latter of the two seems to have been included purely because it presents one of Jin's views on poetry, that it should really be natural expression, and not the result of reading too many books as is the case with poetry written by Confucian scholars. However, the first letter, simple as it is, seems to be an example of Zhou's taste for irony. The two parts of the text marked in italics are those that have been highlighted by the editor.

Those pine seeds I planted so carefully all those years ago
only now stand as tall as people. It would be truly wonderful if

⁹ Kessler (1971), *op.cit.*, p. 185.

¹⁰ *ECCP*, p. 165.

¹¹ *CDXCwb*, 2.33a. It seems that Jin was working on a sequel or expansion of an earlier collection of examination essays entitled *Zhiyi caizi shu*. He was also working on commentaries on the poems of Du Fu when he died, which corresponds with Ji Yongren's account. See *ECCP*, p. 165.

fate would grant me twenty years without illness and without worries, so that I could eat my meals with a smile. And I would take the many books before me and write notes and commentaries on them one by one. Indeed this would be the greatest fortune. *But how could I dare hope to live till the age at which pine trees are covered with thick bark like the scales on a dragon!*¹²

Of course in this case the clever use of the pine tree image provides literary grounds for the inclusion of this letter and the highlighting. The margin note at the top again comments on Jin's literary activities, though in this case they seem more closely related to the letter below it. But it is difficult to believe that Zhou missed the irony of the letter, and of the last line in particular.

This is perhaps the most pointed example of letters in the collection seeming to express sympathy with loyalist elements in the post-conquest period that I have been able to identify. This is particularly so because of its proximity to the events surrounding Jin's death less than a year before *Chidu xinchao* was published, and because of the disaffection which the incident caused among the Jiangnan literati in particular. We should remember that the Tax Arrears investigations which followed on the heels of the 'Laments in the Temple' case were only called off at about the time *Chidu xinchao* was published, so emotions would still have been running high. Therefore, although the two letters I have cited relating to Jin Renrui might seem uncontroversial on the surface, I find it difficult to believe that their inclusion was simply coincidental.

Another letter which contains intriguing references is one by Wang Duo. Most of Wang's letters are unexceptional politically, but this letter suggests the mental anguish Wang suffered late in his life as a result of his decision to collaborate, anguish which Zhou perhaps shared.

Ill luck has placed the towering mountains of Fujian between us, and we have both experienced the greatest calamities. It hardly needs saying that we are but gnats flying through the universe.

Your poetry never becomes frivolous or superficial, and the structure of their composition is far above the common run. Last night I sat with my flute on one side and winecup on the other

¹² CDXC, pp. 120-21; CDXCwb, 5.15a-b.

and drank without restraint. Although I dare not sing in the manner of Wang Dun, tapping the beat with my backscratcher against a spittoon, I sing impassioned laments, but with such disorder around me, how could I just weep in silence!...¹³

It is the second paragraph that is most interesting in view of Wang's position at the time. The letter must have been written after Zhou arrived in Fujian in 1648. The entry on Wang in *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period* says that in some of his poems written in his last years, Wang laments the passing of the Ming dynasty and expresses 'strong feelings of self-pity'¹⁴, and in this context the reference to Wang Dun is particularly interesting. Wang Dun (266-324) was a high official during the last years of the Western Jin (263-327) and the early years of the Eastern Jin (317-420). After the establishment of the Eastern Jin court in Nanjing, the general Liu Wei (273-333) and the official Diao Xie (d. 322) established themselves as the favourites of Emperor Yuan (Sima Rui, 276-322) and sought to sideline the powerful Wang clan. Wang Dun, who had a powerful army under his command and had ambitions to take the throne for himself, was greatly frustrated, and once he had drunk a bit of wine would sing these lines from a famous poem by Cao Cao: 'Though an old horse does no more than drink at the trough, he still thinks of running a thousand miles. Though an ambitious man might be in his twilight years, his heart still harbours those great plans,' at the same time tapping the beat with his backscratcher on a spittoon. Wang later brought his army to the capital and killed Diao and others, and the emperor died shortly after. However, Wang himself was dead within two years, his ambitions unrealised.¹⁵ Wang Duo would therefore seem to be saying that the idea of rebellion has crossed his mind, but he dare not put it into practice. Coming from a figure like Wang, this sounds rather pathetic, but the allusion is an interesting one. Perhaps Zhou found it an expression of his own feelings of displeasure at being mistreated by the new regime. The two men must have had a great deal in common, as both were collaborators with mixed feelings about their collaboration, and they shared a deep interest in art. So in including a letter like this, tucked in at the end of a series of eighteen letters by Wang, Zhou seems to be using the letter to express his own feelings at the time. There is of course some parallel between this letter and the ideas expressed by Zhou in the 'Song of

¹³ CDXC, p. 112.

¹⁴ ECCP, p. 1435.

¹⁵ See *Jin shu*, p. 2557.

Old Crows'.

Most of the letters in *Chidu xinzhao* which refer to the transition are less pointed than the two presented above, but they still constitute moving accounts of their authors' personal experiences during and after the wars of conquest and pacification, or of their memories of life during the last years of the Ming. The loss of friends, disruptions in the lives of the writers, and changes in the places which they used to frequent, are common themes in this type of letter. We have seen one possible example of this in Zhuo Fazhi's letter to Mr. Ding quoted in Chapter Six. Engaging the recipient's sense of nostalgia is one way in which writers sought to express their feelings in this respect. Another poetic example of this is a letter to Zhou Lianggong's younger brother by Wang Ruqian, a minor poet from Xiuning who resided in Hangzhou.

Many people are frightened of seeing the moon when boating on a lake, and criticise the people of Hangzhou for their habit of doing just this. In fact this criticism is unjustified. Thirty years ago, the notables of the city liked to go on outings by the West Lake at night, when they would admire the flowers and choose girls to perform for them. They would find a place along the Six Bridges¹⁶, and set themselves up by a blossoming peach tree with a single lantern. When a breeze sprung up, all the lanterns began to sway, and the effect was like the mythical candle dragon about to take flight.¹⁷ It was even more brilliant than the boats lit up on the evening of the Dragon Boat Festival along the Qinhuai River.¹⁸ However, after the upheavals and changes of recent times, the lake has become a watering hole for horses, and even most of the day-trippers dare not visit the place for long, and are careful to go home early.¹⁹

If we compare this to a letter by the late Ming writer Wang Siren (1575-

¹⁶ This refers to the six bridges along the dikes that stretch across the West Lake. So famous were these bridges that the term was often used to refer to the West Lake, and even to Hangzhou as a whole.

¹⁷ This kind of dragon was said to light up the whole world when it opened its eyes, or alternatively, when it took a candle in its mouth.

¹⁸ The Qinhuai river runs through the southern part of the city of Nanjing, and was the main area for gentry entertainment in Ming and Qing times. Activity centered around the Confucian Temple. Zhou Lianggong grew up near this area.

¹⁹ CDXC, p. 107.

1646) about the Qinhuai River, we notice one or two interesting differences. Wang starved himself to death after Qing troops took his home town of Shaoxing in 1646, so the letter can be from no later than 1645 when Wang served in the court of the Nanjing regime.

The Qinhuai River is, after all, a long toilet. The area in front of the Confucian Temple is especially crowded with all sorts of people, and you can't smell your wine. It's better to go to Treetops Pavilion, eat the cakes at Gaozuo Temple²⁰, and enjoy a couple of pints of the pure waters of Hui Spring²¹, with a little fish and meat. Is there a pleasure to compare with this!²²

Zhou highlighted the first sentence only. A margin note above this letter (there is no note above Wang Ruqian's letter) reads:

The West Lake is best at night, and the Qinhuai River is best in the autumn. However, there is a saying: 'When boating on the West Lake, the dikes are the choice place to go. When boating on the Qinhuai, summer is the best, you know.' I really find this difficult to understand.²³

Clearly then, Wang Siren's letter is just a comment on the unsuitability of the Qinhuai as a place to seek enjoyment, and there seems to be no reason to read any more into it. Wang Ruqian's letter is different in that it compares times rather than places, and the mention of the horses, which were most probably those of cavalry, invokes the disruption caused by the wars associated with the change in dynasty. But the subject is treated subtly, and any political statement that might have been intended is hidden in a mist of nostalgia.

²⁰ Treetops Pavilion (*Mumo ting*) was between the famous Plum Blossom Hill and the tomb of Zhu Yuanzhang to the east of Nanjing. Gaozuo Temple was nearby. Zhou lived at this temple for a while after his release in 1661. See Yu Binshuo, *Jingling langu*, pp.21b-22a. (This book includes a preface by Zhou Lianggong.)

²¹ Hui Spring in Wuxi was said to have the best water for brewing tea in the empire, and was often carried to other parts of the empire for connoisseurs to drink. There is an amusing story told by Yuan Hongdao about servants who got tired of carrying the water to Hubei for their master, so the secretly poured it out, and replaced it with local water as they approached their destination. The literati who later drank it and praised its qualities were much embarrassed when the secret leaked out. Jonathan Chaves has translated this story in Yuan Hung-tao, *Pilgrim of the Clouds*, pp. 90-93.

²² CDXC, p. 251.

²³ CDXC*wb*, 10.12b.

The next example exemplifies the sorts of ambiguities that make analysis of this collection so difficult, at least from the political point of view. The letter, written to Zhou, is by Xu You (or Xu Mei), one of Zhou Lianggong's assistants in the compilation of *Chidu xinchao*, and the painter of the painting to which Zhou attached the 'Song of Old Crows' as a colophon. Biographical sources give few details about Xu's life, so we can presume that it was not particularly eventful, though no doubt there was considerable trauma at the time of the collapse of Ming rule. He was a Government Student under the Ming, and a student of the eminent and upright late Ming statesman Ni Yuanlu (1593-1644). However, after the establishment of the Qing dynasty, Xu no longer sought to serve in government. The rest of his life seems to have been devoted to poetry and painting. He died sometime in the mid-Kangxi period, and was almost certainly a little younger than Zhou.²⁴ Both Qian Qianyi and Zhu Yizun thought very highly of his poetry. In an anthology compiled by Qian called *Wu zhi ji*, he mostly selected one or two examples of the poetry of each poet, but there are more than a hundred poems by Xu.²⁵ Zhou's *Du hua lu* also includes an entry on Xu. Xu was best known for his painting of delicate bamboo, though Zhou records that whenever Xu went north of the Yellow River, he would no longer paint bamboo, but instead painted bare trees and crows in a wintry landscape. 'So bleak were these paintings that one could hardly look at them. Most probably he was just pouring his feelings of spiritual desolation (*wu liao zhi qi*) into these works.'²⁶ It seems likely that Xu's change of style and Zhou's comment is related to Xu's feelings upon approaching the capital of the Manchu dynasty, and therefore to Xu's loyalist sympathies. The chapter of *Chidu xinchao* for which Xu helped select the letters has a decided emphasis on Ming and loyalist figures and, for some reason, on people from the Hangzhou area, including Wang Ruqian discussed above. The letter to Zhou, the last in a series of eleven, reads as follows:

The farewell we bid each other on this last occasion I dare not call a farewell, as I know you will certainly return to the mountains and rivers around Nanjing, and that I will surely

²⁴ *BZJ*, pp. 4122-23.

²⁵ Chen Yan, *Shiyishi shihua*, cited in *QSJS*, p. 1066. Chen's original text says that there were nineteen poems by Xu in this collection, but an annotation by the editors of *QSJS* says that extant editions of *Wu zhi ji* have more than a hundred.

²⁶ *Du hua lu*, pp. 26-7.

come to accompany you there. So I did not waste any more feelings of sorrow on this parting.

The next day, I boarded a boat, and with a sorry bundle of luggage, travelled for more than sixty days alone before finally reaching Hangzhou. The Grand Canal was dry, and the Eight Locks were firmly shut. As I travelled through the countryside, there was not a rock or tree, postal station or town that did not make me think of you, and each time I bought a jug of rice wine or a basket of crabs or fish, I would recall the times when I was with you, chatting under the lamplight. A wave of sadness would surge through me and tears would come to my eyes, before subsiding of itself just as it had come. All that I had left by the time reached home was a face covered in dust.

The walls around my home town no longer stand tall and even, but are more like a ragged mound covered in piles of rubble. Furthermore, following the violent winds from the sea, most of the buildings and houses are ruined and deserted. Fear is written all over the faces of my family, and they wail in distress. Their creditors are cruel and humiliate them, while local troops demand provisions from them. Each attack is like a sword cutting deep into their flesh. In recent times, all my friends and relatives have had little contact with each other, and the gatherings we used to have, where we would all chat over tea or wine, like the banquet of the Queen Mother of the West at Jade Pond, are no more.²⁷ To the left, right, front and back, our home has been divided amongst several families, and the part in which I myself live is but a tenth of the original house. So the owner has become like a guest. Now, whenever I see the smoke from different chimneys curling together, and hear the crowing of roosters and the barking of dogs²⁸, and see how our home has become a village, I sigh at how different things are now. When Gao Zhao came to

²⁷ In Chinese mythology, the Jade Pond (Yao Chi) was a pond on Mt. Kunlun beside which lived the Queen Mother of the West. The latter was a beautiful immortal who looked like a person, but had a leopard's tail and tiger's teeth, and in ancient times was a symbol of immortality because of the peaches of immortality which grew in her garden. In the *Mu tianzi zhuan* she is said to have drunk with King Mu of the Zhou and sung for him on the banks of the Jade Pond.

²⁸ The allusion is from the *Laozi*: 'Though the adjoining states are within sight of one another, and the sound of dogs barking and cocks crowing in one state can be heard in another, yet the people of one state will grow old and die without having any dealings with those of another.' This translation is taken from D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 142. All Xu means here is that different families are very close together.

visit me, we had a cup of tea standing up in the lane outside, said a few words, and then he left. When you have mortgaged your home to someone else, you cannot regain possession of it till the mortgage period ends. However, when other people's mortgage period has come to an end, they are unable to come up with the money to regain possession, and because the house is as full as a beehive or an ants' nest, all they can do is find a little corner for themselves and live there. Apart from Gao Zhao, none of my other friends have come to see me.

The prices of seafood, firewood and rice are quite low at the moment, but this is really because there is no-one buying them. On the first of this month, 'Xi Shi's tongues' and Han River scallops arrived at the market²⁹ - there were mountains of them, and they were fresh and firm. For thirty dollars you could fill your basket, but when I tried to scrape together enough money from my family, there was nothing the colour of Mt. Shushi to be found.³⁰ On the thirteenth, I pawned some clothes, and so we ate our fill for five or six days. My young sons fought over them, and asked me what they were called, and why they had not seen them for several years. While I was away, they never saw these things, and my family didn't dare buy them. They had too many other things to worry about. I wonder if you can believe these things I am telling you?

What ever you do, you must look after your health, though someone with your strength of will hardly needs to wait to be told. The implications of getting into trouble as a result of one's writings are not as serious now as in times past, but I advise you to burn your inkstone and bury your writing brush, and for the time being be like a bare winter tree, so that the frost and snow

²⁹ Both are seafood delicacies from Fujian. Zhou has entries on both in his *Min xiao ji*. Part of the entry on the Xi Shi's Tongues reads as follows: 'In grading paintings, artists talk of 'inspired works', 'skilled works' and 'sublime works' [it is not clear whether Zhou meant these to be in descending order or not, as the order he uses is not the usual one - *author*]. If we rank the seafoods of Fujian in the same way, Xi Shi's Tongues should be classed as 'inspired', *lifang* (a kind of oyster that grows in clusters) should be classed as 'skilled', and Han River Scallops as 'sublime'. Xi Shi's tongues are outstanding for their colour and flavour, like the flowering crabapple...Han River Scallops are outstanding for their sublime coolness, like plums...' *Min xiao ji, op.cit.*, 2.12a-b. Xi Shi's Tongues are a kind of shellfish.

³⁰ Mt. Shushi was in the north of what is now Yunnan province, probably to the west of modern Zhaotong county, and was famous for the silver that was mined there. Mt. Shushi later became synonymous with silver, and thereby with money.

upon you will remain pure white.³¹ In due course spring will return, bringing with it luxuriant growth and life-giving rain. I will be watching most anxiously to see how things turn out for you.³²

While this letter cannot be dated with absolute certainty because of the vagueness of some of the internal references, it appears to date from the time Zhou was being taken north for the continuation of his trial in Beijing, which means the second half of 1658. The main evidence for this is in the last lines, with the advice that Zhou not do anything to get himself into more trouble, and the assurance that everything will be all right soon. This also recalls the warning given to Zhou earlier by Chen Hongshou mentioned in Chapter Five. The first sentence also implies that Zhou is in some kind of danger, and that he is travelling north (since he is obviously not going in the same direction as Xu).

The most interesting passage as far as our discussion here is concerned is the third paragraph of the translation above. Although Xu's description of his family's plight was probably more or less factual, it is also highly likely that it was a convenient metaphor for the plight of China as a whole. Although the 'violent winds from the sea' probably refers to the attacks by the army of Zheng Chenggong, the rest could be read as a veiled reference to the occupation of China by the alien Manchus. In particular the part leading up to the sentence 'So the owner has become like a guest' hints at the fact that Chinese were now 'guests' in their own country, and the following section describing how people are unable to regain possession of mortgaged property could be seen as carrying a *double entendre*, referring both to the real situation and the inability of Chinese to re-establish native rule.

The final section of the letter, in which Xu exhorts Zhou to stop writing for the time being so as to avoid getting into further trouble, is also significant. Firstly, it is further evidence that Zhou did have a tendency to write things which could have got him into trouble. Secondly, the phrase 'The implications of getting into trouble as a result of one's writings are not as serious now as in times past' would, by 1662, have seemed ironic. If my dating is correct, and this letter was written in about 1658, then the Zhuang Tinglong affair had not yet broken out, so Xu's statement would have

³¹ 'Snow and frost' usually refers to maintaining one's moral purity. In this context, Xu is advising Zhou not to write anything in order to avoid giving his enemies any more material with which to attack him.

³² CDXC, pp. 286-87.

seemed valid enough. However, in 1662 this affair had just come to an end, and repercussions had been felt throughout the southern gentry, so the irony of Xu's comment would not have been lost upon readers of the letter.

The theme of destruction and loss is continued in three letters by Chen Hongxu written after the fall of the Ming. Chen was the son of Chen Daoheng (1568 *jinshi*, d. ca. 1624), who had served as Minister of War in the Southern Capital after 1622, and who was identified with the Donglin faction.³³ Chen Hongxu never passed the Metropolitan Examination, but because of his father's high official post, he was entitled under the *yin* system to be appointed to minor posts. According to Shi Runzhang (1618-1683), Chen initially declined such offers, as he wanted any appointments to be made as a reward for merit, but some high officials were jealous of his talents and frustrated his attempts to advance through the examination system.³⁴ However, when the situation of the dynasty became more desperate, he accepted a post as Subprefectural Magistrate of Jinzhou in modern Hebei. He successfully defended that town from a Manchu attack in 1638, but incurred the wrath of Grand Secretary Liu Yuliang when he refused to allow Liu's troops to billet in the town. It is said that Chen's arrest was ordered, but the people of Jinzhou, grateful for his role in defending their town, offered themselves as ransom, and so he was transferred to a minor post at Huzhou in Zhejiang.³⁵ By nature fiercely upright, he offended powerful local interests when he tried to correct abuses in the town. Shi's account says that he was nevertheless successful in chasing up certain overdue taxes, and was appointed magistrate of Shucheng in Anhui.³⁶ But the frustrations caused his lack of a degree, which was a barrier to him being appointed to the higher posts he desired, led him to return to his home in Xinjian, Jiangxi. For the rest of the Ming dynasty he refused offers of further official postings, and declined to serve the Southern Ming as well. He seems to have taken no part in the fighting in Jiangxi (which continued till 1649), though clearly he was very much affected by it as the letters below reveal. Nevertheless, though his relations with the Ming had not been happy, he remained loyal to that dynasty in principle, and declined several recommendations to serve the Qing.³⁷ In 1653 he was able to build a home by the Zhang River at Nanchang. He spent his remaining years mostly at

³³ *Ming shi*, p. 6275.

³⁴ Shi Runzhang, *Muzhiming* for Chen Hongxu, in GCQX, p. 12,750.

³⁵ QSLZ, p. 5691.

³⁶ Shi Runzhang, *op.cit.*, p. 12,750.

³⁷ QSLZ, p. 5692.

home, where he wrote a number of books, including *A Record of Song Loyalists* (*Song yimin lu*), a book of notes and anecdotes called *Notes on a Cold Night* (*Han ye lu*), and a book on sites in the city of Nanchang called *Famous Sites of the River City* (*Jiang cheng ming ji*), in addition to numerous poems and essays. Loyalist sentiments are dotted throughout his work. He was reputedly poor, but used whatever money he earned as an official to buy books, and had an extensive library. Chen disliked sophistry, and in his essays would make his point directly and clearly, and rarely used satire.³⁸ He drew on the styles of the Song writers Ouyang Xiu and Zeng Gong (1019-1083)³⁹, both from Jiangxi, and was often linked with Xu Shipu, though the two men seem to have been of different temperament.⁴⁰

Jiangxi was particularly badly affected by the fighting of the last years of the Ming and the early Qing. In addition to the usual local bandits, Zhang Xianzhong's rebel army had moved through the area in about 1643 pursued by the Ming general Zuo Liangyu (1599-1645). Further destruction was caused by Zuo's army before it surrendered to the Qing, then by the Qing armies themselves. Jin Shenghuan (d. 1649), a commander who had originally been assigned to assist Zuo's army (now led by his son, Zuo Menggeng, following Liangyu's death), took as much of northern Jiangxi as he could before surrendering to the Qing and thereby giving the Manchus control of much of that province. Later, Ji'an fell, and after some hesitation and a long siege, Ganzhou fell in November 1646. This was apparently the end of organised resistance to the Manchu's in that province, and some areas began to rebuild. However, in February 1648, Jin Shanghuan reverted his allegiance to the Ming because he felt the Qing were not giving him the honours he thought he deserved, and were working to replace his private command with a regular command and bureaucracy. The implications of Jin's reversion were huge, and many officials even in faraway places followed suit, including Fujian, where Zhou Lianggong was at the time. It was an enormous setback for the Qing, but they were able to recover and retake Nanchang, 'long since...reduced to cannibalism'⁴¹, in March 1649, and soon after regained control of the whole province. However, it was quite a few years before the province recovered.⁴²

What Chen did during that time is not known, but it must have been

³⁸ Shi Runzhang, *op.cit.*, p. 12,751, and *QSLZ*, p. 5692.

³⁹ Shi Runzhang, *ibid.*, p. 12,750.

⁴⁰ *QZLZ*, p. 5692.

⁴¹ Struve (1984), *op.cit.*, p. 138.

⁴² This account is based on *ibid.*, pp. 67-8, 98-9, 125-27 and 138, and on the biography of Jin in *ECCP*, pp. 166-67.

a very traumatic time for him, as the letters below indicate. Together these letters are perhaps the most moving account of personal loss in *Chidu xinchao*. I will leave them in the order in which they were put in the collection, but will summarise rather than translate the second one. The first letter is to Zhou Lianggong himself.

I have been full of admiration for you for many years. However, now there are armies all over the place, the mountain passes and waterways are all blocked, and every day I worry that that day might be my last. So the affairs of this world I have long put out of my thoughts. The only thing I have fixed in my mind is that if I could see you, sir, even just once, I could then die a thousand times and have no regrets. In the wretchedly poor state I am in now, how could I pack half a month's rice and travel the many hundreds of miles to pay my humble respects to Your Honour in person, and thus fulfil a desire I have long held! I am reminded that in ancient times when two worthy men were friends but had no opportunity to meet face-to-face, they would entrust their thoughts to a foot of silk [i.e. a letter], and by sending it to their faraway friend, would thereby express the sincere feelings that linger in their hearts. However, you, Sir, now hold a post of the greatest importance in the military, so how could you be expected to find the time to write a few words to someone you have never met. And how could I, as a down-and-out person of no consequence, breach the rules of propriety by imposing myself upon you, and thereafter have a reputation as the most despicable kind of person.

Then your letter appeared as from the heavens. I read it over and over again without tiring. Every line was full of expressions of the purest friendship. How deep was your sincerity and admiration towards me, a person of such insignificance living out in the wilds. I am not made of wood or stone, so how could I not be moved to tears, and how could I ever thank you enough!

[In the next section, Chen discusses the difficulty of writing and mastering the principles of the classical prose style, and how fate and history can decide which writers' names will be passed down to posterity and whose will not. He then talks about a number of Jiangxi writers who he thinks deserve wider

recognition, including Ai Nanying, Xu Shipu, Chen Yunheng, Kang Fansheng and a few other now obscure names.] Now some of them are still alive, and some are dead. The dead have disappeared into the desolate mists, while the living are spread all over the place like willow catkins in the wind or duckweed drifting down a river, so there is no way that their works can be found to send to you. The original editions of Wan Shihua and Guo Yunsheng's works have long been reduced to ashes⁴³, and Shu Zhongdang's *Hesai xuan gao* is also no longer to be found.⁴⁴ I also heard that the essays which Zeng Yu had kept at home were thrown into a muddy ditch by bandits; I don't know whether the essays of Su Huan have survived or not. Those of our esteemed friends who were fortunate enough to pass away earlier on have been spared the pain of watching their works being destroyed and dispersed in the savage wars of the last decade or so, so that all that is left is a few scraps and little else. Such destruction is tantamount to their very persons being slaughtered in the flames of war.

Recently the situation has improved a little, and the roads are slowly being opened up, so I am taking up my brush and paper and writing to bibliophiles everywhere, in the hope that they can copy out the works they have and send them to me as soon as possible, though of course I can impose no deadline...

This letter appears to have been written in the lull between the initial Qing conquest of northern Jiangxi following the submission of Jin Shenghuan in 1646, and Jin's reversion of allegiance to the Ming in 1648. It clearly reflects the widespread destruction that occurred in Jiangxi at the time, and Chen's concern that efforts be made to save whatever works of merit could still be found, particularly those by writers from his home province.

The theme of preservation is continued in the next letter, to Huang Yuji, the owner of the huge private library in Nanjing mentioned earlier. Chen begins by commenting that since 1644, he and Huang have rarely seen each other. He then emphasises how important it is to collect rare books during times of dynastic change, and cites a number of examples from the

⁴³ Guo Yunsheng was a native of Xincheng in Jiangxi, and a member of the Fushe. Nothing else is known about him. See *Fushe xingshi zhuanlüe*, 6.18b.

⁴⁴ Shu Zhongdang was a native of Jinxian in Jiangxi, and passed the Provincial Examinations in 1630. *MSJS*, p. 3383. He might have died fighting the Qing.

Han to the Song in support of his argument. He mentions how Qian Qianyi's library was 'the best in the southeast, but was recently burnt to ashes', and points out how many books that were thought to have disappeared were later discovered in wells, walls, graves and so on even centuries later. In view of this, any effort to preserve and print rare books is to be encouraged, as this will increase the chance of the book surviving the vicissitudes of time.⁴⁵

The fire in Qian Qianyi's library occurred in 1650 (it was in fact only partly destroyed), so the letter must date from 1650 or 1651. The third letter in the series seems to date from about 1651, perhaps being written shortly after the letter to Huang. Following on from the first two letters, where he talked about the preservation of literary works in times of upheaval, and mentioned the destruction of others' libraries, the tragedy of what happened to Chen as described by him in the third is particularly poignant.

During the battles of 1648⁴⁶, as I went into hiding deep in the mountains west of here, I injured my arm on a rock.⁴⁷ Now every time that wound aches, a writing-brush begins to look like a long, heavy lance. Your Honour has been very kind to me, and it pains me greatly that I have failed to write even a scrappy letter to express my sincere gratitude. However, on this clear and quiet night, feelings of guilt have finally overwhelmed me, so nursing my pain I am writing this to you. I have read your excellent poems and found they have a rare elegance, with all the outstanding qualities of the verse of Wang Wei and Du Fu, such as has not been seen for several centuries. I wish I could lay out your works, which I treasure, and study them daily whether sitting up or lying down. In that way I might be able to benefit a little from your genius, which I look up to as my ultimate inspiration.

When I came to the mountains in 1645, I carted many hundreds of books from my library with me. But when the cavalry came and set up camp by the river which runs past my little home, they took away every scrap of food and every thread of cloth. My books were cut and torn up and used to make

⁴⁵ CDXC, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁶ That is, when Jin Shenghuan changed his allegiance back to the Ming.

⁴⁷ At the time Chen was living in retirement in his home town of Xinjian, near Nanchang, where he had been since leaving the last post he held under the Ming.

thousands of little plates of paper armour, streaked with red and black ink, which were then laid over the backs of mules. The left-over scraps became stuffing for pillows or matting to be trampled on. Thousands of volumes were thus destroyed overnight. Amongst these books was one entitled *A Classified Collection of Ming Prose*. For thirty years I had been gathering material all over the land, and had managed to gather just about everything into this collection. It was of similar size to *Wenyuan yinghua*.⁴⁸ Now it has been thrown into river.

I have also compiled a collection of annotations of the Confucian classics, leaving aside the authoritative commentaries. This volume is the result of an extensive search through the whole range of scholarly writings, including the collected prose of individuals, the sayings of famous people, reference books, miscellanies and notebooks, works of history and biography, and explications of the classics which have not yet been included in any similar work. To the *Book of Changes* I appended a section on methods of divination, while to the *Book of Odes* I added textual notes on the birds, animals, shrubs and trees. To the *Spring and Autumn Annals* I have appended different textual variations, such as the alternative reading of *Yan* as *Wu* in Lu Chun's edition⁴⁹, and Mr. Cui as Cui Yao in the engraved Tang edition.⁵⁰ I had also added some previously overlooked works on the *Book of Rites*, such as Wang Kekuan's *Addenda to the Book of Rites*, which in my opinion has a number of worthwhile insights, and my discussion of them was attached.⁵¹ Now all that is left is the *Appendix to the Book of Changes* in four volumes, and even there the section entitled *Xi ci* is missing. However, there is still much worth studying in these four volumes. I hope that you might agree to a request to write a few words by way of a preface for this book so that it might win immortality. I am informing

⁴⁸ An imperially sponsored collection of literary works covering the period from the Liang dynasty to the end of the Tang, in 1,000 chapters, completed in 986 A.D.

⁴⁹ Lu Chun (d. 806) was a specialist on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

⁵⁰ The 'engraved Tang edition' refers to the engraving of the Confucian classics on to stone tablets under the auspices of the Tang imperial house with the aim of preserving the most authoritative version of the classics available at the time. The classics were first engraved on stone in 175 A.D. during the Han dynasty, and it was done another six times during Chinese imperial history. Today only the Tang (837) and Qing (18th century) engraved canons survive in full.

⁵¹ The text gives the author's name as Wang Kuan, but this is certainly erroneous. Wang Kekuan lived during the Yuan dynasty.

you of this intention in advance, and hope that at some time in the future I will be able to make the journey to present my request humbly in person. I also have a few works of my own of various sorts, but since all the upheavals began, I have had enough trouble feeding myself, let alone finding someone to correct and print those works. How deep are our sorrows!

Wu Fei has already joined our ancestors, the news of which brought me to tears. Fang Yizhi has disappeared without trace, so I continually worry about his well-being, and I don't know whether Su Huan is still alive or not. There has been no news of him either.

There is still occasional fighting in the Shaowu⁵² area and the roads are cut, so I shall wait until the situation has settled a little, then try to pay you a visit to express my boundless gratitude.⁵³

Perhaps this last letter is the most interesting of the three, not the least because it contains an account of the destruction of his own library. Of course it is not possible to be certain whose army it was that inflicted the damage. It has been suggested to me that they were Qing troops, on the grounds that the cavalry was so prominent in the Qing army.⁵⁴ If they were Qing troops, and presuming Zhou knew it, then we are presented with a very interesting situation, as we have a loyalist describing the destruction of his library (which included the works Chen had collected for his *Classified Collection of Ming Prose*) by the army of an alien regime to a collaborating Qing official involved in mopping up resistance to the new dynasty. One would then begin to wonder if the destruction of the Ming prose collection was meant as an analogy with the political situation. Furthermore, Zhou's inclusion of the letter in *Chidu xinchao* would then seem to be brave, and gives further credence to the possibility that one motivation for compiling this collection was to hint at a continuing, or new-found, loyalty to the fallen Ming dynasty on Zhou's part. However, the evidence is certainly not conclusive.

⁵² The text reads Zhaowu, but this does not seem to make sense. Zhou was in Shaowu, Fujian, in 1647-48 fighting rebels, and returned there from Fuzhou to quell another rebellion in 1651, possibly the year in which this letter was written.

⁵³ CDXC, pp. 81-2. The translation of this letter has been published in *Renditions* (Spring and Autumn 1994), pp. 98-101. I have made some minor changes.

⁵⁴ I am grateful to the late Professor Zhao Qiping of Peking University for his comments on this question.

Nevertheless, even if the troops were part of the born-again loyalist army under Jin Shenghuan, the letter still exemplifies the urgency felt by scholars of the time to preserve as much as possible from the fallen Ming dynasty. It seems quite possible that the reference to the *Collection of Ming Prose* which Chen had been compiling was meant to be symbolic as well as a description of what happened. The mention of Wu Fei, Fang Yizhi and Su Huan was in the main just the passing on of news about old friends, but as far as I have been able to establish, none of them collaborated with the Qing, but either died fighting the invaders, or went into hiding. We cannot know if any hidden meaning was intended, but references such as these would have served as gentle reminders of times that by the early 1660's were recognised as belonging firmly in the past. Thus the emphasis on gathering and preserving examples of the achievements of the culture of the dynasty to which Chen was still loyal, even though he chose not to fight for it.

Chen's letters are not an isolated instance of this in *Chidu xinchao*. Chen Xiaoyi was the younger of the two sons of Chen Jitai (1567-1641), the elder son being Chen Xiaowei. All are represented in *Chidu xinchao*. Chen Jitai, from Linchuan, was associated with Ai Nanying, and was considered one of the best exponents of the eight-legged essay style in the empire. However, he was a Donglin member, and it is probably this factor that prevented him passing the Metropolitan Examinations till he was sixty-eight years old (1634). Zhou Lianggong has included part of the letter he wrote to his sons upon this occasion.⁵⁵ He served as a Messenger for four years, and died at the age of seventy-four. He was also a member of the Fushe. Little is known about the sons, except that they followed in their father's footsteps in their prose style, and there is evidence that Xiaowei served as a Censor in the early years of the Yongli court of the Southern Ming (1647-1661).⁵⁶

The short letter below, written to the essayist Wang Youding, is mostly on literary matters, but Chen's feelings as he looks at what has happened over the previous few years are also clearly reflected in the opening lines:

My father and my friends are all dead. So when you
unexpectedly appeared, I knew that there was still a paragon from

⁵⁵ See CDXC, p. 62. The full letter is in his collected works, *Yiwu ji*, 13.19a. A margin note on CDXCwb 3.12b says that Chen Jitai's works were collected by Chen Xiaoyi and were thus passed down to posterity.

⁵⁶ See MSJS, p. 3221.

the past among us. Since we last saw each other, I dared not think of you too often, and when I thought of you, I could not but think of Du Jun too. When I think how there are at least a couple of outstanding men who have stood tall through the earthshaking events that have surrounded the change of dynasties, I am greatly comforted...⁵⁷

This letter was probably included in part as a way of paying indirect compliments to Wang and Du Jun, who were both good friends of Zhou as well. However, the sense of a past destroyed, of a few people surviving a catastrophe in which many outstanding scholars have died, is clearly present in these lines, and in the collection as a whole.

The same concern for the preservation and publication of the works of Ming writers can be seen in a fine letter by Wang Shizhen (the Qing poet) to Cheng Kangzhuang, a native of Wuxiang in Shanxi and himself a minor poet. Cheng was Assistant Prefect in Zhenjiang at the time Wang was serving in Yangzhou, and according to Wu Weiye, the two men were close friends and often exchanged letters and poetry.⁵⁸ Although there is evidence that Wang lamented the fall of the Ming dynasty (though he was only ten years old in 1644)⁵⁹, this letter cannot be construed to have loyalist meanings: it is simply a record of how Wang, an enthusiastic bibliophile, wished to preserve the works of an old scholar. However, for Zhou Lianggong it would have echoed his own concern that works by Ming scholars be published in order to preserve the memory of the fallen dynasty.

Mr. Lin Gudu is now eighty-four years old. He is one of the grand old men of the literary world, and with his fine achievements he stands out like a beacon on a towering mountain. I saw him a while ago, and asked what had happened to his works. They are all stored at Mount Ru in Lishui county. Since a collection of his poetry was published in 1604, Mr. Lin has been very poor, and has not the resources to publish any more of his works. Even if he did find a way, the number of copies would be so small that they would soon disappear into oblivion anyway.

⁵⁷ CDXC, p. 67.

⁵⁸ Wu Weiye, *Wu Meicun quanji*, *op. cit.*, 'Preface to the Collected Prose of Cheng Kangzhuang', pp. 682-83.

⁵⁹ The main evidence for this is a poem Wang wrote in 1657 entitled 'Willows in Autumn' about which 'annotators seem to agree that the author's "distant" intention was to lament the fall of the Ming Court at Nanking in 1645'. See *ECCP*, pp. 832-33.

Young scholars these days try to show off their talent and learning, sobbing and weeping themselves hoarse in poem after poem, which they then have printed in volume after volume and distributed all over the capital. This venerable gentleman, on the other hand, has enjoyed an outstanding reputation for seventy years, but it seems he might be unable to pass on a single word to posterity. This would be a great pity!

I intend first to make a list of his recent works, then compile a collection of his works by finding some people willing to edit a chapter each. Stone by stone we will create a mountain, and stitch by stitch we will sew a fine gown. These are fine words, but I fear that the number of people willing to help will be few indeed.⁶⁰

There is nothing very original in the content of this letter, though the contrast between Lin's situation, which prevents him from publishing his works of great value, and the younger scholars, who have the resources to publish their works but whose works are insincere and inconsequential, is used by Wang to good effect. The final comment, that it will be difficult to find people willing to assist in the work of compiling this worthy man's opus, is in itself unremarkable, but following on from the previous paragraph, it adds a poignant touch as it reinforces the idea that by the time Wang was writing, people seemed to have little respect for the established, genuinely talented writers of the older generation who learned their skills under the Ming.

The most common feature of the letters discussed in this chapter is a strong sense of loss and of the urgent need to preserve as much of the glory of Ming culture as possible. This could be viewed just as an expression of nostalgia, but when the letters which appear to express discontent with Manchu rule are taken into account, it becomes possible to view *Chidu xinchao* in part as an attempt by Zhou Lianggong to make a statement to the effect that although he had served the alien régime, he was still firmly committed to the ideal of native rule, and to the preservation of Ming culture in the face of 'barbarian' conquest. His gathering together of so many examples of late Ming *chidu*-writing was in itself an act of preservation and commemoration, and his intentions in this respect were made clearer by his

⁶⁰ CDXC, p. 28.

inclusion of letters which put forward his arguments without him having to write them himself. In the same way, it is difficult to imagine that Zhou could have composed a piece of formal prose defending his integrity in the wake of his trial, but by compiling this collection of letters, he was able to use the writings of others to argue his own case.

Although I believe the examples presented in these last two chapters demonstrate convincingly that Zhou used the collection for the ends which I have described, it is not possible to tell whether he would have begun the collection with this in mind. Zhou has not told us how he became interested in *chidu*, though the letter he wrote to Zhang Yi translated in Chapter Five suggests it was basically a kind of hobby. Most probably his interest grew during the period he was in prison, and the non-legitimate nature of the genre appealed to someone who was suffering at the hands of legitimated power. Then, as he gathered letters for the collection, he would have naturally been drawn to those letters which reflected his own ideas. Most of the themes which can be identified as a result of this, such as Zhou's views on literature and painting, are to be expected in such a collection. However, Zhou's position as a collaborator with strong sympathies for the loyalist ideal, and as a man who viewed himself as an upright Confucian whose integrity had unfairly been brought under question, meant that he was likely to pay special attention to letters which expressed his own ideas in regard to these problems. And a *chidu* collection, regarded by most as a form of entertainment (whatever pedigrees might have been assigned to the genre by compilers and preface-writers), by its very nature was ideal for his purposes. Of course Zhou could have chosen to present his arguments through the works of others in other genres, but most other genres would have carried too much ideological weight for them to be suitable. *Chidu*, on the other hand, were sufficiently marginal as a genre that they could serve as an ideal vehicle for the expression of ideas whose expression in canonical genres would have been difficult, if not impossible, in the political context of the time.

Conclusion

The picture of *chidu* which emerges through this study is one of a genre which was never well defined and which never attained a place amongst the canonical genres. Although there is some evidence that *chidu* might have existed as a distinct genre from the *shu* as early as the Han dynasty, we have no certain indication of what this genre might have been like, and it is entirely possible that *chidu* did not exist as a distinct genre at all before the Song. Even when *chidu* did clearly emerge as a separate genre during the Northern Song, it did so erratically, and recognition of it was not universal. It is not even very clear why it emerged at that time and in the way it did. Although we do not have *chidu* from many Song writers, we can presume that since the writers whose *chidu* we do have wrote to many people, those people wrote back, and we can therefore presume that the writing of *chidu* amongst the literati was common. Yet before the appearance of Fan Zhongyan's *chidu*, there is little evidence as to how this practice developed. In the letters of Sun Di, we have clearer evidence that *chidu* were beginning to be cultivated as literature and appreciated for literary qualities. But then just as the genre seemed to be taking its place firmly amongst the genres which were commonly published, interest in the genre apparently dried up after the fall of the Song, and there ensued a gap of three centuries during which few new anthologies were published. We know from some of the collections of *chidu* from ancient times up until the Ming that early Ming writers did write *chidu*, but there seems to have been little interest in cultivating or anthologising in the genre. Thus the status of *chidu* remained at best uncertain.

Wang Shizhen's expanded versions of Yang Shen's *Chidu qingcai* heralded renewed interest in *chidu*, and from then till the end of the seventeenth century the *chidu* genre enjoyed the period of its greatest popularity (though *chidu* would continue to be written into the twentieth century). However, although the collections which have come down to us suggest that most writers at the time understood *chidu* as a type of short, informal letter, there remained a great deal of inconsistency in the types of letters that fell under the rubric of *chidu*. A number of compilers continued to include longer, formal letters in the collections of *chidu* they published, and those who wrote on the genre did little to define the genre in a rigorous

way. Zhou Lianggong was of course a good example of this.

Perhaps more importantly, the comparative popularity of the genre did not relieve its aficionados of an uneasiness about its status. Though - and there is no clear evidence for this - most of those who read *chidu* for pleasure did not really care about the pedigree of *chidu*, it was a problem which vexed some of the compilers, particularly of avowedly more 'serious' collections. They seem to have felt some insecurity about working with a genre for which an unassailable classical pedigree did not exist, fearing that they lay open to charges of frivolousness. We will remember that Pan Lei, in the preface we discussed in Chapter Four, says that he had to do some research before writing the preface, which suggests that scholars were not as versed in the development of the *chidu* genre as they were in the canonical genres. Therefore the compilers and their preface-writers set about constructing a pedigree. Their most common point of reference was Liu Xie's essay on epistolary writing in *Wenxin diaolong*. However, this was problematic on at least two levels. Firstly, the *Wenxin diaolong* essay was on all types of letters, and although the word *chidu* appears once, its use seems to have been merely as a synecdoche. In other words, Liu Xie's essay was not about *chidu* at all. Secondly, even if we were to accept that Liu's essay was relevant to a discussion of the history of *chidu*, the essay contains crucial flaws. His assertions about the function of the genre were highly questionable, and the genealogy he traces is forced, with links being made between essentially different types of writing, and statements being made when Liu obviously had little evidence upon which to base them. It is difficult to tell just how much those who wrote on *chidu* in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries truly believed in the pedigrees they established based on Liu's work, as well as the links they forged between *chidu* and Confucius and other historical figures, but this study demonstrates that what they were in fact doing was to try to assert the genre's respectability, and thereby providing themselves with a shield from accusations of lack of scholarly seriousness in showing so much interest in a non-canonical 'minor' genre. In my opinion, the kind of statements the compilers and preface writers made about the function of *chidu* - especially those about how morally uplifting the genre was - were another element in this campaign to assert the legitimacy of the genre; I doubt such ideals were very much in the compilers' minds as they chose *chidu* to be included in their anthologies.

In fact, as I have shown, it was precisely because *chidu* did not have a

classical pedigree, with accompanying baggage of models, rules and authoritative pronouncements, that writers looking for a space in which to give more rein to their literary skills and wit turned to it. Of course writers could not throw off all, or even most, or the shackles of their literary training and social environment, so their attempts at self expression were to a large extent limited. For this reason, the selves they present in their letters often appear to be no more than constructs, usually conforming to one of the character types into which Chinese biographical tradition divided people. A man might present a romantic image of himself as living outside the 'rat-race' of government service, but the image he projected was almost always one based on traditional notions of what an eremite scholar should be like. Furthermore, he could present such an image in other genres. Thus it was not usually the subject of *chidu* that was different from most other genres, but the way in which it was written. Clearly an admired trait in a *chidu*-writer was to be able to present an idea or an argument in just a few lines, and to deliver it effectively. This required the writer to draw upon his resources of literary invention and wit in ways not commonly used in other genres, and it is this which seems to have attracted them.

Of course *chidu* were supposedly a form of personal letter between friends, and because the genre had not developed into a public one as the *shu* had, we would expect to find writers presenting themselves in a less guarded manner, writing more about the details of everyday lives. However, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Six, this was in fact rarely the case, at least in the letters collected into *Chidu xinchao*. The evidence presented in this collection suggests that few if any writers wrote *chidu* in the manner of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, whose letters mostly dealt with practical matters and fulfilled social obligations, despite the fact that Su and Huang were seen as paragons of *chidu*-writing.

In fact, *Chidu xinchao* leaves us in little doubt that many writers actively cultivated a *chidu* style, as they did for other genres. Although writers about *chidu* claimed that *chidu* were supposed to be the result of a mere flurry of the writing-brush, most of the examples in *Chidu xinchao* are too obviously crafted to be convincing in their spontaneity. This does not mean that they are not charming, witty and often insightful, but they are often nevertheless produced very deliberately. Even in those letters in which the author presents a more authentically intimate picture of himself and his social circle, he is still unable to resist using clever metaphors or allusions, and the letters tend to be structured in a way that highlights these

features. Therefore we must conclude that although writers did exploit the stylistic and expressive possibilities that *chidu* as a relatively minor genre without a clearly defined history offered, their literary training was always going to keep their literary experimentation within certain bounds, and Confucian society in which they lived would ensure that there was a limit to how much of their intimate selves they would actually reveal in their letters.

However, we have also seen how the relatively minor status of the genre made it amenable to the expression of ideas which could not easily be dealt with in formal genres. *Chidu* seem to have attracted scholars who had either never taken up official positions, or who had suffered setbacks in their official careers. Again the attraction seems to have been the non-canonical status of the genre - the fact that it was not a legitimated part of the life of an official. This in itself offered writers a degree of freedom. In this thesis we have looked at this in terms of Zhou Lianggong's using *Chidu xinchao* to protest his own integrity and innocence of the charges with which he was accused, and to express his feelings about the fall of the Ming dynasty. Some writers used the genre to describe their sadness at the fall of the Ming and subsequent alien rule, though it would require a study of much broader range of *chidu* from the period to establish just how widespread this was. However, there is strong evidence that Zhou Lianggong found other people's *chidu* an excellent vehicle for the expression of his own reaction to the fall of the Ming. Ideas expressed in *chidu* did not carry the weight of those expressed in canonical genres, and because they were written by other people, Zhou was a further degree removed from their contents. And since letters on delicate issues were sprinkled amongst many letters on a range of harmless topics, Zhou was able to deliver his message even more subtly.

While in this study I have attempted to provide answers some basic questions about the *chidu* genre. and particularly writers' understanding and practice of it in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it will also have become obvious that there is still much room for further research in the genre at all stages of its development. Among the most notable are the questions of where the *chidu* written by Fan Zhongyan, Su Shi and others developed from, why *chidu* were not widely cultivated during the early and mid Ming (if indeed that was the case), and precisely why there was a revival of interest in the genre when there was. We could also look at the question of whether writers deliberately wrote *chidu* with publication in

mind, especially through comparing letters which were published in collections with those that weren't. There is also potential for interesting research in the collections of model letters, as those could tell us a great deal about the social function of *chidu* among other things. Although I have made some suggestions in regard to some of these questions, it is clearly impossible to answer them in a single study. Here I hope to have made a start in understanding this complex genre.

Glossary

This glossary gives the Chinese characters for all the names and terms found in the text of this thesis apart from those which can be found in the bibliography. Common place names and the names of people of whom only the *zi* (字 or style) is known have been omitted.

An Lushan	安祿山
Beigong Wenzhi	北宮文子
Bi Duomin	畢鐸民
<i>bian wen</i>	便文
<i>biao</i>	表
Biji (Mt.)	碧雞山
<i>bizha</i>	筆札
<i>Boxue hongci</i>	博學鴻辭
<i>bu fu yi yi</i>	不復一一
<i>bu ju yi yi</i>	不具一一
<i>bu xuan</i>	不宣
Cai Yong	蔡邕
<i>Cangju ji</i>	藏集
Cao Cao	曹操
Cao Erkan	曹爾堪
Cao Jingcan	曹景參
Cao Pi	曹丕
Changshu	常熟
Changzhou	常州
Chanyu	單于
Che Ruoshui	車若水

Chen Bozhi	陳伯之
Chen Daoheng	陳道亨
Chen Hongshou	陳洪綬
Chen Hongxu	陳弘緒
Chen Jiru	陳繼儒
Chen Kan	陳衍
Chen Mingxia	陳名夏
Chen Qiyu	陳奇瑜
Chen Run	陳潤
Chen Xianzhang	陳獻章
Chen Xiaowei	陳孝威
Chen Xiaoyi	陳孝逸
Chen Yunheng	陳允衡
Chen Zun	陳遵
Cheng Jiming	成基命
Cheng Kangzhuang	程康莊
<i>chi</i>	尺
<i>chidu</i>	尺牘
<i>chisu</i>	尺素
<i>Chongbian Dongpo xiansheng waiji</i>	重編東坡先生外集
Chunyu Yi (Cang Gong)	淳于意 (倉公)
<i>ci</i>	辭
<i>ci da</i>	辭達
<i>ciling</i>	辭令
<i>ciming</i>	辭命
Cui Chengxiu	崔呈秀

Cui Qun	崔群
Cui Yao	崔夭
Cui Yuan (Ts'ui Yuan)	崔瑗
<i>cun</i>	寸
Daxing	大興
Desheng Gate	德勝門
Dezhou	德州
<i>Dian Lüe</i>	典略
Diancang (Mountains)	點蒼山
Diao Xie	刁協
Dongfang Shuo	東方朔
Donglin	東林
<i>Dongpo xiansheng hanmo chidu</i>	東坡先生翰墨尺牘
Dongtao	東陶
<i>du</i>	牘
Du Fu	杜甫
Du Jun	杜濬
Duke Wen of Lu	魯文公
Duke Xiang of Lu	魯襄公
Dunhuang	敦煌
Duo Tong	多同
<i>Emperor Fuxi</i>	皇羲篇
Emperor Wen of the Western Han (Han Wendi)	漢文帝
Ennin	仁
<i>fan li</i>	範例
Fan Xuanzi (Shi Gai)	范宣子 (士)

Fang Yizhi	方以智
<i>Fayan</i>	法言
Feng Su	馮宿
Fengyang	鳳陽
<i>fu</i>	符
Fu she (Restoration Society)	復社
Fu she (Trust Society)	孚社
Ganzhou (Gansu)	甘州
Ganzhou (Jiangxi)	贛州
Gao Fu	高阜
Gao Panlong	高攀龍
Gao Zhao	高兆
Gaozuo Temple	高座寺
Gengnan	廣南
Gong Dingzi	龔鼎
Gong Xian	龔賢
Gongan	公安
Gongsun Hong	公孫弘
Gongsun Hui	公孫揮
Gongsun Qiao (Zichan)	公孫僑 (子產)
Guangxin	廣信
Gui Fu	桂馥
Gui Youguang	歸有光
Guo Yunsheng	過雲生
<i>Haishan xianguan congshu</i>	海山仙館叢書
Han Qi	韓琦

Han Yu	韓愈
Hou Fangyu	侯方域
Hou Xun	侯恂
Houguan	侯官
Hu Jie	胡介
Hu Shouheng	胡守恆
Hu Yuan	胡瑗
Hu Yukun	胡玉昆
Huai'an	淮安
Huai-Yang	淮揚
Huan Xuan	桓玄
Huang Jing	黃經
Huang Juzhong	黃居中
Huang Yuji	黃虞稷
Huang Zu	黃祖
Huangzhou	黃州
Hui Spring	惠泉
Huizhou	徽州
Huzhou	湖州
Ji Fan	嵇蕃
Ji Kang (Xi Kang, Hsi Kang)	嵇康
Ji Yingzhong	紀映鍾
Ji Yongren	嵇永仁
Ji'an	吉安
<i>jian</i>	牋
Jian'an (Chien-an)	建安

Jiang Bin	蔣玠
Jiangnan	江南
Jiangxia	江夏
Jiao Hong	焦竑
<i>Jiaoqi ji</i>	腳氣集
<i>jiashu</i>	家書
<i>Jielin ji</i>	結鄰集
Jin Renrui (Jin Shengtān)	金人瑞 (金聖歎)
Jin Shenghuan	金聲桓
Jinjiang	晉江
Jinma (Mt.)	金馬山
<i>jinshi</i>	進士
Jiuyi (Mt.)	九疑山
Jizhou	稽粥
<i>kaishu</i>	楷書
Kang Fansheng	康范生
Kang Piyang	康丕揚
Kangxi	康熙
King Mu of the Zhou	周穆王
<i>Kong Congzi</i>	孔叢子
Kong Rong	孔融
Kong Zhigui	孔稚圭
<i>kuai</i> (hexagram)	夬
Kunlun (Mt.)	崑崙山
Lake Er	洱海
<i>leishu</i>	類書

<i>li bu yi yi</i>	力不一一
Li Ling	李陵
Li Panlong	李攀龍
Li Shihong	黎士弘
Li Zhi	李贄
Li Zicheng	李自成
Lian Guoshi	練國事
Liaodong	遼東
<i>lifang</i>	礪房
Lin Gudu	林古度
Lin Sihuan	林嗣環
Linqing	臨清
Linxiang	臨湘
Lishui	溧水
Liu Muzhi	劉穆之
Liu Qianfu	劉潛夫
Liu Rongsi	劉榮嗣
Liu Ruyi	李如一
Liu Wei	劉隗
Liu Xiang	劉向
Liu Xin	劉歆
Liu Xiu (Emperor Guangwu of the Han)	劉秀 (漢光武帝)
Liu Yu (Emperor Wu of the [Liu] Song)	劉裕 (南朝宋武帝)
Liu Yuliang	劉宇亮
Liu Zongzhou	劉宗周
Liu'an	六安

Tang Shisheng	唐時升
<i>Tang Yulin</i>	唐語林
Tao Yuanming (Tao Qian)	陶淵明 (陶潛)
Tianqi (reign)	天啟
<i>Ting Zhai shiyou chidu</i>	艇齋師友尺牘
Tiying	緹縈
Tong Dai	佟岱
Wan Shihua	萬時華
Wan Shouqi	萬壽祺
Wang Can	王粲
Wang Chi	王
Wang Dang	王讜
Wang Dun	王敦
Wang Duo	王鐸
Wang Heng	王衡
Wang Hong	王弘
Wang Ji	汪楫
Wang Kekuan	汪克寬
Wang Ruozhi	王若之
Wang Ruqian	汪汝謙
Wang Shiyun	王士雲
Wang Shouren (Wang Yangming)	王守仁 (王陽明)
Wang Tingdong	王廷棟
Wang Wan	汪琬
Wang Wei	王維
Wang Xizhi	王羲之

Wang Yan'ge	王延閣
Wang Yanwu	王炎午
Wang Yi	汪繹
Wang Youding	王猷定
Wang Yuanheng	王元衡
Wang Zhideng	王稚登
Wangjiang	望江
Wanli	萬曆
Wei (county)	濰
Wei Dazhong	魏大中
Wei Xi	魏禧
Wei Zhongxian	魏忠賢
Wen Tianxiang	文天祥
Wen Tiren	溫體仁
Weng Fanggang	翁方綱
<i>Wenyuan yinghua</i>	文淵英華
<i>wo yu ciming, ze bu neng ye</i>	我與辭命，則不能也
<i>wu</i>	鄔
Wu Fei	吳騏
Wu Jin	吳晉
<i>wu liao zhi qi</i>	無聊之氣
Wu Qi	吳綺
Wu Sangui	吳三桂
<i>Wu za zu</i>	五雜俎
Wu Zhi	吳質
Wu Zongxin	吳宗信

Yuan Chonghuan	袁崇煥
Yuan Zhen	元稹
<i>Yulin</i>	語林
Yushan	玉山
Yuyang	漁陽
<i>zai jian</i>	再見
<i>zatie</i>	雜帖
Zeng Gong	曾鞏
Zeng Jili	曾季狸
Zeng Yizhuan	曾異撰
Zezhou	澤州
Zha Creek	雪溪
Zhang Bisun	張賁孫
Zhang Fengyi	張鳳翼
Zhang Guotai	張國泰
Zhang Juzheng	張居正
Zhang Lie	張烈
Zhang Minbiao	張民表
Zhang Xianzhong	張獻忠
Zhang Yi (Zhang Luzheng)	張怡 (張鹿徵)
Zhang Yihu	張一鶴
<i>zhaodui</i>	召對
Zhao Nanxing	趙南星
Zhao Zhi	趙至
Zhaotong	昭通
Zhaowu	昭武

Zhending	真定
Zheng Chenggong	鄭成功
Zhi Dalun	支大綸
Zhou Bida	周必大
Zhou Wenwei	周文燁
Zhou Yin (Zhou Lianggong)	周
Zhou Yong	周顥
Zhou Zaijun	周在浚
Zhu Fu	朱浮
Zhu Guoxiang	朱國相
Zhu Lingshi	朱齡石
Zhu Xi	朱熹
Zhu Yizun	朱彝尊
Zhu Youjian	朱由檢
Zhu Yuanzhang	朱元璋
Zhu Yun	朱筠
Zhuang Jiao	莊躋
Zhuang Tinglong	莊廷鑑
Zhuji	諸暨
Zhuo Fazhi	卓發之
Zhuo Renyue	卓人月
<i>zou</i>	奏
Zuo Liangyu	左良玉
<i>Zuo zhuan</i>	左傳

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