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SOUNDING AWRY: UNUSUAL VOICES AND THE PROBLEM OF SPEECH IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE LITERATURE

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YIREN ZHENG

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

ABSTRACT vii

INTRODUCTION 1

An Archive of Voices 9

The Problem of *Yan* 12

Resonance across Time 14

1. IMPOSSIBLE ECHO: WHISTLING REINVENTED 23

Poetry without Words 29

Repositioning Whistling in Relation to Speech 45

Integrating Whistling with Poetics 56

Singing as Whistling 63

Whistling as the Voice of a Ming Loyalist 76

Conclusion: Echoing as a Process of Unexpected Transformation 84

2. VOICE GONE AWRY: LISTENING TO *KOUJI* 88

A Voice that Sounds Strange 92

An Acoustic Mirror: Storytelling as *Kouji* 100

Hearing the Cat in the Dark 106

The Master's Voice 115

The Acousmêtre Behind the Text 122

Conclusion 135

3. HEARING BIRDS SPEAK 136

Talking Birds and Literary Anthropocentrism 142

Speech Concealed in Birds 147

The Unruly Voices of Talking Birds 162

Avian Narrators 172

The Two Sides of an Avian Voice 181

Conclusion 186

CODA 189

BIBLIOGRAPHY 201

APPENDIX I: TRANSLATION OF PAN ZHIHENG'S "SU THE TONGUEMASTER" 蘇舌師 212

APPENDIX II: TRANSLATION OF PAN ZHIHENG'S "DAOIST MA'S MUSIC OF THE HANDS" 馬手樂 214

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uncovers an alternative theory of the human voice that decenters speech in premodern Chinese literature from the third to the seventeenth centuries. Through an examination of records of reportage, anecdotes, tales, biographies, poetry, and commentary, all centering on three types of unusual voices—whistling (*xiao* 嘯), a kind of sonic storytelling called *kouji* 口技 (vocal virtuosity), and bird speech (*qinyan* 禽言), I show that these voices create surprising connections among the human vocal apparatus, the body, and language and challenge normative accounts of the human voice from the past as well as in the present. Each of these voices resembles a type of speech mediated by a vocal apparatus—for example, poetry (which was often orally composed), regular storytelling, or human conversation—while destabilizing an aspect of the signifying process essential to speech. Whistling animates a poetic voice without the form of poetry or words, *kouji* puts speech and mere sound on an equal footing, and articulate speech produced by chirping, calling, and talking birds demonstrates a misalignment between the interiority and the exteriority of a speaking voice. I use literary texts from the seventeenth century as a focal point for trans-historical resonances between authors and ideas from different periods in the Chinese history as well as between premodern Chinese theories of the voice and their modern counterparts shaped by Euro-American contexts. Taken as a whole, these unlikely dialogues invite us to reconsider what it means to have a human voice at all.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation reveals many creative responses produced by premodern Chinese literary authors and theorists to a question that still feels urgent today: What does it mean to have a human voice? Their answers, though not immediately self-evident, serve as the basis for a premodern Chinese theory of the human voice that decenters speech. This theory not only explores the workings of the human vocal apparatus beyond speech but also modifies the notion of authority, authorship, and the autonomy of a speaking subject by reconfiguring the relationship among voice, language, and body. This alternative discourse therefore offers an unusual angle for reconsidering past and present normative accounts of the voice.

"Speech is the heart's sounds, and writing, its images," 言心聲也，書心畫也, says the Western-Han dynasty poet Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) in *Fayan* 法言 (*Exemplary Figures*), an aphoristic text he wrote in an imaginary sage's voice imitating Confucius's in *Lunyu* 論語 (*The Analects*).[1] Yang's words reflect an understanding that *yan* 言, which refers both to words in general and to speech in particular, is the most central means of revealing one's inner thoughts and feelings to someone else—the basis of any kind of sympathetic exchange. The first half of Yang's statement gained traction as a proverbial expression *yan wei xinsheng* (言為心聲), and the term "the sound of

[1] Yang's reason for this statement is laid out as follows: "Nothing is as good as speech for exchanging remarks during face-to-face meetings, expressing the heart's desire or communicating people's pent-up emotions. And nothing compares with writing for fully delineating the affairs of the whole realm, for recording events of the distant past or the remote, for clarifying what has been obscured by the mists of time, or for transmitting the difficult-to-comprehend over thousands of miles" 面相之，辭相適，捨中心之所欲，通諸人之嚘嚘者，莫如言。彌綸天下之事，記久明遠，著古昔之昏昏，傳千裏之恣恣者，莫如書. See Wang Rongbao, *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 160. The translation is from Michael Nylan, *Exemplary Figures* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 77. While the title of Yang's book is more commonly translated in English as *Model Sayings*, Nylan departs from this practice to fully capture the complexity and significance of the book's contribution. See Nylan, xi.

one's heart" (*xinsheng* 心聲) is still widely used today as a synecdoche for poems, letters, diaries, songs and other literary genres perceived as both channels of heartfelt self-expression and as metaphors for the human voice.[2]

Even though *yan* is as ubiquitous as air, the ancient thinker Zhuangzi 莊子 (sometime between the fourth and the second centuries BCE) casts it in an unfamiliar light. In particular, he urges anyone who regards *yan* as the core of a human voice to think twice: Are words really a necessary medium for self-expression and interpersonal exchange? Is the human voice truly distinct from sounds made by nonhuman creatures? Is it possible to produce and transmit meaning without a human vocal apparatus—the site of speech? For Zhuangzi, *yan* is unreliable, as words are susceptible to manipulation and misuse—able to drive a wedge between people and to create false divisions between things, ideas, and fields of knowledge.[3] As a result, he turns to ways of destabilizing *yan* as well as alternatives to it. In "Qiwu lun" 齊物論 ("Discourse on Making All Things Equal"), one of the chapters composed by Zhuangzi himself, he offers a parable that would be influential for centuries to come. A master known as Nanguo Ziqi 南郭子綦 has just begun to meditate, but an unenlightened disciple asks him a question that prompts the master to respond in articulate speech:

> [Ziqi of Nanguo] reclined elbow on armrest, looked up at the sky and exhaled, in a trance as though he had lost the counterpart of himself. [Yancheng Ziyou] stood in waiting before him.
> "What is this?" he said. "Can the frame really be made to be like withered wood, the heart like dead ashes? The reclining man here now is not the reclining man of yesterday."
> "You do well to ask that, [Ziyou]! This time I had lost my own self, did you know it? You hear the [Piping of Man], don't you, but not yet the [Piping of Earth], the [Piping of Earth] but not yet the [Piping of Heaven]?"

[2] For a definition of *xinsheng*, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yuyan yanjiusuo cidian bianji shi, *Xiandai hanyu cidian* 現代漢語詞典 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1996), 1399.
[3] Zhuangzi is especially watchful of the written word. For a discussion of this aspect, see Wendy Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry: Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 11.

"I venture to ask the secret of it."

南郭子綦隱几而坐，仰天而噓，嗒焉似喪其耦。顏成子游立侍乎前，曰："何居乎？形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎？今之隱几者，非昔之隱几者也。"子綦曰："偃，不亦善乎而問之也！今者吾喪我，汝知之乎？女聞人籟而未聞地籟，女聞地籟而未聞天籟夫！"子游曰："敢問其方。"[4]

Speaking through the persona of the master Ziqi, Zhuangzi has to teach his own lesson verbally even though his purpose is to demonstrate how to break free from the bounds of words and to expand the communicative capability of the human voice. He proposes a potent alternative in the Three Pipings (*sanlai* 三籟), which consists of three modes of self-expression and communication operating without words: bamboo flutes that produce music with the musician's breath (the Piping of Man), the sound produced by winds traveling through holes, tunnels, and other hollow things in the natural world (the Piping of Earth), and an ineffable, ideal state of interconnectedness upon attaining the Way (the Piping of Heaven). Although Zhuangzi only mentions the Piping of Man in passing and refrains from defining (and thereby placing limits on) the Piping of Heaven, he depicts the Piping of Earth in a colorful language:

That hugest of clumps of soil blows out breath, by name the "wind". Better if it were never to start up, for whenever it does ten thousand hollow places burst out howling, and don't tell me you have never heard how the hubbub swells! The recesses in mountain forests, the hollows that pit great trees a hundred spans round, are like nostrils, like mouths, like ears, like sockets, like bowls, like mortars, like pools, like puddles. Hooting, hissing, sniffing, sucking, mumbling, moaning, whistling, wailing, the winds ahead sing out AAAH!, the winds behind answer EEEH!, breezes strike up a tiny chorus, the whirlwind a mighty chorus.

夫大塊噫氣，其名為風。是唯无作，作則萬竅怒呺。而獨不聞之翏翏乎？山林之畏佳，大木百圍之竅穴，似鼻， 似口，似耳，似枅，似圈，似臼，似洼者，似污者；激者，謞者，叱者，吸者，叫者，譹者，宎者，咬者，前者唱于而隨者唱喁。泠風則小和，飄風則大和。[5]

[4] Liu Wendian, "Qiwu lun," in *Zhuangzi buzheng* 莊子補正 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 1999), 33–35. The translation, with minor modification, is from A. C. Graham, "The Sorting Which Evens Things Out," in *Chuang-tzŭ: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzŭ* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 48.
[5] Liu, 35–38; Graham, 48–49.

This passage unsettles the boundary between articulate speech and mere sound and between the human vocal apparatus and nonhuman sounding bodies. Stephen H. West suggests that the master, while mimicking what the Piping of Earth sounds like, evokes the feeling of a heated argument: "he simply turns into one of the apertures that he describes (i.e., demonstrates its capability), puffing out his own theory, thereby creating the same problems of *shi* [是, that's it] and *fei* [非 that's not] and of confusion he intends to dismiss."[6] The lesson embedded in this parable is twofold. On the one hand, Zhuangzi asks us to imagine alternatives to speech in the sonic domain and presents the inexpressible Piping of Heaven as the exemplary model. On the other hand, as West observes, Zhuangzi urges us to see that the influence of speech extends far beyond verbal forms of communication as even the whistling winds can recreate the feeling of a pointed debate or a harsh criticism in human ears.

The Three Pipings is part of a sustained criticism of *yan* launched by Zhuangzi. In a different chapter, Zhuangzi describes speech as a means to an end—a counterpart of practical tools such as a fish trap or a rabbit snare—even though he acknowledges that speech allows the hidden *yi* 意 (meaning) to materialize:

> The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words.
>
> 荃者所以在魚，得魚而忘荃；蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄；言者所以在意，得意而忘言。[7]

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[6] Stephen H. West, "Look at the Finger, Not Where It Is Pointing," in Pauline Yu et al. eds., *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 77.

[7] Liu Wendian, "Waiwu" 外物, in *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 753–54. The translation is from Burton Watson, "External Things," in *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 233. The Chinese scholar Liu Xiaogan has proved that among the extant thirty-three texts attributed to Zhuangzi, those in the category of *neipian* 內篇 (inner chapters) were composed earlier than those

Zhuangzi concludes this observation by posing a tongue-in-cheek question: "Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?" 吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉.[8] His words can also be interpreted as a sincere call to kindred spirits also interested in decentering speech as a way of expanding the human experience.

Zhuangzi's call received many responses. As his theory became a key part of *Xuanxue* 玄學 (the Mystical Learning) promoted by literati during the Six Dynasties (220–589), countless Chinese literati from the Six Dynasties onwards would spend their lifetimes perusing *Zhuangzi* alongside the Confucian classics.[9] The influence of Zhuangzi's texts indeed permeates premodern Chinese literature of all genres. His ideas held a special appeal among Chinese literati from later historical periods not only because they called into question many fundamental aspects of human life, such as the distinction between self and other, the efficacy of words, and even the basic form of the human body, but also due to the creative nature of his literary style. Resonating with Zhuangzi, many Chinese literati from the Six Dynasties and the late Ming and the early Qing (1570s–1720s) came up with their own creative and playful forms of storytelling (e.g., tales, discursive treatises, plays, poetry)

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in *waipian* 外篇 (the outer chapters) and *zapian* 雜篇 (miscellaneous chapters). The inner chapters are also more representative of Zhuangzi's core philosophical ideas than the rest—some of which were evidently written by Zhuangzi's disciples rather than Zhuangzi himself. See Liu, *Zhuangzi zhexue jiqi yanbian* 莊子哲學及其演變 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1988), 3–33.

[8] Liu Wendian, "Waiwu," in *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 753–54. The translation is from Watson, 233.

[9] *Xuanxue* refers to a body of knowledge comprised of exegesis of texts considered to be the Daoist classics—*Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), *Laozi* 老子, and *Zhuangzi* 莊子. For a discussion of the intervention made by *Xuanxue* scholars in the studies of Chinese classics, see Wendy Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 21–22. Six Dynasties literati also promoted *qingyan* 清言 (pure speech), a form of extemporaneously held or composed discussion on these texts. The Chinese scholar Tang Yiming 唐翼明 points out that *qingyan* should be differentiated from *qingtan* 清談 (pure conversation), which involves a wider range of philosophical topics than those pertaining to these Daoist classics. See Tang Yiming, *Weijin qingtan* 魏晉清談 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2002), 9–36.

as a way of pondering complex philosophical questions: What is and is not speech? What are words for? What else can the human vocal apparatus do?[10]

I add my own voice to this clamor not only by identifying trans-historical echoing between ideas that manifest in various forms but also by arranging unlikely dialogues between premodern Chinese theorists and their counterparts in the twenty-first century. Many of the premodern Chinese theorists who will be discussed in this dissertation would probably regard the Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar as a kindred spirit from half the world and over two millenniums away, since Dolar is also invested in radically de-familiarizing the concept of the human voice. As a way of departing from a problematic Cartesian tendency to conflate the voice with speech, Dolar contends in a Lacanian vein that the voice is an alterity that cannot be located in the body that emanates it, the linguistic units that make it phonologically analyzable and semantically meaningful, or the political apparatuses that enlist its service.[11] Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin lucidly summarize the background of this philosophical intervention: "[The] voice pursued by Dolar…is a so-called 'object-voice,' the voice of Lacan's *objet a* or *objet petit a* (object a or object small a)—meaning that it is not 'an object' in the everyday sense of the word but rather the attempted objectification, or even inverted projection, of a constitutive lack in the subject. It is a lack inverted into a surplus."[12] Dolar casts the voice and speech in an antagonistic competition—a form of friction—as a central part of his argument. This understanding sparks an uncanny resonance with the attempts made by

[10] As Haun Saussy has insightfully demonstrated, these times were among the high points in premodern Chinese theories of interpretation and translation modeled after Zhuangzi's own. See Haun Saussy, *Translation as Citation: Zhuangzi Inside Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[11] See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: the MIT press, 2006), 70.
[12] Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin, "The Clamor of Voices," in Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin eds., *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 4.

premodern Chinese literati to shed light on the friction between the human vocal apparatus and *yan* and to observe the becoming-other of the human voice.

Adopting a comparative perspective, this dissertation scrutinizes various techniques of vocalization produced by the human vocal apparatus that stand at odds with the notion of the voice we are familiar with today—summarized by the cultural anthropologist Amanda Weidman as "a salient category in Euro-Western modernity, highly elaborated in a host of associations between voice and individuality, authorship, agency, authority, and power."[13] This contemporary notion of the human voice is based on the conception of personhood and individual subjectivity steeped in the Cartesian philosophical tradition. As Zeitlin has observed in another essay, in the premodern Chinese discourse, the human voice is neither a coherent concept nor a central metaphor for oneself.[14] In classical Chinese, many words can denote the human voice—including *sheng* 聲, *yin* 音, *shengyin* 聲音, *yinsheng* 音聲, *xinsheng* 心聲, *she* 舌 (tongue), and *yan* 言—but in other contexts, these words can also refer to nonhuman vocalizations and even sounds made by inanimate things. A bird's chirping is often depicted as a "sly tongue" (*qiaoshe* 巧舌), a phrase also denoting manipulative human speech.[15] The ominous sound produced by rock that is shaking of its own accord as a sign of bad governance is often described as the rock's speech (*shiyan* 石言).[16] As Zeitlin points out, the most commonly used term for one's voice in modern Chinese, the compound *shengyin* 聲音, is a linguistic conundrum: "As independent characters, sometimes defined in opposition to one another, but more often used interchangeably, *sheng* or *yin* can be used alone to signify voice, but each also

[13] Amanda Weidman, "Anthropology and Voice," *The Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (October 2014): 38.
[14] Judith T. Zeitlin, "From the Natural to the Instrumental: Chinese Theories of the Sounding Voice before the Modern Era," in Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin eds., *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality*, 54.
[15] The third chapter begins by giving one such example.
[16] For an example, see Lu Bi, *Sanguo zhi jijie* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 11:37b.

has a long history of denoting sound, tone, note, music, timbre, and other sonic concepts."[17] On the one hand, the linguistic versatility of the terms for sound that Zeitlin identifies poses a challenge for defining what a voice is in a concrete and generalizable way in the context of premodern China. On the other hand, she hints at a discrepancy between two contexts—the premodern Chinese thought-world, and modern life where the individual personal voice has a special significance. According to Zeitlin, a Chinese counterpart of the voice in the modern sense—"the fullest emergence of the autonomous human voice as an analytical category"—did not appear until the mid-eighteenth century.[18] While building upon Zeitlin's observation, I propose another type of investigation, which unearths methods for theorizing the human voice that are produced by premodern Chinese texts rather than searching for premodern Chinese counterparts of the notion of the voice familiar to us modern thinkers. I consider how a premodern Chinese theory of the human voice not only responds to but also expands the modern analytical category because of the incommensurability between the two.

From the fourth century BCE to the seventeenth century, Chinese literati were indeed reflecting on the problem of the human voice in their own terms. To examine this discourse, I have compiled an archive that includes poetry, poetry commentary, and a wide range of records of reportage, as well as short anecdotes, narratives, and biographies composed in classical Chinese that closely portray three types of unusual voices—whistling (*xiao* 嘯), a kind of sonic storytelling called *kouji* 口技 (vocal virtuosity), and bird speech (*qinyan* 禽言). I choose these texts because they shed light on unusual aspects of the human voice in exceptionally interesting and telling ways. By depicting the human voice as a site of meaning-making that should be differentiated from *yan*—the

[17] Zeitlin, "Chinese Theories of the Sounding Voice before the Modern Era," in *The Voice as Something More*, 55.
[18] Zeitlin, 55.

semantic content of the voice, these texts produce an alternative theory revolving around aspects of the human vocal apparatus that bypass, circumvent, or de-familiarize speech. By creating a sustained dialogue among Chinese literati from different times, this dissertation shows that they turn the human voice into an object of philosophical inquiry and aesthetic experiment even though they use an array of terms to refer to it. These contributors to this discourse ask us to rethink what voice is and what it means to have a voice at all.

An Archive of Voices

I use literary texts produced during the seventeenth century as a focal point for resonances between ideas emerging from different historical contexts, an approach that allows seemingly unrelated literary texts to speak to each other. I consider the literary writings produced by an author to have agency independent from the human creator since texts, like words, travel along paths that cannot be predicted or controlled. In many cases, only by putting these texts into conversation do their connections become obvious. Most of the texts I choose are in prose forms that fall under two umbrella categories: *biji* 筆記 records ("brush-jottings") and "classical tales" composed in classical Chinese.[19] *Biji* are a type of informal and day-to-day record compiled, usually by a single author, into a collection with a miscellaneous nature and an encyclopedic scope. What a *biji* collection does varies from anthologizing anecdotes, biographies, and stories (various forms of the classical tale); to putting together observations of aspects of everyday life (e.g. caring for flowers); to surveying a type of technical knowledge (e.g. science); to recording reportage on contemporary affairs. The genre of

[19] The term "the classical tale" was coined by Patrick Hanan to distinguish stories written in classical Chinese from the vernacular story. See Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 1–7. See also Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4.

the classical tale—narratives written in classical Chinese—contains two different traditions: *zhiguai* 志怪 (records of the strange) and *chuanqi* 傳奇 (tales of the marvelous).[20] It is worth pointing out that the standard modern Chinese term for fiction, *xiaoshuo* 小說, first appeared in *Zhuangzi* even though the word had a different meaning there, referring generally to "little sayings or speeches."[21] Developed between the third to the sixth centuries (throughout the Six Dynasties), *zhiguai* are short narratives reporting hearsay about usually supernatural events. *Chuanqi*, which matured between the eighth and the tenth centuries (between the High Tang and the late Tang), are usually longer and more elaborate stories depicting persons, things, and events of extraordinary nature. Many *chuanqi* tales assume a biographical form as the genre in its formative stage was developed as a subgenre of the historical biography. *Chuanqi* tales also often integrate stylistic features of various other literary conventions, including several types of regulated poetry and rhymed prose (*ci* 辭 and *fu* 賦) and ancient-style prose (*guwen* 古文). I also choose various forms of poetry as many premodern Chinese literati contributors to the discourse on alternative voices also use poetry as a site of theorization.

I interpret all of these texts as forms of storytelling through which the limitations of voice, body, and language are tested—a literary laboratory like Zhuangzi's own parables. As Monika Fludernik has put it incisively, "narrativity is not something that is simply present in or absent from texts but rather something that is recognized by readers or sometimes projected onto the text by them."[22] Like the premodern Chinese literary texts I will discuss, which use narrativization (i.e., storytelling as an act of interpretation) as a method for theorizing the human voice, my own

[20] For an introduction of the history of both narrative traditions, see Zeitlin, "Xiaoshuo," in Franco Moretti ed., *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1:249–61.
[21] See Zeitlin, "Xiaoshuo," in *The Novel*, 249.
[22] Monika Fludernik, *An introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 109.

storytelling animates many theoretical insights latent in premodern Chinese literary anthologies and collections of personal writings as well as their connections.

Like the voices in Lacanian theory, which elude and resist a positivist, materialist approach, the alternative voices examined in this dissertation cannot be defined and located in a straightforward way. These three types of bodily technique that demonstrate the excessive and unruly aspects of the human vocal apparatus—whistling, *kouji*, and bird speech—ask us to look at the categories, boundaries, and hierarchies that they perturb.[23] While Dolar's theorization is centered on the becoming-other of the human voice that always exceeds its semantic content, his theory has the tendency to treat speech as a somewhat stable category. I supplement this understanding by emphasizing that speech becomes a strange thing in the vocal apparatus of a third-century whistler, a seventeenth-century *kouji* performer, or a talking bird from the eleventh century onwards. At the same time, the friction between speech and voice to be discussed in the following chapters operates in far more, and more varied, ways than the ones suggested by Dolar, including confrontation, competition, mutual extension, and doubling.

By uncovering insights from premodern China that present the human voice as an excess, a strange thing that draws attention to the gap between the human vocal apparatus and the human body as well as language, I will not only speculate the answers my authors would have for questions raised by contemporary theorists but will also identify important questions about the voice that modern philosophers have yet to ask.

[23] See Haun Saussy's discussion of techniques of the body in Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm: Orality and Its Technologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 163–71.

The Problem of *Yan*

Long before the seventeenth century, *yan* was not only an integral part of the most important aspects of the literati culture (e.g. studying the classics and composing formal essays for the imperial civil service examination, writing in a leisurely way, holding a conversation with a colleague). It was also a social institution. *Yan* was the Voice to which the alternative voices I examine pose a threat. Confucius once gave a famous admonition that rectifying names (*zhengming* 正名), a preeminent way of regulating speech, should be the first task when a new political regime is under construction, to ensure social order.[24] Along the same lines, an oft-cited passage from *Xici* 繫辭 (*Commentary on the Attached Phrases*), an early Chinese commentary on the *Yijing* from the late Warring States period (475–221 BCE), reinforces the urgency of regulating speech by comparing uttering words to the snapping of a trigger: a gentleman (an ideal persona embodying characteristics of a sage ruler) can use his speech to exert influence that extends far and lasts long.[25] Bi Zhongyou 畢仲遊 (1047–1121), a northern Song dynasty scholar-official, articulates the extent to which a traditional literatus is committed to speech in a letter to his friend, the illustrious poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101): "As for the range of speech [*yanyu*], it is not restricted to things emitted by one's mouth. The things manifested through poetry, taken up by the rhapsody or the ode, entrusted to a stele inscription, or

[24] Liu Baonan, *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 2:517–23.

[25] Li Daoping, *Zhouyi jijie zuanshu* 周易集解纂疏 (Beiing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 569–71. As a metaphor derived from a mechanical device of the double trigger, *ji* (also as *shuji* 樞機) implies the ability to exert influence with minimal effort. *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (*The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*), a foundational early Chinese medical theory datable to the second century BCE, also introduces the tongue, "the minister of the heart" (*xin zhi guan* 心之官), as "the trigger of the human voice" (*shengyin zhi ji* 聲音之機), indicating the affinity between one's speech and one's mind. For the reference in *Huangdi neijing*, see Guo Aichun, *Huangdi neijing lingshu jiaozhu yuyi* 黃帝內經靈樞校註語譯 (Tianjin: Tianjin kexue jishu chubanshe, 1989), 289. See also Guo, 447. For an examination of this concept in early Chinese thought, see Boqun Zhou, "Mechanical Metaphors in Early Chinese Thought," PhD diss., (University of Chicago, 2019), 74–87.

demonstrated in a preface or an exposition are all [forms of] speech" 夫言語之累，不特出口者為言。其形于詩歌，責于賦頌，託于碑銘，著于序記者，皆言語也.[26] In a criticism of the mannerism, hypocrisy, counterfeit and other types of inauthenticity pervading his contemporary world, the late-Ming thinker Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) identifies insincere speech not only as the symptom of a degenerated social order but also as its cause: "Once the childlike heart-mind has been obstructed, one loses the ability to put into words one's innermost feelings, one's efforts to participate in government prove unsuccessful, and one's written compositions fail to express the truth" 童心既障，於是發而為言語，則言語不由衷；見而為政事，則政事無根柢；著而為文辭，則文辭不能達.[27] Through a careful examination of Li's insights on language, Rivi Handler-Spitz states: "The notion that the Chinese language, whether written or spoken, had become unmoored from its origins in natural phenomena was shared by many of Li's Chinese contemporaries. The words they used on a daily basis, they felt, had shed much of their intrinsic, etymological affinity to the objects they had once designated and, in taking on new meanings, had strayed far from their roots."[28] The idea that one's speech offers a window onto one's heart, plus the heightened awareness of literary writing as an extension of an author's own voice, both of which are embedded in the observations made by Yang Xiong, Bi Zhongyou, and Li Zhi, also underscore the institutional role that *yan*—in the form of speech as well as text—plays in the literary world throughout the Chinese history.

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[26] Zhang Ying et al., *Yuanjian leihan* 淵鑒類函 (*Siku quanshu* edition), 266:24a–24b.
[27] Li Zhi, "Tongxin shuo" 童心說, in *Fenshu Xu fenshu* 焚書 續焚書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 98. The translation is from Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, Haun Saussy, *A Book to Burn and a Book to Keep (Hidden)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 107–8.
[28] Rivi Handler-Spitz, *Symptoms of an Unruly Age: Li Zhi and Cultures of Early Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 34.

By leading us to decenter *yan* and to explore other potential of the human vocal apparatus, the alternative discourse is also capable of changing the way we perceive familiar genres of vocal performance, including poetry (which was usually orally composed and recited), dramatic singing, and storytelling (*shuoshu* 說書). While each of these voices resembles a familiar type of speech, it is also where speech becomes strange. Whistling animates a poetic process through which one expresses oneself and communicates with like-minded people using breath while doing away with words. *Kouji* is the sonic counterpart of regular storytelling, and yet it upends the hierarchy between articulate speech and mere sound. A talking bird sounds like a human speaker, but its articulate speech originates from a nonhuman vocal apparatus. By drawing attention to the friction between the voice and speech, these literary accounts also offer a space for their literary authors to reconsider their own commitment to words.

Resonance across Time

The Six Dynasties (220–589) is a term collectively referring to six short, consecutive regimes, including Cao Wei 曹魏 (220–266), Jin 晉 (266–420), Liu Song 劉宋 (420–479), Southern Qi 南齊 (479–502), Liang 梁 (502–557), and Chen 陳 (557–589). It was a period of frequent confrontations between warlords in the absence of a reliable centralized government. During this period, out of a sense of disillusionment as well as the awareness that speech is a political weapon that frequently backfires, many literati indulged in exploring and celebrating nonverbal aspects of the human voice. For example, as Jack Chen has observed, a number of literati from the second to the fifth centuries imitated the donkey's bray as a way of mourning deceased friends at their funerals even though this action runs counter to ritualistic conventions.[29] As Six Dynasties literati deliberately turned away

[29] Jack W. Chen, "On Hearing the Donkey's Bray: Friendship, Ritual, and Social Convention in Medieval China," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 33 (Dec 2011): 1–13.

from speech as a means of communication, the poetics they envisioned often displays a subversive quality, as I have shown in a recent journal article on whistling.[30] The popularity of Mystical Learning among Six Dynasties literati also partly resulted from their skepticism toward *yan*. The inexpressible ideal called the Way (*dao* 道) that promises to unlock the subtleties of the cosmic world and the human life therefore had a powerful appeal.

Six Dynasties literati's interest in the nonverbal also takes shape in theories of language developed during this period. Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), the prominent third-century commentator on *Yijing*, explores the nonverbal domain to produce an unlikely synergy between conflicting Confucian and Daoist frameworks for explaining the way in which language mediates one's perception of reality. He modifies the Zhuangzian *yan*/*yi* dialectics by inserting *xiang* 象 (a mental image), a counterpart of words in the visual field, as an intermediary between *yan* 言 and *yi* 意. Wang's "*yi-xiang-yan*" framework had a lasting impact on the discourse of literary theory in premodern China by shaping several foundational theories of literary creation during the Six Dynasties, including the "Wen fu" 文賦 ("Rhapsody on Writing") written by the poet Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) and the theoretical anthology *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*) composed by Liu Xie 劉勰 (circa 465–?). As Zong-qi Cai has observed, Wang's tripartite framework positions the verbal and the nonverbal in a rare equilibrium of practical value by endorsing the pragmatic, semantic function of words without restricting the transmission of meaning to the verbal domain.[31]

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[30] Yiren Zheng, "Sounding the Ineffable: Third-Century Chinese Whistling as an Alternative Voice," *positions: asia critique* 29, no. 2 (2021): 267–90.

[31] According to Cai, Wang took the deconstructive stance as a way to challenge scholars who sought to locate *xiang* in tangible images and numerals while adopting the essentialist view from *Xici* due to its irresistible influence. For this discussion, see Zong-qi Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm and Early

Shortly after Wang Bi, partly in response to Zhuangzi's ideas, many third-century literati participated in a sustained discussion of whether *yan* sufficiently expresses one's intended meaning (*yan jinyi* 言盡意) or not (*yan bu jinyi* 言不盡意).[32] Those who contended that meaning exceeds words, such as Yu Ai 庾敳 (262–311), followed in the footsteps of Zhuangzi, whereas their colleagues who took the opposite stance sought to reiterate the sociopolitical significance of speech.[33] Taken as a whole, these resources contribute to the abundance of literary texts composed on the limitations of *yan* and the human voice as well as alternative forms of communication.

The seventeenth century, like the Six Dynasties, was a period of political turmoil. It witnessed decades-long confrontations between the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which was already struggling under the weight of many domestic problems, and the ensuing Qing dynasty (1644–1912), which was ruled by the Manchu, a different ethnic group from the Han Chinese. The abrupt Manchu conquest turned many people who identified with the Ming dynasty into loyalists resisting the Qing order, whether openly or surreptitiously. As a result, literature from the late Ming and the early Qing is saturated with the sentiment of Ming loyalism. Although I include a number of literary texts produced during the seventeenth century, I decenter the role that the Ming–Qing dynastic transition plays in the literary history of this period. Historians of the Ming–Qing transition have examined a wide range of themes that Ming loyalists and sympathizers wrote about as a means of grappling with the period of crisis, including dreams, musical instruments, courtesans, ghosts, and

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Chinese Theories of Literary Creation," in Paula Varsano ed., *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2016), 346–48.

[32] See Cai, "*Yi-Xiang-Yan*," 338–46.

[33] Yu Ai, also the author of *Yifu* 意賦 (*Rhapsody on Meaning*), considers the concept of *yi* 意 (meaning) as a state of in-between-ness, "precisely between having a meaning and not having meaning at all" 正在有意無意之間. See Yu Jiaxi, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 2:282.

ruins.[34] Several scholars have considered the problems of *yan* identified by late-Ming thinkers like Li Zhi as symptoms of political chaos. These symptoms include what Rivi Handler-Spitz observes as "a kind of semiotic slippage or erosion"—a discrepancy between words and their referents—revealed through an investigation of Li Zhi's thoughts and what Lynn A. Struve sees as "crisis dreaming" in writings on dreams produced in and after the end of the Ming.[35] I depart from this discussion that regards seventeenth-century literary texts expressing concerns about *yan* as signs of anxiety caused by the political crisis. Instead, I read such texts as creative responses to an evolving discourse centering on non-ordinary aspects of language and the human voice as well as the body—a discourse that reaches well beyond the seventeenth century. At the same time, literary texts from the seventeenth century act as the center of gravity in this dissertation, leading me to focus on the extralinguistic and the unruly aspects of the human voice as well as to identify historical and theoretical connections between concerns expressed by seventeenth-century authors and those voiced by earlier writers and thinkers.

Among the seventeenth-century literary texts that will be discussed in the following chapters, the ones written by Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556–1622), a renowned and well-connected poet and drama aficionado from the late Ming, serve as a nexus in the network of theoretical insights on the human voice to be unfolded in this dissertation. While the bulk of drama and music criticism

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[34] For several examples of recent scholarship on literature as a window onto Ming loyalist sentiments, see Naixi Feng, "Mushroom Cloud Over the Northern Capital: Writing the Tianqi Explosion in the Seventeenth Century," *Late Imperial China* 41, no. 1 (2020): 71–112; Lynn A. Struve, *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019); Yingzhi Zhao, "What Remains of Mountains and Waters: Fragments, Mutilation, and Creation in Early Qing Literature and Culture," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2019): 137–68. For recent scholarship on the Ming–Qing transition, see Kenneth M. Swope, *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger: War, Trauma, and Social Dislocation in Southwest China during the Ming–Qing Transition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 2018.

[35] See Rivi Handler-Spitz, *Symptoms of an Unruly Age: Li Zhi and Cultures of Early Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 33. See also Struve, *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World*, 165–241.

produced by Pan Zhiheng lends itself to an analysis of the singing voice, I focus instead on Pan's fascination with the otherness of the human voice, which is illustrated in biographies of *kouji* performers and whistlers, and accounts of unusual birds.[36]

A lover of courtesans as well as mountains, a connoisseur of music as well as mushrooms, Pan lived an untrammeled lifestyle that disregarded social conventions in a way reminiscent of many free-spirited literati from the Six Dynasties. Since Pan was friends with many influential late-Ming literary authors, his writings act as a node of the network of poetics and other literary aesthetics during the seventeenth century. Pan rose to fame thanks to the recognition of several important proponents of literary archaism, especially Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), one of the "Latter Seven Masters," and Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525–1593), who founded the "White Elm" poetry society (*Baiyu she* 白榆社) in which Pan actively participated. In his late thirties, Pan befriended Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610), one of the leading figures in the anti-archaist Gongan School 公安派 based in Gongan county in the central-southern province of Hubei. Later in his life, Pan developed close friendships with Zhong Xing 鐘惺 (1574–1625) and Tan Yuanchun 譚元春 (1586–1637), the leaders of the even more influential anti-archaist Jingling School 竟陵派 based in Jingling county, also located in Hubei province.[37] Although Pan was not a member of any school, his

[36] For several examples of existing scholarship on Pan Zhiheng, see Zhang Qiuchan, "Pan Zhiheng yanjiu" 潘之恆研究 ("A Study of Pan Zhi-heng"), PhD diss., (Soochow University, 2008). See also Zheng Zhiliang, "Qingchi shuo: Zhongguo gudian julun de dianfan sixiang—Pan Zhiheng xiqu biaoyan lun de neihan jiqi yiyi" 情癡說：中國古典劇論的典範思想——潘之恆戲曲表演論的內涵及其意義, *Hebei xuekan* 29, no. 6 (2009): 122–25.

[37] Gongan and Jingling writers shared the conviction that writing should express a unique literary character (*xingling* 性靈) that is free and independent from preexisting formalistic conventions, although they took different approaches to realizing these ideals. Yuan Hongdao coined the concept of *xingling* in a commentary on the poetry of his younger brother Yuan Zhongdao. See Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Hongdao jijian jiao* 袁宏道集箋校 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 1:187. Members of the Gongan School and the Jingling School are also usually considered to have been

conception of poetics, which is most vividly demonstrated in his poetry and music criticism, deeply resonates with those promoted by Yuan, Zhong, and Tan. At the same time, Pan went beyond reiterating the significance of expressing one's authentic voice through literary writing—a stance championed by his friends among the Gongan and Jingling writers—by envisioning alternative poetics outside the verbal domain.

A short essay written by Pan Zhiheng called "Ma shouyue" 馬手樂 ("Ma's Music of the Hands") can give readers a taste of the disorienting nature of the alternative voices that will be considered in the following chapters. In it, Pan alludes to a story that Zhuangzi once told about a butcher known as Cook Ding. In Zhuangzi's story, the cook's marvelous skill at butchering an ox is depicted as a musical event:

> [Cook Ding] was carving an ox for Lord [Wenhui]. As his hand slapped, shoulder lunged, foot stamped, knee crooked, with a hiss! with a thud! the brandished blade as it sliced never missed the rhythm, now in time with the Mulberry Forest dance, now with an orchestra playing the [Jingshou].
>
> 庖丁为文惠君解牛，手之所触，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然向然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音：合于《桑林》之舞，乃中《经首》之会。[38]

motivated by a desire for individualistic expression given their embrace of key concepts promoted by the Wang Yangming school of Neo-Confucianism, which acknowledges individual agency, such as the *qing* 情 (an innate disposition that makes one capable of feeling). Intellectuals during the May Fourth era, especially Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), played a key role in shaping the still-influential narrative that writings by the Gongan and Jingling authors signaled an expressivist turn in Chinese literary history. Intellectuals like Zhou regarded these late-Ming authors as their kindred spirits, as they were trying to put a burdensome literary past behind them and remake the character of Chinese literature. The idea that Gongan and Jingling writers had a radical vision results from these later authors' projection of their own revolutionary agenda. Timothy Clifford offers an in-depth examination of the May Fourth writers' motivation to elevate the Gongan writers. See Clifford, "In the Eye of the Selector: Ancient-Style Prose Anthologies in Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) China," PhD diss., (University of Pennsylvania, 2017), xxvi–xxxv.

[38] Liu Wendian, "Yangsheng zhu" 養生主, in *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 92. The translation, with romanization modified, is from Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ*, 63.

The rhythm of Cook Ding's movement reminds us of the depiction of the Piping of Earth in "Qiwu lun." Since the Mulberry Forest dance was a musical performance usually reserved for sacrificial ceremonies during the Shang dynasty (circa 1600–1046 BCE), the analogy between the dance and the chef's action of killing adds a whiff of irony: Cook Ding is portrayed as a sage holding a butcher knife. Amazed by his performance, Lord Wenhui asks whether he has reached the upper limits of his skill. Cook Ding explains that his butchery is not only a type of skill (*ji* 技) but also a manifestation of the Way (*dao* 道):

> When I first began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but oxen wherever I looked. Three years more and I never saw an ox as a whole. Nowadays, I am in touch through the daemonic in me, and do not look with the eye. With the senses I know where to stop, the daemonic I desire to run its course. I rely on Heaven's structuring, cleave along the main seams, let myself be guided by the main cavities, go by what is inherently so. A ligament or tendon I never touch, not to mention solid bone. … However, whenever I come to something intricate, I see where it will be hard to handle and cautiously prepare myself, my gaze settles on it, action slows down for it, you scarcely see the flick of the chopper—and at one stroke the tangle has been unraveled, as a clod crumbles to the ground.
>
> 始臣之解牛之時，所見無非全牛者；三年之后，未嘗見全牛也；方今之時，臣以神遇而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗微礙，而況大軱乎！… 雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，怵然為戒，視為止，行為遲，動刀甚微，謋然已解，如土委地。[39]

Drawing from this parable, in "Ma shouyue" Pan creates a Daoist with the last name Ma who lives in Suzhou in the Jiangnan region:

> Daoist Ma lived at a shrine in Huliu [an area in Suzhou]. He imitated the music of the orchestra in the big cities, and made smaller musical instruments from bamboo, wood, metal, and leather to mark the beat. The sounds they made were disconnected and uneven, as scattered as wind and rain and as disordered as grass and weeds. The [instruments] were called "The Ten Brocades." They produced harmony by freely mixing one note with another, with no individual note following another. So they were also called "The Ten Reversals."[40] Ma said: "Why must music be made with an instrument? The way the bygone

[39] Liu Wendian, *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 94–97. The translation is from Graham, 63–64.

[40] *Shifan* 十反 (the Ten Reversals) is an earlier term for *shifan* 十番, which is a genre of folk music involving a variety of woodwind and percussion instruments. Another name for *shifan* is *shiyangjin* 十樣錦 or *shijin* 十錦 (the Ten Brocades). This type of music was particularly popular in the Jiangnan region in the late Ming.

> Cook Ding butchered an ox fit the rhythm of the Mulberry Forest Dance.[41] Why must one distinguish between sounds in the kingdom of body language? If I extend both of my arms, there are [differences between] palms and fists, backs and fronts, fingers and joints, bones and flesh, plucking and pressing, the bent and the stretched. As for what I touch alternately with lightness or with pressure, hastily or slowly, there are the differences between the thick and the thin, the supple and the brittle, the firm and the shrinking. The number of sounds reaches more than one hundred. How could there be only ten of them!" Ma then played the music [for the audience]. He marked the beat with his tongue; in addition to that his lips, teeth and cheeks all harmonized with it. The listeners could not fully comprehend all the variations.
>
> 馬道士，居虎曒之神祠。仿郡城之戲樂，用竹、木、金、革之小器而節其音。其音斷續不齊，雜如風雨，亂如蓬麻，名曰"十錦"。間錯成韻，各不相沿，亦曰"十反"。馬之言曰："樂，奚以器為哉？昔庖丁解牛，乃合桑林之舞。形語之國，奚必殊音？自吾舒雙臂，有掌有拳，有背有面，有指有節，有骨有肉，有抑有按，有屈有伸，而輕重疾徐間之所觸，亦有厚薄、柔脆、堅衄之異，數之至百且溢，豈惟十哉！"於是為一奏。而節之以舌，惟唇齒頰輔咸和焉，聽者莫能盡其變。[42]

The nature of the music of the hands is even more peculiar than the idea that one's hands can be used as a musical instrument. Whereas Pan describes the sound of the miniaturized musical instruments in vivid detail, he does not even mention what the music of hands sounds like even though some listeners are taken aback by the variations Ma is able to produce. This curious omission might lead someone to wonder: Does this novel form of music have a broader acoustic range, perhaps going beyond the capability of human hearing? Is it even sonic in the first place?

Under the name of "Historian of Expansiveness" (*Genshi shi* 亙史氏), Pan adds a commentary to his story:[43]

> …Someone who has their heart reach the rest of their body can make even wood and stone respond to them; how much the more if someone knows how to make use of their arms without any musical instruments at all? Therefore, I say: From the Music of the Hands I understand the minuteness of "The Ten Brocades" and the tininess of "The Ten

[41] A dance performed in early Chinese ritual ceremonies for paying respect to the ancestors.
[42] Pan Zhiheng, *Luanxiao xiaopin* 鸞嘯小品 (*Essays of the Blue Bird's Whistle*) (1629), 2:7b.
[43] This alias is modeled after "Grand Historian," a persona created by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (circa 154 BCE–?) in *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*) to offer commentary to be distinguished from his narration of the historical events. For an introduction of this rhetorical convention and its use in early modern Chinese literary anthologies and collections of the classical tale, see Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*, 1–2.

> Reversals." Who is able to talk with his body so that I could talk to him with my hands? Who is able to butcher an ox, so that I could analyze sound with him?
>
> …心之所通，而木石應之，況能運臂者乎？故曰：吾於手樂而知錦之細、反之微也，孰能形語者而與之手語？孰能解牛者而與之解音哉？[44]

In the final question—a riff on Zhuangzi's question "where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him," Pan turns *jie* 解, which denotes dissecting as well as analyzing or comprehending, into a pun that captures the nature of his own storytelling: an anatomy of sound (*jieyin* 解音). As the Daoist adds his tongue, lips, teeth, and cheeks to the bodily ensemble as part of the music of the hands, and as Pan refers to it as a type of bodily speech (as body-talk 形語 or hand-talk 手語), his essay unsettles the boundary between the human vocal apparatus and other parts of the human body as well as the hierarchy among voice, music, and mere sound. By now, readers of the story would begin to see that the human vocal apparatus is not the only site where a theorization of the human voice takes shape. Hands shed light on the voice as well. To dive into the theoretical discourse centering on alternative voices as strange as Ma's music of the hands and to have a word with premodern Chinese theorists of the voice, one needs to be willing to forget *yan*, to decenter the human vocal apparatus, and to dissect the human voice. Dear readers: are you willing?

[44] Pan, *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 2:7a–7b.

CHAPTER ONE

Impossible Echo: Whistling Reinvented

In 1605 and 1606, Pan Zhiheng spent many months roaming in the Yellow Mountains with various friends. The Yellow Mountains, still among the most popular Chinese tourist attractions today, are located in Pan's hometown Yanzhen 岩鎮 (present-day Huangshan) in Huizhou 徽州, a prefecture in the mountainous region in the southeastern Anhui province. Along with several like-minded hikers, Pan formed a group bearing a playful name, "Long-lasting Friends in the Mountains" (山中耐久朋). They left a trail of poetry and prose travelogues marveling at the awe-inspiring landscape of the mountains; these accounts were preserved in *Yellow Sea*. In one such account, Wang Zhijie 王之傑 (*jinshi* 1598), one of Pan's "long-lasting friends," casually reported an extraordinary event he experienced one night while roaming in the mountains in the spring of 1606:

> I suspected that when the sky cleared after a rain there must be a nice moon, so I got up at midnight and gazed out, [finding the moon] as frosty and beautiful as snow. The mood suddenly took me, and I whistled. Other travelers in the mountains from a distance woke up in surprise and resonated one after another by whistling, which was echoed by the mountains and valleys. The next day my friends said that it had been foggy and rained ceaselessly.
>
> 計新霽必有佳月，丙夜起視，冷艷如雪，興劇發嘯，隔山遊侶驚起，競以嘯和，山谷響應。次日，諸友謂霾雨不休。[1]

Despite Wang's matter-of-fact tone, we can imagine that he and any kindred-spirited reader in his time would have taken great pleasure in the poetic vision animated in this passage: whistling, while reverberating in the mountains, blends into the image of the elegant moon; the acoustic echoing even brings about meteorological resonance long after the sound faded out.

[1] This account is an excerpt from a long travelogue by Wang included in *Huang hai* 黃海, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu shibu* 四庫全書存目叢書史部 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1996), 230:123.

What Wang refers to as *xiao* 嘯 (usually translated as whistling) is a technique of drawing usually high-pitched and lingering sounds from one's mouth by skillfully controlling one's breath. It is akin to the kind of whistling one hears from time to time in the contemporary world but involves a wider range of vocalizations, including some that are not strictly tuneful. For example, the deep and thunderous sound of a tiger's roar is often called "a tiger's whistling" 虎嘯 (*huxiao*). The sound of a sudden gust of wind traveling through a hollowed medium, the gibbon's cry, and the "voices" of ghosts are also called *xiao*. The Japanese scholar Masahiro Ikeda contends that referring to the tiger's roar and the gibbon's cry as whistling is an anthropomorphic gesture, which appeared in literary works as early as the "Dongxiao fu" 洞簫賦 ("Rhapsody on the Panpipes") composed by the first-century BCE writer Wang Bao 王褒 (circa 90–49 BCE).[2]

The focus of this chapter is the whistling practiced by many renowned literati during the Six Dynasties; even though whistling had appeared in the historical record long before, Six Dynasties literati elevated it to a type of high art. This literati-style whistling disappeared during the medieval period, but other types of skill that fall under the category of *xiao* continued to exist in a variety of sonic genres with lowlier status. Understanding *xiao* as a premodern counterpart to the contemporary practice of whistling , Chinese scholar Zhang Yingbin considers the playing of a reed leaf to be a subset of *xiao*; he claims that the *xiao* techniques that literati adopted reappeared in various types of street performance as early as the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279).[3] The

[2] Masahiro Ikeda, "Ensei wa naze kanashii no ka" 猿声はなぜ悲しいのか ("Why Do Gibbons Sound Sad?"), *ACTA Humanistica et Scientifica* 49 (2016): 129–43.

[3] Zhang contributes a comprehensive survey of the history of whistling, claiming that whistling retreated from elite culture but rose in popular culture after the Southern Song. See Zhang Yingbin, *Xiao wenxue jianshi* 嘯文學簡史 (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2012), 113. According to Zhang, the decline of whistling from elite music results from the bans placed on it in the northern Song. In 1113, the central government banned the playing of reed leaves (*shaodi* 哨笛) at conservatories, along with six other kinds of "inappropriate sounds." For information on this restriction, see *Yuezhi* 樂志 in Toqto'a, *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 9:3018.

Chinese ethnomusicologist Fan Ziye proposes that Tuvan throat singing, known as *khöömei*, is a descendant of *xiao* based on the similarity between their techniques and perceived acoustic effects even though little textual evidence substantiates the historical lineage between them.[4] Even though *xiao* still appears in literary texts from the Ming and Qing dynasties, it is usually a poetic allusion that refers back to earlier literary tropes and records concerning whistlers.

The confusion frequently expressed by scholars from the medieval period onward about the technical specifics of literati-style whistling attests to the discontinuation of the art. As early as the mid-eighth century, the scholar-official Feng Yan 封演 (*jinshi* 756) noted some discrepancies between the techniques documented in third-century texts and those still practiced in his time. He makes these observations in his introduction to a manual-like text called *Xiao zhi* 嘯旨 (*Principles of Whistling*), which was allegedly composed by a contemporary named Sun Guang 孫廣 between 765 and 766.[5] Feng's comment signals a recognition that techniques of whistling are already being lost. *Xiao zhi* offers a rare technical perspective on the obsolete art, as the text contains a list of twelve vocal techniques and an elaborate introduction of fifteen set tunes. Since Feng does not mention the list in his record, it is not unlikely that the list was fabricated in a later period by unknown editors as a way of projecting their own understanding of whistling. Many early modern scholars found *Xiao zhi* 嘯旨 to be obscure. When the Ming dynasty scholar Li Lian 李濂 (1488–1566) came across this

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Zhang considers playing reed leaves as a variation on whistling, given that playing reed leaves produces a similar acoustic effect. But reed leaf whistling is usually a signal (e.g., to start a riot), which is different from the literati-style whistling practiced during the Six Dynasties.

[4] See Fan Ziye, "Xiao: Dongfang guguo de koushao yinyue" "嘯"：東方古國的口哨音樂, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化 1, no. 2 (1995): 177–84.

[5] Some bibliographical sources attribute *Xiao zhi*'s authorship to Sun Kang 孫康, likely a variant derived from Sun Guang; a few sources consider the author to be the Tang poet Lu Tong 盧仝 (795–835), which is unlikely to be true; and others label the text as "author unknown." For a brief account of the text's background, see Feng Yan, *Fengshi wenjian ji jiaozhu* 封氏聞見記校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 49–50.

text, he was so frustrated with its incomprehensibility that he composed a poem comparing the text to a painless rash that stays on one's skin and blaming its author for spreading the disease.[6]

Many textual records from the Ming and the Qing dynasties also use the characters for whistling and laughing interchangeably since they are homonyms.[7] Furthermore, the seventeenth-century scholar Niu Xiu 鈕琇 (1644–1704) explicitly refers to whistling as one of three ancient techniques that did not survive (古法之不傳者).[8] Niu speculates that *kouji*, a type of sonically mimetic storytelling (to be examined in the second chapter), is a descendant of the literati-style whistling.[9] But it is more likely that Niu enlisted *kouji*, which was more familiar to him, to understand the archaic and obsolete whistling than that he believed that these techniques share the same lineage.

Coming across a vivid description like the one offered by Wang Zhijie out of context could easily lead someone to assume that whistling was still actively practiced in the late Ming just as it had

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[6] See "Du *Xiao zhi* you gan" 讀嘯旨有感 ("On Reading *Principles of Whistling*"), in Li Lian, *Songzhu wenji* 嵩渚文集 (Ming edition, 1522–1566), 31:2b. For Li Lian's biography, see Guo Tingxun, *Benchao fengsheng renwu* kao 本朝分省人物考 (Ming Tianqi edition), 87:21b–22b. Li owed his early literary reputation to Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1472–1529), one of the most influential proponents of archaist literary styles in the Ming dynasty. Considering Li Mengyang's evaluation of the Tang dynasty as a period that produced many invaluable models for composing poetry and prose essays, Li Lian's frustration with *Xiao zhi* may reflect the text's deviation from the types of proper literary models that Li Mengyang promoted.

[7] Several early modern scholars criticize this confusion of homonyms. Lang Ying, for instance, declares this lack of differentiation, which is common among historical texts, to be laughable. See Lang Ying, *Qixiu leigao* 七修類稿 (Ming edition), 27: 6b–7a. But it is noteworthy that the third-century poet Sun Chu 孫楚 (220–293) portrays the act of laughing in a way that makes it resemble whistling in "Xiao fu" 笑賦 ("Rhapsody on Laughter"). He also uses the phrase *beixiao* 悲嘯 (sad whistling) to describe one of laughing's manifold acoustic effects. See Ouyang Xun and Wang Shaoying, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 1:357.

[8] Niu does not specify what the other two were.

[9] Niu also comments that *kouji* surpasses whistling by producing an even more incredible sonic illusion. See Niu Xiu, "Xiang sheng," in *Gusheng xubian* 觚剩續編 (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1970), 286.

been in the Six Dynasties. But we do not know what sounds they actually made. Wang and his fellows might have screamed to each other or improvised some other kind of call-and-response on the moonlit evening. Whereas his record tells us little about the sonic nature of the event, it invites us to ponder what motivates Wang to imagine himself as a whistler and to reanimate a sound that no longer existed in his time.

Wang is not alone in animating such a sonic illusion. A number of Ming and Qing literary authors come up with strategies for "hearing" (which is actually mishearing) the literati-style whistling as a sound within their earshot. Some of them report that they know someone who is a whistler while some of them depict other types of vocal sound, ranging from poetry recitation to singing, as the literati-style whistling. What do these literary authors gain by imagining listening to a sound that they cannot hear?

This chapter examines the motivation shared by a group of like-minded seventeenth-century literary authors for hearing the literati-style whistling as a present sound rather than reconstructing sonic details of whistling from textual records. Scholars including Jui-lung Su, Fan Ziye, and Zhang Yingbin have produced valuable insights on the social and historical contexts in which practicing literati-style whistling gained traction in premodern times by carefully reconstructing technical specifics of the practice scattered across a wide range of historical and literary records.[10] But much of the mystery regarding what whistling sounded like remains unresolved. It is partly because the esoteric practice of whistling eludes and resists textual transmission. It is partly due to the specific nature of the relationship between literature and sound: a literary text does not reproduce a sound it depicts like a phonograph but recreates the sound as a literary phenomenon. As a result, being

[10] See Fan Ziye, "Xiao: Dongfang guguo de koushao yinyue," in *Zhongguo wenhua*, 177–84; Zhang, *Xiao wenxue jianshi*, 112–26. See also Jui-lung Su, "Whistling and Its Magico-Religious Tradition: A Comparative Perspective," *Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 14–44.

overly preoccupied with a reconstructive approach to reading premodern Chinese literature on whistling might lead one to overlook its other aspects.

This chapter takes an alternative approach to interpreting the literary representation of whistling by analyzing well-studied literary texts in a fresh light as well as bringing into view texts that await scholarship. I contend that literary representations of whistling from the early medieval to the early modern periods offer a space for numerous literary authors to grapple with the friction between the verbal and the nonverbal as a way of imagining an alternative voice that is meaningful without speech. In particular, these authors are interested in the idea that echoing is a key technical aspect of the whistling voice, but what it means to consider whistling-as-echoing shifts between the early medieval and the early modern periods. For the poets in the Six Dynasties, whistling embodies a poetic vision to be accessed sonically rather than linguistically and a utopic space that lies beyond the domain of words. This understanding casts whistling and speech in an antagonistic relationship. Starting in the fourteenth century, however, poets begin to find a place for whistling within the linguistic system by reconceptualizing the relationship between whistling and speech as collaborative, even while tapping into their incommensurability. As these literary authors reimagine whistling, they also consider whistling as a different type of echoing mechanism, creating synergy between whistling and speech.

Whistling also invites us modern readers to rethink: Does a nonverbal sound whose meaning is perpetually in flux count as a meaningful voice? Considering the numerous examples of meaningful self-expression, conversation, and resonance enabled by whistling and the literary imagination of whistling examined in this chapter, the answer is yes. These examples also encourage us to develop a more expansive notion of the voice than simply the site of speech. Unlike the notion of the voice in the Cartesian tradition, whistling is not an individual voice, although it can be personal. Instead, whistling is the voice of a collective process of echoing rather than something that

belongs to a single body. Although the poetics of whistling shift between the third century and the seventeenth century, whistling—whether a sonic practice or an imaginary event—consistently offers an alternative channel for expressing and communicating as well as for reflecting on what makes self-expression and communication meaningful. Imagining whistling as a meaningful voice as well as a site of echoing allows an author to tap into the friction between the verbal and the nonverbal and to open up a channel of communication alternative to linguistically bound modes of representation, especially speech and literary writing.

Poetry without Words

Wang Zhijie's account echoes the story of a legendary meeting between the third-century poet and musician Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) and an anonymous Daoist hermit, which is perhaps the most frequently cited example in the lore of whistling. In this narrative, Ruan learns of an unnamed Daoist hermit, known only as True Man 真人, residing on Mount Sumen (located in the present-day Henan province) and decides to pay him a visit. Ruan finds the hermit sitting next to a cliff, but as he draws closer, the hermit faces Ruan with his feet stretched out "in the shape of a dustpan" [箕踞]—showing his soles in a gesture of disparagement. The hermit does not respond to Ruan's enthusiastic inquires with even a single word:

> Ruan Ji discussed the past, enumerating things as far back as mystical principles from the times of the Yellow Emperor and the Divine Farmer, and delving into things as recent as the beauty of remarkable events during the dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou. As Ruan asked [the True Man] about these things, [the True Man] remained still and did not respond. Ruan Ji then talked about Confucian teachings and [Daoist] techniques for concentrating one's spirits and channeling one's breath. As Ruan observed [the True Man], he had his eyes fixed upon something just as before.
>
> 籍商略終古，上陳黃、農玄寂之道，下考三代盛德之美，以問之，仡然不應。復敘有為之教，棲神導氣之術，以觀之，彼猶如前，凝矚不轉。[11]

[11] Yu Jiaxi, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 2:715.

Frustrated, Ruan Ji tries a different approach:

> He produced long-drawn-out whistles in [the hermit's] direction. After a long time, [the True Man] smiled and said: "Do it again." Ruan Ji resumed whistling. When Ruan Ji could not whistle any longer, he left. Halfway down the mountain, Ruan Ji heard a shrill sound similar to the playing of multiple orchestras, echoed by forests and valleys. Ruan Ji turned back to find that the person he had visited was whistling.
>
> 籍因對之長嘯。良久，乃笑曰："可更作。" 籍復嘯。意盡，退還半嶺許，聞上嘨然有聲，如數部鼓吹，林谷傳響，顧看迺向人嘯也。[12]

The hermit demonstrates a type of nonverbal eloquence through whistling that creates an echoing on such a grand scale that Ruan is bewildered for a second. Through his silence as well as his whistling, the Daoist hermit encourages Ruan to exit the conversation-based discursive spheres of history, politics, and metaphysics where he began the encounter and to leave speech behind. The largely extralinguistic exchange between these two whistlers recalls a famous debate between third-century scholars such as Ouyang Jian 歐陽健 (269–300), who held the opinion that words can fully communicate meaning (*yan jinyi* 言盡意), and those who contended that meaning exceeds words (*yan bu jinyi* 言不盡意), such as Yu Ai 庾敳 (262–311). To use Zong-qi Cai's words, this debate extends a historical clash among pre-Han Confucian and Daoist thinkers between "essentialist" and "deconstructive" views of language, which arise from different understandings of how words mediate reality.[13] The True Man takes an even more radical position than the "deconstructive" one: language will always fall short, but whistling is a space where meaning can fully unfold.

The story above is the most frequently cited version of Ruan Ji's visit to Mount Sumen, which appears in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (*A New Account of the Tales of the World*), an anthology of

[12] Yu, 2:715.
[13] Zong-qi Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm and Early Chinese Theories of Literary Creation" in Paula M. Varsano ed., *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 334–341.

hagiographical accounts of famous literati during the Six Dynasties, compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444). The story ends with many things unsaid: How exactly did Ruan's whistling delight the hermit? What did the hermit's whistling convey? What has Ruan gained from the meeting? Does whistling convey something meaningful through a different communicative conduit from speech? Does it escape meaning altogether?

These gaps produce a sense of ambiguity regarding whether whistling is representational. Two earlier versions of the same story, which survive in an annotation of the account in *Shishuo xinyu*, attempt to reconcile this ambiguity by taking a different approach to interpreting the meaning of whistling. In these versions of the story, after Ruan returns home, he composes an essay called "Daren xiansheng lun" 大人先生論 ("The Treatise on the Master Great Man"), which is a biography of an anonymous hermit—perhaps based on the one that Ruan had just visited. This additional detail emphasizes that Ruan's literary creation, as a verbal echo of the Daoist hermit's whistling, translates the profound and inexpressible lesson given by the hermit back into words.

Xiao zhi, which recounts the same event, reads even more into the gaps that the version we saw first leaves unresolved. It goes as the following:

> Ruan Ji was a skilled whistler and heard about the immortal of Mount Sumen. Thinking himself of comparable skill to the immortal, Ruan Ji went off for a visit to the mountain. The immortal just sat quietly, with disheveled hair tossed about his shoulders, while Ruan Ji bowed repeatedly and made polite inquiries about the immortal's well-being. He repeated his salutations again, and repeated them again. The immortal's expression remained completely unchanged, and he made no response to Ruan Ji at all.
>
> So Ruan Ji whistled several dozen long notes and departed. Guessing when Ji had not traveled too far off, the immortal began to whistle in the Clear *Jue* mode. He issued four or five notes. Ji only sensed that all of the trees and plants of the forests and mountains had a different sound about them. But in a very short while, powerful winds blew up and a fierce thunderstorm burst forth. When this ended, many *luan* [a type of mystical bird], phoenixes and peacocks flew forth from every direction in greater numbers than could be counted. Ji was at first frightened; then he was delighted. After he returned, he tried to write [the music] down, managing to get perhaps two of ten parts.

晉阮嗣宗善嘯，聞遷君以為己若，往詣焉。方被發握坐，籍再拜而請之，順風而請者三，承風而請者再。遷君神色自若，竟無所對。籍因長嘯數十聲而去。遷君料籍固未遠，因動清角而嘯，至四五發聲，籍但覺林巒草木皆有異聲，須臾，飄風暴雨忽至，已而鸞鳳孔雀繽紛而至，不可勝數。籍既懼又喜而歸。因傳寫之，十得其二，為之蘇門。今所傳者是也。[14]

By extrapolating the motivation for the hermit (here an immortal) to whistle—offering a lesson intended for Ruan Ji, this version indicates that whistling, like speech, offers a window into the whistler's mind. This retelling also elaborates on Ruan Ji's feelings, a mixture of terror and delight, as he listens to the hermit's whistling and witnesses the cosmological echoing that it brings about. The sudden change of weather and the unexpected appearance of rare and legendary creatures reflects an understanding of whistling that is rooted in correlative cosmology. A correlative cosmological model considers all existing things to be consist of *qi* 氣 (breath). As a result, everything is potentially interconnected on the elemental level. *Qi* manifests externally as a system of dynamics governed by forms of imbalance between the complementary *yin* 陰 (yielding) and *yang* 陽 (dominant) forces and, in turn, by the coordination among the *wuxing* 五行 (Five Agents, i.e., Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, Soil), which cause movement and transformation.[15] The Five Agents provide a descriptive mapping of the structure of natural phenomena within the cosmos, ranging from the five directions 五方, to the five internal organs 五臟, to the five musical notes 五音, all of which are interconnected. The passage in *Xiao zhi* highlights the idea that whistling is larger than a mere sound—it fulfills the role

[14] Translation by DeWoskin with modifications. See Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1982), 165–166.

[15] The Five Agents, each embodying a different composition of *yin*/*yang*, are nuanced and specific manifestations of the *yin*/*yang* interactions on another order. See Donald Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1999), 860–66.

of a cosmological barometer. In light of correlative cosmology, whistling is already an echo of the cosmos the moment that the whistler emits it from his or her mouth.

Taken together, these different versions of the meeting between Ruan Ji and the Daoist hermit reflect different attempts made by medieval authors to position whistling in relation to speech in spoken and written forms. Whether whistling is an extension of speech or the antithesis of speech is a conundrum that Chinese poets would try to work out for centuries to come.

Third-century literati closer to Ruan Ji's own time regarded whistling as a privileged site for reflecting on the shortcomings of speech as well as a space into which they could retreat from the linguistic domain. The warlord Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404) had a pointed epistolary debate with his friend the poet Yuan Shansong 袁山松 (?–401), the author of a nonextant *fu* on singing, over the relative merits of whistling and singing as a form of expression. The major point of contention is whether whistling, a wordless art, is meaningful. Huan and Yuan interpret Ruan Ji's story in drastically different ways to support their arguments. Advocating for whistling, Huan, also a whistler, argues:

> As a sound that connects with the divine, it expresses things in fullness without being many, manifesting the ultimate harmony in just one sound. Mr. Ruan's speech didn't move the listener at Mount Sumen, but with a mere whistle, the silent listener smiled. As for [Ruan Ji's] stirring up a free-roaming resonance—how deep it was!
>
> 夫契神之音，既不俟多贍而通其致，苟一音足以究清和之極。阮公之言，不動蘇門之聽，而微嘯一鼓，玄默為之解顏。若人之興逸響，惟深也哉！[16]

For his part, Yuan understands the echoing atop Mount Sumen as a singular and irreproducible instance. He dismisses whistling as something akin to nonsense—"a trick of the mouth, or a clear and lingering sound and nothing more" 一往之清冷而已.[17] By contrast, he approves singing as it

[16] Ouyang and Wang, *Yiwen leiju*, 354–55.
[17] Ouyang and Wang, 355.

"allows one to plumb the roots to the fullest extent, [and] as one puts it to use, one increasingly senses the range of its effects" 歌窮測根之致，用之彌覺其遠.[18] Although Yuan does not make the point explicitly, he seems to attribute the profundity of a song to its lyrics, words that allow it to be not only intelligible but also transmittable.

The third-century poet Chenggong Sui 成公綏 (231–273) portrays the tension between whistling and speech more subtly in "Xiao fu" 嘯賦 ("Rhapsody on Whistling"), which became the most elaborate literary text on whistling produced during the Six Dynasties. The *fu* 賦 (often translated as "rhapsody") is a type of rhymed prose that represents its central subject matter in a primarily descriptive mode and an extravagantly flowery style, sometimes stretching to almost a hundred lines. The epideictic *fu* (to be distinguished from the shorter, somewhat more plainspoken *fu* developed during the Six Dynasties) rose to popularity as a genre favored by the ruling class during the Western Han (206 BCE–24 CE). Many poets therefore explored the epideictic *fu* as a for political purposes, such as flattering the emperor and offering him advice. As one of the most important means of gauging a poet's literary competence, the epideictic *fu* also plays a key role in authors' ambitions to be selected and promoted to official rank. On the formal level, the epideictic *fu* is a performance of eloquence: it often unfolds as a verbal wrestling between two eloquent speakers with opposing opinions, who spare no effort to outsmart one another. The *fu* was often orally performed during the Han dynasty, which shaped the expectation that a poet's ability to compose an elaborate *fu* orally on the spot authenticates his literary competence. As Han dynasty poets developed numerous techniques for displaying their own eloquence, *fu* as a genre offers ample insights into the stakes of speech. As the Han dynasty came to an end, *fu* developed into a distinct poetic form in terms of its stylistic features as well as sits ocial function. Whereas the epideictic *fu*

[18] Ouyang and Wang, 355.

mainly portrays grand spectacles, such as the imperial garden or the cosmos, *fu* in the Six Dynasties concentrate on things on a much smaller scale, ranging from musical instruments to insects. As a genre, *fu* became shorter, usually containing no more than fifty lines in a single piece. This development also shaped the popularity of a sub-genre called the "ode on things" (*yongwu* 詠物), a range of poetic forms (including *fu*) that take a special interest in depicting objects.[19]

Chenggong was also known as a whistler. His own whistling was said to have inspired the composition of "Xiao fu": "Once on a hot day, as he was finding solace in the cool breeze, he whistled: cool and clear, [his whistling] had a tune, whereupon he composed *Rhapsody on Whistling*" 嘗當暑承風而嘯，泠然成曲，因為《嘯賦》.[20] The fifth-century scholar Zang Rongxu 臧榮緒 (415–488), who compiled *Jin shu* 晉書 (*The History of the Jin Dynasty*), adds a noteworthy detail to Chenggong's biography: "[Chenggong] showed a literary flair from an early age and had a stammer" 少有俊才而口吃.[21] Mark G. Pitner has observed that during the Han dynasty and the Six Dynasties a writer's lack of verbal eloquence is often portrayed in biographical materials as an explanation for his talent in writing, a trope that results from the shared understanding that stuttering is a sign of the speaker's laudable moral conduct.[22] If we read these two biographical accounts of Chenggong next

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[19] For a detailed discussion of the development of the "ode on things," see Li Dingguang 李定廣, "Lun zhongguo gudai yongwu shi de yanjin luoji" 論中國古代詠物詩的演進邏輯, *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* 中山大學學報 55, no. 4 (2015): 18–32. See also David Knechtges, "'Have You Not Seen the Beauty of the Large?': An Inquiry into Early Imperial Chinese Aesthetics," in Li Fengmao ed., Wenxue wenhua yu shibian 文學、文化與世變 (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo, 2002), 60–61.

[20] Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 92:2373.

[21] Mark G. Pitner suggests that the conjunctive particle *er* 而, which can signal a contrastive, causal, or parallel relationship between what goes before and after it, here indicates a continuity rather than a contrast, because stuttering is only rarely portrayed as a limiting factor in a poet's profile. See Pitner, "Stuttered Speech and Moral Intent," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 137, no. 4: 708–12.

[21] See Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wen xuan* 六臣注文選 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 18:342.

[22] Pitner, "Stuttered Speech and Moral Intent," 708–12.

to each other, it seems that the poet's ability to whistle reinforces his literary flair. Neither account is concerned about the lesser eloquence the poet might have demonstrated in oral discussion or debate, even though these are key means of gauging a literatus's literary competence during the Six Dynasties.[23] By leading us to perceive the poet's whistling and literary writing as supplementary conduits of self-expression, Chenggong's biography acts as a reminder that whistling is the pre-linguistic form of the flawless oral performance of the *fu* that the poet was never be able to deliver via speech.

The following analysis of "Xiao fu" diverges from the ample discussion in existing scholarship. Given that Chenggong was a whistler himself, scholars have mainly focused on decoding the technical details of whistling embedded in "Xiao fu," thereby reinforcing the limiting assumption that a literary text discussing whistling reflects what kind of sound it is in a straightforward way. Instead, I contend that the *fu* revolves around the tension between whistling and speech, an aspect of the text that is yet to be analyzed.

"Xiao fu" follows a young gentleman who has discarded worldly affairs and set his mind on traveling afar. The *fu* consists of an opening section and three main sections that portray a sequence of four occasions on which the gentleman whistles while roaming freely. The beginning of "Xiao fu" depicts the young gentleman's train of thought before the moment that he emits the first whistle:

> A young gentleman, who stands out from the crowd,
> Explores the marvelous and enjoys the unusual.
> He looks down on the world and forsakes glory,

[23] During the Six Dynasties, a writer's oral eloquence was usually praised as an extension of his skill in writing. This expectation largely resulted from to the popularity of "pure speech" 清言 or "pure conversation" 清談, which includes but is not limited to extemporaneously held oral conversation on topics germane to mystical learning (*xuanxue*). However, it is not to say that orality was valued more than writing, and the distinction between orality and writing was often deemed unimportant. There were well-regarded speakers who were not as competent in writing, such as Yue Guang 樂廣 (?–304). But having such an imbalance between one's speaking and writing competence was not portrayed negatively. For several examples about Yue Guang's incompetence in writing, see Yu Jiaxi, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 1:137–39.

Thoroughly discarding worldly affairs.
Aspiring to the lofty and admiring the ancient,
He thinks extensively and ponders from afar.
He prepares to ascend Mount Ji in order to maintain his integrity,
And float out upon the great blue sea to let his aspirations roam.
Thereupon he invites friends and gathers like-minded fellows.
They refine the subtleties of disposition and destiny,
And probe the profundities of the Way and Virtue.
He laments the common people's not yet having attained comprehension,
And that he alone has transcended the commonplace and awoken before others.
He feels constrained by the narrow path of the ordinary world,
He gazes upon Heaven's breadth and travels aloft.
He distances himself from the ostentatious and the vulgar, and leaves his body behind,
Energetically releasing a long-drawn whistle.

逸群公子，體奇好異。傲世忘榮，絕棄人事。睎高慕古，長想遠思。將登箕山以抗節，浮滄海以游志。於是延友生，集同好。精性命之至機，研道德之玄奧。愍流俗之未悟，獨超然而先覺。狹世路之阨僻，仰天衢而高蹈。邈姱俗而遺身，乃慷慨而長嘯。[24]

The gentleman is already in a transcendent state of mind. The description that he "leaves his body behind" indicates a meditative state reminiscent of the beginning of Zhuangzi's famous chapter "Qiwu lun" 齊物論 ("Discourse on Making All Things Equal") described in the introduction.[25] David Knechtges states that whistling was a breathing exercise practiced by Daoist adepts, which suggests a connection between this passage in the *fu* and the Daoist practice of meditation.[26] However, the extant textual materials on whistling have yet to substantiate this connection; whistling is barely mentioned in most medieval manuals on Daoist meditation techniques.[27] But the literary imagination of whistling was indeed profoundly shaped by Daoist metaphysics, considering that

[24] Xiao et al., *Liuchen zhu Wen xuan*, 18:342–43. The translation of "Xiao fu" in this section is mine unless noted otherwise.
[25] Liu, *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 33.
[26] Knechtges, "Rhapsody on Whistling," in *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, *Volume III* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 315.
[27] *Xiao zhi* may be in dialogue with some Daoist manuals for meditation in medieval China. For example, *Shesheng zuanlu* 攝生纂錄 includes a list of twelve items called "Poluomen daoyin fa" 婆羅門導引法 (Brahman Methods for Conserving Health). See Zhang Jiyu, *Zhonghua daozang* 中華道藏 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004), 23:676.

several legendary figures involved in the origin myth of whistling are Daoist immortals, such as the Queen Mother of the West 西王母 and Liu Gen 劉根 (who allegedly lived around the beginning of the Common Era and who was famous for his ability to command ghosts).[28]

Upon closer examination, this opening scene in "Xiao fu" is implicitly in dialogue with a description of a process of literary creation (what we now call "brainstorming") that appears in "Wen fu" 文賦 ("Rhapsody on Writing") written by Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303), a poet contemporaneous to Chenggong Sui. "Wen fu" is now widely regarded as the earliest genre theory and one of the foundational texts of literary theory produced in premodern China. It is not a coincidence that the literary critic Liu Xie 劉勰 (circa 465–?) pairs Chenggong Sui with Lu Ji when he evaluates generic features of the *fu* in his theoretical anthology *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*).[29] Although Liu casts Chenggong and Lu as parallel, the opening section in "Xiao fu" invites us to read Chenggong's text as a quite defferent theory of literary creation from Lu Ji's.

Like "Xiao fu," Lu's "Wen fu" portrays the pre-writing stage of literary creation as a meditative process:

> This is how it begins: perception is held back and listening is reverted.
> Engrossed in thought, one searches all sides.
> His essence galloping to the world's eight boundaries,
> One's mind roaming across ten thousand yards.
>
> 其始也，皆收視反聽，耽思傍訊，精騖八極，心遊萬仞。[30]

[28] For an introduction to Liu Gen, see Sun, "Whistling and Its Magico-Religious Tradition: A Comparative Perspective," 29–31. Many texts from the medieval China often depicts *xiao* as a method for summoning ghosts. See Xiao zhi, in Zhou Lüjing, *Yimen guagndu* 夷門廣牘 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1940), 4:32a–32b.

[29] Liu Xie, Huang Shulin, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu* 增訂《文心雕龍》校註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 1:96.

[30] Stephen Owen, *The Poetic Exposition on Literature*, in *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 96.

Zong-qi Cai has pointed out that this passage contains a reference to Zhuangzi's concept of a roaming mind (*youxin* 遊心), which features a "daemonic flight" that allows one to experience the cosmos as an infinite space at the service of oneself.[31] Cai elaborates on the significance of the "Wen fu" including this meditative stage as the first necessary step in literary creation this way: "Unlike a Daoist adept striving to perpetuate his blissful flight in the Great Empyrean (*taiqing* 太清), however, a writer does not seek to achieve the permanent transcendence of time and space. His [daemonic] flight of spirit is only momentary and always ends in a return to this world."[32] The world that a literary author returns to is one replete with emotions, images (including external and mental ones), and words. Cai observes that Lu Ji's understanding of literary writing as a process of materializing the hidden reflects a three-step movement from *yi* 意 (meaning) to *xiang* 象 (image) and to *yan* 言 (words), which is a central characteristic of the "grand linguistic-cognitive-cosmological paradigm" formulated by the third-century thinker and scholar Wang Bi.[33]

But the step after the meditative phase, which according to Lu Ji allows accumulated thoughts to materialize through an external communicative medium (in this case *yan*), is precisely where Chenggong Sui's "Xiao fu" heads in a different direction: whistling departs from words completely. In the next section, after an extensive description of the manifold acoustic effects of the gentleman's whistling, the *fu* praises whistling for its improvisational nature and freedom from external media, emphasizing the difference between the creative process enabled by whistling and that of literary creation:

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[31] Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm," in Varsano ed., *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 350.
[32] Cai, 350.
[33] Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm," in Varsano ed., *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 333. Cai suggests that "[the] only significance difference may lie in the fact that Lu blends images with emotions. This modification is imperative for one who would promote the importance of the lyric endeavor, the very seed of which is emotion." See Cai, 351.

> Therefore its sounds are not dependent on instruments;
> Its effects are not mediated by external things.
> He [the gentleman] takes it near at hand, from his own body,
> By enlisting his heart and controlling his breath.
> When he moves his lips, there is a tune;
> When he opens his mouth, it produces a note.
> By making contact with like categories, things are stimulated.
> As one "sings," other people "chant" in response.[34]
>
> 是故聲不假器，用不借物。近取諸身，役心御氣。動脣有曲，發口成音。觸類感物，因歌隨吟。

Evoking correlative cosmology, these lines portray the gentleman's whistling as a process of echoing through which his thoughts and feelings manifest through breath rather than words. But the gentleman's whistling is described as resembling singing and poetry-chanting, which enhances the rhetorical effect of the metaphor in the last line (where singing and chanting are used to denote whistling metaphorically). As a way of revealing hidden connections between things, whistling-as-echoing also mirrors the process of writing as it is portrayed in Lu Ji's "Wen fu":

> And when it is attained: light gathers about moods and they grow in brightness; things become luminous and draw one another forward; I quaff the word-hoard's spray of droplets; and roll in my mouth the sweet moisture of the Classics.
>
> 其致也，情曈曨而彌鮮，物昭晰而互進。傾群言之瀝液，漱六藝之芳潤。[35]

It is noteworthy that Lu Ji depicts literary writing in strikingly oral terms as drawing words from the author's mouth. Zong-qi Cai comments that the significance of Lu Ji's theory of literary creation, which is further elucidated by Liu Xie, lies in his attributing the preeminent representational prowess to words: "Without the promise of a perfect fusion of *yi* (*yixiang*) and *yan* in a great work of art, their

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[34] Xiao et al., *Liuchenzhu Wenxuan*, 18:343. In the original text, whistling is referred to as *ge* 歌 (singing) and *yin* 吟 (chanting). David Knechtges's translation treats singing as an analogue to whistling and does not render the chanting. In the original text, it is ambiguous whether whistling is likened to singing/chanting or whether singing/chanting alternates with whistling in the scene depicted here. See Knechtges, "Rhapsody on Whistling," in *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature*, 317.

[35] Owen, *The Poetic Exposition on Literature*, 98.

theorization of the creative process—and literature in general—would be meaningless."[36] In comparison to whistling, whose sounds "are not dependent on instruments" and whose effects "are not mediated by external things," "quaffing the word-hoard's spray of droplets," however effortless it seems to be, relies on several external media in addition to one's own body. As whistling is portrayed as a means of spontaneous self-expression ("when he moves his lips, there is a tune; when he opens his mouth, it produces a note") and freestyle representation ("by making contact with like categories, things are stimulated") akin to literary creation, it gradually becomes clear that the content of the self-expression and representation is non-semantic and therefore in flux. This semantic indeterminacy allows whistling to become a different mode of representation from literary writing. The meaningfulness of whistling lies in its ability to represent things and feelings (i.e. making them palpable) by means of sonic and cosmological echoing, which is also present in the process of literary creation, without ever returning to the realm of verbal representation. "Xiao fu" envisions whistling as a poetic mode of communication incongruous with the form of poetry—the preeminent genre of literary writing in Lu Ji's time—as well as the site of an alternative theory of literary creation and representation.

Chenggong Sui was indeed interested in exploring the friction between words and things that reveals the limitations of verbal representation. This interest is further illustrated in a short preface that the poet wrote for his "Tiandi fu" 天地賦 ("Rhapsody on Heaven and Earth").[37] For Chenggong, "heaven and earth" is splendid yet formless, which poses a challenge for literary writing.

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[36] Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm," in Varsano ed., *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 353.

[37] Chenggong sums up his motivation for composing "Tiandi fu" this way: "Looking back at all the ancient people, none of them wrote a *fu* on [heaven and earth]. Is it simply because this is something extremely magnificent but lacking concrete patterns, and therefore difficult to praise in words? If not, why is such a piece of writing missing?" 歷觀古人未之有賦，豈獨以至麗無文，難以辭贊；不然，何其闕哉? See Zhang Pu, *Han Wei Liuchao yibai sanjia ji* 漢魏六朝一百三家集 (1631), 39:6a.

Composing the "Tiandi fu" is therefore an attempt to tap into the incommensurability that lies between the act of literary representation and inexpressible things. From this perspective, whistling offers the poet another privileged site for reflecting on the purpose of literary representation.

The second and third sections in "Xiao fu" further elaborate on the idea that echoing is a technical aspect of whistling. The beginning of the third section unfolds as follows:

> He travels upon lofty ridges and climbs high mountains,
> And looks down from the cliff and gazes at running rivers.
> He sits atop a firm rock,
> And rinses his mouth in a clear spring.
> He lies upon the waterside orchids swinging in the wind,
> As he shelters among the elegance of tall bamboos,
> He chants and [the sound] disperses in all directions,
> And it reverberates continuously without stopping.
> This way, he unfurls pent-up resentment,
> And unravels tangled thoughts.
> His heart is cleansed and unattached,
> His intent detaches from the worldly and roams freely.
>
> 若乃遊崇崗，陵景山。臨巖側，望流川。坐盤石，漱清泉。藉皋蘭之猗靡，蔭脩竹之蟬蜎。乃吟詠而發散，聲駱驛而響連。舒蓄思之悱憤，奮久結之纏綿。心滌蕩而無累，志離俗而飄然。[38]

As the *fu* enumerates the manifold acoustic effects the gentleman's whistling produces, it becomes difficult to tell whether he uses whistling to imitate the scenery he encounters, or the ever-changing natural environments that he sees are mental images simulated by his whistling. The line, "this way, he unfurls pent-up resentment; and unravels tangled thoughts," can also describe literary writing. What differentiates whistling from literary creation is the purpose that the whistler's intent serves. In the classics from the pre-Han periods and the Han dynasty, the concept of *zhi* 志 (intent) refers specifically to "a volitional intent provoked by certain sociopolitical events or conditions," as Zong-

[38] Xiao et al. 2012, 18:344.

qi Cai incisively points out.[39] The whistler's intent is detached from the sociopolitical aspects of human life. No longer the privileged creative resource (as in the case of literary writing), the whistler's mind (*xin* 心) is only one of manifold mediums upon which whistling exerts its representational power, through the physical process of echoing. In this way, whistling allows the gentleman's interiority to become one with the external sonic and cosmic ecology.

The last main section, which continues to elaborate on the idea that whistling is a form of echoing, begins by drawing an analogy between the sound of whistling and that of playing wind instruments:

> Numerous sounds are played and blended together, like a reed pipe and a bamboo flute. Pounding and booming, they are thunderously loud; Drumming and splashing, they are vociferously boisterous.
>
> 衆聲繁奏，若笳若簫。磅硠震隱，訇磕嘲嘈。[40]

This analogy evokes two different types of pipes that feature in ancient Chinese theories of acoustics. One of these, bamboo pitch pipes, served as an important means of tuning in ancient Chinese music. Starting in the Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE), the twelve standard pitches were set by using a length of a bamboo which, when blown across, would emit the lowest, fundamental pitch (called "Yellow Bell" 黃鐘). Other pitches were derived from this base by cutting other lengths of bamboo that were longer or shorter by one-third.[41] A way to materialize the harmony and symmetry innate to the natural-cosmological world, the twelve pitch pipes also acted as a political thermostat

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[39] Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm," in Varsano ed., *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, 349. For a discussion of the development of the discourse of *shi yan zhi* 詩言志 (poetry expresses one's intent), see Cai, Configurations of Comparative Poetics: Three Perspectives on Western and Chinese Literary Criticism (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 35–49. See also Wendy Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 13–19.
[40] Cai, "The *Yi-Xiang-Yan* Paradigm," 345.
[41] See Erica Fox Brindley, *Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 77–82.

by implementing a harmonious state order and detecting malfunction in the relationship between a ruler and his people. At the same time, the lines also recall another kind of pipe: Zhuangzi's Piping of Earth, which destabilizes the kind of regulation offered by the pitch pipes. Freeing sounds from fixed categories (such as the concept of music), the Piping of Earth subverts the hierarchy of sound implemented by early Chinese music theory, which prioritized patterned and musical sounds. Considering that Zhuangzi's introduction of the Three Pipings is a first step toward a systematic criticism of words, the pipes can also be seen as instruments for destabilization.[42] We might speculate that whistling embodies the Zhuangzian Three Pipings all together. Like the Piping of Man, whistling enlists the whistler's body as a wind instrument. Like the Piping of Earth, whistling-as-echoing allows manifold meanings to emerge from a void and to resonate with each other. And like the Piping of Heaven, whistling creates a form of free expression where an extralinguistic aspect of the voice overrides speech and the boundary between meaningful utterances and nonsense dissolves. By foregrounding the idea that echoing surpasses words, "Xiao fu" animates a poetic vision that does not rely on the poetic form or words in general. The friction between whistling and speech is at the heart of "Xiao fu"—a literary representation of a marvelous sound that calls into question the logic of literary representation.

[42] This thought experiment takes place before the passage where Zhuangzi further elaborates on the constraints of speech and other ways of overcoming them. He takes another step towards destabilizing language by coming up with the concept of *zhiyan* 卮言 (goblet words), a type of circular and self-canceling speech that re-assembles language and precludes articulation. For an in-depth examination of this concept, see Daniel Fried, "A Never-Stable Word: Zhuangzi's 'Zhiyan' and 'Tipping-Vessel' Irrigation," *Early China* 31 (2007): 145–170.

Repositioning Whistling in Relation to Speech

Although the tension between whistling and speech is unarticulated in literary texts on whistling from the Six Dynasties, the preface to the eighth-century text *Xiao zhi* begins by making an unequivocal dichotomy between the two:

> As for breath, that which is stirred up within the throat and turbid we call "speech;" that which is stirred up by the tongue and clear we call "whistling." Turbid speech can transmit human affairs and express emotions; clear whistling can move spirits and confer immortality. If the words one speaks are excellent, people a thousand miles away respond. If the whistling one produces is excellent, ten thousand kinds of spirits are at one's command.
>
> 夫氣激於喉中而濁，謂之言；激於舌而清，謂之嘯。言之濁可以通人事，達性情；嘯之清可以感鬼神，致不死。蓋出其言善，千里應之；出其嘯善，萬靈受職。[43]

The last line of this quote is a modified version of a passage from *Xici* 繫辭 (*Appended Statements*), an early Chinese commentary on *Yijing*, in which one is urged to be careful about what one says since words travel far.[44] Whereas *Xici* emphasizes the central role that words play in a gentleman's self-cultivation as well as in governance in a Confucian worldview, *Xiao zhi* creates a new hierarchy that prioritizes the tongue over the throat, whistling over speech, and a state of detachment over commitment to human affairs. The tenth section in *Xiao zhi*, "The Stanza of Moving Earth" 動地

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[43] Gu Yuanqing, *Yangshan Gushi wenfang xiaoshuo* 陽山顧氏文房小說 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1934), 9:37a.

[44] The passage reads: "The Sage said: When a gentleman resides in his house, if the words he says are excellent, wouldn't people a thousand miles away respond to him, let alone those who are by his side? When a gentleman resides in his house, if the words he says are not excellent, wouldn't people a thousand miles away disobey them, let alone those who are by his side? Words emit from his person and affect the people; actions emit from within his vicinity and manifest at a distance. Words and actions are a gentleman's axle and trigger. The turning of the axle and the pulling of the trigger control glory or disgrace. Words and actions are the gentleman's means of moving heaven and the earth. How can one not be mindful of them?" 子曰：君子居其室，出其言善，則千里之外應之，況其邇者乎？居其室，出其言不善，則千里之外違之，況其邇者乎？言出乎身加乎民；行發乎邇見乎遠。言行君子之樞機，樞機之發，榮辱之主也。言行，君子之所以動天地也，可不慎乎? See Li Fang and Xia Jianqin., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu, 1994), 569–571.

章, expresses the idea that whistling acts as a mode of self-expression even though it does not involve words:

> What is it that allows whistling to shake the ground? Man has mind and intent and then expresses them through his breath. The breath bursts forth and forms sound. The sound incorporates the major *gong* and major *shang*, and of its own accord harmonizes with the four seasons.[45] As a result, when an even-numbered bamboo pipe moves, an odd-numbered bamboo pipe responds; when the *yang* manifests, the *yin* yields. Of necessity, *yang* withdraws and stirs *yin*; *yin* withdraws and stirs *yang*. When either *yang* or *yin* withdraws and [thereby] stirs its complement, a shaking starts up and does not settle down. The earth resides upon *yin* and *yang*, so how could it be that the thing which supports it moves while the thing that depends upon it is at rest? As a sound is made, the principle behind what makes the earth move manifests; one then understands that the response inherent in music does not necessarily [take the form in outward] shaking and motion. Only then does one refer to it as the sound of moving earth.
>
> 然有所動之何者？夫人心志而發乎氣，氣激於外而成於聲，聲含太宮太商，自然與四氣相合，則呂動律應，陽行陰伏，必陽藏而動陰，陰藏而動陽。當藏而動之，則振發不定，地居陰陽之上，焉有所負者動而所據能息哉？然則聲作而見動地之道，知音樂之有感，不必與震動，然後謂動地之聲。[46]

This passage's explication of sound's origin is in dialogue with the "Yue ji" 樂記 ("Record of Music") section in *Liji* 禮記 (*The Book of Rites*), which is a foundational text in ancient Chinese music theory:

> All sounds grow from people's hearts. Feeling is moved inside, therefore it manifests in sound (*sheng*). When sounds form a pattern, we call it "tone" (*yin*). Therefore, as the tones of a prosperous society are peaceful and joyful, the ruler and his people are in agreement; as the tones of a chaotic society are resentful and angry, the ruler and his people are in dissonance; the tones of a falling dynasty are sad and heavy when the people are in trouble.
>
> 凡音者，生人心者也。情動於中，故形於聲。聲成文，謂之音。是故治世之音安以樂，其政和。亂世之音怨以怒，其政乖。亡國之音哀以思，其民困。[47]

[45] *Gong* 宮, *shang* 商, *jue* 角, *zhi* 徵, and *yu* 羽 refer to the musical notes of the Chinese pentatonic scale.
[46] Gu, *Yangshan Gushi wenfang xiaoshuo*, 9:42b–43a.
[47] Ruan Yuan, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2008), 37:1077.

Xiao zhi's assertion that "Man has mind and intent and then expresses them through his breath" is a modified version of the description in "Yue ji" of how music comes into existence: "feeling is moved inside, therefore it manifests in sound." The theory of music outlined in "Yue ji" revolves around the idea that music acts as a political barometer through which harmony and disharmony between a ruler and his people manifest. Although "Yue ji" depicts inarticulate sound as the most rudimentary means of expressing one's intent, *Xiao zhi* revises this idea by locating the most elemental unit in one's breath. By reconfiguring the classical model, *Xiao zhi* offers an apolitical theory of sound. *Xiao zhi* foregrounds the role that breath has in mediating a cosmological echoing, which we have seen in Chenggong Sui's "Xiao fu" and Huan Xuan's letter to Yuan Shansong.

In medieval China, numerous poets incorporated whistlers and whistling in their works by drawing from the whistling lore produced during the Six Dynasties. For example, in a famous poem called "Zhuli guan" 竹裡館 ("Lodge in Bamboo"), which serves as a self-portrait, the poet Wang Wei 王維 (701–761) who was contemporaneous to Sun Guang—the alleged author of *Xiao zhi*—says he once imagined himself as a whistler: "I sit alone in a secluded bamboo grove/strumming my zither, then whistling long/deep in the woods—no one knows I am here/but the bright moon comes and shines on me" 獨坐幽篁裡，彈琴復長嘯。深林人不知，明月來相照.[48] This poem recalls another anecdote about Ruan Ji, who once whistled while a friend of his—the hermit and *qin* master Sun Deng 孫登—accompanied his whistling by playing the *qin*.[49] Among literary antecedents from the Six Dynasties, the final lines of "Guiqu laixi ci" 歸去來兮辭 ("The Return"), an

[48] Paul Rouzer trans., *The Poetry and Prose of Wang Wei* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 2:119.
[49] See *Taiping yulan*, 3:2613. Many records of this musical event confuse Sun Deng with the anonymous hermit at Mount Sumen. For a discussion of this confusion, see Fan Ziye, "Wei Jin zhi sheng: xiaotai benshi jiqi xiangguan wenxue shuxie" 魏晉之聲：嘯台本事及其相關文學書寫, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 42, no. 2 (2020): 16–17.

autobiographical *fu* written by Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427) in 405, gained particular traction among poets from the medieval to the early modern periods:

> Rather on some fine morning to walk alone
> Now planting my staff to take up a hoe,
> Or climbing the east hill and whistling long
> Or composing verses beside the clear stream:
> So I manage to accept my lot until the ultimate homecoming.
> Rejoicing in Heaven's command, what is there to doubt?
>
> 懷良辰以孤往，或植杖而耘耔。
> 登東皋以舒嘯，臨清流而賦詩。
> 聊乘化以歸盡，樂夫天命復奚疑？[50]

This *fu* announces Tao's decision to abandon officialdom for a detached lifestyle, and the line, "climbing the east hill and whistling long; or composing verses beside the clear stream," represents the poet's yearning to leave human affairs behind. By juxtaposing whistling and poetry composition, Tao draws a noteworthy analogy between the two as authentic, apolitical modes of self-expression and reconciles the tension between them found in earlier literary texts from the Six Dynasties.

Poets from later time periods, especially during the Ming dynasty, were also invested in reconceptualizing the relationship between whistling and speech. In various ways, they explored the potential of whistling to enable authentic self-expression without words, which makes whistling a double of speech. The renowned late-Yuan poet Yang Weizhen 楊維楨 (1296–1370) was once commissioned to write an essay called "Shuxiao tai ji" 舒嘯臺記 ("Record of the Terrace of Relaxed Whistling").[51] "The Terrace of Relaxed Whistling" was a garden where a native of Songjiang 松江

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[50] See Yang Yong, *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶淵明集校箋 (Hongkong: Wuxingji shuju, 1971), 267. The translation is from James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 270.

[51] There were multiple attempts made by premodern scholars to locate the place where Ruan Ji and the hermit at Mount Sumen had their extralinguistic exchange, which is referred in historical records as The Terrace of Whistling (Xiaotai 嘯臺). These attempts locate the terrace in different places,

(now part of Shanghai) named Xie Zhongyun 謝仲允 (n.d.) hosted banquets for honored guests, including Yang Weizhen himself. The name of the terrace, with its allusion to the aforementioned line of Tao's *fu*, might reflect Xie's own desire to regard himself as a kindred spirit of Tao Qian.

In his essay, Yang portrays a musical event that took place during a banquet hosted by Xie. While inebriated Xie performed for Yang something described as "the tune from Mount Sumen" (為予作蘇門之音)—an allusion to whistling. Even though Yang reports the event matter-of-factly, he uses whistling as a metaphor for whatever vocalization Xie produced on the spot, which could have been a type of singing or even something unmusical. Xie's tune inspires the guests to echo with other musical improvisation.[52] Yang, an expert flutist who owned an iron flute, plays a jade flute while other guests compose song lyrics in the style of *yuefu* 樂府 ("music bureau"), a poetic form in the style of a folk song, and order Xie's singers to sing them.

Considering the fact that Yang wrote this essay to sing the praises of the host, the portrayal of the musical improvisation at the banquet likely reflects a poeticized than a straightforward recounting of the actual proceedings, which are beyond our knowledge. Despite the ambiguity regarding the sonic nature of Xie's performance, Yang Weizhen devotes the second half of the essay to portraying the host as if he was actually a whistler. Referring to his firsthand experience of Xie's whistling, Yang suggests that it offers a window into Xie's remarkable personality:

> I have heard that *gong* serves as ruler, *shang* serves as minister, and *jue* serves as people. If *gong* is slack, the ruler becomes haughty. If *shang* is unsmooth, *gong* becomes corrupt. If *jue* is messy, people become resentful. When whistling is harmonious with *gong*, as I hear it, [I feel] peaceful and expansive. When whistling is harmonious with *shang* and *jue*, as I hear it, [I feel] righteous and fond of loyalty, and [I feel] merciful and fond of people. Ah! This is the sound of Yun's heart.

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including two in Henan province. For a discussion of the location of the terrace, see Fan Ziye, "Wei Jin zhi sheng: xiaotai benshi jiqi xiangguan wenxue shuxie," in *Wenxue pinglun*, 15–23.

[52] Yang Weizhen, "Shuxiao tai ji," in *Dongweizi wenji* 東維子文集 (Sibu congkan 四部叢刊 edition), 21:4a.

> 吾聞宮為君，商為臣，角為民。宮荒則君驕，商陂則宮壞，角亂則民其怨。嘯協於宮，使予聞之，溫舒而廣大，協於商、於角，使予聞之，方正而好義，惻隱而好人。吁！此允之心聲也。[53]

The concept of *xinsheng* 心聲 "the sound of his heart" was more commonly used as a metaphor for speech, especially in the form of poetry, in premodern Chinese literary criticism. This catchphrase carries an idealistic connotation that poetry is a preeminent means through which a poet speaks spontaneously and eloquently from the tip of their brush and receives recognition as a distinctive voice. By describing Xie's whistling as the sound of his heart, Yang Weizhen shows that whistling is akin to speech. With minor modifications, Yang quotes the aforementioned passage from "Yue ji," which creates a hierarchy among musical notes that mirrors the relationship among a ruler, his ministers, and his people, as a way of reinforcing the similarity between whistling and speech.

By bringing whistling, which was commonly portrayed as an apolitical mode of communication, into a sociopolitical context, Yang's intention was not so much to assign a political role to whistling as to consider it as a personal mode of self-expression that retains an impersonal quality. As we have also seen in the discussion of the literary accounts of whistling during the Six Dynasties, whistling as a form of communication has an impersonal quality, which is what allows it to be a "voice" of the cosmos. Portraying Xie as a whistler emphasizes the idea that the host's virtuous moral character manifests outwardly in spite of himself.

In the second half of the essay, Yang further departs from conceptions of whistling that permeated literature from the Six Dynasties by imagining whistling as a type of political weapon. During the late 1350s and 1360s, when Yang wrote this essay, China was under siege by multiple forces, including the Red Turban Rebels (1351–1368) and the army led by Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋

[53] Yang, 21:4b.

(1328–1398), the soon-to-be founding emperor of the Ming dynasty.[54] In a commentary on an unspecified confrontation on the northwestern borders, Yang entertains the idea that whistling could repel foreign troops more effectively than a battle:

> I heard that Liu Yueshi gave out the clear-sounding whistling in Jinyang, and when the barbarian troops heard it, they retreated weeping. Whistling can move people like this. Now bandits from the northwest are blocking fortified passes and occupying bridges; if Yun [Xie Zhongyun] could create the powerful and fierce effect of Yueshi's whistling, making winds and clouds move and raising smoke and dust, who would be afraid of the menace at the passes!
>
> 予聞劉越石在晉陽清嘯，胡騎聞之，悽然而退。嘯之感人者又如是。今西北之寇閉塞鬱梁，允能以越石之嘯慷慨激烈者，使風雲動搖，煙塵猝起，又孰畏乎關梁之孽哉！[55]

In this passage, Yang invokes the story of Liu Yueshi, a Six Dynasties politician who was said to use whistling and the playing of Tartar reed flutes to drive off encircling troops—the music moved the opposing army to tears and disarmed them from within.[56] Central to this anecdote is the idea that whistling is capable of inspiring an emotional resonance between the whistler and listeners despite the difference between their stances. The story of Liu Yueshi also reflects an understanding that whistling, like the music promoted by a sage king, cultivates virtuous states of mind among people in a gradual and unintrusive way. Yang adapts this anecdote to project a utopian vision in which whistling is able to solve a real-world political crisis in his time without using violence; in the process, he also takes it in a different direction. Yang imagines that whistling at the frontiers would move foreign soldiers not emotionally but by producing intimidating meteorological changes that would aggressively scare them away.

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[54] This essay was written after Yang moved to and settled in Yunjian (Songjiang) in 1360. See Sun Xiaoli, *Yang Weizhen nianpu* 楊維楨年譜 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 243. In his collection of essays, Yang refers to the Red Turban Rebels multiple times as *kou* 寇, but the mention of the northwestern frontiers seems to suggest a confrontation with a different force outside of China proper.

[55] Yang, "Shuxiao tai ji," in *Dongweizi wenji*, 21:4b–5a.

[56] For the story about Liu Yueshi, see Fang, *Yiwenleiju*, 353.

Yang's conception of whistling as a double of articulate speech departs from Six Dynasties understanding of the sound as an antithesis of speech. Several literati authors from the Ming to the Qing shared Yang's interest in reconfiguring the relationship between whistling and speech. In the early modern periods, the character *xiao* was often incorporated into titles of personal collections and the names of buildings. A Jiangxi native named Mao Zhongding 毛仲鼎 and his younger brother Mao Zhonghuai 毛仲槐 owned a house called "Mansion for Relaxed Whistling" 舒嘯軒, which was named by a friend of theirs, the scholar-official Lian Zining 練子寧 (1359–1402; *bangyan* 1385). Lian also wrote an essay in honor of the house. Lian apparently had Tao Qian's autobiographical *fu* in mind, but he understood whistling not so much as a sonic phenomenon as a mode of transcendence characteristic of a hermit.[57] The Mao brothers also invited the Ming dynasty Grand Chief Secretary Xie Jin 解縉 (1369–1415) to write an essay for their house. In comparison with Lian's essay, Xie's account contains a noteworthy understanding that whistling serves as a means of self-expression by combining previously incongruous conceptions of the sound. Xie not only foregrounds whistling's sonic nature but also uses whistling to reconceptualize the origin of sound in general. In this way, Xie also theorizes the personal aspect of whistling.

Xie begins his essay by drawing from the theory of correlative cosmology: "The stirring of sound always stems from how one responds" 聲之動也，未始不由所感也.[58] He proceeds to divide all types of sound into two categories: sounds that arise spontaneously (聲之出於自然 *sheng zhi chuyu ziran*), such as the sound of thunder and pounding waves; and sounds that are produced by sentient beings (聲之出於使然 *sheng zhi chuyu shiran*), such as the music from a musical instrument.

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[57] Lian Zining, "Shuxiao xuan ji" 舒嘯軒記, in *Lian zhongcheng ji* 練中丞集, in *Jinchuan yuxie ji* 金川玉屑集 (Ming edition) 4:2b–4a.

[58] Xie Jin, "Shuxiao xuan ji" 舒嘯軒記, in Huang Zongxi, *Ming wenhai* 明文海 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 2701.

This distinction also implies the understanding that the former group is more autonomous whereas the latter group is contingent on external media. Positing that the characteristics of a sound are shaped by the way it physically emerges, Xie turns to the human voice and makes the following observations:

> As for one's singing and crooning, weeping and wailing, laughing and bantering, crying and howling, intoning and sobbing, moaning and groaning, chanting and exclaiming, and giggling and gasping; making the sound of "alas" when letting out a sigh, and making the sound of "haha" when emitting an extensive laugh, they use one's mouth, lips, throat, and tongue, which rise and fall, inhale and exhale to produce these sounds.
>
> 人之歌呼、悲號、笑嬉、哭咷、噫嚶、呻吟、咏呀、喜咢、嘅然而太息、劃然而長笑者，假於口吻喉舌，昇嗄噭呼，轉運動定，以出是聲也。[59]

Xie lists various types of communication enabled by one's vocal apparatus (such as sighing and laughing), describing these as movements of the breath without mentioning anything about their linguistic aspects or social function. By emphasizing the notion that breath, the primal element of the cosmos, is also the basis for one's own voice, Xie reconsiders the origin of the voice in cosmological terms. Unlike the concept of the human voice found in early Chinese theories of acoustics and in the materials on singing pedagogy (mostly relating to theatrical performance) that were beginning to appear around the time Xie was writing, Xie's conception of the human voice focuses on its pre-linguistic state.[60] Xie theorizes the voice in a Zhuangzian vein by enlisting whistling as a master metaphor for vocal communication of all kind. Extrapolating from this logic, speech, as a particular way of using the breath, should be considered as a subset of whistling. Xie illustrates this point by imagining the Mao brothers as whistlers who do not fit the standard characterization of whistlers as recluses detached from human affairs:

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[59] Xie, "Shuxiao xuan ji," in Huang, *Ming wenhai*, 2701.

[60] See Yannan zhi'an 燕南芝庵, "Changlun" 唱論 ("Treatise on Singing"), in Zhongguo xiqu yanjiu yuan ed., *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1959), 1:159–62.

> [As Mao Zhongding and Mao Zhonghuai] climb high and gaze out afar; they are moved by things that inspire emotions. The natural sounds of thunder, lightning, wind, and waves change before them every day but cannot stir them; this is how calm their whistling is. They lift their feet and embark on journeys. As they observe things, their whistling manifests endless variations [of those things]. As they move people, their whistling exceeds any possible response. Unbridled, the Mao brothers carry serene thoughts, and their piercing whistles bear peaceful intent from the hollow within. From this vacancy, the Mao brothers take charge of whistling so that at all times they inhabit a tranquil space saturated with serenity. As for [their] feelings, there is no place that they do not have a clear and delightful sky. Although they have mastered whistling, they do not confine themselves to whistling; they are unbound by the limitations imposed by Mr. Chenggong.
>
> 登高而望遠，感物而興懷，雷電風水自然之聲日變其前而不能動，其嘯之靜也。舉足而進涉，觀物而賾煩，感人而賾應，浩然思安，而劃然之意块然，其中不實。其虛也，然則其主也，固無時而非恬淡衝安之地；其感也，固無往而非清和會適之天。雖得于嘯而不泥於嘯，非若成公之賦，蓋拘拘也。[61]

It is noteworthy that Xie goes so far as to re-theorize whistling as a metaphor for self-expression in order to produce a flattering character appraisal of the Mao brothers. His theorization suggests a change of perspective in a Zhuangzian vein.[62] From this passage, we see that Xie proposes his theory of whistling as a corrective to Chenggong Sui's "Xiao fu," which is limiting as it portrays whistling as a distinctive aesthetic form. Instead, according to Xie, one's expertise in whistling is not confined to

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[61] Xie, "Shuxiao xuan ji," in Huang, *Ming wenhai*, 2701.

[62] Xie refers to the restricting feature of Chenggong's rhapsody as *juju* 拘拘 (a crumpled thing), a phrase that also appears in Zhuangzi's chapter "Da zongshi" 大宗師 ("The Teacher Who Is the Ultimate Ancestor"), which refers to a condition under which one is physically constrained and even disabled. In this chapter, a man who falls ill tells his friend of his joy at approaching the threshold between life and death that will liberate him from all worldly burdens. He says: "Wonderful! how the maker of things is turning me into this crumpled thing. He hunches me and my back sticks out, the five pipes to the spine run up above my head, my chin hides down in my navel, my shoulders are higher than my crown, the knobbly bone in my neck points up at the sky. The energies of Yin and Yang are all awry" 偉哉！夫造物者，將以予為此拘拘也！曲僂發背，上有五管，頤隱於齊，肩高於頂，句贅指天. See Liu Wendian, *Zhuangzi buzheng* 莊子補正 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 1999), 205–6. The translation of this response is from A. C. Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzŭ* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 88. This self-image is a variation of the portrayal of a disabled man named Cripple Shu 支離疏 in the preceding chapter, "Renjian shi" 人間世 ("Worldly Business Among Men"). Cripple Shu's disability allows him to avoid being enlisted as a soldier during a period of war and to receive food and household essentials as part of a relief program. As a result, he is able to support himself and to live a long life. See Liu, *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 141–43.

the sonic domain. As the Mao brothers have demonstrated, whistling as a state of transcendence is present in one's ability to remain at ease and unconstrained regardless of the physical and social spaces one inhabits.

Xie's method for considering whistling as a metaphor for the personal voice in general while depicting its sonic aspects in concrete terms deserves closer examination. By portraying one's voice as a void, Xie evokes Zhuangzi's Three Pipings. Xie considers the voice as a site of echoing in a correlative cosmological model rather than as a means of exteriorizing one's intent, ideas, and feelings, which is a central characteristic of speech. Xie's conception of whistling downplays the role that the feeling subject has in the formation of his or her voice in the most literal sense. To have a voice like those of the Mao brothers is to have a voice other than one's own, one that expresses one's harmonious interconnection with a larger cosmological ecology rather than asserting one's uniqueness.

Xie concludes his essay with the following observations:

> As for singing and crooning, weeping and wailing, laughing and bantering, crying and howling, sighing and sobbing, moaning and groaning, chanting and exclaiming, and giggling and gasping, all of these sounds involve whistling and yet none of them are whistling by itself. As one "whistles" in order to express one's intent and thought, things that stir and sadden oneself must also be expressed before one can whistle. Mountains echo and valleys respond, winds arise and waves engulf. What moves them to do so? Zhongding understands that a sound that is made is not different from a sound that arises spontaneously.
>
> 歌呼、悲號、笑嬉、哭咷、噫嚶、呻吟、咏呀、喜愕，未嘗不嘯，亦未嘗嘯也。嘯以舒其志意，所觸所傷亦必舒而後能嘯也。何也？山鳴谷應，風起水湧，此何如其感也？仲鼎知使然之聲不異於自然之聲也。[63]

In this passage, Xie further de-familiarizes the act of communication in the form of verbal conversation as well as singing, crying, sighing, among other extralinguistic means of self-expression by considering each of them as whistling—a process of echoing animated by one's own breath. To

[63] Xie, "Shuxiao xuan ji," in Huang, *Ming wenhai*, 2701.

Xie, whistling embodies a "vocal utopia" in a Zhuangzian sense: an alternative space enabled by one's vocal apparatus where the hierarchy among speech, mere sound, and noise collapses and where one's body becomes the Zhuangzian Piping of Earth. The distinction between sound that arises spontaneously and sound produced artificially, which is destabilized by Zhuangzi in his demonstration of the Three Pipings, dissolves utterly in Xie's theory of whistling. Seen in this light, Xie's metaphorization of whistling treats communication as an autonomous process akin to echoing in the most literal sense. In this way, Xie offers a rare correlative cosmological interpretation of whistling that considers sound as the preeminent mode of self-expression, a role usually reserved for speech.

While Yang Weizhen and Xie Jin take different approaches to understanding whistling as a mode of self-expression akin to speech, both of them are interested in seeing the archaic sound as a counterpart of familiar functions of one's voice, including speech and singing. Even though these conceptions were produced in isolation from each other, taken as a whole, they depart from the understandings shaped by their Six Dynasties predecessors that separate whistling from the linguistic domain. For Yang Weizhen, whistling not only mirrors speech but also has a wider range of communicative potential than speech. For Xie Jin in particular, whistling is no longer an alternative to the voice but *is* the voice. Xie and Yang's essays mark the beginning of a phase in which literary authors from different time periods came to consider whistling as an extension of or supplement to linguistic forms of communication rather than something outside the system of language.

Integrating Whistling with Poetics

Seventeenth-century scholars further reflected on the personal aspect of whistling as a mode of communication akin to speech while trying to find a place for whistling in poetics. In 1619, a late-

Ming scholar named Cheng Mingshan 程明善 (n.d.) published a guidebook on the composition of *ci* 詞 (lyric poetry). *Ci* poetry features set rhyme patterns, each associated with a specific name or title,) and lines of varying length. As a result, *ci* poetry is often called *changduan ju* 長短句 (long and short lines). This lyrical form is also commonly referred to as *shiyu* 詩餘 (the remainder of poetry). As the preeminent poetic form during the Song dynasty (960–1279), *ci* poetry was sung as a musical form. Cheng named his book *Xiaoyu pu* 嘯餘譜 (*The Manual of the Remainder of Whistling*), which promotes an alternative history of the genre: *ci* poetry developed out of whistling. Cheng opens his preface to *Xiaoyu pu* with a provocative statement that reflects an ambitious attempt to reinvent the origin story of Chinese poetry:

> One has whistling before one has a voice, and one has a voice before there are pitch pipes and music, and they develop into *yuefu* poetry, *ci* poetry, and drama. All of these are offspring of one's voice.
>
> 人有嘯而後有聲，有聲而後有律、有樂，流而為樂府，為詞曲，皆其聲之緒餘也。[64]

This chronology recalls Xie Jin's claim that whistling is the origin of the human voice. As Cheng offers this account for the creation of poetry, he suggests that whistling, which was understood as an alternative to poetry during the Six Dynasties, is actually an integral part of poetics. As if to bolster this point, Cheng presents *Xiao zhi* as the first text in his manual even though scholars such as Li Lian had dismissed the text as incomprehensible decades before.

Xiao zhi stands out somewhat uncomfortably from the compendium, which mainly contains rhyme books, musical scores, and treatises on singing, and its inclusion reflects Cheng's agenda to reconstruct a discourse on the *ci* poetry. As Cheng stopped short of elaborating his rationale for considering whistling as the progenitor of poetry, he left his bold claim vulnerable to criticism.

[64] Cheng Mingshan, "'Xiaoyu pu' xu" 《嘯餘譜》序, in *Xiaoyu pu* 嘯餘譜 (1619), 5a.

When the editors of the Qing dynasty imperial compendium *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (*Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*) selected Cheng's guidebook for inclusion, they rejected this statement and declared that it is groundless to consider whistling as poetry's origin. The editors were also vexed by the disorganized nature of the book and the compositional methods it prescribes. As the editors prioritized scholarly rigor, they apparently missed the possibility that the playful rhetoric in Cheng's statement may be an unusual strategy for making his claim. As a result, the *Siku* editors dismissed *Xiaoyu pu* as an inferior text full of fabricated speculations.[65]

A scholar named Ma Mingting 馬鳴霆 (*jinshi* 1613) took up the task that Cheng Mingshan left unfinished. Ma wrote a preface for *Xiaoyu pu* in which he conceptualizes whistling as an integral part of poetry writing, thereby placing the previously ineffable sound squarely within the linguistic system. Ma opens his preface by identifying a homology between the tonal aspects of language and the breath, which connects one's heart with wind and other natural forces in the cosmos: "One sees that the vital energy of Heaven and Earth releases and disperses by means of wind, whereas the human heart concentrates the vital energy of Heaven and Earth and releases and disperses it by means of rhyme" 蓋見天地之精氣嘯散於風，而人心彙天地之精氣, 嘯散於韻.[66] Ma uses *xiaosan* (whistling) as an intransitive verb to denote an act of communication that operates spontaneously and autonomously, a feature shared by the wind and the human speech. This reconceptualization of whistling recalls Xie Jin's intervention discussed above. The purpose of this statement is to use whistling as a metaphor for poetic composition by drawing an analogy between the process of creating rhythmic resonance by composing *ci* poetry and that of wind "expressing" on behalf of the heaven of earth (another unmistakable allusion to the Zhuangzian Piping of Earth).

[65] See *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四庫全書總目 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 2:1835.
[66] Ma Mingting, "Ti 'Xiaoyu pu' xu" 題《嘯餘譜》序, in Cheng Mingshan, *Xiaoyu pu*, 2b.

After this opening, Ma revisits a poem by the famous Tang dynasty poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) describing the Three Kingdoms state strategist Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234). Du compares Zhuge to an old cypress tree and praises him for the talent that makes him stand out effortlessly: "Even without showing its patterning, [he/the tree] would make the world amazed; nor would it refuse to be cut down, but who could transport it?" 不露文章世已驚，未辭翦伐誰能送.[67] *Wenzhang* 文章, the word that Du uses for "patterning," also denotes literary writing. But Du does not specify through which means Zhuge showed his talent. Ma fills in this gap by pointing out a biographical detail that Du does not: Zhuge was also known as a whistler before he became a politician.[68] Ma states:

> When Kongming [Zhuge's courtesy name] was farming in Nanyang, he held his knees and emitted long-drawn whistling. Du [Fu] the Minister of Works praised Zhuge, saying "even without showing its patterning, [he/the tree] would make the world amazed"; Zhuge's enormous strength in assisting the world is nurtured in a single whistle.
>
> 孔明躬耕南陽，抱膝長嘯。杜工部稱其"不露文章而世已驚"，濟世巨力，養於一嘯。[69]

Ma suggests that Zhuge's eloquence and competence as a military strategist for the state of the Shu Han is already discernible in his whistling when he is living the life of a recluse. Here, Zhuge's whistling is considered a pre-linguistic state of eloquence. In the next sentence, putting the anecdote about Zhuge next to the story of Ruan Ji's visit to Mount Sumen, Ma uses these examples to support his claim that whistling should be understood as an umbrella term for denoting a wide range of vocal sounds rather than a particular type of sound:

> Whistling is different in kind: it might hide, or show, or form a pattern, or set an elegant model; these forms gather and represent by means of tones and sounds: birds weep upon withered flowers, and water turns green as mountains turn blue. This whistling is the same

[67] Stephen Owen, *The Poetry of Du Fu* (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 4:231.
[68] See "Zhuge Liang zhuan" 諸葛亮傳, in Lu Bi, *Sanguo zhi jijie* 三國志集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 756.
[69] Ma, "Ti 'Xiaoyu pu' xu," in Cheng Mingshan, *Xiaoyu pu*, 2b–3a.

> in the past as it is in the present. Only the grand deity understands this: [the sound] can be long or short, connected or disjoined, [these forms of whistling] live in the whistler. If one gathers a breath and triggers the crossbow [of expression], the sounds [of whistling] alternately express through each other, and the [sounds] before resonate with the [sounds] after. They vary in sound, but they all fall under the category of whistling, just like the puffs that produce the myriad never-repeating sounds are all expressions of wind. How great it is!
>
> 夫嘯不同也，而隱而見而文章而風流標樹，揔於音聲中券之。蓋鳥啼花落，水綠山青。古今同此嘯。圃神而明之，長短合間，存乎其人。揔是一氣一機，自相輸寫，前後暎發，韻致不同而同歸於嘯，猶之吹萬不同而同鼓於風，善乎！[70]

The weeping birds, withering flowers, and the green water and blue mountain allude to different themes in poetic composition, whereas the cadence of *ci* poetry is indeed "long or short, connected or disjoined." With a rhetorical sleight of hand, Ma begins the essay considering whistling as a type of sound but ends up comparing the process of composing a *ci* poem to whistling.

In the rest of the essay, Ma uses whistling as a metaphor for composing *ci* poetry, emphasizing the notion that poetry is an effortless and spontaneous act of self-expression despite its constructed nature. Ma concludes by referring to a poem written by the Song dynasty poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) in 1080, "Dinghuiyuan yongshi wei yu zhuxia kaixiaoxuan" 定惠院顒師為余竹下開嘯軒 ("Master Yong at the Dinghui Temple Opened the Whistling Cottage for Me"):

> Mr. Po [alluding to Su Shi's courtesy name Dongpo] has one line that goes like this: "Gradually, I exhaust [my words] and what else can I say? When wind comes, the bamboo groves whistles by itself." This can shed light on *Xiaoyu pu* in the form of an annotation.
>
> 坡公之韻有云："累盡吾何言，風來竹自嘯，"此可以徵嘯餘譜之註腳矣。[71]

Here Ma is citing the concluding line of Su's poem, which describes a variety of nonhuman ambient sounds, including twittering birds and chirping crickets, while placing the poet in the role of a listener and a transcriber.[72] This displacement of poetic agency is most vividly illustrated by the

[70] Ma, 3a–3b.
[71] Ma, 3b–4a.
[72] See Wang Wengao, *Su Shi shiji* 蘇軾詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 4:1059.

contrast between the poet's cumbersome speech and the whistling bamboo in the final line. Ma's repurposing of the line converges multiple kinds of whistling (i.e., that of a whistler, that of a wind, and that of poetry-as-whistling) into a single act of spontaneous self-expression, which is what poetry is for. By understanding composing poetry as a type of "whistling," Ma turns whistling into a special metaphor akin to the one designed by Xie Jin. Together, Xie and Ma shed some light on the reason that many seventeenth-century literary authors portrayed poets they personally knew as whistlers: whistling represents an effortless and unrestrained creative process that many poets aspired to realize with words.

Many seventeenth-century literary authors were sensitive to the fact that literati-style whistling was a sound that they were unable to hear anymore. The metaphor of whistling conveys a sense of ephemerality, which is particularly pronounced in the late Ming and the early Qing. Through an examination of three different cases produced around the Ming–Qing transition, the following discussion will focus on how whistling allows these literary authors to animate personal memories in a variety of ways.

The first case is a preface that scholar-official Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612–1672) wrote for a collection of poems written his friend Xiang Yuanlin 向遠林 (fl. 1644) after Xiang's premature death. In the beginning of the preface, Zhou describes a high point in Xiang's political career, which took place near the end of the Ming dynasty. After Xiang candidly pointed out the inefficacy of governance in a letter to the emperor (presumably the Chongzhen emperor), the emperor was moved and granted Xiang a reward. But Xiang's proposal was never put into practice due to the interference of opposing factions. Subsequently, whenever Xiang presented the emperor's written reply to other people, they doubted whether this exchange ever took place. Without getting another chance to accomplish anything politically important, Xiang spent the rest of his life living in hardship. In the last years of his life, poetry was the only channel through which he expressed his

unfulfilled political ambition. In 1662, several years after Xiang's death, as Zhou was fumbling through a stack of archived official records, he stumbled upon evidence of the emperor's reward for Xiang. Zhou laments the fact that Xiang's voice has only partially survived as poetic traces while his political vision left no mark in history.

A sense of transience permeates the preface as Zhou shares his memory of his talented friend. In the second half of the preface, Zhou introduces Xiang as a lover of whistling even though he acknowledges that whistling was a rare skill at that time. Zhou connects the poet's writing and his whistling as two forms of fragility characteristic of this poet's voice in the public sphere. Zhou fleshes out Xiang's profile as a whistler by recounting two exchanges he has had with Xiang. In the first, Zhou asks Xiang how he acquired the skill of whistling, but Xiang smiles without responding, which resonates with the Daoist hermit's initial reaction to Ruan Ji's eager inquiries atop Mount Sumen. In the second exchange, Xiang finally discloses the secret to his mastery of the obsolete skill. As Zhou recalls, Xiang says:

> Whistling is essentially emitting breath and contracting the mouth to form sound. It is as soft as silk and bamboo [an allusion to string and wind instruments] and as loud as thunder and lightning, making all mountains and valleys respond and flocks of birds sing along.
>
> 嘯本噫氣，蹙口成聲，微若絲竹，大若雷霆，山谷皆應，群鳥和鳴。[73]

Xiang's words have the cadence of poetry. Taking this response as a lens for observing Xiang's poetry, Zhou offers an interpretation of how Xiang's whistling and poetic writing extend each other:

> As he has pent-up feelings in his chest, he borrows whistling to express his intent. He then becomes open-minded and contented, and the Piping of Heaven is stirred [by his whistling] as a result. Yuanlin has now attained both [the way of poetry and the way of whistling]; the origins [of his feelings] are as lofty and marvelous as this.
>
> 蓋其胸有所抑鬱而借以抒發其志意，不則曠然自得，而天籟為之適動也。今遠林皆有之，而其所託之高妙乃爾。[74]

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[73] Zhou Lianggong, "Xiang Yuanlin shixu" 向遠林詩序, in *Laigutang ji* 賴古堂集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979) 13:11a–11b.
[74] Zhou, 11a–11b.

Zhou continues to elaborate on the doubling between Xiang's whistling and poetry to underscore his own feeling of loss upon reading Xiang's poems:

> Since *Guangling Melody* (an ancient piece of *qin* music) disappeared, such a tune has rarely been played. But those who read Yuanlin's poetry understand Yuanlin's whistling. Where are those who heard Yuanlin's whistling in his time? It would be better to read Yuanlin's poetry [than to hear his whistling], [for poetry] is the means for transmitting Yuanlin.
>
> 自廣陵散絕，此調多不彈矣。則讀遠林之詩者，可以得遠林之嘯。而當時聞遠林之嘯者安在？不如今日之讀遠林之詩哉，可以傳遠林矣。[75]

A paradox is at work in this passage. On the one hand, Zhou depicts whistling as a lack that constantly calls attention to its own absence. As a sound that cannot be retrieved from the past, the friend is gone. On the other hand, Zhou indicates that leafing through Xiang's poems conjures up an illusion that the friend's whistling is still within earshot. For Zhou, Xiang's poetry does not survive the vagaries of life so much as bear witness to the fragility of literary writing. Like the poet's whistling, the written words are simply traces of an irrecoverable personal voice from a bygone era. In this case, presented alongside poetry as a phantom double of an author's lyrical voice, whistling serves as a reminder that making a mark through spoken and written words is a fragile act.

Singing as Whistling

The second case revolves around Pan Zhiheng. Pan's collection of personal writings, called *Luanxiao xiaopin* 鸞嘯小品 (*Trivial Notes on the Whistling of a Fabulous Bird*) was compiled and published posthumously in 1629 by his fifth son Pan Bishi 潘弼時 with help from a number of Pan's friends.[76] This title presumably reflects the wish of Pan's friends to pay homage to one of

[75] Zhou, 11b.
[76] For information about the publication of this collection, see Zhang Qiuchan, "Pan Zhiheng yanjiu" 潘之恆研究 ("A Study of Pan Zhi-heng"), PhD diss., (Soochow University, 2008), 95–98.

Pan's favorite sobriquets, "Mr. Fabulous Bird" 鸞生 (*Luan sheng*). It was common for Ming and Qing literati to include the character for whistling in the titles of their personal collections, their studios, and their own names. The Ming playwright Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593), gave one of his plays the title of *Ge dai xiao* 歌代嘯 (*Singing in Place of Whistling*). Dong Sizhang 董斯張 (1586–1628), the father of the late-Ming writer Dong Yue 董說 (1620–1686), named his own study "Studio for Quiet Whistling" 靜嘯齋. Such titles were often intended by their authors as one-off playful rhetorical gestures that do not lend themselves to further interpretation. But this is not the case with Pan's personal collection. When, in the ninth month of 1629, the scholar-official Wang Zegu 王則古 (*jinshi* 1613) wrote the postface 後序 for the collection, he volunteered a personal anecdote about Pan:

> I recall the first time I met Jingsheng [Pan Zhiheng's courtesy name] in Chang'an, he was nothing but a high-spirited man who took bold actions. He would lift up his beard and produce a long-drawn whistle, and seemed to have an unconstrained character. For twenty-three years, the more that Pan exerted himself in the forest of writers, the more he was enriched within.
>
> 憶余初識景升于長安府，第昂藏豪舉，掀髯長嘯，意豁如也。垂二十三年，益肆力作者之林，胸中日益富。[77]

As there is barely any record elsewhere of Pan Zhiheng's expertise in whistling, the detail of Pan lifting his thick beard to whistle might have been projected by Wang to make Pan's untrammeled personality even more memorable. As this passage indicates, Wang portrays Pan as a whistler as a way of introducing his identity as an author, which makes whistling a double metaphor representing not only Pan's personal character but also his literary competence.

[77] Wang Zegu, "'Luanxiao xiaopin' Houji" 《鸞嘯小品》後序, in Pan Zhiheng, *Luanxiao xiaopin* 鸞嘯小品 (1629), 13:2a–2b.

Like Zhou Lianggong, Wang volunteers himself as an ear-witness of Pan's whistling and the extralinguistic self-expression that otherwise left no material trace. By positioning himself as a listener, Wang creates an aural bond with the owner of a peerless voice, which gives his memory about Pan heightened credibility whether the event he recounts actually took place or not. Such depictions of someone as a whistler commemorate the writer's personal connection with the remembered person (who often has already passed away), reflecting the writer's desire to animate a memorable event from the past as something as tangible as a unique sound lingering within his earshot.

Pan Zhiheng shared this desire, but manifested it in a somewhat peculiar way. Pan spent nearly half of his lifetime in the cultural metropolis Jinling 金陵 (present-day Nanjing) in the Jiangnan region, where he was acquainted with many singers, actresses, actors, courtesans, and other performers and musicians; he wrote numerous biographies for them and produced many prose essays commenting on contemporary drama performances. He depicted the singing of at least five of his favorite singers as *shuxiao* 舒嘯 (relaxed whistling), which again borrows from Tao Qian's autobiographical *fu*. In its original context, *shuxiao* is associated with the idea that whistling embodies a state of detachment and transcendence. Considering that most of the singers Pan portrayed as whistlers were courtesans, who are the opposite of hermits in that their livelihood depends on their liaisons with patrons, Pan's choice is certainly surprising.

Two of Pan's biographies, "Song Ni" 宋尼 ("The Nun Surnamed Song") and "Nü Nanhua" 女南華 ("Lady Nanhua"), tell the story ofcourtesans. Reading these alongside a range of literary texts from the late Ming that mention whistling, Peng Xu considers whistling to be a masculine singing style in vogue during Pan's time, which was often referred to by the onomatopoeic "wou-

wou."[78] Based on this understanding, she suggests that a redefinition of the concept of *xiao* happened during the late Ming. While I agree that the meaning of *xiao* did indeed change in the early modern period, my previous discussion has demonstrated that this transformation is not specific to the late Ming. I also depart from Xu's interpretation of whistling as a type of singing by situating the late-Ming examples of whistling in the literary history from the early medieval to the early modern periods.

The following discussion analyzes "Song Ni" and "Nü Nanhua" alongside other essays in which Pan Zhiheng referred to singing as whistling. Xu points out that imagining a courtesan singer as a whistler is likely Pan's attempt to see her as his peer, which incorporates a sense of masculinity into the profile of the courtesan and in turn subverts the courtesan's stereotypical hyper-feminine image. Through a closer examination, I will supplement Xu's interpretation by pointing out another intervention embedded in Pan's characterization of these courtesans as whistlers. The term for singing, *ge* 歌, often appears alongside the word for whistling, *xiao* 嘯, to form the compound word *xiaoge* 嘯歌 (or *gexiao* 歌嘯).[79] Depending on the context, the compound word can either mean singing in a relaxed and effortless manner, akin to whistling, or singing and whistling in alternation. When this term appears in *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Songs*)—the first Chinese poetry anthology—whistling is linguistically subordinated to singing.[80] Pan reverses this subordination by using

[78] See Peng Xu, "Courtesan vs. Literatus: Gendered Soundscapes and Aesthetics in Late-Ming Singing Culture," *T'oung Pao* 100, no. 4–5 (2014): 404–59.

[79] Fan Ziye offers an interpretation that the *ge* (singing) in the phrase of "*xiaoge* 嘯歌" marks the musical nature of whistling rather than making whistling a type of singing. See Fan Ziye, "Xiao: Dongfang guguo de koushao yinyue," in *Zhongguo wenhua*, 179. However, the linguist Zhao Yintang 趙蔭堂 suggests that this phrase should be understood as singing in a way akin to whistling. See Zhao, *Dengyun yuanliu* 等韻源流 (Beiping: Guoli Beijing daxue wenxueyuan, 1941), 35–36.

[80] For an example, see "Jiang you si" 江有汜 ("The River Parts and Joins"), in Li Xueqin, *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe), 1:98.

whistling, an obsolete and obscure sound, as a metaphor for singing, a more familiar and usually "unmarked" skill. In this way, Pan also revisesthe linguistic hierarchy between singing and whistling.

"Song Ni" is Pan's biography of Liu Yizhi 劉一枝, a courtesan from Yangzhou who became a Buddhist nun sometime between 1604 and 1607. In "Song Ni," Pan recounts a hiking trip he took with Qian Shuda 錢叔達, Liu, and another courtesan during the winter of 1598 in Mount Songluo, which is adjacent to the Yellow Mountains. The other courtesan was Li Nanhua 李南華, a native of Songjiang (now a district in Shanghai), who later became a concubine of Wang Cijun 汪次君, a wealthy man from Pan Zhiheng's hometown who resided in Nanjing.[81] (Wang had at one time intended to acquire Liu as one of his concubines but she forestalled the proposal sternly.) The trip was Li's idea. Pan recalls that the day was cold and the trail, covered with fallen leaves, was slippery. After the party climbs up on a hill, they look up to the summit and are intimidated by how steep and arduous the way up looked. But the two courtesans do not hesitate. They undress until they are only wearing short, thin jackets, and they begin to climb. When Pan recounts this moment, Liu and Li appear before his eyes as two fearless swordsmen: "As both of them were proud of their passion for climbing the mountain, they stripped off their outer robes, squatted down,[82] and climbed straight to the mountaintop" 皆自豪登山之興，解衣磐礴，直凌絕頂.[83]

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[81] Taking Li as an average courtesan at first, famous literati at that time visited her house and chatted with her in a flirtatious way. But Li's reply to them was "all emanating the Piping of Heaven and naturally conforming to moral principles" 皆發天籟，自然中理. Startled, the literati regarded her words as even more superior to the discourse on Zhuangzi's chapter "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊 produced by Jin dynasty literati. They began to call Li "Lady Nanhua" 女南華, which alludes to *The Classic of Nanhua* 南華經, another name by which *Zhuangzi* was known during the Six Dynasties. See Pan, "Nü Nanhua," in *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 9:20b–21a.

[82] As an idiomatic expression, "taking off clothes and squatting down" 解衣磐礴 (*jieyi panbo*) usually denotes taking action in an unrestrained manner while defying social conventions. In this case, Pan might be using this phrase to describe the bodily movements of the courtesans as they climbed the mountain.

[83] See Pan, "Song Ni," in *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 9:19a.

After Liu and Li reach the summit, they begin whistling in a duet. Pan reports: "Their long-drawn whistling joined together, and it was like the doubled calling of two phoenixes" 雙聲長嘯，如鳳齊鳴.[84] Pan goes ahead to take a look at the Cave of Yellow Clouds, and tries to persuade the ladies not to venture there. But Liu is ready for the new adventure, saying that if the two literati want to follow the footsteps of Liu Chen 劉晨 and Ruan Zhao 阮肇, two scholar-officials in the Eastern Han dynasty who encountered two immortal ladies on Mount Tiantai, why shouldn't she and Li act as those immortal ladies to make the legend come true?[85] The group then continues the journey uphill and downhill, covering over 20 *li* (approximately 7.5 miles). At this point of their trip, Li remains calm and at ease, which deeply impresses Pan, who comments: "It is even difficult to find such a person among us literati" 吾黨中亦不易得也.[86] Although this biography is written for Li, and as such focuses on her reactions, Pan's praise can certainly be extended to Liu.

Coming across the description of Li's and Liu's "long-drawn whistling" on the mountaintop in isolation from Pan's other essays might lead a reader to assume that the courtesans were imitating the kind of whistling practiced by Six Dynasties literati. It is unclear whether to take Pan's use of whistling literally or metaphorically, especially when reading in conjunction with similar attempts made by other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers. In one such poem, the scholar Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642) also refers a courtesan's singing as whistling: "In her family she acquired the long-drawn whistling imitating the Sumen style; now she has turned it into an even more soul-

[84] Pan, "Song Ni," in *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 9:19a. The detail of their whistling is omitted in Li's biography.
[85] For details of Liu and Ruan's trip in Mount Tiantai, see Liu Yiqing, *Youming lu* 幽明錄, in Lu Xun, *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沉, in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973), 8:361–362.
[86] Pan, "Nü Nanhua," in *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 9:22a.

piercing song in Wu tunes" 家傳長嘯學蘇門，變出吳歈更斷魂.[87] But the parallel structure of Shen's couplet makes it easy to comprehend the nature of the metaphor. By contrast, what Pan plants in Song's biography seems more like a puzzle.

"Nü Nanhua," the Pan's biography of Li Nanhua, the other courtesan on the trip to Mount Songluo, sheds more light on what was happening on the mountaintop. In the biography, Pan describes a performance given by Li after she has married Wang Cijun and become one of nine singers in that house: "Ever since then, at the Hall of Three Blue Birds, the seats are surrounded by miraculous glow, and from behind the screens come flowing sounds [so fabulous that they] stop clouds. It is Lady Nanhua whistling at ease amidst them" 自是三青鳥堂靈光繞座，屏后流響遏云，則南華舒嘯其中.[88] The screens were likely placed to separate the singers, also Wang's concubines, from male guests in observance of social etiquette. Pan notes that the Wang would always let Li perform last, a spot which is usually reserved for the best performance, even though she was not ranked the top among the singers in the house. The poetic phrase "flowing sounds that stop clouds" is a set phrase for describing marvelous singing. Pan also mentions two songs sung by the merchant's other concubines, "Untying the Jade Pendant" from Anhui and "Bamboo Twig Lyrics" from Hangzhou, which were popular songs at that time, to compare with Li's performance. Through these auxiliary details, we can get a sense that Li's "relaxed whistling" is in fact singing. By describing Li's singing as "relaxed whistling," a term that commonly refers to the literati-style whistling practiced during the Six Dynasties, Pan indicates the singularity of her singing voice and distinguishes her from the other "marvelous sounds that stop clouds" emitting from behind the screens.

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[87] For Shen's poem entitled "Four Poems on Encountering a Courtesan from Guangling at a Banquet" (席上遇廣陵阮姬四首), see Shen Defu, *Qingquantang ji* 清權堂集 (1578–1642), 10:11b–12a.
[88] Pan, "Nü Nanhua," in *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 9:22a.

However, Pan's characterization of Li as a whistler who stands out among marvelous singers is in stark contrast with an earlier comment that he added to Liu's biography when it was included in *Gen shi* 亙史 (*History of Expansiveness*), an extensive collection of biographies and tales he compiled.[89] In this commentary, Pan sets up a contrast between Liu and Li, praising the former for her ability to transcend the "dirty mud" of pleasure quarters as well as worldly affairs while casting the latter in a pejorative light:

> When I climbed Mount Songluo, I could tell that Lady Song had the intention of leaving the dusty world. At the same time, Miss Nanhua married into a wealthy household, and everybody praised her for being a wise woman. Up to today she is quite vain and showy, flaunting trendy tunes behind screens and thinking that she has a master to break her away from the dirty mud. But looking at Nun Song, there is truly a world of difference.
>
> 余登松蘿山，識宋尼有出塵之想云，同時南華氏先歸巨室，夙稱具智慧女子，至今大自矜飾，倚新聲於屏後，自以為得主脫離污泥，視宋尼且天壤矣。[90]

In this comment, Pan refers to Li's singing as showy, even though he would later describe her performance as "relaxed whistling" that puts her on a par with Lady Song. Considering that Pan had a romantic relationship with Li that had lasted for a decade but probably did not have the money to make her his own concubine, it is not unlikely that Pan wrote those words out of bitterness. The depiction of Li's singing as "flaunting trendy tunes behind screens" treats Li as an average singing girl that one would come across in the pleasure quarters, a denigrating remark considering that Li had already upgraded from a courtesan to a concubine by then.

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[89] The book has two extant Ming editions. The earlier edition, titled *Genshi chao* 亙史鈔, dated to the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1573–1620) and now stored at the Zhejiang Provincial Library, was published by Pan in increments as he compiled it. The later edition was compiled and published by one of Pan's sons Pan Biliang 潘弼亮 in 1626 after Pan Zhiheng's death, and it is kept at the Capital Library of China (*shoudu tushuguan* 首都圖書館). For a detailed examination of the differences between these two editions, see Zhang Qiuchan, "Pan Zhiheng yanjiu," 91–95.

[90] See Pan, "Song Ni," in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, 193:586. The end commentary of this biography is missing in the version included in *Luanxiao xiaopin*.

But in the following years, several events changed Pan's mind about Li. Wang Cijun died three years after he acquired Li as a concubine. His other concubines quickly married other men with great reputation. But Li, lamenting the premature death of her late husband, set her mind on fasting herself to death in order to reunite with Wang in the netherworld. After refusing to eat or drink for ten days, she was eventually convinced by other people to live in order to look after what Wang had left behind. Although Wang's other concubines belittled her for being the youngest and for not being able to rear a son, she insisted on joining them and accompanying Wang's coffin as it was returned to his hometown in Anhui. This righteous deed earned her a lot of praise from onlookers. After Wang's funeral, when some matchmakers tried to reconnect her with another famous man with whom she had a relationship in the past, Li declined. She declared her loyalty to Wang and developed a daily routine characteristic of that of a Buddhist nun. Her determination to stay alone and away from worldly connections eventually discouraged men from sending marriage proposals. Pan concludes his essay by referring to Li as an "extraordinary person" 異人, which reinforces his observation from the hiking episode that someone like Li is rare even among his own colleagues.[91] All these virtuous qualities lead Pan to recast his portrayal of Li as a singer in Wang's house, elevating her from courtesan not just to the counterpart of a literatus but to the stature of a true whistler–something extremely rare even among famous literati in the Six Dynasties. In retrospect, Pan's portrayal of Li's singing as whistling reflects not only an attempt to elevate her singing skills but also an effort to construct an alternative personal history for Li, that she had been his peer all along even when she was still a singing girl.

Pan Zhiheng's portrayals of other courtesan singers as whistlers reflect a different rationale. Compared with the accounts of Liu Yizhi and Li Nanhua, Pan's use of whistling as a metaphor for

[91] The term *yiren* 異人 (extraordinary person) is usually associated with eccentric literati, hermits, swordsmen, and beggars—people who possess rare skills but do not conform to social conventions.

the singing of Wang Saiyu 王賽玉 and Luo Guilin 羅桂林, two famous courtesans in Nanjing, is more straightforward: "Wang Saiyu and Luo Guilin have a reputation for excelling in (dramatic) singing. Sometimes, when in a scene, they would whistle in the relaxed manner; sometimes, in the middle of a song, they would burst into tears" 王賽玉、羅桂林以善音鳴。或當景而舒嘯，或中曲而涕零.[92] Pan seems to speak highly not only of the singers' virtuosity but also of their sentimental dispositions, which make their singing all the more authentic. It is worth pointing out that the Qing dynasty poet Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) introduced Wang Saiyu as a courtesan singer specializing in southern drama (南曲妓).[93] Wang participated in one of two singing contests called "Immortal Gathering on the Lotus Terrace" 蓮臺仙會 co-hosted by the sixteenth-century scholar-official Cao Dazhang 曹大章 (1520–1575) and the playwright Liang Chenyu 梁辰魚 (1520–1592) in the late summer and the early autumn of 1570, in which she was ranked the sixth among fourteen top candidates and earned the honorable title "Lady Grand Secretariat" 女學士.[94] The southern-style singing in vogue in the Jiangnan area at that time was the Kunshan tune, which was developed by the Ming musician and singing pedagogue Wei Liangfu 魏良輔 (circa 1497–circa 1582) in the mid-sixteenth century. As one of the four top courtesans bearing the honorary title

[92] See Pan Zhiheng, "Chuyan" 初艷, in *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 2:18b–19a.
[93] See Zhu Yizun, "Jiaofang" 教坊, in *Jingzhiju shihua* 靜志居詩話 (Fuli shanfang: Qing edition), 23:52b–53a.
[94] Pan Zhiheng also discussed this phenomenal event in an essay called "Liantai xianhui xu" 蓮台仙會敘 ("On the 'Immortal Gathering on the Lotus Terrace"), in *Gen shi*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, 193: 522–23. The results from the singing contest can be found in the same essay. Zhu refers to the singing contest in which Wang earned the title "Lady Grand Secretariat" as "The New Gathering on the Lotus Terrace" 蓮台新會, which indicates that it may be the second singing contest to be held in 1570. See Zhu, "Jiaofang," in *Jingzhi ju shihua*, 23:53a.

"Four Masters" 四君 in Nanjing, Luo was presumably also an expert in singing in the Kunshan tune.[95]

With this background in mind, Pan's portrayals of two other singers in Nanjing, who specialized in the northern style singing 北曲 characteristic of the *zaju* 雜劇 drama, becomes noteworthy.[96] As Pan mentions in a biography that he wrote for Zhu Taiyu 朱泰玉, another favorite courtesan of his, he was close with the singer Fu Shou 傅壽 around 1585. Other essays included in *Luanxiao xiaopin* devote special attention to Fu Shou. She had a brother named Fu Mao 傅卯, and the siblings were trained by their father, a famous *zaju* actor. In the Pan's biography of Fu Shou, he looks back to the beginning of the Fu siblings' singing career (presumably in the late 1570s or the early 1580s), and notes that very few singers could perform the northern tune at that time. But Fu Mao and Fu Shou preserved this singing style by orally transmitting their father's skills and recreated what Pan describes as "the tune of the sonorous clash between metal and jade" 鏘金戛玉之韻, which seems to indicate a strong cadence.[97] Whenever they appeared on stage, their singing was so virtuosic that the engrossed audience would forget that the northern style singing was obsolete. Pan then mentions that Fu Shou and Fu Mao were also well-versed in singing the Kunshan tune, which was still deemed a fashionable new tune 新曲 among singers in the pleasure quarters:

> Fu Shou learned to make the prolonged sounds that stop the clouds [alluding to extraordinary singing in the Kunshan style], which struck people from the Wu region [Suzhou and its vicinity] tongue-tied. Fu Mao also rose above his league, and as he shook his clothes and whistled in a relaxed manner, nobody in the entire country could accompany him on a musical instrument.

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[95] For a careful discussion of the plausible dates of Wei's birth and death, see Li Ang, "Cong Wei Liangfu dao Ye Tang—Ming Qing duqu lilun fazhan yanjiu" 從魏良輔到葉堂——明清度曲理論發展研究, PhD diss., (Soochow University, 2016), 11–12.

[96] *Zaju* is a northern style theatrical form characteristic of Yuan dynasty drama.

[97] Pan, "Fu lingxiu zhuan" 傅靈修傳, in *Gen shi*, *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu*, 193:570.

> 壽習為曼聲遏雲，吳人咸挢舌不下。卯則超距行伍中，振衣舒嘯，舉國無能和者。[98]

The "prolonged sounds that stop the clouds" 曼声遏云, which recalls the phrase "flowing sounds [so fabulous that they] stop clouds" 流響遏雲 in Li Nanhua's biography, alludes to "Water-Polished Tune" 水磨調, one of the quintessential effects of singing in the Kunshan style. It features an overall soft and reserved tonal quality and smooth and controlled transition between characters with different tones. Although Pan refers to Fu Shou's southern-style singing in a standard way, he depicts her brother's singing, whose style is not specified, as "relaxed whistling." Unlike whistling, which was improvisational, dramatic singing was an art with regulated rules. Even though mastering the Kunshan style requires a lot of training and skill, Pan's characterization of Fu Mao as a whistler accentuates a sense of effortless virtuosity as if he was born with it. At the same time, comparing his singing to whistling also highlights its peerless nature even though many singers at that time were hailed as experts of the style.

By portrayingKunshan-style singing as whistling, Pan invites readers to perceive this fashionable skill as something unfamiliar. In the aforementioned examples, the semantic content of the virtuosic singing is completely omitted. As Judith T. Zeitlin has pointed out, a standard description of dramatic singing from the late Ming usually foregrounds the role of the sung words, as the development of music and drama criticism was informed by the growing body of knowledge in the field of phonological scholarship.[99] Wei Liangfu's refinement of the southern singing style was driven by his desire to elevate the status of the Wu dialect to that of a musical language.[100] Many

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[98] Pan, 570.

[99] Judith T. Zeitlin, "'Instrument of Flesh': The Operatic Voice in Late Ming Musical Culture" (Keynote Webinar, Sound and Noise in Asia Symposium, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO, November 5, 2020).

[100] See Zeng Yongyi, "Wei Liangfu zhi shuimo diao jiqi *Nanci yinzheng* yu *Qulü*" 魏良輔之水磨調及其《南詞引證》與《曲律》, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 62, no. 4 (2016): 138.

theoretical texts on dramatic singing produced during the Ming dynasty, such as Wei Liangfu's *Qulü* 曲律 (*Rules of Dramatic Singing*), a book written by Wang Jide 王驥德(1540–1623) under the same title, and *Duqu xuzhi* 度曲須知 (*Handbook for Dramatic Singing*) by Shen Chongsui 沈寵綏 (?–1645), prioritize a singer pronouncing every character in the song lyrics correctly; this phonological approach to singing is intended to make the otherwise elusive vocal techniques more comprehensible and teachable.[101] Wang Jide puts it in an assertive tone: "If one want to speak of dramatic singing, one should first know the characters. To know the characters, one should first learn the *fanqie* phonological spelling" 欲語曲者，先須識字，識字先須反切.[102] Many drama critics also indirectly reinforced this approach by praising singers for delivering song lyrics in an elegant and authentic way, as Pan's comment on Wang Saiyu's and Luo Guilin's singing indicates. As a whole, these texts reinforce the idea that singing is a verbal art from which Pan's depictions of the singers as whistlers break away.

By using whistling as a metaphor for singing in a way that produces a disorienting effect, Pan invites his readers to reimagine the similarity and asymmetry between these two musical forms. Considering that some of his readers frequented theater houses and brothels (as he did himself), this gesture would prompt them to perceive singing, the familiar and popular musical form, in an unfamiliar and mystified light. Most importantly, Pan reinvents whistling as an inflected term in musical criticism not only to elevate select singers but also to mystify them, especially when the standard vocabulary for evaluating singing virtuosity no longer suffices. As Pan develops his

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[101] See Wei Liangfu, *Qulü*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1959), 5:5–13. See also Wang Jide, *Qulü*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng,* 4:43–191; Shen Chongsui, *Duqu xuzhi*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, 5:183–319.
[102] See Wang Jide, "Lun pingze diwu" 論平仄第五, in *Qulü*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, 4:105–7. *Fanqie* is a method for reconstructing the sound of a character by using two common characters, each of which represents a distinctive syllable. It was commonly used in annotations of classical texts beginning in ancient China.

metaphoric use of whistling to convey his aesthetic ideal, he transforms the then-obsolete literati-style whistling into a special metaphor as well as an echo of the literary imagination from the Six Dynasties.

Whistling as the Voice of a Ming Loyalist

Finally we turn to "The Biography of the Old Whistler," a biography written by the early-Qing writer Chen Ding 陳鼎 (1650–?) in the style of a classical tale, which portrays whistling as an echo from the end of the Ming world that still re-sounds in the ears of loyalists after the tumultuous dynastic transition.[103] Born in the early Qing, Chen had not personally experienced the dynastic transition, but he was devoted to preserving historical records about numerous Ming loyalists. Chen's extant books include *Donglin liezhuan* 東林列傳 (*The Biographies of the Donglin Literati*), a collection of over two hundred biographies of members of the Donglin Faction, a group of late-Ming activist scholars who vocally criticized the government's incompetence and fought fiercely to undermine the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627).[104] As Wei prosecuted many Donglin scholars to death before being removed from the court, the Donglin Faction became widely remembered as a token of political martyrdom for a Ming cause and as an antecedent of the numerous loyalists who committed suicide during or after the dynastic transition. Also surviving is Chen's *Liuxi waizhuan* 留溪外傳 (*Unofficial Histories of Liuxi*), a collection of short tales centered on

[103] A native of the county of Jiangyin in the prosperous Jiangnan region of eastern Jiangsu province, Chen grew up in the southwestern province of Yunnan; he spent much of his youth traveling throughout Yunnan and Guizhou, producing a substantial number of travelogues describing his journeys.

[104] The core members of the Donglin Faction were initially based in the Donglin Academy in Wuxi, located in Jiangsu province. For details of the Donglin activism, see Benjamin A. Elman, "Imperial Politics and Confucian Societies in Late Imperial China: The Hanlin and Donglin Academies," *Modern China* 15, no. 4 (1989): 379–418.

artists, musicians, artisans, and other memorable figures active during the late Ming and the early Qing. Thirteen stories from the collection were selected for inclusion in *Yuchu xinzhi* 虞初新志 (*The Magician's New Records*), a widely read anthology of classical tales, biographies, and essays written by literary authors both from the late Ming and the early Qing and compiled and published by Zhang Chao 张潮 (1650–1707), a renowned seventeenth-century publisher and literary writer from the county of Shezhou 歙州 in Anhui province.[105] Eight of these stories explicitly feature protagonists who survived the Ming–Qing transition but experienced the aftermath of the loss of the Ming dynasty as loyalists.

"The Biography of the Old Whistler" is dedicated to a whistler named Wang Jing 汪京 (courtesy name "Purple Garden" 紫庭) who was known by his nickname "The Old Whistler" 嘯翁. A native of Shezhou, Wang seems to have been active in the cultural metropolis Yangzhou in the Jiangsu province. The temporal setting of this tale is never specified, which is a noteworthy ambiguity. But Chen's personal interest in documenting and imagining the lives of individuals during the Ming–Qing transition, especially in the Jiangnan region, invites readers to see that Ming loyalism resurfaces in this story in an unarticulated but potent manner—through a powerful sound that channels a collective sentiment. Although Wang's whistling is an imaginary scenario animated by Chen's writing, it is portrayed as a lived experience that has a strong physical impact on the bodies of the whistler and his listeners. By inviting readers to imagine themselves listening to Wang's whistling, the tale fleshes out an aspect of the literary imagination of whistling in early modern China that rarely takes the spotlight.

[105] For a comprehensive investigation of Zhang's publishing enterprise, see Suyoung Son, *Writing for Print: Publishing and the Making of Textual Authority in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018).

The short tale consists of detailed depictions of two of Wang's performances. The first one takes place unexpectedly in the middle of a night on an unspecified mountain near the city Yangzhou. Wang improvises this whistling on a mountaintop, which sets him apart from other mountain dwellers. This characterization makes him similar to the anonymous hermit residing on Mount Sumen, whose whistling produced a bewildering effect to Ruan Ji's ears. As a more dramatic echo to the hermit's whistling, Wang's improvisation at first strikes everyone dwelling in the mountain as an apocalyptic event:

> Mountains were calling, valleys were echoing, and trees were shaking; birds were startled and flew away, and tigers and leopards fled in terror. Among people living in the mountains, those who were asleep suddenly woke up from their dreams, and those who weren't yet asleep had their hearts seized by terror. Suspecting that the mountains and earth were falling apart, everybody was pacing back and forth, and none of them dared to go to bed.
>
> 山鳴谷應，林木震動，禽鳥驚飛，虎豹駭走。山中人已寐者，夢陡然醒。未寐者，心悚然懼，疑為山崩地裂，皆彷徨罔敢寢。[106]

"People living in the mountains" 山中人 alludes to those who have retreated into remote areas as a way of declaring loyalty to the Ming emperor, refusing to live in the new dynasty. For them, the mountains represent not only an apolitical space but also the last place on earth where they can escape from the real changes brought about by the dynastic transition. (Many of these refugees may also have had friends, family members or colleagues who committed suicide for the same reason.) Not knowing the source of the whistling or the fact that it is merely a sound, the mountain dwellers are trapped in a liminal space where the uncertain reality they woke up to turns out to be worse than a nightmare. They are too close to the sound to escape from its visceral impact. They can do nothing but confront the uncertainty about their very existence. In addition to a sense of helplessness, this passage also highlights the collective nature of ear-witnessing the sonic event. Although people were

[106] Zhang Chao, *Yuchu xinzhi* 虞初新志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 132–33.

asleep or awake in separate houses, they are connected by their ears. The adverb *jie* 皆 (all) enhances the sense of plurality embedded in the description of an anonymous listener's perspective. This description makes one begin to wonder whether this unsettling event forces some of those who hear it to temporarily relive their own experiences of the end of the Ming world.

Is this a prank played by Wang? Does the whistler intend to use his whistling to deliver a message or a lesson to his fellows in the mountains, similar to the way that the hermit in Mount Sumen "talked" back to Ruan Ji? Or is he seeking someone who truly comprehends his skill and is even able to echo him? The whistler's intention leaves no trace in the account. But the forceful manner in which his whistling affects the listeners and the feeling of terror provoked by the sonic event suggests that the whistler is demanding they pay attention to something profound though unexpressed. Considering that most of the biographies written by Chen Ding included in *Yuchu xinzhi* and many biographies in the collection written by other authors commemorate Ming loyalists, one may wonder: is the whistler asking his listeners and readers to remember their own experiences of the dynastic fall, however terrifying or painful it might be?

In the second performance, however, the whistler loses control over his own whistling and reveals a surprising sense of vulnerability. This account describes an excursion to the outskirts of Yangzhou that Wang makes with ten other people, including a "Woodcutter at Yellow Crane Mountain" 黃鶴山樵, a "Blind Man at Mount Heavenly Capital" 天都瞎漢, a "Fisherman at Xiaoxiang River" 瀟湘漁父, and a "Tiger-Head General" 虎頭將軍. It is no coincidence that "Woodcutter at Yellow Crane Mountain" was the sobriquet of the fourteenth-century painter Wang Meng 王蒙, who retreated to Yellow Crane Mountain but died a victim of political conflict during the Yuan–Ming dynastic transition. Similarly, historical records associate the "Fisherman at

Xiaoxiang River" with an anonymous poet who was a loyalist of the Song dynasty.[107] The references in the other characters' names are perhaps less pointed. The Jin dynasty painter Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (circa 348–409) was known by the nickname "Tiger-Head" 虎頭, but it is unclear whether he might be the "Tiger-Head General" in question,[108] and the nickname "Blind Man at Mount Heavenly Capital" does not offer any clue about its potential prototype. Nonetheless, three of the four seem to be associated with apolitical historical figures, two of whom were loyalists from previous dynasties. These characters indicate a plausibly deliberate effort on Chen Ding's part to highlight the role that the Ming–Qing dynastic transition plays in the story.

When they arrive at "Pingshan Six-One Tower" 平山六一樓, a tourist attraction in Yangzhou associated with the northern Song dynasty scholar-official Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), everybody urges Wang to perform his whistling.[109] At first, Wang declines under the pretext of his missing teeth, but he eventually caves. The first sounds emitted by Wang are compared to the playing of an iron flute on an unpopulated mountain, an allusion to the legendary Tang dynasty flutist Li Mo 李謨.[110] The following description emphasizes the bewildering effect produced by Wang's whistling:

> Shortly, the sound traveled eastward, and the wind came from the west, making all wild grasses prostrate, forcing doors open, pounding on the windows, and making high towers sway. Then the sound traveled westward, and wind came from the east in an overpowering way, like a thousand soldiers and ten thousand horses running before [one's eyes], also like two armies engaged in a battle, with short weapons and long swords clashing. After a while,

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[107] See Wang Shizhen 王士禎, "Ba *Guyin*" 跋《谷音》, *Daijingtang ji* 帶經堂集 (Chengzhe qilue shutang: 1711), 91:10a–11a.
[108] See Li Fang, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 5:1607.
[109] Ouyang Xiu constructed Pingshan Hall on the Shu Ridge in 1048, and it later became an important historical attraction in the city due to Ouyang's fame. For a detailed history of Pingshan Hall, see Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 128–164. Since one of Ouyang's sobriquets is *Liuyi jushi* 六一居士 ("Retiree Six-One"), this "Pingshan Six-One Tower" likely alludes to Pingshan Hall.
[110] For a standard literary portrayal of the flutist Li Mo, see Li Fang, *Taiping guangji*, 5:1552–1554.

> the tiles on the roofs were about to fly off, and trees in the woods were about to be uprooted.
>
> 少傾，移聲向東，則風從西來，蒿萊盡伏，排闥擊戶，危樓欲動。再而移聲向西，則風從東至，闇然蕩然，如千軍萬馬，馳驟于前，又若兩軍相角，短兵長劍緊接之勢。久之，則屋瓦欲飛，林木將拔也。[111]

Again, we perceive this increasingly intense performance through the ears of an anonymous listener. To everybody's surprise, the whistler suddenly falls unconscious, just like a bamboo flute that breaks while forcing an extremely high note. The startled listeners call in monks from a nearby temple for hot water to pour into Wang's mouth, and wait a long time before the whistler finally wakes up. While the whistler is portrayed as a transcendent figure in the first half of the story, his unconscious body highlights the intensity of the visceral sensations he produces.

Even though the acoustic effects of Wang's whistling are generic, the moment that whistling literally exhausts his breath occurs right after an extensive and detailed battle scene, which takes up the second half of the quoted passage. The general description of the whistling's acoustic effects may be a guise for some specific but hidden sentiment that is brought to the surface accidentally. Considering that someone who has personally experienced war or carries loyalist sentiment may not be able to perceive a lifelike simulation of a battlefield neutrally, it is not unlikely that the author Chen Ding has planted this generic battle as a way of reminding readers of the feeling of unrest and chaos that permeated the Ming–Qing transition. Despite the initial characterization of the whistler as a transcendent figure, whistling ultimately exposes Wang's mortality; accordingly, this episode indicates that nobody can remain undisturbed before the nightmare the whistling activates, especially if this nightmare has contemporary resonance. Wang's fainting highlights that the sonic illusion is more than an illusion. From an allegorical perspective, Wang's body rebels against him, unleashing a

[111] Zhang, "Xiaoweng zhuan," in *Yuchu xinzhi*, 133.

probably unintended outburst of loyalist sentiment perhaps shared by other listeners at the gathering.

Literary writings commemorating the fallen dynasty that flourished in the late Ming and the early Qing usually remember the recent past through abundant metaphoric associations. Ruins, broken or vanished precious musical instruments, courtesans who commit suicide when captured by rebels, and storytellers from the previous dynasty all serve as familiar tropes allowing literati writers and readers to mourn their irretrievable loss in concrete terms.[112] Wai-yee Li incisively describes this representational approach this way: "In numerous writings across genres, variations on themes related to gender boundaries, female virtues, vices, agency, and ethical dilemmas are used to allegorize national destiny and the political choices of individuals. 'To allegorize' is to draw on analogies ranging from transparent to elusive."[113] An analogy employed in an allegorical mode of representation inevitably introduces a carefully regulated and demarcated distance between the surface meaning of a metaphor and its deeper meaning, as well as between a past experience and an interpretation conducted in the present. To allegorize an object or an event, one must observe it from a distance. However, a viscerally unnerving sonic experience, such as Wang's whistling, does not allow such a distance. To lend an ear to whistling, for the imaginary listeners as well as the readers, is to be viscerally entangled in whistling and the historical circumstance in which the sound reverberates physically and symbolizes nonverbally.

The author Chen Ding adds a comment after the story ends. He points out that few whistlers were recorded in writing after the Six Dynasties. Chen has heard performances given by two expert whistlers in the early Qing, who were known by the nicknames "Mr. Wang from Luoxia"

[112] For examples, see Wai-yee Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).
[113] Li, 3.

洛下王 and "Mr. Li from Zhaoyang" 昭陽李, but the author wonders whether their skills are the same as the whistling practiced by the recluse in Mount Sumen. He then continues:

> Last time I heard the whistling produced by the Old Whistler, I found it to have power of transforming weather and moving mountains, which is entirely not what [the whistler] from Luoxia could emulate. Doesn't the Old Whistler's whistling directly extend that of the hermit in Mount Sumen?
>
> 昨聞嘯翁之嘯，則有變風雲動山岳之勢，大非洛下者可幾及也。豈嘯翁之嘯，直接蘇門者耶？[114]

In this comment, Chen emphasizes his own role as a listener to Wang's whistling. Such a detail usually authenticates a source as more than hearsay. But it is ambiguous whether the performance Chen refers to is one of those recorded in the biography or another event. It is also unclear whether Chen actually had direct contact with the whistler or whether he fabricated this detail to imagine himself as a witness to an extraordinary event. In a comment, the editor of *Yuchu xinzhi*, Zhang Chao, who was from Wang's hometown and who also lived in Yangzhou, volunteers a personal exchange he had with the whistler: "I once came across the Old Whistler. I wanted to hear his whistling, but he declined because his teeth had fallen out. I didn't expect that he would be so animated at Mount Ping. What a pity that I didn't get to know him then!" 予遇嘯翁，欲聞其嘯，翁以齒豁辭。不意其在平山發如許高興，惜予不及知也.[115] While Zhang expresses remorse about not being able to hear Wang's whistling, which is a sentiment that he often conveys in comments on stories in *Yuchu xinzhi* featuring memories of the late Ming, he also emphasizes that he could have been an ear-witness as well.

Although it unfolds as an allegory, the tale is not so much about remembering any particular event during the Ming–Qing transition as a reflection on the relationship between writing and

[114] Zhang, "Xiaoweng zhuan," in *Yuchu xinzhi*, 133.
[115] Zhang, 133.

personal and collective memory. The biography activates two means of remembering that collaborate with each other: animating a sound that reenacts memory in a visceral mode and writing in an allegorical mode. Wang's whistling is an echo from a bygone era that continues to demand attention from listeners in the early Qing. As a nonverbal channel for self-expression and communication, whistling expresses a collective sentiment and a desire shared by the whistler, the author of the biography, and other readers of the story to amplify and to echo this feeling.

Conclusion: Echoing as a Process of Unexpected Transformation

This chapter shows a transformation in the conception of whistling as an alternative voice from the Six Dynasties to the end of the Ming dynasty. I reveal a prominent incongruity between poetic representations of whistling and anecdotes about whistlers from the third century and personal biographies of individuals portrayed as whistlers, ranging from deceased poets to singing courtesans, from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Whereas Six Dynasties poets portrayed whistling as a voice in flux that recreates the feeling of poetry without *yan* through the process of echoing, which embodies a kind of freedom in self-expression and communication, Ming and Qing poets developed a variety of strategies for reconceptualizing whistling as an integral part of *yan* in the form of speech as well as writing. For the seventeenth-century literary authors in particular, whistling represents an alternative space within language, creating echoes between the bygone era and the present, between kindred spirits across temporal and spatial constraints, and between voice and text. What remains consistent is the becoming-other of the whistling voice through the process of echoing, literally and metaphorically.

The echo is key to the understanding of whistling as an alternative voice. As Ruan Ji's meeting with the anonymous Daoist hermit indicates, whistling overcomes the constraints of verbal exchange by completing a conversation in the form of echoing emitted from the mountaintop.

During whistling's literary afterlife, where it was imagined and simulated as a hyper-sonic phenomenon even though the sound had vanished in the real world, whistling was understood as a site of sympathetic exchange and resonance. Although depicted by means of language, the poetics that whistling embodies features a friction between verbal and nonverbal modes of representation. During the Six Dynasties, whistling was perceived as a deliberate mode of resistance to verbal modes of expression and communication. The relationship between whistling and speech became less antagonistic when imperial and early modern Chinese authors reconceptualized whistling to be a nonverbal supplement to and extension of linguistic means of conveying emotions and ideas. But whistling continued to represent an ideal state that cannot be achieved by speech. Some authors, especially Chen Ding, turned this friction between whistling and speech into a generative space by imagining whistling as an alternative means for expressing nostalgia for the former dynasty even though that sentiment remains unarticulated.

Every attempt to document, to animate, and to simulate whistling within the textual space reflects a desire to produce an echo of the lost sound to give it a new life. The motivation is not to resuscitate an extinct art but to reinvent whistling as a metaphor that enables meaningful resonance in concrete terms. Echoing is a creative and transformative process, which offers a potent metaphor for the role of literary writing as a means to exteriorize and to preserve memory.

By focusing on echoing as a dynamic process mechanism rather than treating the echo as a somewhat objectified trope, this chapter reconceptualizes the relationship between a sound and its literal and figurative echoes in a way different from existing theoretical scholarship. The concept of the echo, a powerful trope for inter-subject interaction, has recently received an increasing amount of theorization. Thinking in a Lacanian vein, Mladen Dolar understands the echo as a permanent condition of the voice, which is in itself a site of alterity that points to the gap between one's voice and one's body, between the interior and the exterior, among a list of oppositions that underline the

instability of subjectivity constructed by the notion of the voice.[116] This chapter explores a theoretical approach different from but resonant with the psychoanalytic discourse by exploring the destabilizing quality of whistling in premodern Chinese poetics and acoustics and understanding whistling-as-echoing in a positive light.

My analysis of whistling mirrors Michel de Certeau's discussion of glossolalia, which denotes a range of vocal utterances that formally resemble linguistic exchange but that do not contain semantic meaning. De Certeau considers glossolalia to be a "vocal utopia" as it turns the vocal apparatus, the preeminent site of speech, into an alternative space where the system of language and institutional baggage associated with articulate speech are undone.[117] As de Certeau puts it, "what utopia is to social space, glossolalia is to oral communication; it encloses in a linguistic simulacrum all that is not language and comes from the speaking voice."[118] By inviting us to temporarily suspend our dependence on language and observe it from a distance, de Certeau suggests that speech becomes other in glossolalia:

> As an invention of vocal space, glossolalia in fact multiplies the possibilities of speech. No determination of meaning constrains or restrains it. The decomposition of syllables and the combination of elementary sounds in games of alliteration create an indefinite space outside of the jurisdiction of a language. This vast space, artificial and entrancing, this virgin forest of the voice, is supposed to have "meaning" as a whole, as a totality, but one can circulate freely within it without encountering the limits that condition any articulation of meaning.[119]

What glossolalia is to structural linguistics, whistling is to poetics. The friction between whistling and speech allows the sound to embody another type of vocal utopia by giving voice to the inexpressible

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[116] Mladen Dolar, "Voices that Matter," in Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin ed., *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 339–55.
[117] For example, de Certeau points out that the very notion of discourse in the Foucauldian sense is an institution founded at the site of the voice that glossolalia can destabilize. See Michel de Certeau, "Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias," *Representations* 56 (Fall 1996): 38–40.
[118] de Certeau, 31.
[119] de Certeau, 41.

and the unarticulated. Whistling opens up an alternative space within one's vocal apparatus that completely does away with words while enabling meaningful and resonant exchange.

CHAPTER TWO

Voice Gone Awry: Listening to *Kouji*

One day in the late sixteenth century, when a blind musician in Beijing named Li Jinlou 李近樓 (?–1580?) plucked the strings of his *pipa*—a lute-shaped, four-stringed musical instrument that frequently appeared in banquets, theaters, and the pleasure quarters of major Chinese cities, instead of music, he produced something that sounded both familiar and strange: a human voice. Shen Bang 沈榜 (1540–1597), a county magistrate in Beijing, described one of Li's performances as follows:

> Li was able to produce the uproar of a training field when a general pays a visit, or the sounds of orchestra playing, cannon firing and people yelling—all on strings at the same time. When he talked with people, he responded with his strings; his words and lines were intelligible and sounded just like human speech. He sometimes acted like two or three people were speaking at the same time, and sometimes imitated the sound of the *qin*, or the *zheng* [a string instrument that usually has twenty-five strings], or the bamboo flute, all of which sounded absolutely authentic. But he played with his left hand—known as a particularly difficult skill since ancient times.
>
> 能於弦中作將軍下教場、鼓樂炮喊之聲，一時並作; 與人言，以絃對，字句分明，儼如人語；或為二三人並語、或為琴、為箏、為笛，皆絕似。而彈用左手，尤古所難。[1]

Li Jinlou's virtuosity lies in his ability to play the *pipa* like a puppeteer manipulates his puppet, projecting a range of speaking, chatting, and yelling voices as if the object has a life of its own. Li's *pipa* appears to be "talking" back to its human interlocutor in a slightly coarse and high-pitched "voice," an effect produced by moving the fingers rapidly on the strings while producing a combination of musical notes that replicate the cadence of speech (other string instruments, such as the violin, can be manipulated to create a similar effect). Someone going to Li's performance expecting to hear famous tunes in the classical style might instead find himself on an invisible battlefield—a shocking experience. Nonetheless, Shen's portrayal sounds matter-of-fact, betraying

[1] Shen Bang, *Wanshu zaji* 宛署雜記 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1961), 263.

not even a hint of surprise, making one wonder whether the author was present at the performance or wrote the account based on hearsay or another record he had read.

This short account is one of the numerous anecdotes and observations on the lively urban activities and landscapes of the prefecture of Wanping 宛平 (part of present-day Beijing) composed in the style of *biji* 筆記 ("brush-jottings"), which became Shen's *Wanshu zaji* 宛署雜記 (*Miscellaneous Records of Wanping Prefecture*). This book is also one of the earliest early modern *biji* collections of city records centered on Beijing.[2] According to Shen, Li once had a career serving in the imperial guard, but started playing *pipa* as entertainment after he went blind in middle age.[3] In his account, Shen gives Li an honorary title, "The Ultimate *Pipa* Player" (*pipa jue* 琵琶絕), and puts him alongside seven other top Beijing performers with rare skills (ranging from playing other types of musical instruments to playing games) during the reigns of the Jiajing and the Longqing emperors (1522–1572).[4] The honorary title also indicates that the author had no problem subsuming Li's unconventional expertise under the category of *pipa*-playing even though it does not accurately reflect what Li was doing with his musical instrument. A reader in Shen's time might wonder: Can Li's skill even be considered to be *pipa*-playing? If not, what is it?

It would be another half of a century before the skill demonstrated by Li Jinlou was subsumed into a new category called *kouji* 口技 (literally "vocal virtuosity"), a type of sonic storytelling that typically uses the human vocal apparatus to produce a pyrotechnics of sonic illusion through skillful mimicry. But *kouji* does not necessarily depend on the human vocal apparatus; a performance in which a musical instrument simulates the effect of speaking voices would also be

[2] Naixi Feng, "City on Edge: Inhabiting Literary Beijing on the Eve of the Manchu Conquest," PhD diss., (University of Chicago, 2019), 6–7.
[3] But Shen Defu's introduction of Li disagrees with Shen Bang's, noting that Li was a descendant of an imperial guard who was already blind in his childhood.
[4] Shen, *Wanshu zaji*, 263.

considered *kouji*. The first record of this skill is documented in *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), a historical record produced in the first century BCE that recounts major political and social events during the Warring States (fifth-century–221 BCE) and the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE): in this account, Lord Mengchang, a statesman of the Qi kingdom in the third century BCE, escapes imprisonment in the Qin kingdom with the help of an anonymous retainer who imitates crowing roosters so convincingly that the guards open the pass ahead of schedule.[5] Before the Ming dynasty, *kouji* was usually an unnamed technique occasionally found in the margins of historical records. In the 1640s, though, *kouji* entered common use as an umbrella term and as a particular type of vocal sound. Even after *kouji* became a standard term, it was still referred to by various names, including *xiangsheng* 象聲 (imitating sounds), which was frequently used in seventeenth-century literary records, and *gebi xi* 隔壁戲 (theater from the other side of the wall), a term that was more commonly used during the Republican era (1912–1949).

Although it is impossible to pinpoint who coined the term, the practice of referring to *kouji* by a specific name reflects a desire shared by seventeenth-century literary authors to see this otherwise ancient technique as a new mediatized experience. As this chapter will show, *kouji* is a porous technique: it is nested in various familiar sonic genres, including *pipa*-playing, singing, and conventional storytelling. More importantly, a *kouji* performance is not only a sonic simulacrum of a human voice but also where the human voice becomes strange. A single human voice is capable of conjuring up manifold sounding bodies, ranging from barking dogs to crying babies and blurring the boundary between a human voice and its nonhuman analogue in a bewildering way; a *kouji* performer might mimic the crowing, barking, and twittering in such a lifelike way that it fools real

[5] See "Mengchang jun liezhuan" 孟嘗君列傳, in Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 7:2355.

roosters, dogs, and birds. I will argue that *kouji*, as a mirror reflection of a speaking human voice, led a group of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literati to ponder the doubling relationship between the extralinguistic skill and speech as well as literary writing. By using the term extralinguistic, I highlight a key aspect of *kouji* that it departs from the conventional storytelling—a linguistic voice—by using sounds rather than words to tell stories.

Early modern authors wrestled with a love-hate relationship with *kouji* because it sounded both surprisingly familiar and alarmingly strange. While some of them regarded *kouji* as manipulative, akin to the words uttered by people who spread slander and gossip for things to work in their favor, others saw its potential to offer an antidote to the inefficacy of human speech by undermining speech's central role in everyday communication. At the same time, several literary authors and commentators suggested that excellent literary prose is a verbal double of *kouji*. While this argument turns extralinguistic sound into an integral part of literary criticism, it also inaugurates an implicit competition between literary authors and the *kouji* masters that they portrayed. By tracing various types of slippage and displacement that take place between the source and the effect of *kouji* as well as between *kouji* and speech, this chapter reveals what motivated seventeenth-century literary authors to consider this sonic storytelling as an alternative voice and what potentials they saw in this special skill.

This chapter focuses on reportage and personal biographies that discuss techniques of *kouji* and renowned performers from the 1590s to the 1680s. The technique for using one's voice to imitate animal sounds had long been known from ancient Chinese sources, but it was considered a disreputable skill. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, performers developed this technique into a new type of storytelling that relied primarily on sounds rather than words to create narratives. At first, the *pipa* was used to perform this technique, but it was later developed into a preeminently vocal skill. It is only in the 1640s that *kouji* became a common term for this technique of sonic

mimicry; around the same time the standard format of a *kouji* performance was also established: the performer would deliberately conceal his or her body from the audience by retreating into a space encircled by screens or curtains. Since then, nearly anyone who wrote an account of a *kouji* performance would ruminate on its disembodied nature. Since *kouji* produces a sonic illusion that masks the mismatch between the physical source and the perceived effect of a sound, authors might begin by depicting a *kouji* performance in a flat tone, but these accounts usually end up describing the bewilderment experienced by listeners, often including the author himself.

Tapping into the disorienting effect of *kouji* as an unusual type of human voice, many seventeenth-century scholars theorized *kouji* as a double of speech and literary writing. While most of these scholars expressed concerns about *kouji*'s manipulative quality, which makes this technique a sonic counterpart of manipulative speech, some of them pondered *kouji*'s capacity to free the human voice from the baggage of speech. At the same time, for a number of seventeenth-century commentators, *kouji* acted as a model for analyzing the mechanism of displacement central to writing informal literary essays, which places writers and *kouji* masters at the same level.

A Voice that Sounds Strange

Some decades after Shen Bang wrote his account of Li Jinlou, the late-Ming scholar Shen Defu composed a short biography of the musician. Since Li died in 1580, when Shen was less than three years old, Shen must have relied on second-hand information. According to Shen, the musician works so hard to perfect his skill that even the blanket he sleeps on is worn out by the tireless tapping of his fingers. As a result, the musician is able to simulate multiple voices simultaneously: "his voice (*qi sheng* 其聲) can produce [the sounds of] multiple persons out of a

single person and multiple voices out of a single voice. 其聲能以一人兼數人，以一音兼數音."[6] The classical Chinese third-person possessive pronoun *qi* 其, which can modify a human or a nonhuman subject, creates a noteworthy ambiguity here. Moreover, since in classical Chinese the word *sheng* 聲 can denote mere sound as well as the human voice, a reader might wonder: whose voice (*qi sheng* 其聲) is Shen referring to as the outcome of Li's assiduous practice—Li's biological voice or the voices that he simulates with the help of his *pipa*? Is Shen Defu accidentally confusing Li's biological voice with his instrumental voice as the true source of the sonic illusion animated by the musician?

Shen goes on to describe in detail a performance of Li's that his father witnessed:

> When my father was in the capital, he once heard [Li perform] at a banquet. Li produced the sounds of eight nuns performing a Buddhist ritual, mixing the sounds of sutra-chanting with the sounds of drums, cymbals, and the flutes. All of these sounds were fully represented; and they were strikingly similar to the voices of nuns, representing the old, the young, the revered, and the humble individually and collectively, without slipping in a single male voice.
>
> 先人在都時，曾於席間得聞，則作八尼僧修佛事，經唄、鼓鈸、笙簫之屬。無不畢舉，酷似其聲，老稺高下，各各曲盡，又不雜一男音。[7]

The concluding remark that Li's virtuosity is such that he even manages to conceal his own gender is curious. Why would the musician's gender matter at all if he is playing a *pipa* and his performance does not rely on his biological voice? This superfluous detail betrays Shen Defu's confusion between the source and effect of Li's sonic mimicry. Shen's slip also reflects his understanding that Li specializes not in playing the *pipa* but rather in manipulating the human vocal apparatus.

In the same account, Shen Defu describes another marvelous performance that he considers akin to Li Jinlou's. A friend of Shen's (someone named Wei Zhuang) has invited the author to his

[6] Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 2:625.
[7] Shen, *Wanli yehuo bian* 2:625–26.

house for a special performance without disclosing its nature. The gathering starts with a feast. When people start to get tipsy, the host ushers in a blind man, who encircles himself with a small set of screens, and Shen Defu observes, with a hint of surprise, that—unlike Li Jinlou—the blind performer is just sitting by himself without holding a *pipa*. Instead of using an instrument, this anonymous blind performer uses his own vocal apparatus to animate a sequence of sonic mimicry that "narrates" several farcical events. Shen comments: "The sounds he produced were boisterous but orderly, making the listener marvel at them" 其聲嘈雜，而井井不亂，心已大異之.[8] Here, the previously ambiguous phrase *qisheng* (his/one's/their voices) unequivocally refers to the artist's biological voice. The voices produced by the blind performer are different in nature from the ones conjured up by Li Jinlou: they come from the human voice as opposed to a wooden analogue of it. But Shen Defu seems indifferent to the distinction between Li's and Wei's skills. Is he aware of the distinction at all? Or, does he consider both performances to be the same type of skill because of their similar effect?

When the nineteenth-century scholar Ping Buqing 平步青 (1832–1896) compiled a comprehensive entry on literary records of *kouji*, he selected Shen Defu's account of Li Jinlou for inclusion.[9] However, Ping expurgated all information related to Li Jinlou while keeping only the second half of Shen's original account—the description of the unnamed blind artist's performance. Ping's editorial decision reflects an incongruity between his understanding of *kouji*, which is presumably based on a narrower definition of the technique, and an earlier point in the history of *kouji* when the standards were yet to be established.

[8] Shen, 2:626.

[9] See Ping Buqing, "Kouji," in *Xiawai junxie* 霞外攟屑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 561–64.

Several other performers and writers from the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries tapped into the twining relationship between *kouji* and *pipa*-playing even further. Tang Yingzeng 湯應曾 (circa 1530–1588), a more prestigious *pipa* player contemporaneous to Li Jinlou, was also well-versed in *kouji*, even though his reputation was mainly built on his virtuosic renditions of classic *pipa* set pieces such as *Hujia shiba pai* 胡笳十八拍 (*Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*).[10] The information we have on Tang survives in a biography of the musician written by Wang Youding 王猷定 (1598-1662), which was also included in Zhang Chao's *Yuchu xinzhi*. In the biography, Wang does not distinguish Tang's mimicry of other sounds by playing his *pipa* from his performance of the instrument in the conventional, musical style, suggesting that he considers *kouji* as a subset of *pipa*-playing. The following analysis will examine two performances given by Tang—one that turns out to be *kouji* and the other portrayed as *kouji*—to show that this sonic genre further destabilizes one's expectation of a *pipa* performance.

The context of the first performance involves an actual battlefield. A certain General Wang recruits Tang as a musician for his army, and Tang becomes an integral part of military tactics devised by one of General Wang's strategists. Whenever there is a battle, the strategist orders Tang to use his *pipa* to imitate the uproar of stout soldiers (令為壯士聲) to lift the army's spirits.[11] Having *pipa* music in this kind of military context is highly unusual. In other accounts of *pipa* players from around the same time, the musical instrument typically provides background music for pastime entertainment at the royal court or in urban pleasure quarters, which in turns gives *pipa*-playing an

[10] *Hujia shiba pai* was a piece of *qin* music allegedly created by Cai Yan 蔡琰, the daughter of the famous second-century literatus and scholar-official Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192). It became especially popular during the late Song and the early Yuan. See Xiu Hailin, *Guyue jijin* 古樂集錦 (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2011), 129–31.

[11] Wang Youding, "Tang pipa zhuan" 湯琵琶傳, in Zhang Chao ed., *Yuchu xinzhi* 虞初新志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 13.

effeminate quality.[12] In contrast, Tang's *kouji* not only moves the musical instrument out of its regular environment but also literally transforms it into a sonic weapon.

The second and most detailed portrayal of Tang's *pipa* performance in the biography is portrayed as a *kouji* performance even though it centers on a set piece in the *pipa* repertoire called *Chu Han* 楚漢 (*The Battle between Chu and Han*).[13] This performance takes place in the lowest point in Tang's life. He has not only lost his wife, who was also his musical soulmate, but also returned home too late to bid her a last farewell. On top of that, he has become deaf and blind, and suffers a ceaselessly running nose. All those who summon him to perform place him behind closed screens and curtains so that they do not have to look at him (召之者，隔以屏障，聽其聲而已). The performance unfolds like this:

> Tang played over a hundred ancient tunes. From wind, rain and thunder, to the sounds of lovesick men and women, to the wailing of a hundred kinds of insects, and to the sighing of grasses and trees, there was none that was not completely animated in his sound. He especially took pride in playing *The Battle between Chu and Han*. When the armies on both sides engaged in the final battle, their sounds shook the heaven and the earth, lifting the tiles on the roof as if they were about to fly and fall. If you took time and observed closely, there were the sounds of metals, drums, swords, arrows, and the sounds of people and horses running away. Soon there was no sound at all. At last, there came something resentful and inarticulate, which turned out to be someone singing in the Chu style; there came something sorrowful and bright, which turned out to be Xiang Yu's sad and impassioned singing and his voice bidding farewell to his concubine; when Xiang Yu was trapped in the great marsh, there came the sounds of the horses chasing him; when [the army] reached the Wu river, there came the sounds of Xiang Yu committing suicide and of soldiers fighting over his body, which made listeners at first excited, then scared, and finally weep without knowing where the tears came from. This is the extent to which he moved people!
>
> 所彈古調百十餘曲，大而風雨雷霆，與夫愁人思婦，百蟲之號，一草一木之吟，靡不于其聲中傳之。而尤得意于楚漢一曲，當其兩軍決戰時，聲動天地，屋瓦若飛墜，徐而察之，有金聲、鼓聲、劍聲、弩聲、人馬辟易聲。俄而無聲。久之，

[12] For a normative account of the *pipa* as a musical instrument and a cultural artifact in the Ming–Qing periods, see Zeitlin, "The Cultural Biography of a Musical Instrument: Little Hulei as Sounding Object, Antique, Prop, and Relic," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 69*, no. 2 (2009): 395–441.
[13] *Chu Han* was an early version of the classic piece in the *pipa* repertory *Shimian maifu* 十面埋伏 (*Ambush from Ten Sides*). See Xiu, *Guyue jijin*, 139–41.

> 有怨而難明者，為楚歌聲，淒而壯者，為項王悲歌慷慨之聲、別姬聲；陷大澤，有追騎聲; 至烏江，有項王自刎聲，餘騎蹂踐爭項王聲，使聞者始而奮，既而恐，終而涕淚之無從也。其感人如此。[14]

A literary description of music in classical Chinese texts typically relies on an array of similes, marked by words such as "like" or "as though" (*ru* 如 or *si* 似 respectively). In place of such words, this passage repetitively uses "there is" (*you* 有), which emphasizes the animated quality of the depicted sounds. Moreover, the description unfolds as a cumulative and cacophonous sonic narrative punctuated by silence, and the syntactical structure it uses is commonly seen in seventeenth-century literary accounts of *kouji* performances.

Wang also invites his readers to imagine themselves as listeners to Wang's performance by using the phrase "take time and observe closely" (*xu'er cha zhi* 徐而察之).[15] To emphasize the emotional impact of Tang's music, Wang creates an anonymous listener's experience and traces how this fictitious listener is excited, frightened, and moved to tears by Tang's virtuosic performance. The battle that led to Xiang Yu's eventual defeat carries powerful echoes of the similarly turbulent end of the Ming dynasty, which both the musician and the author would have experienced firsthand. Given that the biography is set at the end of the Ming dynasty, Tang's *pipa*-playing might indeed be an indirect reference to the fall of the Ming dynasty.[16] This possibly deliberate resemblance between these two historical losses—the demise of Xiang Yu and that of the Ming—underscores the emotionally troubling effect of Tang's performance. Listening to Tang's music as a Ming loyalist—a position with which Wang probably identifies—means reliving and acting as an ear-witness of the traumatic historical past. The portrayal of Tang's *pipa*-playing as *kouji*, a voice that sounds at once

[14] Wang, "Tang pipa zhuan," in Zhang, *Yuchu xinzhi*, 13–14.
[15] Wang, 13–14.
[16] Wang's three other biographies are also included in Zhang Chao's *Yuchu xinzhi*. Among these biographies, sentiment about the fallen Ming dynasty is most pronounced in "Tang pipa zhuan."

familiar and strange, might be a means of giving voice to loyalist sentiment in a compelling yet unarticulated way.

The loyalist sentiment is also at the heart of another story included in *Yuchu xinzhi*: "Goupi daoshi zhuan" 狗皮道士傳 ("Biography of a Dog-Skin Daoist") written by Chen Ding, which is centered on another type of *kouji*—mimicry of barking. The protagonist of the story is an anonymous Daoist living in Chengdu, a metropolis in the southwestern province of Sichuan, who always wears a dog-skin pelt. Throughout the entire story, the Daoist never utters a single word, but he constantly barks. As the Daoist barks not to tell a story but to replace speech as his primary mode of communication, his *kouji* departs from the convention of sonic storytelling. His barking is versatile. He barks when he meanders in the city collecting food; his mimicry has such verisimilitude that both household dogs and dogs in the streets rush out to bark back at him. His barking seems nonsensical and purposeless at first, but it can quickly become aggressive. When he gets irritated by the excessive barking of real dogs, he imitates a tiger's roar to scare them off. When he resides at an abandoned temple at night, he barks to the extent that hundreds and thousands of dogs both nearby and afar eventually join him, creating a disconcerting effect. Excessive by nature, the Daoist's barking produces a transgressive effect, bringing the "voices" of countless dogs, which are often part of background noise in the urban space, to the forefront.

At that time, residents of Chengdu were living under the repressive regime established by the rebel leader Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠 (1606–1647), who was notorious for his atrocity. In the story, Zhang, while riding his horse and making his way into Chengdu, runs into the Daoist. As Zhang comes closer, the Daoist starts barking in Zhang's direction. Zhang instantly understands that the barking is an extralinguistic counterpart of cursing and orders his personal guards to kill the Daoist. But strange things happen: the horses that Zhang and his guards are riding refuse to move forward, and all of the arrows shot by the guards miss the Daoist. When Zhang shoots an arrow

himself, it somehow changes direction halfway to its target and ends up killing his own horse. Intimidated, Zhang aborts his plan and leaves.[17]

The second half of the story is set on New Year's Day of 1645—a critical historical moment. In the eleventh month of 1644, Zhang enthroned himself as the king of the "Great Western Kingdom" 大西國 in the city of Chengdu, where he would commit an atrocious massacre two years later. The Ming dynasty had just ended a few months earlier. In the story, as a parade of ministers is greeting the rebel-king in the city center, the Daoist sneaks in among them. Holding an official court tablet like the other ministers, the Daoist starts barking—a nonlinguistic equivalent of cursing. This defiant action enrages the rebel-king, who immediately orders his guards to arrest the Daoist. The Daoist then barks even more fiercely, and the noise, like a nonverbal call to arms, causes thousands of dogs throughout the city to bark with him. The deafening commotion drowns out the rebel-king's verbal command. However loudly Zhang shouts, his voice cannot be heard by any of his attendants. When Zhang retreats in fear, the barking immediately comes to a stop and the Daoist is nowhere to be seen.[18]

The climax of the story portrays the human vocal apparatus as a battlefield in a conflict between sounds and words that escalates into a state of emergency. By making Zhang's regime deaf to the tyrant's own words, the spontaneous sonic insurrection led by the Daoist temporarily overthrows the tyranny of the rebel-king. Although barking dogs are typically nothing more than a common nuisance in a space populated by human beings, in this case the bark acts as a sonic weapon that takes revenge on behalf of the human and nonhuman residents of Chengdu who had

[17] This episode is based on an actual encounter between Zhang Xianzhong and a Daoist documented in other historical records. See Zheng Guanglu, *Zhang Xianzhong jiao Sichuan zhenxiang* 張獻忠剿四川真相 (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2010), 116.
[18] This episode is based on another actual event that took place on the day of the mid-autumn festival of 1644. See Zheng, 129–30.

been living in terror during that tumultuous time. In a comment attached to the story, Zhang Chao, the editor of the literary anthology *Yuchu xinzhi*, raises a poignant question: "People with human skin were unable to bark at the bandit, but someone in a dog pelt could. Could it be that human beings are on the same level as dogs?" 人皮者不能吠賊，狗皮者反能之，可以人而不如狗乎? [19] Zhang's comment is also a poignant critique of the inability of speech to overthrow Zhang's tyranny, something of which Zhang's fellow literati as well as himself were guilty.

The story also recalls the beginning of Chen Ding's story "Biography of the Old Whistler," in which the whistler ascends to the mountaintop near Yangzhou and creates an earthquake-like sensation by means of whistling. Whereas the old whistler creates a united front among loyalists who have retreated to the mountains by forcing them to wake up and listen, the Daoist initiates an extralinguistic insurrection with thousands of dogs in the city of Chengdu. By housing a subversive vision that might have appeared in the dreams of countless Ming loyalists but that could not come true in the real world, the story of the Daoist also transforms into a utopic space.

An Acoustic Mirror: Storytelling as *Kouji*

Several seventeenth-century literati tapped into the mirroring relationship between sonic storytelling and the genre of *shuoshu* 說書 (conventional storytelling); by comparing conventional storytelling to *kouji*, they cast the former in an unfamiliar light and further enhanced the mirroring relationship between the two modes of storytelling. The poet Li Liangnian 李良年 (1635–1694) refers to the famous storyteller Liu Jingting 柳敬亭 (1592–circa 1672) as a performer of *kouji*: "That old man used a chess piece and a fan to create beats while performing *kouji* 叟以一棋一扇，按節

[19] Chen Ding, "Goupi daoshi zhuan" 狗皮道士傳, in Zhang, *Yuchu xinzhi*, 126.

作口技.[20] The nineteenth-century scholar Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) also refers to the genre of storytelling as "the type of *kouji* performed by Liu Jingting."[21] These introductions reflect Li and Ruan's shared understanding that storytelling is not only a skill in retelling stories but also a performance staged within the human vocal apparatus—*how* a voice animates a story is just as important as the content of the story itself.

Three biographies of Liu Jingting, written by Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609–1671), Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695), and Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1689) respectively, portray the storyteller's skill as *kouji*. They deliberately tap into the destabilizing potential of *kouji* as a sonic genre to highlight aspects of Liu's voice that they deem noteworthy. Liu Jingting was a close friend of the late Ming general Zuo Liangyu 左良玉 (1599–1645), who played a key role in fighting the rebel Zhang Xianzhong and in holding the Ming army together until their ultimate defeat and Li Zicheng's occupation of Beijing (Li was the rebel leader who ultimately overthrew the Ming dynasty). As a result of his connection with members of the elite circles, Liu played an active role in late Ming politics, which is portrayed in *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (*The Peach Blossom Fan*), a famous play written by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718).[22] In an in-depth analysis of Wu's and Huang's biographies, Sophie Volpp notes that they characterize the storyteller in opposite ways: "Wu warned that the storyteller was a wily trickster, but he obviously delighted in Liu's ability to infiltrate boundaries of

[20] Li Liangnian, "Kouzhan zeng Liu Jingting" (口占贈柳敬亭), in Li Daocheng, *Meihui shixuan* 梅會詩選 (1767), 12:6b.

[21] This reference appears in a biographical account on a poet named Ye Ying 葉英 (?–1797), attached to a poem entitled "Fengshang" 縫裳 ("Mending Clothes") composed by Ye. See Ruan Yuan, *Huaihai yingling ji* 淮海英靈集, in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 1803:614.

[22] For an introduction of Liu's personal connections with important players in the late Ming politics, see Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 214–48.

status and romanticized his liminal position at the threshold of two worlds. Huang Zongxi sought to contain this transgression of social hierarchies, voicing his outrage at Wu's celebration of the storyteller's art and warning that the rogue storyteller would manipulate those under his thrall."[23] In considering Zhang's biography, although she does not analyze the essay in detail, Volpp insightfully points out it is an exception as it concentrates on Liu's storytelling skill: "[Zhang] shared none of Wu's and Huang's anxieties and ambivalences regarding Liu's ascension among the ranks of the elite. Rather, Zhang's respect for Liu is clear as he emphasizes Liu's sense of self-worth as a virtuoso of his craft." [24] My analysis supplements Volpp's reading by giving a more microscopic account of Liu Jingting's storytelling—in particular, its extralinguistic aspect—portrayed in these three biographies.

As Volpp has observed, these three biographies reflect their authors' different priorities. Wu's biography elevates Liu to the status of a member of the literary elite whose storytelling, a manifestation of the storyteller's inner virtues, makes the street performer akin to a learned Confucian scholar. Considering this agenda, one might expect Wu to concentrate on the semantic content of Liu's storytelling and its connection with Liu's moral character. Instead, Wu portrays Liu's storytelling as a wide range of vocalizations in which speech is not at the center: commenting and discussing (*tanlun* 談論), joking and jesting (referred to as *xiexue* 諧謔 and as *huitiao xiexiao* 詼啁諧笑), and the skill in making things up (*shan dan* 善誕). Wu groups all of these under the rubric of *ji* 技 (technique) without using the standard term for storytelling—*shuoshu*—even once. To Wu, Liu's storytelling technique is not separate from his personality, and it is likewise manifested by his everyday conversational skills: "When he (Liu) conversed with someone, he didn't banter much at

[23] Volpp, 216.
[24] Volpp writes in a footnote: "Zhang Dai's sketch of Liu Jingting may be an exception. He shared none of Wu's and Huang's anxieties and ambivalences regarding Liu's ascension among the ranks of the elite. Rather, Zhang's respect for Liu is clear as he emphasizes Liu's sense of self-worth as a virtuoso of his craft." See Volpp, 218.

first; he patiently recounted a thing from the past to respond to the invitation. His words were gentle and his replies were elegant, bowling over the whole seated audience. Everyone valued him for his speech, and they didn't always urge him to perform his skills" 與人談，初不甚諧謔，徐舉一往事相酬答，澹辭雅對，一坐傾靡。諸公以此重之，亦不盡以其技彊也.[25]

Volpp has pointed out that Wu regards Liu's storytelling as untrustworthy, since it can bowl over his listeners; Liu's speech is an imitation of the language of other storytellers rather than "an emanation of his own self in the manner of the poetic tradition."[26] As a result, Volpp observes: "the vernacular is cast as theatrical and therefore viewed as unmoored."[27] I suggest a more nuanced interpretation of Wu's portrayal of what Volpp describes as Liu's "arts of enchantment."[28] Wu actually depicts the transgressive potential of Liu's storytelling in a positive light, which is particularly illustrated in the following comment:

> When nothing took place in the country, all that Mr. Liu talked about were stories of boldfaced con men, mighty knights-errant, rebels and runaways. As we heard them, we laughed and told each other: "This must not be true; Mr. Liu is just good at making up ridiculous things." Who knew that we would now unfortunately witness such things in person?
>
> 方海內無事，生所談，皆豪猾大俠、草澤亡命。吾等聞之，笑謂必無是，乃公故善誕耳；孰圖今日不幸，竟親見之乎？[29]

Wu suggests that Liu taught the literary elite a hard lesson: the boundary between fictional tales and lived reality can be tenuous in a period of political unrest. By immersing his elite audience members in his storytelling, Liu also forces them to reflect on contemporary social events, which can be seen as an act of activism in disguise.

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[25] Wu Weiye, *Wu Meicun wenji* 吳梅村文集 (Shanghai: Guoguang yinshuasuo, 1910), 5a.
[26] Volpp, *Worldly Stage*, 221.
[27] Volpp, 221.
[28] Volpp, 221.
[29] Volpp, 221.

Volpp points out that Huang Zongxi, who borrowed heavily from Wu's biography in order to revise it, "explicitly wrote his biography of Liu Jingting as a corrective to Wu's seeming celebration of the storyteller's art."[30] Like Wu, Huang details Liu's training under his teacher Mo Houguang but depicts it as a process of perfecting a manipulative skill that culminates in Liu's ability to make his audience unable to control their own emotion 使人性情不能自主.[31] To build on Volpp's analysis, I call for attention to Huang's depiction of one of Liu's storytelling performances, which took place shortly after General Zuo's tragic death, as a *kouji* event:

> Whenever Liu made a sound, upon hearing it, it was sometimes like knives and swords and iron horses suddenly appearing in the air; or it was like winds howling and rains weeping and birds saddened and animals frightened. Our regret for our fallen country suddenly emerged, casting a pall on the sound from the sandalwood clapper. There are things that cannot be fully expressed by Mr. Mo [Liu's alleged teacher]'s words.
>
> 每發一聲，使人聞之，或如刀劍鐵騎，颯然浮空，或如風號雨泣，鳥悲獸駭，亡國之恨頓生，檀板之聲無色，有非莫生之言可盡者也。[32]

Huang's description animates the excessive quality of Liu's storytelling. Throughout the biography, Huang makes a consistent effort to reduce to Liu's storytelling to a trick (whereas Wu sees it as an admirable technique). Volpp incisively elucidates Huang's reason for doing so: "the storyteller's capacity to mimic makes him particularly threatening, because the spurious origins of his reproduction of elite speech easily go undetected."[33] Volpp's perspective would lead one to assume that Huang animates Liu's storytelling in order to dismiss it as a performative and even manipulative trick. Upon scrutiny, however, this passage speaks of the virtuosity of Liu's storytelling in an

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[30] Volpp, 222.
[31] Volpp also draws attention to the manipulative quality of Liu's storytelling implied in this characterization. See Volpp, 224.
[32] Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985), 10:573.
[33] Volpp, *Worldly Stage*, 223.

approving tone, as if the scholar took pleasure in portraying the vocal pyrotechnics in detail, which stands at odds with Huang's dismissive tone in the rest of the biography.

Zhang's biography is unique in that the author consistently scrutinizes Liu's storytelling through the lens of *kouji*. This strategy deconstructs the hierarchy as well as the distinction between the semantic and the extralinguistic aspects of regular storytelling, as one of Zhang's most elaborate depictions of Liu's performance shows:

> His voice was as loud as the sound of a giant bell. When his storytelling came to a turning point in the story, he would yell and shout so intensely that the house was on the verge of collapse. When Wu Song [a protagonist in the novel [*Outlaws of the Marsh*] arrives at an inn to buy wine but no one is there, [Wu Song] suddenly gives out a roar, causing all empty vats and loose bricks to shake in unison.
>
> 勃夬声如巨钟，说至筋节处，叱咤叫喊，汹汹崩屋。武松到店沽酒，店内无人，譬地一吼，店中空缸空甓皆瓮瓮有声。[34]

By animating Liu's voice as Wu Song's own voice rather than a compelling approximation of it, Zhang turns his description into an act of literary ventriloquism that draws an analogy between Liu's storytelling and Zhang's own act of literary representation. Later in his essay, Zhang offers an even closer observation of the movement of Liu's mouth, so detailed that readers can almost feel the moving rhythm of Liu's voice:

> Every night when it grows late, when someone wipes the table, trims the lamp and silently hands Liu a white teacup, he starts patiently to tell a story. His voice is alternately quick and slow, soft and loud, taken in and let out, rising and falling, full of emotion and substance, and full of organization and structure.
>
> 每至丙夜，拭桌剪灯，素瓷静递，款款言之，其疾徐轻重，吞吐抑扬, 入情入理，入筋入骨。[35]

Noteworthy is that Zhang describes Liu's storytelling as an array of extralinguistic sounds rather than articulate speech. By decentering speech in his description, Zhang concentrates on Liu's act of

[34] Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi xihu mengxun* 陶庵夢憶 西湖夢尋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 63.
[35] Zhang, 63.

speaking as a performance in itself rather than as a performance of something else (e.g. the content of his storytelling).

Furthermore, Zhang characterizes Liu as an apolitical figure despite his active role in late-Ming politics. We see this in his first introduction of Liu: "Pockmarked Liu from Nanjing is dark-skinned and has scars and lumps all over his face. Detached and carefree, he treats his bodily frame like so much earth or wood" 南京柳麻子，黧黑，滿面皯瘤，悠悠忽忽，土木形骸.[36] The second line of the description is a verbatim transcription of the characterization of Liu Ling 劉伶, a literatus from the Six Dynasties who had a special reputation for defying social conventions, in the fifth-century literary anthology *Shishuo xinyu*.[37] Zhang's sketch of the storyteller further enhances the singularity of Liu's voice as well as its transgressive capability. Taken as a whole, these elements singled out by Zhang make the excessive aspects of Liu's storytelling an admirable thing.

Hearing the Cat in the Dark

Some of the descriptions of *kouji* performances from the late sixteenth century discussed above capture what gradually became a central characteristic to this sonic storytelling as portrayed in seventeenth-century *biji* records: the performer would use screens, curtains, or other dividers to conceal himself or herself from the audience in the beginning of a performance. By producing a sense of mystery, this arrangement further enhances the disorienting effects produced by the *kouji* performer's transformative voice. Several sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literati paid special attention to this acousmatic (i.e. disembodied through technological means) aspect of *kouji*; this

[36] Zhang Dai, Tao'an mengyi Xihu mengxun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 62. The second half of the translation is from Richard B. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 311.
[37] See Yu Jiaxi, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 2:676.

section will focus on their descriptions of one *kouji* star, Guo Mao'er 郭貓兒, who was known by his nickname "the Cat."

Born in the late 1590s, the Cat was the only *kouji* artist who became the central subject of multiple literary biographies penned by different literati writers. The Cat might have started his career as a *kouji* performer as early as in the first decades of the seventeenth century, but it was his later performances in the late 1670s and 1680 that attracted most attention from his elite contemporaries. In the 1640s, *kouji* was already used as a standard term for denoting the sonic storytelling by authors including Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608–1661) and Lin Sihuan 林嗣環 (1607–1662). In a biography of the Cat that the scholar-official Wang Maolin 汪懋麟 (1640–1688) wrote between the 1670s and the 1680s, however, Wang refers to the Cat's skill not as *kouji* but as *xiangsheng* 象生 (imitating life). At first, Wang treats the skill as a subcategory of singing:

> Guo Mao'er was a native of Yangzhou, and he was named Weixiu. When he was young, he made a name by jesting and bantering at markets. He was good at singing *and was particularly good* [my emphasis] at Imitating Life. Imitating Life is a type of skill that mimics animals including those with feathers, those that fly, and those that run. His voices were adroit and bore close resemblance [to what he imitated]. He particularly excelled in mimicking cats, so people in Yangzhou gave him the nickname "Guo the Cat."
>
> 郭貓兒者，揚州市人也，名惟秀。少以詼調謔浪聞市肆，善謳，尤善象生。象生者，效羽毛飛走之屬，聲音宛轉偪肖，尤工於貓，故揚人號之貓郭。[38]

This introduction is followed by an elaborate description of one of the Cat's performances in an early stage of his career. At that time, the Cat was performing along with a blind *pipa* player. Wang introduces the Cat's voice ambiguously as a type of "slow voicing" 曼聲 (*mansheng*), a term usually referring to the Kunshan-style singing in the late Ming, which makes us wonder whether the Cat was actually singing or whether Wang uses "singing" as a metaphor for *kouji*. This performance took

[38] Wang Maolin, *Baichi wutong ge ji* 百尺梧桐閣集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 1:437.

place in the pleasure quarters, in a room where multiple singers were performing at the same time accompanied by their own musicians playing string instruments and bamboo flutes. As the Cat starts to perform, he captivates everyone in the room and becomes the center of attention. At the same time, the reason that his voice stood out from the rest of the musical din is that it animates the heartbreaking voices of women from short-lived dynasties during the sixth and the seventh centuries, who were abandoned by their lovers:

> The *pipa* player turned the peg and plucked the strings, producing the slow voicing from the Chen (557–589) and the Sui (581–619) dynasties to create the atmosphere of a stormy evening with the forlorn ladies, abandoned wives, famous courtesans and beautiful concubines weeping in their secluded and dimly lit boudoir. None of the listeners was unaffected by those voices, and the audience saw their faces as if the ladies were before them, and took pity in those women's hapless sentiments.
>
> 撥軸鳴絃，為陳隋間曼聲，恍如風雨之夕，怨女棄婦，名娼艷妾，啼訴於幽房暗壁。聞者莫不感動其聲，髣髴其態，而憐其無可如何之情。[39]

Although the sonic nature of Cat's "slow voicing" is never disclosed, this description invites readers to imagine the performance—a lifelike simulation of multiple discrete female voices—as *kouji*.

The second half of the biography depicts an impromptu *kouji* performance as a sonic trickery. This performance takes place at a banquet held on the outskirts of Yangzhou, a commercial and cultural metropolis in eastern China, in the late 1670s, twenty years after Wang last saw the performer.[40] The Cat is seventy-six years old, and the blind *pipa* player who used to accompany him has already died. Surprisingly, as Wang remarks later in the biography, the Cat's skill has not aged at all:

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[39] Wang, 437.

[40] The temporal range of this encounter can be narrowed down to 1674–1680. Wang launched a project of reconstructing Pingshan Hall 平山堂 (Pingshan tang) after his return to Yangzhou, which was completed in 1674. According to the chronical of Wang's life, no more banquets were hosted at Pingshan Hall after 1680. We may even speculate that the performance took place in the summer of 1677, when Wang took residence in Pingshan Hall for a summer. See Hu Chunli, *Wang Maolin nianpu* 汪懋麟年譜 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2014), 208–406.

> After singing a couple of lines, the Cat suddenly got up and hid himself among some screens, mimicking a rooster's crowing. It was already past midday, but the roosters in the remote villages all responded by crowing. In a short while, the Cat then imitated a dog's bark. As soon as he barked, the dogs on the hillside all responded by barking at the same moment. The seated guests burst into laughter and marveled at how incredible it was.
>
> 歌曲數行，貓忽起，匿屏間，喔喔作老雞聲。時日已逾午，而遠村之雞，翕然鼓應。須臾，又為犬吠聲，一發而山之羣犬皆應於是。坐客笑樂，歎以為神。[41]

Using screens or a similar divider to conceal the body of the *kouji* master from his audience had become a standard practice around the mid-seventeenth century, whereas such an arrangement appeared only sporadically in late sixteenth-century literary records of *kouji* performances. By sliding behind the screens, the Cat signals to the audience the sly nature of his mimicry. However, Wang, along with the rest of the audience, still mishears his sound. Noting the oddity of hearing crowing roosters in the afternoon, the audience seems convinced that the roosters echoing from afar are real animals rather than acoustic simulacra. It is quite possible that the performer is conjuring up the full range of sounds perceived by the audience, including the responses from the crowing roosters and barking dogs that seem to arise from a distance. The incongruity between the cunning master and the gullible audience emerges as the account captures both the construction and the perception of the sonic illusion.

Despite the biography's generally approving tone, Wang expresses concern that *kouji* is constantly haunted by speech. The Cat's imitative crowing immediately reminds Wang of two historical uses of *kouji*. The first is the story of the anonymous retainer of Lord Mengchang aiding the lord's escape from the Qin kingdom. Wang compares Lord Mengchang's retainer with the same lord's prized advisor Mr. Feng, whose eloquence had gained him a fortune while serving the lord. But once speech poses a threat to his lord's very survival, Mr. Feng's talent is completely useless, as any articulate words heard by the guards at the pass could cost Lord Mengchang his freedom.

[41] Wang Maolin, *Baichi wutong ge ji*, 1:438.

Although the retainer is the hero of the episode, his name has been omitted from historical records, since the surreptitious nature of his skill makes it morally precarious. The retainer's extralinguistic involvement in politics precludes his presence in the linguistic order. The second historical example Wang cites concerns the use of *kouji* as something equivalent to obsequious speech: Zhao Shize 趙師擇 (n.d.), a minor minister working for the powerful Southern Song chancellor Han Tuozhou 韓侂胄 (1152–1207), wins Han's favor by imitating barking dogs during a rural excursion when Han laments the absence of the crowing and barking typically expected of bucolic settings.

Wang's anxiety over the close but non-identical relationship between *kouji* and speech is manifest in his effort to place the Cat's skill beyond these two historical uses of *kouji* that could be considered sonic counterparts to the "sly tongue." Although those in power compete to hire the Cat, the performer chooses to stay out of politics. This earns him Wang's unreserved praise. Despite the close resemblance between *kouji* and speech that threatens to contaminate the Cat's skill, his retreat from the realm of politics shields his extralinguistic voice from misuse.

Wang's portrayal of the Cat is centered on one central feature of his performance: the artist deliberately directs his mimicry so that it is perceived as an acousmatic voice—a voice whose source is unseen, unknown, or removed at the time it is perceived.[42] Wang was both amazed by and concerned about the acousmatic quality of the performance, which reflects the Cat's virtuosity on the one hand and makes the artist's voice resemble a sly tongue on the other hand. As a theoretical concept, the acousmatic is not neutral. It is distinct from the idea of the disembodied, in that the

[42] The French composer Pierre Schaeffer first introduced "acousmatic" to refer to a sound whose source is unseen. Michel Chion adopts this definition; Brian Kane expands it by suggesting that sounds whose source or cause is unknown are also acousmatic. To these defining categories of "unseen" and "unknown" I add "removed," modifying the definition of the term to be attentive to the role of manipulation and deception in the formation of an acousmatic experience. See also Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 149–50.

acousmatic calls for a heightened awareness of a sound's mediatized nature and the technological as well as the psychological mechanisms involved in producing and perceiving the misalignment between the source and the effect of the sound. The French composer Pierre Schaeffer first repurposed the archaic term "acousmatic" to describe the auditory experience of the experimental compositional form *musique concrète*, which intentionally displaces the standard source and effect of a sound.[43] The French film and sound theorist Michel Chion has coined the term "the acousmêtre" to denote the source of an acousmatic sound and has dedicated several projects to the power dynamics of the acousmatic as an audio-visual construction, especially when it takes the form of a mismatch between sound and image on screen.[44] More recently, Chion has proposed the concept of "figurative listening" as a corrective to Shaeffer's concept of "reduced listening" as a way to observe how acousmatic listening allows the listener to de-familiarize regular habits of listening. The music theorist Brian Kane traces the root of the French term for the acousmatic—*l'acousmatique*—back to "akousmatikoi" (acousmatics) in ancient Greek, which refers audiences at Pythagoras's lectures, who were separated from the teacher and his selected students by a veil.

Mladen Dolar uses the acousmatic to consider the nature of the human voice as a site of alterity. For Dolar, the voice is by nature acousmatic as it constantly lacks a source and any attempt to locate it in a materialist and positivist manner is doomed to fail.[45] Brian Kane, who takes a technological approach to understanding the acousmatic, challenges this position. Kane understands the acousmatic sound as a mediatized experience where a spacing (*espacement*) takes place between the source, cause and effect of a sound, forcing the listener to confront intellectual uncertainty. Kane

[43] For an introduction of Schaeffer's development of the concept, see Kane, 15–41.
[44] See Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 17–29. For a more recent elaboration on the concept by Chion, see Michel Chion, *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 112–17.
[45] See Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 36–52.

suggests that the acousmatic is a special circumstance caused by a specific type of technological mediation rather than a permanent condition.[46] But these understandings of the acousmatic consider it as part of a linear process that culminates in the revelation of the sound's true source (known as de-acousmatisation), whether that be discovering the physical origin of a mystifying sound or confronting one's own voice as the site of alterity. Taking into consideration dimensions of an acousmatic experience that do not insist on its linear nature would also offer solutions to this dispute.

Nearly every literary author who wrote a literary account of *kouji* during the seventeenth century reflected on the acousmatic nature of the sonic storytelling, which allows these literary records to produce valuable theoretical insights that should be put in dialogue with the contemporary theoretical discussions of the acousmatic in sound studies and media studies. The rest of this chapter will uncover theoretical insights into the acousmatic embedded in seventeenth-century literary accounts of *kouji* to consider what displacing the source of an extralinguistic voice entails in a premodern Chinese context. In addition to Wang Maolin, an anonymous author writing under the pseudonym "Master of the Eastern Mansion" portrays the Cat as an acousmêtre in an essay called "Kouji ji" 口技記 ("A Record of *Kouji*") by detailing the process of the performer setting up a performance that took place in Yangzhou in 1680. Unlike Wang Maolin, who experienced the Cat's *kouji* as an unexpected trick, the Master of the Eastern Mansion is a member of an audience who is anticipating it. At a banquet where guests start to get inebriated, the Cat volunteers to perform his skill. The Master of the Eastern Mansion observes:

> The Cat set up a foldable screen next to his seat, and did not place any lamp or candle in the room. He sat behind the screen, and the host and guests listened quietly. For a long time, there was no sound. Suddenly, one heard two people run into each other in the street and exchange pleasantries. One of them sounded older, and the other sounded younger. The older man dragged the younger man to his place to drink. They threw dice and played

[46] See Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 150.

> game of guessing the ring is in whose hand, and had a good time. Saying that he was drunk, the younger man intended to leave for home, and the older man forcefully persuaded him to down several more cups. [The younger man] then staggered out, and they parted with each other. The host closed the doors, and the younger man's footsteps sounded faltering.
>
> 於席右設圍屏，不置燈燭。郭坐屏后，主客靜聽，久之無聲。俄聞二人途中相遇，揖敘寒暄，其聲一老一少。老者拉少者至家飲酒，投瓊藏鉤，備極款洽。少者以醉歸辭，老者復力勸數甌，遂踉蹌出門，彼此謝別。主人閉門，少者履聲蹣跚。[47]

The Cat's essentially wordless act of storytelling centers on the nightly routine of a nameless male protagonist, who gets drunk with a friend, staggers and passes out in the street, knocks on the wrong door, is rebuffed and finds his way home, vomits into his wife's slippers and gets upbraided by her. After this chain of farcical incidents, it is almost daybreak, and the protagonist's father wakes him up and asks him to butcher pigs. Here the narrator inserts a line that conveys a sense of revelation: "and only then did one realize that this was a family of butchers" 始知其為屠門也, which articulates the listener's sense of surprise and disorientation.[48] What follows is an elaborate description of the butchering:

> His son then tied up a pig: the sound of the pig being tied up, the sound of sharpening knives, the sound of butchering the pig, the scream of the pig being butchered, the sound of blood gushing, and the sounds of scalding the pork and plucking the pig's hair, were rendered fully and distinctly.
>
> 其子遂縛一豬，豬被縛聲、磨刀聲、殺豬聲、豬被殺聲、出血聲、燖剝聲，歷歷不爽也。[49]

Although this storytelling is made legible through writing, a linguistic act, the account is portraying an extralinguistic event. The performance does contain spoken words, as when the Cat conjures up a scene where two characters engage in dialogue, but those words are twisted. They are used not only for conveying the plot, which imposes a linear sense of development on the narrated event, but also

[47] Zheng Shuruo, *Yuchu xuzhi* 虞初續志 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1989), 138.
[48] Zheng, 139.
[49] Zheng, 139.

for evoking the multiplicity of acoustic effects in the performance, which also unfolds in a non-linear way. At the scene of the *kouji* performance, every sonic detail needs to be conjured up if it is to assume a signifying role. But every sound, be it a mere sound, a voice, or a noise, plays a potentially meaningful narrative role that engages and distracts the audience at the same time. From a listener's point of view, the hierarchy between semantically meaningful sounds and mere sounds dissolves in the master's virtuosity. As the Cat manipulates his sounds, he also manipulates language by dismantling speech and reducing it to mere sound. As a result, *kouji* decenters articulate speech and the signifying process enabled by it, including plot and the act of storytelling in a standard sense.

Understanding language as a torture house, a repressive regime that inflicts violence upon man by means of speech, Slavoj Žižek calls for a homeopathic remedy by means of torture, suggesting that "[language] should be twisted, denaturalized, extended, condensed, cut, and reunited, made to work against itself."[50] This ear-witness account of the Cat's performance turns us into witnesses of an instance of torture that *kouji* inflicts upon language. The slaughter of the pigs takes place in the torture house of language, as the Cat still relies on certain meaning-making functions of language, and the sounds are translated into words and made legible through writing. But the Cat turns language against itself, reducing speech to mere sound and turning *kouji* into a mirror image of speech through his act of mimetic "storytelling." But through this mirror reflection *kouji* goes awry. In a close acousmatic listening, every sound assumes a potentially meaningful narrative role, thereby multiplying the expressive capacity of seemingly nonsensical sounds and collapsing the hierarchy between speech and mere sound.

The performance ends abruptly as the speaking voices and noise of chopping become cumulatively dense:

[50] Slavoj Žižek, "The Poetic Torture-House of Language," *Poetry* 203, no. 6 (2014): 566.

> One hears the sound of loading meat onto the table, and then hears the sound of the sellers and buyers counting money; there were people buying the pig's head, the intestines, and the pork meat. While they were yelling and arguing incessantly, a loud clapping sound rang out; the entire space was quiet.
>
> 聞肉上案聲，即聞有賣買數錢聲，有買豬首者，有買腹臟者，有買肉者，正在紛紛爭鬧不已。耑然一聲，四座俱寂。[51]

The sharp contrast between the dazzling acoustic effects and the subsequent ambient silence exposes the illusory nature of the performance and reveals the presence of the *kouji* master. Even after the performance is over, its acousmatic prowess lingers as the audience wonders how a single person conjured up manifold voices and noises—a point to be returned to later.

The Master's Voice

This section turns to a sound theorist from the late sixteenth century—Pan Zhiheng—who theorized the acousmatic nature of *kouji* in a way that produces an alternative theoretical model for understanding the acousmatic. A contemporary of the late sixteenth-century *pipa* master Li Jinlou, Pan composed a literary biography called "Su sheshi" 蘇舌師 ("Su the Tonguemaster") for a *kouji* master with the last name Su. Among the numerous literary biographies Pan wrote of actors, singers and courtesans in his time, this biography stands out as it is not about dramatic singing but about an unusual voice. The biography never identifies what Master Su's skill is; *kouji* was not a common term until the 1640s. When Huang Zongxi later compiled the literary compendium *Ming wenhai* 明文海 (*The Sea of Writings from the Ming*), he selected this biography but changed its title to "Kouxi" 口戲 "Vocal Tricks" as if to elucidate the sonic nature of Master Su's expertise, even though the term

[51] Zheng, *Yuchu xuzhi*, 138–39.

kouji was more frequently used.[52] This modification indicates that the editor probably found the original title "Tonguemaster" vague.

In fact, the tongue is key to a conceptual intervention made by Pan in the essay. As an apparatus essential to speaking and other linguistic activities, the tongue is typically understood as a shorthand for *yan* 言 (speech) and its signifying function. Slanderers and gossipers are often said to have a sly tongue (*qiaoshe* 巧舌).[53] During the Six Dynasties, when many literati actively explored alternatives to speech, such as the literati-style whistling, some of them proposed that one such alternative would be not to use the tongue. In a provocative short essay entitled "Buyong she lun" 不用舌論 ("Treatise on Not Using the Tongue"), Zhang Han 張韓 (n.d.) suggests that one should pay closer attention to non-speech (*buyan* 不言) than to speech (*youyan* 有言). Zhang spends most of his time listing reasons for why one must not use one's tongue (i.e. to speak): "The snapping of the trigger [of the tongue] determines one's fortune and misfortune; speech causing catastrophe keeps reoccurring whereas speech quite rarely brings about fortune" 樞機之發，主乎榮辱，禍言相尋，召福甚希; also, he says, "parrots and mythological orangutans play their tricks [with their tongues] but getting caught up in cages and nets, and their existences have little importance" 鸚鵡狌狌，鼓弄於籠羅，財無一介之存.[54] Zhang concludes with a sigh: "As for everything between the

[52] See Huang Zongxi ed., *Ming wenhai* 明文海 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 2:1460.

[53] This term derives from the phrase "sly speech" 巧言 (*qiaoyan*), which first appeared in the earliest Chinese anthology of poetry *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Songs*) in the characterization of a brazen minister who talks the king of Zhou into making a fateful decision: "Thin and shallow are their inflated words/out from their mouths they spew/clever words like a tooted reed/how thick-skinned they are indeed" 蛇蛇碩言，出自口矣。巧言如簧，顏之厚矣. See Kong Yingda et al., *Maoshi zhushu* 毛詩註疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013), 2:1088. The translation comes from Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 180.

[54] This mythological orangutan is called *shengsheng* 狌狌, an animal mentioned in *Shanhai jing* 山海經. Ouyang Xun, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 318.

heaven and the earth, and as for humans and things, why should they bother to have speech?" 普天地之與人物，亦何屑於有言哉.[55]

Zhang's admonition against using the tongue is also a reference to the "Metal Man" inscription, allegedly transcribed by Confucius himself from a metal statue at the ancestral temple of the king of Zhou.[56] The statue has its mouth sealed three times and bears an inscription on its back that identifies the figure as a "man of antiquity who is cautious with speech" 古之慎言人.[57] The form of the statue mirrors the content of the inscription, which enumerates reasons why anyone should be careful about speech and persistently urges its readers to follow its advice. Thomas P. Kelly has observed that the inscription "called into question the very purpose of speech" by making an inanimate thing speak through a text not only to negate its own speech-act but also to silence its human reader.[58] Zhang's essay is among a number of texts challenging the Metal Man inscription that sprang up during the Six Dynasties in compact prose and poetic forms, including the inscription (*ming* 銘), the proverb (*zhen* 箴), and the *fu* 賦. The literatus Sun Chu 孫楚 (?–293) wrote a parody of this inscription called "Fan Jinren ming" 反金人銘 ("Counter Metal Man Inscription"). Sun imagines a loquacious Stone Man, a statue made from rocks who opens his mouth wide open and bears an inscription on his chest. In contrast with the disembodied voice of the Metal Man denounced by its own inscription, Sun's imaginary inscription begins by giving the Stone Man a first-person speaking voice: "I am a man of antiquity who speaks excessively" 我古之多言人也.[59] The Stone Man inscription rejects the statements made in the Metal Man inscription by enumerating

[55] Ouyang, 318.
[56] Xiang Zonglu, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 10:258.
[57] For an examination of this inscription, see Thomas Patrick Kelly, "Clawed Skin: The Literary Inscription of Things in Sixteenth Century China," PhD diss., (University of Chicago, 2017), 41–44.
[58] Kelly, 42–43.
[59] Ouyang Xun, *Yiwen leiju*, 348.

reasons why one must not refrain from speaking when the well-being of the society is at stake: for example, regulating speech could be used as a means of suppressing dissidents whose opinions would help a ruler make impartial decisions.[60] By openly challenging the Metal Man, itself a spokesperson for Confucius, the Stone Man inscription inaugurates a dissident's voice that speaks in defiance of the ancient admonition.

In "Su sheshi," Pan Zhiheng combines the suggestions given by the loquacious Stone Man and the insights offered by Zhang Han on the dangerous consequences of using the human tongue. Through a close examination of how Master Su uses his tongue not to speak but to perform *kouji*, Pan disconnects the tongue from the signifying function and explores purposes that it can serve other than speaking. Although we cannot find the tonguemaster's name in any other historical record, with a sense of credibility, Pan introduces him as someone who was active in the elite circles in Beijing:

> The blind man Su was a native of the eastern district in Beijing. He could not see anything with his eyes, but he mastered all types of cleverness related to the tongue.[61] Not a day went by when he was not invited by the noblemen in the capital.
>
> 蘇瞽，北京東院人。雙目無見，而舌根之慧，無所不通，長安貴人延請無虛日。[62]

Pan then proceeds to expound the "all types of cleverness related to the tongue" possessed by Su, which covers a broad spectrum of skills involved in employing the master's voice. Pan divides Su's skills into two categories: the seen and the unseen—the acousmatic:

> Among his skills, one-tenth was presented before an audience while nine-tenths were deployed behind the audience's back. The one-tenth were things he [as well as others] was able to do, and the nine-tenths were things only he could do. Playing stringed instruments and singing to convey his feelings fully was the one-tenth that he would perform before an audience. [But] if you shut him in a room and lean against the wall to listen: it is sometimes as if you are wandering in a forest, with hundreds of birds warbling; sometimes it is as if

[60] Ouyang, 348.
[61] The term that Pan chose for the tongue, *shegen* 舌根, has a distinctively Buddhist connotation.
[62] Pan Zhiheng, *Luanxiao xiaopin* 鸞嘯小品 (1629), 2:6a.

> you are touring in a huge garden, with cows mooing and horses neighing. Sometimes it is as if you are caught up in a noisy city, with roosters crowing and dogs barking and children crying; [sometimes it is as if you witness] scoundrels fighting, caught up in passing wheels and horse hooves that run tumultuously and raise dust in the air. The skills that cause a sensation and shock the audience belong to the nine-tenths that he did behind the audience's back.
>
> 其技面陳者十一，而背聘者十九；一所能也，九所絕也。彈絃奏肉，曲盡其情，此面陳之一也。閉之室，倚壁而聽之：忽若游茂林而白鳥哢音也，忽若閱大苑而牛馬嘶風也。忽若臨市塵而雞鳴犬吠，兒女啼號；猾豪爭鬨，輪蹄夾擊，雜沓奔馳，囂起氛上；若震一方而驚四座，此背聘之九也。[63]

Curiously, although this passage describes the representational purpose of Master Su's instrument—playing and singing (e.g. expressing feelings)—it does not introduce the function of the other nine-tenths of Master Su's skills. Instead, Pan immerses readers in an ever-changing acoustic illusion conjured up by Master Su's tongue. Even though Pan does not tell us what the nine-tenths are in concrete terms, by now we can tell that they are *kouji*.

At the end of Su's performance, an incredulous listener asks the master: "Is this the upper limit of your skill? Can you see things with your tongue?" 子技至此乎？子將以舌視乎. [64] The listener's words imply a gesture of debunking: I can see your tricks. The listener makes a further observation that borders on an accusation: "By taking a look at your tongue, I can tell that you are a descendant of the Qin empire" 吾視子舌，知為秦之苗裔矣.[65] Insinuating that Master Su's *kouji* is a trick of the sly tongue akin to the eloquent speech given by politicians who served the Qin kingdom and played a vital role in Qin's assimilation of other kingdoms into a unified central power, the contentious guest sharply points out the manipulative potential in the master's elastic voice.

The guest's words provoke the master finally to respond in speech: "I listen to all of the sounds as if they were one sound, and I master the one [sound] and shut my beak. If people listen to

[63] Pan, 2:6a.
[64] Pan, 2:6a.
[65] Pan, 2:6a.

me, in the end one voice becomes ten thousand" 吾聽之若一，吾執一而合喙，眾之聽之，遂以一而為萬矣. [66] The blind master's virtuosity lies not only in manipulating the auditory perception of the listener but also in transforming the performer's relationship with his own vocal apparatus. To illustrate his point more vividly, Master Su compares *kouji* with the sounding of the Piping of Earth—*chuiwan* 吹萬.[67] He suggests that his tongue achieves the same effect as the whistling wind traveling through the hollows, recesses, and gaps in nature described in Zhuangzi's theory, producing sounds in flux while sustaining an open-ended signifying process:

> This is how I use my tongue: my entire body is the tongue; my five sense organs are the tongue; and even a single hair or a single pore of mine is the tongue. I become unaware of either my tongue or my body; only then do I achieve this skill. I use my thought to accomplish my skill; it is not that my tongue is wise, but rather that I attain wisdom through my tongue. Attaining wisdom through my tongue means simply that I do not let my tongue bring harm to my body, but rather that I use my tongue to nourish my life.
>
> 吾所以用舌者：四體，舌也。五官，舌也。一毛一竅，皆舌也。吾不知有吾舌，亦不知有吾身，而後能成此技也。成之, 以想者也，非舌慧也，通乎慧也。通乎慧者，舌不能為身殃，吾以舌養吾生耳。[68]

This passage radically re-theorizes the function of the human tongue, which destabilizes the hierarchy between the tongue—the apparatus of speech—and a single hair or a single pore, which are never considered to be capable of expression. Master Su's explanation reflects his awareness of the risk involved in using his tongue for speaking. *Kouji* not only frees the master from the danger of bringing harms to his life but also undoes the hierarchy between the vocal apparatus and the rest of

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[66] Pan, *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 2:6b. Pan borrows the trope of the bird's beak from the "Heaven and Earth" 天地 chapter in *Zhuangzi*. For the original line in *Zhuangzi* see Liu Wendian, *Zhuangzi buzheng* 莊子補正 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 1999), 343. A bird chirps (denoted by the act of closing its beak) without having its own intention, which manifests a type of innate automatism parallel to the movement of heaven and earth that takes place without an explicit reason.
[67] Pan, 2:6b.
[68] Pan, 2:6b.

the body. The master's demonstration of this other use of the tongue in turn replaces the necessity of saying things and making sense with a potentially infinite sound-making.

Noteworthy is the master's elaboration of the tongue as the key to a bodily automatism of sounding-as-becoming, which can be understood as a premodern counterpart of the acousmachine, a term coined by Michel Chion to describe an acousmêtre with a nonhuman body. For Chion, the acousmachine is epitomized by Hal 9000, the all-seeing, one-eyed computer with a robotic voice in Stanley Kubrick's movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*; Hal exemplifies "the notion that [the acousmachine's] center cannot be reached, and it is impossible to defuse."[69] The acousmachine forces spectators to face the threat that it poses to the foundation of a speaking voice: human subjectivity. By constructing an acousmachine in the extralinguistic domain as an alternative to speech and especially the "sly tongue," Pan's theorization also questions the limitations of the human voice and locates an alternative in a type of human vocalization that undermines its own human nature. In a Zhuangzian vein, Master Su describes that his *kouji* allows him to transform into bodies not his own and to become the animals he vocalizes:

> Little by little, turning into a rooster, I start crowing: and then a flock of birds takes flight, and suddenly I grow ten thousand wings; little by little, turning into a horse, I start neighing: and then a herd of horses gallops by, and suddenly I run with ten thousand hooves.
>
> 浸假而鳴，群飛而翔。忽生萬翼，浸假而嘶，羣逸而奔。[70]

Master Su's tongue is an acousmachine that masks not only the singularity of his voice but also the humanness of his own body. As his tongue-as-body infinitely multiplies, even the master cannot locate each sound that he emits. Like his listeners, the master also grows unaware of either his

[69] Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 43.

[70] Pan, *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 2: 6b. This line is a riff on "The Teacher Who is the Ultimate Ancestor" 大宗師 chapter. Pan borrows Zhuangzi's syntax and deploys it to convey his own message. For the reference from *Zhuangzi*, see Liu, *Zhuangzi buzheng*, 207.

tongue or his body. His manifold hypothetical tongues are ultimately acousmatic even to himself. Automating a productive deconstruction of the body as a way to animate an all-embracing voice, Master Su's tongue activates a synaesthetic body and achieves a permanent acousmatic state that lies outside the domain of speech. Through Master Su's voice, Pan offers a lesson to readers about how to leave behind our regular voices and bodies as well as our dependence on the signifying function of speech.

The Acousmêtre Behind the Text

Behind the scene of a *kouji* performance stands another concealed master—the literary author who turns the all-transforming, extralinguistic voice into word magic. A commentary written by Zheng Shuruo 郑澍若 (n.d.), the eighteenth-century editor of the literary anthology *Yuchu xuzhi* 虞初續志 (*The Magician's Extended Records*), which was modeled after Zhang Chao's *Yuchu xinzhi*, praises the Master of the Eastern Mansion's "Kouji ji" for being an act of verbal virtuosity akin to *kouji*:

> A skill reaching such a level is a miraculous skill. The performer conjures up all possible forms and appearances, producing an effect close to the howling of ten thousand hollows at the same time. Similarly, the author of the record lets his ink dance and his brush fly in a way like writing with one brush in each hand simultaneously. This skill has evolved into a Way. I would say the same about this record.
>
> 技至此，神乎技矣。在奏者窮形盡相，幾于萬竅皆鳴。而作記者，亦復墨舞筆飛，不啻雙管齊下。技也，而進于道也。吾于斯記亦云然。[71]

In this passage, Zheng employs *kouji* as a kinesthetic model for understanding the mechanism of literary writing, an expertise in manipulating words analogous to how Master Su uses his tongue. A number of authors from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries share the notion that informal

[71] Zheng, *Yuchu xuzhi*, 138–39.

classical prose (*wen* 文) is a double of *kouji*. Their reflections on the mirroring relationship between *kouji* and literary prose shed light on the nature of literary sensations as simulacra enabled by words and produce a model for considering the literary text as the product of the acousmatic voice of an author—the ultimate storyteller.

In a commentary on the fourteenth-century novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (*Outlaws of the Marsh*), the literary commentator Jin Shengtan describes a virtuosic *kouji* performance in Beijing that he heard about from his friend Wang Zhuoshan 王卓山. The highlight of this performance is an acousmatic representation of an unexpected fire that breaks out in a neighborhood late at night. Deeply immersed in the acoustic details of the turbulence, the members of the audience involuntarily identify with the imaginary residents struggling to escape from the spreading fire:

> At this point, among the members of the audience there were none whose expression did not change, not one who did not leave their seat. They rolled up their sleeves to bare their arms and, with both legs shaking, were about to run away.
>
> 於是賓客無不變色離席，奮袖出臂，兩股戰戰, 幾欲先走。[72]

At this moment, with one beat of the clapper that marks the ending of the performance, the sonic chaos disappears. But the audience is still under the spell of the acousmatic sounds at the moment of de-acousmatisation:

> People had the screens removed and took a look, only to see one person, one table, one chair, one fan, and one clapper just as before. For a long time, the room was silent, and none of the audience dared to be the first to make a noise.
>
> 而忽然撫尺一下，群響畢絕。撤屏視之，一人、一桌、一椅、一扇、一撫尺如故。蓋久之久之，猶滿堂寂然，賓客無敢先嘩者。[73]

At this point, Jin recalls his initial skepticism about his friend's description and how he questioned Wang's truthfulness: "This is made up by your flowery speech. Does such a skill exist in the world?"

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[72] Jin, *Jin Shengtan quanji* 金聖歎全集 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1985), 3:455.
[73] Jin, 456.

此自是卿粲花之論耳，世豈真有是技.[74] But Jin changes his mind when he reads the fire scene portrayed in "A Fire Burning on the Tower of Emerald Clouds," the sixty-fifth chapter of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, as he realizes that that episode is a written counterpart of *kouji*: "I exclaimed loudly that Mr. Wang had not lied to me, since such peerless skill indeed exists in the world!" 今日讀火燒翠雲樓一篇，而深嘆先生未嘗吾欺，世固真有是絕異非常之技也.[75]

Although the account of the performance is told in Wang's voice, with Jin assuming the role of listener and transcriber, the scene takes place in the context of a verbal performance that Jin carefully choreographs. Jin introduces his revelation about the artist's skill as if it were accidental, but his comment belies his awareness of the mirroring relationship between *kouji* and writing. The deliberation with which Jin conceals that awareness makes his description a scene of ventriloquism, where the commentator throws his own voice into the mouths of two storytellers—the virtuosic Beijing *kouji* performer as well as his friend. Even though Jin's own voice seems to disappear as he steps into the role of a listener, his own writing becomes a verbal counterpart of *kouji,* thus redoubling the sense of deft acousmatic displacement.

This virtuosic verbal performance, however, has more than one ventriloquist. The description appears almost verbatim in an essay entitled "Qiusheng shi zixu" 秋聲詩自序 "A Personal Preface to Poems on Autumn Sounds" (hereafter "Zixu") by the scholar-official Lin Sihuan. Lin might have appropriated Jin's writing, as Jin's commentary predates Lin's preface at least by nineteen years.[76] But Lin adds a new frame narrative to the description and stages an act of ventriloquism of his own. The beginning of his preface introduces a certain Mr. Dummy 徹呆子, a

[74] Jin, 456.
[75] Jin, 456.
[76] Sun Jiazhi 孫甲智, "Kouji zuozhe gongan huigu yu sikao" 《口技》作者公案回顧與思考, *Jiujiang xueyuan xuebao* 33, no. 4 (2015): 42 –45.

fictional surrogate of the author, who has in mind an unconventional model for producing poetic expression:

> On one day in the autumn, Mr. Dummy shut the doors and stopped leaving his house. With needles underneath his carpet[77] and his armor[78] hanging on the wall, he had a hard time without having any outlet for his feelings. But whenever he picked up gossip coming his way, he would dip his brush in ink, lick the brush, and compose a poem. When he completed the poem, he named it "Autumn Sound."
>
> 徹呆子當正秋之日，杜門簡出，氈有針，壁有衷甲，苦無可排解者。然每聽謠諑之來，則濡墨吮筆而為詩，詩成，以秋聲名篇。[79]

Mr. Dummy enlists poetry as a means of ventriloquism. But the ventriloquist is absent from this scene of ventriloquism, as Mr. Dummy has replaced his ear with his voice as the source of creativity. Opening with finding a solution to a predicament in an unusual way, the preface indicates the author's self-awareness of his position as a writer.

Lin's storytelling features a deft displacement of the storytelling voice from the author's brush to a fictional character's mouth. The *kouji* performance we have seen in Jin's commentary is told as a story, not by Mr. Dummy but by an anonymous storyteller at an impromptu banquet. Mr. Dummy invites a few strangers to his house to drink with him and, in the manner of creating a drinking game, asks them to take turns to name what they think is the best type of sound, the most dignified type of speech, and the most ornate type of speech. His guests respond with a list of sounds that are mostly extralinguistic: the whirr of a spinning wheel and the sound of a child reading aloud; the sound of a servant cursing a donkey and the sounds of musical instruments and singing; and the sound of a woman playing chess with her mother-in-law. Finally, the host asks his guests to name the most profound type of speech, and only one of them responds: through his voice we hear

[77] This alludes to an uneasy feeling.
[78] *Zhongjia* 衷甲 refers to an outer robe a warrior wears on top of his armor to show a sense of deference.
[79] Zhang, *Yuchu xinzhi*, 9.

Jin Shengtan's *kouji* again. The guest who offers his own storytelling as an example of the most profound type of speech is doubled by an author who ventriloquizes through his characters, coming up with an unusual taxonomy of speech that unsettles the boundary between the semantic and the non-semantic. While hiding himself behind these fictional storytellers, Lin uses the description of *kouji* that he copies from Jin Shengtan to promote his own literary ingenuity—a kind of one-upmanship. In a comment on "Zixu," Zhang Chao also notes this mirroring relationship between *kouji* and Lin's story: "Such a peerlessly marvelous skill gets to be transmitted through such a marvelous essay" 絕世奇技，復得此奇文以傳之.[80]

These literary portrayals of *kouji* feature a deft removal of the author's voice, conducted with an awareness of literary prose as *kouji*'s double. For Jin as well as Lin, the act of literary creation is disguised as lending an ear to someone else's voice. In Lin's "Zixu," the authorial voice is even portrayed as a void where echoing between multiple imaginary voices takes place. Recalling the acousmachine of Pan Zhiheng's Tonguemaster, these materials shed light on one aspect of the connection between the vocal apparatus and literary creation: the key to literary virtuosity is letting the puppet be more eloquent than the ventriloquist and letting simulacra be a more animated presence than their creator. To write is to be ventriloquized rather than to have a voice. That writing is a sly tongue does not mean that the divide between writing and the voice has been overcome by making writing sonic in a figurative sense, but the meaning of having a voice by being a literary author is modified.

The idea of writing as a sly tongue comparable to sonic trickery is further complicated by the paratextual network surrounding a short story called "Kouji" in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (*Strange Tales from Liaozhai*), a collection of short tales written by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715). *Liaozhai*

[80] Zhang, 10.

contains nearly five hundred stories that the author completed over the course of over four decades. Most of the stories follow the tradition of *chuanqi* 傳奇 (tales of the marvelous), which is an umbrella term for a wide range of narratives featuring events of extraordinary nature. As Judith T. Zeitlin has insightfully pointed out, even though these genres seem to manifest a special interest, shared by literary authors from the Six Dynasties to the early modern periods, in navigating the realm of the strange, the concept of the strange is much broader than the supernatural.[81] Pu Songling's collection reflects the author's investment not so much in compiling tales of foxes, ghosts, and spirits as in exploring borderlines between the normal and the abnormal only to realize that "the boundary between the strange and the normal is never fixed but is constantly altered, blurred, erased, multiplied, or redefined."[82] "Kouji" is one such story through which the author discovers something uncanny in everyday life.

The story depicts an anonymous female vendor's *kouji* performance. The woman comes to an unknown village to sell medicine, but she is unable to prescribe any recipe on the spot, explaining that she needs to consult the gods in the evening. As the woman shuts herself in a small room, a crowd gathers around her doors and windows. After a long wait, the listeners hear the increasingly overwhelming voices of unknown goddesses and their attendants, each of which sounds markedly different, mingled with a baby's babble, a cat's meows, the sounds of preparing brushes and paper, grinding ink, and brushes dropping on a table. But these lifelike voices and sounds turn out to be doubly deceptive. Only when the villagers find that the recipes of these "goddesses" are ineffective do they realize that the medicine was a pretext for the sonic trickery orchestrated by the female vendor in order to market her services.

[81] See Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 5–12.
[82] Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 7.

As the crowd listens, readers of this story also unknowingly slip into the role of an eavesdropper, absorbed into the story that unfolds as a form of trickery on the level of writing. Unlike many *Liaozhai* stories, "Kouji" ends without an added commentary voiced by the "Historian of the Strange" 異史氏, a fictional persona that the author Pu Songling proffers as his surrogate, usually to deliver a moral message. A closing comment usually signals a desire to contain or to explain away the strange things animated by the story proper. Without this additional frame, however, "Kouji" allows the vendor's voice to haunt the border between the textual space and the imaginary soundscape; the story becomes the trickster's accomplice.

Another noteworthy feature of this story is that it foregrounds a narrative perspective that could be either first-person or third-person. The open ending reinforces this lack of specificity and leaves the story suspended between fiction and reality by indicating that one might fall prey to such a manipulative voice—an extralinguistic counterpart of a sly tongue—anywhere. Although the author seems to take pleasure in his own storytelling of a sonic storytelling despite its morally precarious nature, his story bothered two nineteenth-century commentators of *Liaozhai* so much that they felt compelled to over-interpret the woman's *kouji*. Dan Minglun 但明倫 (1782–1855) immediately recognizes the vendor's *kouji* as a manifestation of her manipulative voice:

> There are people who use the deity as a pretext to sell their medicine. But they simply apply it to praying, making announcements and casting spells. Although the foolish are tricked by them, the smart can see through their tricks. But when someone employs *kouji*, instead of showing off their medicine skills right away, they engage people with pleasantries and chitchat. On top of that, she invents countless details in order to further convince those who overhear. After that, she slowly asks about the illness and quickly drafts the recipes, as if everything was taken care of with consideration. How wouldn't the foolish villagers believe that true deities were there!
>
> 假諸神以售其醫，人有行之者矣。然只索之於祈禱、告召、厭呪之間，愚者被其惑，黠者可以辨其詐也。乃托至於口技，又不沾沾於醫術，而敘寒暄、談瑣事，

且其人不一而足，以堅竊聽者之信；然後閒閒問病，切切開方，一似斟酌盡善者。鄉愚何知，有不以為真神者乎？[83]

In the passage immediately following, Dan describes a type of divination technique, which he considers akin to *kouji*:

> Recently, there has been someone called "Miraculous Aunt," who can communicate with immortals in front of people. As she asks which medicine the patient should take, which evil spirit the patient has encountered, and where the patient's soul wanders to, a voice responds in the air saying in a compelling manner which recipe to take for treatment, which god to pray to for protection, and from which place the soul must come back. Without using a dark night or a closed room, [this Aunt] plays her tricks before your face, and everybody respects and believes her. If you closely inspect where that voice comes from, it is neither up in the air nor inside her mouth, but comes from somewhere above her chest and below her throat. This is something of the same kind as *kouji* but even more marvelous.
>
> 近又有靈姑者，能於人前請仙，問病者應服何劑，所遇何邪，遊魂何地，即有從空答之，以服某方可愈，禳何神可瘳，魂在何處可返，言之鑿鑿。不假于昏夜，不假於暗室，當面搗鬼，羣皆敬而信之。細測其聲之所自來，則不在空中，不在口中，而乃在其人之胸以上，喉以下也。斯又口技之流而更出奇者。[84]

The type of divination performed by the "Miraculous Aunt," a spiritual medium, existed long before the nineteenth century.[85] It is noteworthy that Dan chooses to examine this technique through the lens of a *kouji* performance. To Dan, *Kouji* represents a manipulative use of voice and therefore acts as a trope for scheming speech. What alarms Dan is the higher level of acousmaticity manifested in the trickster's voice, which can be narrowed down to "somewhere above her chest and below her throat" but remains un-locatable. But seeing *kouji* as a trope for speech is already a sleight of hand on the commentator's part, whether intentional or inadvertent.

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[83] Zhang Youhe, *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋誌異會校會註會評本 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 1:270.
[84] Zhang, 1:270–271.
[85] See Glen Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuang-I Chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–17.

Feng Zhenluan 馮鎮巒 (1760–1830), another *Liaozhai* commentator, also recognizes the moral danger of the transformative aspect of the vendor's voice, reproaching it as a type of sly speech (*qiaoyan* 巧言).[86] Moreover, Feng identifies the abuse of speech as an aspect of the "long tongue" (*changshe* 長舌), a classic synecdoche for manipulative women who toppled countries by spreading gossip and rumor:

> The voice of a woman has been responsible for lowering a hero's spirit, upsetting a determined man's heart, disrupting a regular morality, breaking apart a happy family. Infatuated with the time in bed, a man would even be content with drinking poisoned wine; enthralled by the sweet pillow talk, he would be delighted by the beautiful while irritated by his own parents, resulting in the destruction of one's family and oneself and the demise of happiness and fortune. … With a sly tongue akin to the reed in a woodwind instrument, she transforms in all kinds of forms and appearances; no wonder people are fooled by her.
>
> 從來短英雄之氣，灰志士之心，亂倫紀之常，離骨肉之歡，甚至衾裯迷戀，甘鴆毒以為宴安，枕簟啁嘈，慰紅顏而惱白髮，身家破喪，福澤消亡，皆出自婦人女子之口。… 巧言如簧，窮形盡相，無惑乎人之受其欺也。[87]

By imagining the destructive effect of the feedback loop constituted by men's ears and women's tongues/mouths on a macroscopic scale, Feng, like Dan, considers *kouji* not as a specific type of sound but as an acousmatic mechanism, which is latent in everyday social interaction. The ear, a sensory faculty and a metonymy of a perspicacious mind, along with its loss—deafness, is at once literal and symbolic, which dramatically emphasizes the harm of falling prey to manipulative speech.

Feng is even more aware than Dan of the danger of *kouji*'s acousmatic nature, suggesting that the disembodied nature of the vendor's *kouji* results not only from the invisibility of its source but also from a habitual acousmatic listening (*tuting* 徒聽) that enthralls and ensnares (male) listeners to her voice. Feng states:

> People are fooled because they merely listen [*tuting*] to her. If instead of receiving her sounds with their ears, they examine her with their eyes, how can a woman's long tongue

[86] Zhang Youhe, *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 1: 270.
[87] Zhang, 1:270.

hold a gentleman for a second? But if I cover my ears to avoid listening to it, I wouldn't know there is a skill like hers, so what is the use of inquiring? Those who listen to the speech of women lose their sanity the first time they listen, get their souls seduced the second time they listen, and forget how their hands and feet should behave the third time they listen; and their ears are deafened before they finish listening. Gaining a woman at the cost of manhood is a tragedy shared by people ancient and present. Hundreds of generations from now, there will be a woman who still sells such a skill and a man who still gets tricked by it, can one say that it is because Mr. Liaozhai is not good at [persuasive] speech? It is because men have ears, and there is no way of keeping women from having voices.

蓋受其欺者，徒聽之故也。使不徒接之以耳，而更察之以目，雖婦人長舌，何足當君子一瞬哉？且吾掩耳不聽，則並不知有其術也，焉用察為！乃世之聽婦人女子言者，一聽而神昏，再聽而魂迷，三聽而手足失所，聽未及終而耳聾矣。得女子而失丈夫，古今同慨。 然百世後，女子終售其技，男兒終中其技，豈聊齋之不善言哉！然男兒有耳，固不能禁女子有口也。[88]

Whereas Feng reprimands *kouji* for its manipulative potential, he praises Pu Songling's storytelling for being a double of the acousmatic voice:

There are so many little turns and twists, but they are written without one single thread out of place. One hears things distinctly in one's ear and sees things as if they appeared before one's eyes. Also, it is written in a concise and sophisticated way. All-encompassing and ever-changing, this is indeed a divine spirit amidst literary prose.

許多小節次，寫來一絲不亂，耳際分明，眼中如見，而又能出筆簡老，亦包括，亦變幻，鬼神於文者也。[89]

This contradictory attitude toward the use of *kouji* deserves closer scrutiny. What Feng appreciates in particular is a transformative quality of literary writing where the author's presence is displaced, which is dramatically articulated through the analogy between writing and ghostly creatures.[90] More

[88] Zhang, 1:270.
[89] Zhang, 1:268.
[90] Although the Chinese compound word *guishen* (whose literal meaning is "ghost and divinity," and here translated as spirit) commonly acts as a metaphor referring generally to the extraordinary quality of things, I suggest that Feng uses it as a synecdoche that alludes specifically to the doubling between writing and the otherworldly. What makes a story an otherworldly creature on the level of writing is not only its hyper-sensory verisimilitude but also its elusive and metamorphic nature. Moreover, Feng fleshes out this synecdoche by commenting on another suspenseful *Liaozhai* story as "secretive and eerie, there is ghost at the tip of the brush" 隱隱怪怪，筆端有鬼. See Zhang, *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben*, 3:1129.

importantly, Feng reappropriates the term *kouji* to describe the crafting of literary simulacra as a dynamic process that underscores the acousmatic nature of literary prose: conjuring up lifelike things from nothingness while making them so transformative that nobody can tell where the illusion begins and where it ends.

Many literary authors from the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, including Yuan Hongdao, Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), and Tan Yuanchun, paid special attention to this transformative though elusive aspect of literary prose. These late-Ming literary authors' observations that the dynamic process of crafting a literary prose is a type of trickery are not intended only to emphasize the significance of an individualistic literary style. Central to them is the notion of automatism, which gives an author's skillful demonstration of his or her literary voice an impersonal quality, as Tang Xianzu describes in an appraisal of an essay written by the literary author Qiu Zhaolin 丘兆麟 (1572–1629):

> I would say that the marvelousness of a literary prose lies not in imitating in order to formally resemble [the things represented]; imbued with natural flair, [excellent literary prose] comes when the author is absent-minded or arrives without [the author] thinking about it. It is strange and indescribable, and it is not something that takes shape by [an author] seeking recourse from usual things.
>
> 予謂文章之妙，不在步趨形似之間，自然靈氣，恍惚而來，不思自至，怪怪奇奇，莫可名狀，非物尋常得以合之。[91]

Tang imagines that a literary prose takes shape like a mirage, as if it has a life of its own and no human originator. It is also noteworthy that these literati saw the *kouji*-like quality of literary writing, which allows it to become other, in such a positive light even though a similar effect had led earlier critics to consider the works of select literary authors—including the Tang dynasty writer Li Zhao 李

[91] See Tang Xianzu, "'Heqi' xu" 《合奇》序 in *Tang Xianzu ji quanbian* 湯顯祖集全編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015), 1532.

肇 and the late-Yuan poet Yang Weizhen—as "demonic literary prose" (*wenyao* 文妖).[92] But the *kouji*-like quality is not limited to the genre of literary prose. In a reflection on how poetry comes into existence, Tan Yuanchun casts poetry in a similar light:

> The poet sets his feelings in one direction, and ten thousand forms unfold at once. His mouth suddenly chants, and his hand suddenly writes. One's hand and mouth initially follow what pours from within, but the hand and the mouth cannot predict where it goes; what's within me is initially where the hand and the mouth stop, but what's within me cannot be forced to stay.
>
> 夫作詩者一情獨往，萬象俱開，口忽然吟，手忽然書，即手口原聽我胸中之所流，手口不能測，即胸中原聽我手口之所止，胸中不可強。[93]

The model that Tan has in mind can be traced back to *Zhuangzi*, as the nineteenth-century scholar Liu Xizai 劉熙載 (1813–1881) points out. Liu's remark, couched in performative language, appears in a comment on the central feature of Zhuangzi's famous chapter "Xiaoyao you" 逍遙遊 ("Going Rambling without a Destination"). Liu uses imagery created by Zhuangzi—the soaring of a gigantic mythological bird—as a metaphor for Zhuangzi's own writing:

> Nothing is more miraculous and marvelous about an essay than its ability to fly. *Zhuangzi* said that the *peng* [a legendary bird] "spares no effort to fly." Now I observe his literary prose, it comes and goes without a reason; it probably gets the essence of "flying." How does one know if the *peng* didn't learn that from Zhuangzi?

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[92] This term first appears in a seemingly pejorative comment made by a medieval writer Li Zhao 李肇 on contemporary authors of classical tales and poems. See Li Zhao and Zhao Lin, *Tang guoshi bu yinhua lu* 唐國史補 因話錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 55. This concept received more exposure in the Ming by way of literary critic Wang Yi 王彝's open attack on the late-Yuan poet Yang Weizhen 楊維楨's seductively ornate and decadent style, which had a large number of imitators and followers in the late Yuan and early Ming. For Wang's essay, see Guo Shaoyu, *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選 (Hongkong: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 2:228. For a discussion of Wang's criticism of Yang, see Liu Xia, "Wang Yi 'Wenyao shuo' kaolun" 王彝《文妖說》考論, *Qiushi xuekan* 求是学刊 40, no. 4 (2013): 142–50.

[93] See Tan Yuanchun, "Wangzi wusi shixu" 汪子戊巳詩序, in *Tan Youxia heji* 譚友夏合集 (Taipei: Weiwen tushu chubanshe, 1976), 2:408.

文之神妙，莫过于能飞。《庄子》之言鹏曰"怒而飞"，今观其文，无端而来，无端而去，殆得"飞"之机者，乌知非鹏之学为周耶！[94]

Let us consider several comments that the nineteenth-century scholar Ping Buqing offered as the final example. Ping wrote a short essay in which he compared and evaluated major works of literary prose composed on the subject matter of *kouji*. The texts he selected include Lin Sihuan's "Zixu," the Master of the Eastern Mansion's essay on the Cat, and Pu Songling's short tale "Kouji." (Ping concluded that Pu's piece was the best.) In an introductory remark, Ping points out that these literary texts on *kouji* encapsulate the challenge faced by all authors of literary prose in the style of *xiaopin* 小品: outsmarting their predecessors as well as other contemporary writers who had also written about *kouji*.[95] It is by no means a coincidence that Ping suggests that fiction writers should borrow the techniques of storytelling from masterpieces of literary prose: "The way of composing a literary prose should be expansive and transformative, and it is only right when readers cannot tell where writing begins and ends" 便知作文之法，要縱橫爛漫，出入變化，使人莫測其起止乃可.[96] The exemplars Ping encourages fiction writers to emulate include *Zhuangzi*, Buddhist scriptures, and famous plays and novels from the Yuan and the Ming dynasties including Wang Shifu's *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (*Romance of the Western Chamber*) and Shi Nai'an's *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (*Outlaws of the Marsh*). If we combine Ping's various observations, we will see that *kouji* serves as a metaphor for describing the potential of literary prose to become strange, untraceable, formless, and excessive—an acousmatic experience.

The relationship between writing and *kouji* is more than a parallel. *Kouji* acts as an acousmatic model for understanding the internal dynamics of literary composition, especially that of literary

[94] Yuan Jinhu, *Yigai zhugao* 藝概註稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 41.
[95] Ping, "Xiaoshuo bukeyong" 小說不可用, in *Xiawai junxie*, 561.
[96] Ping, 559.

prose. Writing, as an acousmachine, is caught up in a mirroring mechanism where its own source and cause are infinitely concealed, removed and replaced, and haunted by a spacing between its competence in verisimilitude and its own status as a simulacrum. As the authors in this section demonstrate, *kouji* spells out some of the most crucial conditions under which writing operates: being a virtuosic writer akin to a *kouji* master means submitting oneself to acousmatic displacement.

Conclusion

As a mirror reflection of speech that constantly goes awry, *kouji* allows literary authors to reflect on the inefficacy of speech through moments that it no longer works normally. As Chen Ding's story of the Dog-Skin Daoist indicates, a sound as ordinary as barking is capable of achieving a powerfully subversive effect and becoming-other in a human vocal apparatus. As sound replaces words to be the basis of storytelling, *kouji* invites its listeners and readers to reconsider what makes a voice meaningful and human by reflecting on the limitations of speech as well as alternatives suggested by literary records of the sonic storytelling. Authors such as Shen Bang inevitably misunderstand technical specifics of *kouji* as they cannot help but project assumptions about the sound before they fully comprehend it. Such accounts also reflect the slippery, deconstructive nature of *kouji* as a technique, which constantly departs from standard uses of the voice and de-familiarizes more usual types of performance, including *pipa*-playing, singing, and storytelling. These seventeenth-century Chinese authors closely examine the doubling relationship between *kouji* and the sly tongue of a gossiper as well as the mechanism of displacement characteristic of ingenious literary prose. As a result, they collectively shape a discourse of *kouji* that is intimately entangled with concerns with the pitfalls as well as alternative functions of speech. These authors extend an invitation for us modern readers to join them to explore antidotes to the perils of speech and to rethink our standard modes of linguistic communication.

CHAPTER THREE

Hearing Birds Speak

The eighteenth-century poet and playwright Jiang Shiquan 蔣士銓 (1725–1785) once wrote a poem about a young *kouji* star in Beijing who was commonly known as "Yang the Huamei" 畫眉楊 (or "Huamei Yang") for his ability to mimic a wide variety of twittering songbirds, especially the *huamei* (which is in the family of thrushes). Yang's standard repertoire also included imitating talking parrots (more specifically, "parrot hating the cage and angry at the sound of 'Suoling' [a piece of *guqin* music]" 鸚鵡嫌籠嗔索鈴 or "parrot asking for tea" 鸚鵡呼茶).[1] In the final lines of the poem, Jiang draws attention to two different types of mimicry involved in Yang's performance: a bird imitating human speech and a human artist mimicking birdsong. While Jiang speaks of the former in an approving tone, he reminds readers that the latter is a sly use of the tongue: "A bird copying a human voice has an excellent speaking skill, and a human being producing birdsong has a sly throat and tongue" 鳥學人聲語言好，人為鳥聲喉舌巧.[2] After pointing out that speech always has the risk of uttering the unspeakable by mistake, Jiang ends his poem with a tongue-in-cheek comment: being a human being is not as good as being a bird!

The mirroring relationship between birds and human speakers also inspired a comic episode in the eighteenth-century novel *Hong lou meng* 紅樓夢 (*Story of the Stone*) written by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715–1763). In the beginning of the novel's thirty-fifth chapter, the usually wistful female protagonist Lin Daiyu has been indulging in another round of melancholy upon recalling a scene

[1] See Jiang Shiquan, "Huamei Yang," *Zhongyatang wenji* 忠雅堂文集 (Qing edition), 8:4a. The repertory of "Parrot Asking for Tea" is documented in Zhao Lian, *Xiaoting zalu* 嘯亭雜錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 237.
[2] Jiang, *Zhongyatang wenji*, 8:4a.

from the thirteenth-century play *Xixiang ji*. While Daiyu is absorbed in her thoughts, a parrot suddenly descends and takes her by surprise. Although the novel has never revealed that Daiyu keeps a pet parrot in the hallway of her house, when she blames the bird for casting dust on her again, readers realize that it has been inhabiting the world of the novel all along. The parrot then returns to its perch and calls out the name of one of Daiyu's attendants, asking her to raise the blinds and announcing that Daiyu is back.[3]

Were this speaking parrot nothing but a superfluous detail, we would expect Daiyu simply to enter the house and be greeted by her attendants. Instead, Daiyu stops, taps the perch, and asks whether the parrot's water bowl has been refilled. Although it is ambiguous whether Daiyu is asking the parrot or her attendants, the bird responds, first giving out a sigh, which the narrator remarks is strikingly similar to Daiyu's sighing, and then continuing to recite the last three couplets from "Burying the Flowers," a poem composed by Daiyu[4]:

> Let others laugh flower-burial to see:
> Another year who will be burying me?
> As petals drop and spring begins to fail,
> The bloom of youth, too, sickens and turns pale.
> One day, when spring has gone and youth has fled.
> The Maiden and the flowers will both be dead.
>
> 儂今葬花笑人癡，他年葬儂知是誰？
> 試看春盡花漸落，便是紅顏老死時。

[3] This detail is likely an imitation of a detail in the ninth-century classical tale "Huo Xiaoyu's Story" written by Jiang Fang 蔣昉. When Li Yi, the courtesan Huo Xiaoyu's future lover, visits her house for the first time, a parrot kept in the hallway announces "a man is coming—quick, pull down the curtains!" Li is so startled by the parrot's words that he is "overcome with panic and [doesn't] dare go on farther." See Li Jianguo, *Tang Wudai chuanqi ji* 唐五代傳奇集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 2:1006–1021. The translation is from Stephen Owen, "Huo Xiaoyu's Story," in *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 180.

[4] *Jueju* is a compact poetic form that consists of four lines composed in matching couplets with each line having five or seven syllables. It first became popular during the Tang dynasty.

一朝春盡紅顏老，花落人亡兩不知！[5]

Everybody laughs even though these lines are replete with bleak images that represent separation and death. One of Daiyu's attendants wonders how the parrot managed to memorize these lines. Amused by the parrot's speech, Daiyu brings it back to her room and teaches it to recite more poems.

As the parrot plays back Daiyu's voice as a feathered "phonograph," it draws attention to elements of her voice other than the words she uttered. In the novel, "Burying the Flowers" is the centerpiece of the prolific poet's oeuvre, a mass of compositions that she burns right before she dies. The poem expresses Daiyu's innermost fear and sorrow allegorically. In Chapter Twenty-Seven, she composes it orally as she tearfully buries the petals of some withered flowers that she perceives as a reflection of her own fate. Her chanting is overheard by her cousin and platonic lover Jia Baoyu, who bursts into tears as the last three lines remind him that Daiyu will die one day just like the flowers she is mourning. But when the parrot reproduces these lines in Chapter Thirty-Five, nobody seems to heed the content of the poem, whose bleak imageries stand at odds with the comic effect produced by the parrot's mimicry.

Instead of attempting an allegorical interpretation of the parrot's voice, everyone present listens to it and marvels at its uncanny resemblance to Daiyu's voice. In this way, the listeners tacitly acknowledge that the avian replica, unlike a human voice, is an exteriority without an interiority. The exteriority of a speaking voice is everything that allows an utterance to make a sonic impression on the listener: such as its intonation, cadence, extralinguistic noises, along with the exterior means through which the voice travels. The interiority is the substance of the voice, everything that makes

[5] Cao Xueqin, *Hong lou meng* 紅樓夢 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 1:461. The translation is from David Hawkes, *The Story of the Stone, Volume II: The Crab-Flower Club* (London: Penguin Classics, 1977), 44–45.

it sound human: the intent, feeling, and opinion expressed by the utterance. A speaking human voice is rarely considered to have an exterior separate from its interior: the connection between speech and interiority is crucial to the modern conception of personhood in the Cartesian philosophical tradition. The human voice synthesizes interiority and exteriority at once.

As Jiang's poem and the episode from the novel illustrate, by perceiving birdsong and words uttered by birds as mirror reflections of human speech, eighteenth-century Chinese literary authors pondered the same question that many modern thinkers asked about the human voice: what makes speech human? When a communication proceeds smoothly, one tends to forget the media that make it possible: speech, language, and voice. But a communication that does not proceed according to one's expectation would lead one to reconsider how these media normally work without assuming that their operationis what it should be. In the young *kouji* artist's voice, Jiang recognizes the limitations of human speech. Through the parrot's recitation, the talented poet Daiyu hears her own voice as something at once familiar and strange.

The mirroring relationship between human speech and twittering, screeching, and talking birds inspired ample received the attention of numerous poets from the Six Dynasties to the Qing dynasty. This chapter scrutinizes a variety of approaches that premodern Chinese poets took to portray birdsong and bird speech as counterpart of human speech. Poets from the third century BCE to the eleventh century CE used various types of anthropomorphic techniques for projecting human interiority onto twittering birds to make them sound like human beings. A group of seventeenth-century prose narratives written by Pan Zhiheng and Pu Songling, however, reflects a different understanding of the similarity between avian and human speech by showing that the voice of a talking bird—a parrot or a mynah bird—is where language goes awry and speech becomes nonhuman.

Linguists have established the notion that language is a human phenomenon and there is no equivalence to it in the social worlds inhabited by other species, and I do not plan to overturn this understanding.[6] Strictly speaking, words uttered by a bird are vocalizations rather than speech. Therefore, by saying that a bird speaks, I evoke a metaphorical rather than a technical notion of language. I consider bird speech as a borderline as well as a site of friction between human speech and nonhuman vocalization and between meaningful voice and mere sound.

In recent years, nonhuman communication has received more attention in the humanities, especially in the fields of animal studies and posthuman studies.[7] As Christopher GoGwilt and Melanie D. Holm have pointed out in their recent edited volume, *Mocking Bird Technologies*, the challenge posed by this topic lies in "the difficulty of disentangling bird mimicry of humans and human mimicry of birds."[8] Since a representation of a bird is inevitably a human representation, the editors suggest that we focus on the role that the entanglement between human and avian communication plays in theories of language and poetics. While extending this approach, I am careful not to re-inscribe an anthropocentric understanding of speech. Instead, I suggest that even though literary birds do not have their own voices in the literal sense, bird speech, a site where

[6] For example, see Peter Slater, "Bird Song and Language," in Maggie Tallerman and Kathleen R. Gibson eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Language Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 96–101.

[7] Examples of recent literary studies on nonhuman communication include: Hedwig Schmalzgruber ed., *Speaking Animals in Ancient Literature* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020); Karl Steel, *How Not to Make a Human: Pets, Feral Children, Worms, Sky Burial, Oysters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Sarah Nooter, "The Prosthetic Voice in Ancient Greece," in *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality*, 277–94; James Paz, *Nonhuman Voices in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Material Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017). Examples of anthropological studies on this topic include Eduardo Kohn, "How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement," in *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (2007): 3–24; Stephen Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982).

[8] Christopher GoGwilt and Melanie D. Holm, *Mocking Bird Technologies: The Poetics of Parroting, Mimicry, and Other Starling Tropes*, eds., GoGwilt and Holm (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 3.

human voice and nonhuman body become uncannily entangled, exposes the limitations of human representation.

Not all types of birds "speak" in the same way in literature. The avian protagonists in this chapter include both twittering and screeching birds, whose sounds are interpreted as intelligible words by human poets, and birds that produce vocalizations that resemble human speech, such as the parrot and the mynah bird. I will show that literary portrayals of birds in these two categories reflect different concerns with speech. The first half of the chapter explores the motivation for premodern Chinese poets from the third to the eleventh centuries to hear birdsong as articulate speech. Since *Shijing*, birdsong has permeated premodern Chinese poetry as onomatopoeia as well as ambient noise. Some types of calling birds, such as the goose and the cuckoo, are particularly common poetic images as these birds signal seasonal changes (the spring is when cuckoos are most frequently heard and the autumn is when geese migrate to the south) and therefore embody a sense of transience. Considering birdsong as speaking voices akin to their human counterpart, however, casts this ancient rhetorical trope in an unfamiliar light. In the second half of the chapter, I follow Pan Zhiheng and Pu Songling and listen to parrots and mynah birds as autonomous voices that demand to be heard on their own terms. The literary history of talking birds presented in this chapter is not a continuous or comprehensive genealogy. My intention is not to suggest that portraying birds as autonomous speakers with their own minds is more advanced or "modern" than projecting one's own sentiment onto the sound made by chirping birds. Instead, I reflect on what birds teach us about human speech by exploring an array of literary examples that portrays the bird's voice as a special medium through which the transparency of speech is undone and the notion of the human voice is unsettled once again.

Talking Birds and Literary Anthropocentrism

In their earliest appearances in Chinese literature, birds are instantly anthropomorphized, fluent speakers of human language used by their human interlocutors. The first recorded instance of talking birds in literature is *Chijiu zhi ji Tang zhi wu* 赤鳩之集湯之屋 (*The Red Doves Perching atop Tang's House*), a set of Warring States bamboo texts whose composition predates the third century BCE.[9] Although literary genres among ancient Chinese texts are a matter of ongoing discussion, scholars have argued that this narrative is the earliest precursor of anomaly tales that fall under the category of *zhiguai* or "records of the strange." *The Red Doves* offers a backstory for the sage Shang dynasty minister Yi Yin 伊尹 when he was still a chef working for Tang, the founder of the Shang dynasty. In this story, several types of birds play a determining role in the minister's rise to power. One day, Tang shoots some red doves off the rooftop of his house, and he orders Yi Yin to make soup with them. Once Yi has finished cooking, Tang's wife coerces him into letting her taste the soup. She also forces Yi to try some. Both the wife and the chef thereby acquire the power of omniscience. Tang finds out and curses Yi Yin, who falls ill by the roadside and loses his ability to speak. As a flock of crows are about to prey on him, their leader, who is a messenger for the Supreme Deity, intervenes. The crows decide to use the chef to infiltrate the kingdom of Xia Jie, who had fallen ill due to a spell cast by the Supreme Deity. The chef appears before the king and introduces himself as someone with magical power, but in fact the leading crow is hiding in his body and speaking on his behalf. This is the first step toward the overthrow of the Xia dynasty. It is noteworthy that the story portrays the voice of a talking bird as a site of ventriloquism: the leading crow is the mastermind, but it enlists the chef's vocal apparatus to enhance the credibility of its own words. Even this earliest example already documents the becoming-other of bird speech.

[9] For a recent research on this text, see Sun Feiyan 孫飛燕, "Lun Qinghua jian 'Chijiu zhi ji tang zhi wu' de xingzhi" 論清華簡《赤鳩之集湯之屋》的性質, *Jianbo* 簡帛 16, no. 1 (2018): 31–41.

In early Chinese religious culture, the crow often serves as a medium through which divine power materializes.[10] Practices of divination also established a connection between chirping birds and divinity. A technique for deciphering sounds made by twittering birds is one of the major methods of divination found in extant manuals.[11] Another important early example of talking birds, a famous *fu* on the owl written by the Western Han poet and politician Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–169 BCE), describes one instance of such ornithomancy. The *fu* was composed as an urgent response to a real-world event: an owl suddenly flew into Jia's house. It took place during the third year of the poet's residence in Changsha, then a remote kingdom in southern China, after Jia's demotion from the central court. Considering the bird an ominous sign, Jia consulted a divination manual and received a foreboding portent of departure, tantamount to a prophecy of death. In the preface, Jia mentions that he composed the *fu* in order to console himself. In the *fu* proper, as soon as the poet receives the omen, he asks the owl, which is perching on the corner of his seat, to shed more light on it:

> Where should I go?
> Is it auspicious? Then inform me!
> Inauspicious? Tell me the misfortune.
> Whether it shall occur late or soon,
> Let me know the time.[12]
>
> 余去何之？吉凶告我，凶言其災。淹速之度，語余其期。

[10] See Yang Jun 杨军, "Zhongguo gudai wuya xinyang shulue" 中国古代乌鸦信仰述略, *Shanxi shifan daxue jixu jiaoyu xuebao* 21, no. 2 (2004): 38–42. For a thorough discussion of worship for crows in ancient China and detailed visual evidence on this topic, see Zhang Cheng 张程, "Qianxi zhongguo gudai taiyang chongbai yu niaochongbai de shiwu tuxiang – yi wu yu sanzuwu de xingxiang neihan bianqian weili" 浅析中国古代太阳崇拜与鸟崇拜的实物图像——以乌与三足乌的形象内涵变迁为例, *Xingxiang shixue* 形象史学 11, no. 1 (2018): 40–60.

[11] For an introduction of this divination technique called *niaozhan* 鳥占 (divination via birds), see Liu Yuqing 刘毓庆, "Shijing niaolei xingxiang yu shanggu niaozhan wushu" 《诗经》鸟类兴象与上古鸟占巫术, *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 22, no. 3 (2001): 129–40.

[12] "Rhapsody on the Houlet," in David Knechtges trans., *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature, Volume III* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 43.

By directly addressing the owl and demanding a response, the poet is already anthropomorphizing the owl as an interlocutor. But the poet immediately points out that the owl cannot speak despite its effort to do so:

> The houlet heaved a great sigh,
> Raised its head and flapped its wings.
> Since its beak cannot speak,
> Let me reply what it thought.[13]
>
> 鵩乃太息，舉首奮翼，口不能言，請對以意。

It is noteworthy that the poet offers this explanation to legitimize his following projection, which is masked as a transcription of the owl's mind. Metaphysical by nature, the response arrives at an argument that there is no fixed boundary between the self and other things and between life and death, which echoes influential ideas of the fourth-century BCE philosopher Zhuangzi. Although the entire *fu* is composed in quadrisyllabic lines, which makes each speaker sound similar to the others, the tone shifts from anxious in the beginning to detached at the end. It is possible that for the poet the cathartic effect of the *fu* is more than rhetorical: by ventriloquizing through the owl, he eventually regains control despite the uncertainty suggested by the omen. The poet's projection of what the owl has in mind also domesticates the owl on the rhetorical level by bridging the gap between human and avian communicability. Filling in the owl's voice also allows what first struck the poet as a "strange thing" (*yiwu* 異物) to talk back as a companion.

Talking birds attracted more attention from poets of *fu* during the Eastern Han (25–220) and the Six Dynasties (220–589), partly due to a rise of interest in portraying the parrot. Unlike crows, owls, or most other animals, whose ability to speak is usually the result of literary anthropomorphism, the parrot can be trained to imitate human speech, which reinforces the mirroring relationship between talking birds and human poets. At least thirteen poets from this era

[13] Knechtges, 43.

composed *fu* on the parrot. Most of these survive only as a few lines, in which they focus on the appearance of the bird—still an exotic creature at that time—and mention its ability to imitate human speech only in passing. But one *fu* on the parrot, which survives intact, produced a lasting influence on the literary representations of the bird. It was written by Mi Heng 禰衡 (173–198), a talented but short-lived poet known for his unusually outspoken personality. Mi composed the *fu* while he was working for Huang Zu 黃祖, a high-ranking official working under Liu Biao, one of the major warlords at that time. At a banquet hosted by Huang Zu's oldest son Huang Yi 黃射, a guest presented a parrot to the host as a gift. The guest then approached Mi and asked him to compose a *fu* on the parrot on the spot. Despite the polite tone of the guest, this request was closer to a challenge than to an invitation. But the poet completed the *fu* in a confident and scintillating manner, "without pausing his brush, and without making the slightest correction."[14]

Mi's *fu* on the parrot unfolds as a detailed reflection on the stakes of eloquence—a human problem that soon would cost the poet his own life . (Mi was killed by Huang Zu after he openly reviled the short-tempered official.) The first third of the *fu* is devoted to praising the parrot for its elegant appearance and intelligent demeanor (including its ability to speak), which allows it to stand out among all types of birds. The rest of the piece, however, details how the parrot was captured and locked up in a cage once its reputation spread. Through a rhetorical question near the end, Mi suggests that it is speech (*yanyu* 言語) that led to the parrot's confinement:

> Gazing homeward, it waits with craned neck.
> It knows that its vile and stinking flesh
> Will be of no use in the cauldron and meat stand.
> Alas, how meager the blessings fate has bestowed upon him!
> Why has he met such vicious times?
> Were words the stairway to calamity?
> Or did indiscretion bring on his peril?[15]

[14] Knechtges, 51.
[15] Knechtges, 55.

眷西路而長懷，望故鄉而延佇。
忖陋體之腥臊，亦何勞於鼎俎。
嗟祿命之衰薄，奚遭時之險巇。
豈言語以階亂，將不密以致危。

By pondering "were words the stairway to calamity?" Mi regards the parrot as a nonhuman counterpart of human speakers, especially those whose careers depend on their eloquence. Considering that Mi's spoken words would later lead to his death, this question also reads like an uncanny omen. In the following lines, the similarity between the parrot and the poet himself becomes increasingly evident as Mi compares the bird to a minister serving a lofty lord while staying far away from home:

He has forsaken a lowly land of the Man and Yi,
To serve a majestic and stately lord.
Yet he fears that his reputation does not match reality,
And is ashamed that he lacks unusual talent.[16]

背蠻夷之下國，侍君子之光儀。
懼名實之不副，恥才能之無奇。

The *fu* continues to anthropomorphize the parrot by having it convey the poet's own aspiration:

It turns its head and looks at the damage to its quills;
Yet, though he furiously [flaps] his wings, where could he go?
His heart longs to return, yet he cannot do so;
He can only bear bitter resentment in his little corner.
If he is to serve his master with full devotion,
How can he turn his back on kindness and forget past favors?
Having entrusted his lord with his humble fate,
He offers his paltry body.
He hopes to abide until death to repay benevolence,
And is ready fully to express himself in order to offer humble advice.
Having relied on exalted favor in the past,
May it long endure and never change![17]

顧六翮之殘毀，雖奮迅其焉如。
心懷歸而弗果，徒怨毒於一隅。

[16] Knechtges, 55.
[17] Knechtges, 57.

苟竭心於所事，敢背惠而忘初。
託輕鄙之微命，委陋賤之薄軀。
期守死以報德，甘盡辭以效愚。
恃隆恩於既往，庶彌久而不渝。

This *fu* ends with a declaration of loyalty to the lord that the poet serves: a common rhetorical tactic used by the *fu* poets. Considering that Mi was pressured to write the *fu* to prove his reputation as an eloquent strategist, there is almost no other way he could have ended it. But the ending also hints at the costs of that loyalty and the confinement that Mi was subject to: despite the possibility that words will lead to calamity, the poet has no option but to use them in order to fulfill his duty. This ending spells out the poet's fate quite literally, betraying a darker connotation than the intended effect. His eloquence was doomed.

Speech Concealed in Birds

Poetic representations of bird speech from the Western Han to the Six Dynasties invite readers to interpret talking birds allegorically. Human poets frequently enlisted birds as surrogate voices for their own anxiety, using a special rhetorical technique: *yin* 隱 (concealment), also known as *yinyan* 隱言 (concealed speech/words) or *yinyu* 隱語 (concealed speech). Although many poets after the Six Dynasties made use of *yin* as they portrayed animals and other things in poetry in the category of "odes on things," several poets, including the eleventh-century poet Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060), came up with poetic representations of talking birds that depart from this tradition.

The fifth-century anthology *Wenxin diaolong* theorizes *xieyin* 諧隱 (the combination of *xie* 諧, a technique for punning that produces a comic effect, with *yin* 隱) as a mechanism of doubling, using absurd imagery to reveal a hidden meaning that is never articulated by the speaker but is

perceived by the listener.[18] Ministers in ancient China began to use both *xie* and *yin* as rhetorical techniques for delivering pointed criticism or advice by telling jokes and relating entertaining anecdotes. According to *Wenxin diaolong*, *yin* was taken up by riddles while *xie* faded away as this performative genre lost favor among aristocratic patrons. The elusive explanation offered by *Wenxin diaolong* has led modern scholars to consider *yin* as a technique specific to riddles and forms of riddling (such as the riddle tale). The Chinese scholar Li Pengfei takes these insights from *Wenxin diaolong* as guidelines for tracing the genealogy of *yin*. He understands *yin* primarily as a technique for composing riddles, which appear in a wide range of literary genres, including odes on things (*yongwu shi* 詠物詩), acrostic "separate and combine" poems (*lihe shi* 離合詩), and riddle tales.[19] This emphasis on the use of *yin* in genres of riddles has limited the investigation of this literary technique to the literary traditions most pertinent to the "ode on the thing," even though *Wenxin diaolong* associates *yin* with a broader spectrum of literary genres and rhetorical techniques.

Several Ming dynasty scholars produced an alternative approach to defining *yin* by considering riddles as a subset of *yin* and not the other way around. The sixteenth-century scholar Lang Ying 郎瑛 (1487–circa 1566) owned a dilapidated copy of an undated book of riddles called *The Tiger with Ten Thousand Patterns* 千文虎, whose preface begins with the following statement: "The riddle is concealed speech. It is composed in same way that poetry is written" 夫謎者，隱語也，蓋擬詩義而為之.[20] The preface goes on to trace a genealogy of riddles that begin with *feng* 風, an

[18] To make this observation, *Wenxin diaolong* draws attention to the visual composition of the character for *xie*, which combines *yan* 言 (speech/speak) and *jie* 皆 (together). See "Xieyin" 諧隱, in Huang Shulin, *Zengding Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu* 增訂文心雕龍校註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 1:193–195.

[19] Li Pengfei, *Tangdai feixieshi xiaoshuo zhi leixing yanjiu* 唐代非寫實小說之類型研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), 34–51.

[20] See "Qianwenhu xu" 千文虎序, in Lang Ying 郎瑛, *Qixiu xugao* 七修續稿, 5:2b.

umbrella term for folk songs collected in *Shijing* from numerous kingdoms from the Western Zhou dynasty (circa 1046–771 BCE) to the Spring and Autumn period (circa 771–476 BCE); the preface ends with a list of games in the Ming world that incorporate riddles and charades. Lang acquired an incomplete copy of another book of riddles called *A Guide for the Society of Riddles* 謎社便覽 when he was seventy-seven years old. The preface to this book is less interested in creating a new system of classification for *yin* as in reflecting on the specificity of *yin* as a mode of signification. In a deliberate effort to imitate the mode of equivocation central to *yin*, the preface begins with the following:

> What is a riddle? It is concealed speech. Is it a type of speech that is abstruse? I would say: No. Is it a type of speech that is esoteric? I would say: It is not. Then why call it "concealed speech"? I would say: What it encompasses is something broad; what it hides is something profound. As what makes it broad has no limits, it is profound and hard to understand. But isn't what makes it limitless something abstruse and what makes it hard to understand something esoteric? I would say: It is not so. The profound wisdom of the sages and the Confucian scholars[21] is something abstruse; the books for divination from the late-Han dynasty are something esoteric. Neither of them is what I am saying.
>
> 謎者何？隱語也。隱微之語乎？曰：否。隱辟之語乎？曰：非也。何以謂之隱語？曰：所包者廣，所藏者深，惟其廣而無窮，是以深而難知也。其無窮非隱微，而難知非隱辟乎？曰：不然。隱微者，聖賢性理之奧，隱辟者，後漢讖緯之書，皆非此之謂也。[22]

This preface never clearly states what *yin* is. Instead, it enumerates a wider range of examples of *yin* that includes a classical tale written by the Tang dynasty poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and exegesis on a Daoist classic composed by the prominent Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). The Ming playwright Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502–1568) also understands *yin* as an integral part of poetic discourse in a preface he wrote for *Shi chan* 詩禪 (*Poetic Meditation*), an anthology of riddles that he

[21] Here the preface refers to the Neo-Confucian thought in particular.
[22] Lang, *Qixiu xugao*, 5:4a–4b.

compiled.[23] The conception of *yin* contained in these early modern prefaces shows a much broader spectrum of literary techniques and effects than the elusive definition given by *Wenxin diaolong*.

Inspired by these Ming dynasty prefaces, I consider the technique of *yin* as a mechanism of displacement, a type of verbal trickery, which extends far beyond the literary convention of riddles. Whereas existing scholarship has emphasized the duality intrinsic to *yin* on a semantic level by understanding it as a mode of equivocation that conveys two seemingly unrelated meanings of the same words, I suggest that we focus on the mediating role played by *yin*. It is not only wordplay but also interplay between the exteriority and the interiority of a communicative medium. As a rhetorical and a literary technique, *yin* serves the goal of drawing out the speaker's interiority, such as a personal sentiment or an intention. This implicit understanding that *yin* offers an outlet for a speaker's interiority makes it an especially useful means of anthropomorphizing talking birds in poetic texts. As a rhetorical technique, *yin* allows poets to pretend that birds speak on their own while speaking on their behalf. Even though the interiority of the speaking voice constructed in the poems belongs to the poets, it is noteworthy that they choose to project the interiority externally, conveying it through voices other than their own. This mechanism is shared by several types of poetry that will be examined in the rest of this section.

The Song dynasty poet Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) said that he had always been puzzled by a poem written by the Tang dynasty poet Han Yu since he first learned it in childhood: "[Upon hearing] 'wake up,' it is completely light outside the window. [Upon hearing] 'hurry back,' the sun has yet to face westward. Birds in the flowers have no intent [to say so]; they simply chirp to

[23] Li Kaixian 李開先, "Shichan qianxu" 詩禪前序 in *Li zhonglu xianju ji* 李中麓閒居集 (preface 1556), 6:3a–4b.

their heart's content" 喚起窗全曙，催歸日未西。無心花里鳥，更與盡情啼.[24] Although Huang did not elaborate what he found confusing about this poem, it is likely that he had difficulty understanding the connection between the first and the second couplet. When Huang was fifty-eight years old, on a spring evening (when chirping birds could be heard), he suddenly realized that "huanqi" 喚起 (wake up) and "cuigui" 催歸 (hurry back) are transliterations of the names of two types of birds—the shrike and the cuckoo, respectively (these names were also thought to approximate the birds' calls). Reading in this new light, although twittering birds are the central subject of the poem, it first introduces them as acousmatic sounds and delays the revelation of their presence. Huang was amazed by how cleverly Han hid the chirping birds in the first couplet, and remarked that a tiny detail like this reflects the poet's thoughtfulness. Huang's process of solving the puzzle indicates that the birdsong demands a different interpretive approach: the reader should focus on its exteriority—what it sounds like—rather than speculate what it conveys semantically. After all, central to an onomatopoeia as such is the friction between an extralinguistic nonhuman sound and a human language that imitates it by way of assimilation.

In addition to Han Yu, a number of famous Tang poets, including Li Bai 李白 (701–762), Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831), and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), integrated birdsong into their poems. For example, the sound of the pelican is usually transcribed as *tihu* 提壺, which literally means "bring a (wine) bottle." In the spirit of free association, many Tang poets imagined that pelicans encourage their listeners to drink more wine as a reminder that one should live in the moment. In their poems, these calling birds were mainly used as secondary characters that fit into certain poetic contexts in order to enhance a type of atmosphere that the poets had in mind.

[24] Hu Zi 胡仔, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua qianji* 苕溪漁隱叢話前集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962), 114.

It is noteworthy that birdsong suddenly took center stage in a type of poetry called "bird speech poetry" 禽言詩, which was invented by the Song dynasty poet and scholar-official Mei Yaochen in the beginning of the eleventh century. In 1037, Mei composed a set of four quatrains under the title "*Qinyan*" 禽言 ("Bird Speech"). Each of Mei's quatrains imitates the sound of a type of bird: the cuckoo, the pelican, a kind of mountain bird whose call sounds like "mother-in-law's pancake is burnt!" (*po bing jiao* 婆餅焦), and the bamboo partridge. These poems quickly went "viral" among Mei's contemporaries and inspired many imitations from poets including Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi. This new genre mainly consists of short verses generally ranging from four to six lines in the style of *jueju* 絕句 (quatrain) or *yuefu* 樂府 (poetic elaborations on popular songs). Compared with strictly regulated types of poetry, including various forms of *lüshi* 律詩, *jueju* and *yuefu* use a much freer prosody, which makes them more colloquial. A unique feature of bird speech poetry is that chirping, screeching, and calling birds become speaking subjects. Whereas Tang dynasty poets naturalize chirping birds by embedding their sounds seamlessly in their poetry, an effect attested by Huang Tingjian's delayed revelation, Song dynasty bird speech poetry deliberately makes them sound awkward. At the same time, by creating the appearance that chirping birds speak independently of human listeners, bird speech poetry calls into question the connection between spoken words and interiority.

Unlike the attempts made by Tang poets to incorporate birdsong, Mei's quatrains not only begin by transcribing birdsong into words but also use it to set the rhythm of the entire poem, animating talking birds as speaking subjects whose voices reveal what species they are. Unlike the Six Dynasties rhapsodies on birds whose voices are no different from those of the poets, the talking birds in Mei's quatrains actively address human listeners as exterior voices, demanding their

attention as well as offering solutions or comfort to them. In the first quatrain, the cuckoo is urging the listener to quit taking the imperial examination over and over to no avail and to go home:

> May as well go back! The spring mountain is near its end.
> Ten thousand trees reach the clouds,
> Where is the sky above the Shu kingdom?
> People say that if you have wings you can soar;
> Why bother weeping to tall trees in vain!
>
> 不如歸去。
> 春山雲暮。
> 萬木兮參雲，蜀天兮何處。
> 人言有翼可高飛，安用空啼向高樹。[25]

"May as well go back" is a generic transcription of the cuckoo's call, which set the baseline of the prosody to be tetrasyllabic.[26] This verse simulates a bird's perspective by selecting a series of things a bird might experience to serve as analogues to the obstacles faced by the human scholar: for example, a forest of towering trees as metaphor for the hopeless situation of not being able to stand out. While purporting to draw from human wisdom, the bird turns the metaphor of soaring high on the wing literal. The speech features simple grammar, relying heavily on juxtapositions and loosely matched couplets (such as "ten thousand trees" and "the sky above the Shu kingdom") and producing a rough-hewn effect. The transitions between lines are abrupt, which makes each line appear somewhat out of context. This somewhat disorienting effect emphasizes the semantic gaps within each couplet, which leads one to wonder if there is any hidden meaning beneath the message on the surface. These details in turn make the utterance resemble purposeless rambling. Purporting to quote human wisdom ("people say that if you have wings you can soar"), the cuckoo

[25] Mei Yaochen, *Wanling ji* 宛陵集 (Changchun: Jilin chuban jituan, 2005), 37.
[26] The cuckoo was considered to be a reincarnation of the legendary king of the ancient Shu Kingdom in the end of the Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE), Wang Di 望帝. The bird, with its sorrowful call, often reminded listeners of this king. See Zhang Hua, Shi Kuang Qinjing 師曠禽經, in *Suoshi Baichuan xuehai* 左氏百川學海 (Wujin Taoshi sheyuan: 1927), 32:6b–7a.

acknowledges its appropriation of human language. Although language (its material expression) is the medium that renders the bird's voice akin to a human one, by attaining an unnatural voice that equivocates, the bird remains incongruous with the linguistic medium that it temporarily inhabits. These details create the impression that the cuckoo has an autonomous voice that is only partly made intelligible by poetry.

Similarly, the quatrain on the pelican, in which the bird sounds are rendered as *tihulu* 提壺蘆, "carry a gourd" (a type of container for wine as well as a drinking vessel), is centered on feasting. The pelican encourages listeners to seize the moment and enjoy wine, while wishing them longevity. In the quatrain on the mountain bird, the bird weeps for a woman dealing with domestic hardship—the opening lines indicate that she might be dealing with a demanding mother-in-law while attending a sick child. In the final quatrain, a bamboo partridge conveys sympathy to a man on horseback making his way through pouring rain and slippery mud. In these three quatrains, the sounds made by these birds are transcribed as trisyllabic phrases, and the poems alternate between trisyllabic and heptasyllabic lines (the verse on mountain birds is an exception, using one pentasyllabic line to make a transition).

What is the purpose of writing these quatrains? Existing scholarship has pointed out that Mei started to use poetry as an outlet for his frustrated feelings after he again failed in the imperial civil service examination in 1034, three years before he wrote these four bird speech quatrains.[27] Although a number of scholars have sought biographical traces in many other poems by Mei, they have showed little interest in his bird speech poetry. These quatrains receive little attention probably

[27] Tang Guomei 汤国梅, "Mei Yaochen de qinyan shi yu dongwu yixiang yanjiu" 梅尧臣的禽言诗与动物意象研究, M.A. thesis., (South-Central University for Nationalities 中南民族大学, 2009), 17–23.

because of their simplicity, which contrasts with the artistic sophistication and complexity manifested in the prolific poet's other writings.

In fact, the poet explained his motivation for writing bird speech quatrains in another quatrain that he wrote with his friend Ouyang Xiu in mind, this one on talking birds. In 1046, while residing in Chuzhou 滁州, Anhui after a recent demotion, Ouyang wrote a seven-character quatrain entitled "Chirping Birds" 啼鳥. At the beginning of the poem, Ouyang addresses twittering birds in the second person to create a sense of conversation, even as he emphasizes that such a conversation is doomed to be one-sided: "How can I understand the meaning of your bird speech? / I simply love how pleasant the sound of your chirping is" 鳥言我豈解爾意，綿蠻但愛聲可聽.[28] Ouyang then enumerates the sounds of seven types of twittering birds, including the shrike, the oriole, and the cuckoo, which shape the poet's sonic environment in seclusion. Although Ouyang claimed that he perceived birdsong as mere sounds, the following lines suggest that the poet could not help hearing human voices in them. Immediately after listing the sounds of birds, the tone of the poem suddenly betrays a tinge of bitterness: "I came to this place suffering from slanderous mouths; / a sly tongue deserves to be resented whenever I hear one" 我遭讒口身落此，每聞巧舌宜可憎.[29] This line refers to the political conflict that resulted in Ouyang's demotion: The Chancellor Fan Zhongyan launched a bureaucratic reform, but it failed after a year. After Fan resigned, Ouyang submitted a memorial to the emperor, coming to Fan's defense and attacking Fan's political

[28] See Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang wenzhong quanji* 歐陽文忠全集, in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 74:37.
[29] Ouyang, 74:37.

enemies; he was demoted for factionalism.[30] This line reveals the poet's bitterness: the bird's chirping resembles a sly, manipulative speaking voice—the "sly tongue" 巧舌.

In an effort to console Ouyang, Mei composed a quatrain in the same meter under the same title. As these two friends exchanged poems in resonance with each other, we see that their conceptions of bird speech differed. Although Ouyang generally understands chirping birds as pleasantly noisy but incomprehensible, he occasionally mishears them as voices that are all *too* human—sly and slanderous. In contrast, Mei considers twittering birds as autonomous voices with their own emotions, which he hopes to uncover.

Mei apparently has Ouyang's analogy between birds and slanderers in mind as he devotes the second half of the poem to persuading Ouyang not to be so pessimistic about birdsong. Mei invites Ouyang to hear birdsong as benevolent voices: for example, the hoopoe sounds like it is urging farmers to work industriously. Mei also reminds Ouyang that he took particular pleasure in reading Mei's poem on the bamboo partridge. Mei then discloses what motivated him to write those quatrains on bird speech, probably encouraging his friend to examine it in a more positive light:

> I simply follow the sound to produce corresponding characters,
> And they therefore differ from the phonetic characters in the *Erya*.[31]
> In the past I have written poems called "bird speech"
> Where I superficially examine a few chirps and twitters for their feeling tone.
>
> 但依音響得其字，因與《爾雅》殊形聲。我昔曾有《禽言》詩，粗究一二啼噱情。[32]

[30] For an overview of the events that led to Ouyang's demotion, see Hua Ziheng 華孳亨, *Zengding ouyang wenzhong gong nianpu* 增訂歐陽文忠公年譜, in *Zhaodai congshu bing ji* 昭代叢書丙集 (Qing edition), 3:8a–9a.

[31] *Erya* 爾雅 refers to the earliest extant Chinese dictionary, compiled between the fourth and the second centuries BCE.

[32] See "He Ouyang yongshu tiniao shibayun" 和歐陽永叔啼鳥十八韻, in Mei Yaochen, *Wanling ji*, 210.

We can feel Mei's sympathy for chirping birds through these words. Mei goes on and offers a confident self-evaluation: "Each of the other ones has its intended meaning, / but I regret that I did not ask all types of birds for their opinions on these" 餘篇亦各有思致，恨未與盡眾鳥評.[33] This line indicates that Mei sees his poems as an attempt to elicit the "language" of birds and to engage them in a conversation.

Mei and Ouyang hear the pelican (*tihu* 提壺) differently. This is Mei's bird speech poem on the bird:

> Bring a gourd [*Tihulu*!], get delicious wine.
> Invite the wind as guest; make the trees friends.
> Colorful mountain flowers are blossoming before your eyes;
> I urge you to celebrate this day and enjoy a long life!
>
> 提壺蘆，酤美酒，風為賓，樹為友。
> 山花繚亂目前開，勸爾今朝千萬壽。[34]

Mei's quatrain constructs the pelican as a chatty voice, which could be talking to someone or having a monologue. Although the words in the poem are straightforward, more questions arise upon scrutiny: Who is carrying a gourd? Or is it a request? Who is befriending the winds and trees, and who is looking at the blossoming flowers? As *tihulu* is both a transcription of the pelican's squawking and a trio of words that can be interpreted as "bring a gourd," the poem entertains the possibility of having intelligible words evoke the feeling of nonsense (and vice versa). Although there is a human poet behind the poem, he is a mere transcriber; none of the bird's words reminds us of his presence. The speech conveyed by the poem is intelligible, but the lack of a clear rhyming pattern conjures up a sense of clumsiness that makes this speaking voice less familiar. This awkward and unfamiliar speaking voice creates an impression that it has a mind of its own.

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[33] Mei, 210.
[34] See "Tihu" 提壺, in Mei, *Wanling ji*, 37.

This is how Ouyang imagines his interaction with some pelicans near the end of "Chirping Birds":

> When the spring arrives in the mountain town, I suffer from loneliness.
> When I am holding a wine cup, I often regret not having a beauty's company.
> Whenever flowers blossom and birds talk, I would be drunk;
> Whenever I am drunk, I befriend flowers and birds.
> Flowers can give me a lovely smile,
> As birds urge me to drink, they are not without feelings.
> Free time and fine wine: I shall cherish the present moment,
> Foreseeing that birds will leave and flowers will wither.
>
> 春到山城苦寂寞，把盞常恨無娉婷。
> 花開鳥語輒自醉，醉與花鳥為交朋。
> 花能嫣然顧我笑，鳥勸我飲非無情。
> 身閒酒美惜光景，唯恐鳥散花飄零。[35]

These lines give us a sense of how the talking pelican in Mei's poem would have been heard by an uninformed human ear. Each line in Ouyang's poem is rooted in the perspective of the human poet, reminding us of the poet's difference from his chirping companions. He generally perceives birdsong as pleasant but noisy sound. Only when he is drunk does he allow himself to mistake it for a speaking voice that is "not without feeling."

The desire to pretend that nonhuman voices can be sources of interiority—an interiority accessible through only exteriority, as is signaled by the emphasis on perception—marks the innovation that we see from Mei's bird speech poetry. Although transforming nonlinguistic sound into intelligible words is an anthropomorphic process, Mei's quatrains realize an uncommon vision that goes beyond the conventional anthropomorphism that had dominated the literary representation of birds, the sort of anthropomorphism that John Ruskin called "the pathetic fallacy."[36] In Mei's work, birds start to speak autonomously when the human poet allows them not to sound like humans and when they are heard as exterior and errant voices. A noteworthy shift

[35] See "Tiniao" 啼鳥, in Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang wenzhong quanji*, 37.
[36] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (New York: Wiley, 1890), 3:153–167.

took place as a number of poets used poetry as a proto-phonographic medium for overhearing chirping birds and playing back their sounds. As these poets displaced the poet's voice with the poet's ear as the primary conduit of self-expression, they foregrounded the role of poetry in facilitating an external network of communication over the poetry's regular role in revealing the poet's intent. Whereas earlier *fu* authors, including Jia Yi and Mi Heng, projected human sentiments onto avian voices, poets in the late Six Dynasties began to portray chirping birds as disembodied voices heard by human poets from the outside. Although birds continued to be anthropomorphized as poets interpreted birdsong into intelligible words that belie specific human sentiments, the use of *yin* during this development activated new forms of displacement that make us reconsider what poetic self-expression is for.

The parrot's ability to utter words intelligible to human ears makes it all too human. As we have seen in Mi Heng's rhapsody, the parrot allows the poet to reflect on the stakes of eloquence. From the Song dynasty onward, poets continued to write *fu* on the parrot as a way to contemplate human problems centered on the misuse of words. Although Mei Yaochen considered birds as voices with their own minds in his bird speech poetry, he shares Mi Heng's pessimistic understanding that the parrot's ability to speak leads to its confinement. Around the year 1032, Mei wrote a short *fu* on a caged red parrot that someone had presented to the high-ranking official Qian Weiyan 錢惟演 (977–1034), a former prince of the Wuyue Kingdom who was recruited by the Song dynasty.[37] This *fu* unfolds as a miniaturized version of Mi Heng's rhapsody on the parrot. Mei begins by distinguishing the parrot from other types of birds: whereas the parrot speaks intelligibly (*nengyan*

[37] Qian was also an influential poet in Northern Song affiliated with the Xikun 西昆 poetic style, which is a type of literary archaism modeled after the poetic style of the Tang dynasty poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858). Accordingly, Qian aligned with a different set of poetic ideals from Mei's. See Ji Yun, "Guo Mingshan shiji xu" 郭茗山詩集序, in *Ji Wenda gong yiji* 紀文達公遺集 (1812), 9:·15a–16a.

能言), other birds merely make noisy sounds ("sometimes whistling and sometimes calling while staying far away from humans" 或嘯或呼，遠人而處)[38]. The rest of the *fu* details the process by which the parrot is made a prisoner and concludes, in echo of Zhuangzi's arguments about the utility of the useless, that being born with an unusual and clever disposition is less advantageous than having an ordinary and foolish one.

Ouyang Xiu composed a more elaborate *fu* on the red parrot in response to Mei. In a preface that Ouyang wrote for this *fu*, he first extends Mei's argument and states that the parrot shares the fate of a human author whose own words backfire: "Simply by being engaged in speech and literature, this parrot has by now induced misery and is imprisoned in a cage. It would have been better off as a crow, an eagle, a rooster, or a chick" 今茲鸚徒事言語文章以招累，見囚樊中，曾烏鳶雞雛之不若也.[39] But Ouyang had dissent in mind. He introduced another *fu* on the red parrot written by Xie Jiang 謝絳 (994–1039), a scholar-official of the time, which has not survived anywhere else. Xie develops a counter-argument in a Zhuangzian vein, praising the red parrot instead for its ability to adapt to its environment. Xie suggests that imprisonment is no different from living a free life as long as one feels at ease. After summarizing the strengths of Mei's and Xie's *fu*s on the red parrot, Ouyang speculates that the red parrot has not yet said its last word and volunteers to speak its mind: "I suspect that in the bird's belly there lie things unsaid, so I have gleaned what these two rhapsodies neglected to complete the parrot's speech on its behalf" 疑夫茲禽之腹中或有未盡者，因拾二賦之餘棄也，以代鸚畢其說.[40] Even though Ouyang did not

[38] See "Hong yingwu fu" 紅鸚鵡賦, in Mei, *Wanling ji*, 438.
[39] See "Hong yingwu fu" 紅鸚鵡賦, in Ouyang Xiu, *Ouyang wenzhong quanji*, 291.
[40] Ouyang, 291.

seem to see bird speech poetry in the same light as Mei, rhetorically, this statement seems in accord with Mei's stance that birds have their own minds.

In the *fu* proper, Ouyang animates a speaking parrot that blames its owner for altering its nature according to human standards. This parrot is surrounded by other types of caged birds selected for qualities that make each of them peerless. After the red parrot voices sympathy toward its companions, it launches into a wholesale criticism that human techniques and technologies are developed at the expense of the lives and the authentic forms of other creatures, taking as examples animals used in sacrifice and the tortoise shells that were the earliest medium for writing. The red parrot in turn ridicules humans for concealing and modifying their own disposition by covering their bodies with artificially dyed clothes and restricting their movements with the use of mechanical tools. The argument that Ouyang develops is akin to Marshall McLuhan's words of caution that human-made media technology eventually leads to the amputation of the human body: the methods developed by humans to enhance their lives actually confine them in a way similar to caging a bird; they distort human nature by causing worry and shortening people's life spans.[41]

In keeping with this logic, Ouyang seems to regard words as one of the artificial things that bring harm to human nature by causing conflict, confinement, and death. This idea is articulated by the Yuan dynasty playwright Zhang Yanghao 張養浩 (1270–1329) in a *fu* on the parrot. Using the talking parrot as a mirror for observing the manipulative tendency of speech, Zhang enumerates historical examples of detrimental consequences that resulted from misuse of words. Zhang's *fu* ends with a narrative of one of his dreams: in it, an anonymous visitor with an unusual appearance—dressed in green and having golden pupils, bright red lips, and toes that have the luster of jade—comes before him jumping and dancing. These visual clues reveal that the author is describing a

[41] See Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1994), 8–11.

green parrot in quasi-human form. The parrot thanks the poet for having its best interests at heart before it offers a self-defense. The parrot knows very well that words are susceptible to manipulation, but it cannot simply abandon its nature and stop speaking. At the same time, the parrot argues that it should not be responsible for problems created by human speakers simply because it too speaks. Instead, the parrot asks the poet to regulate his own speech: "If instead you could only restrain yourself, then how would I be responsible for you humans' behavior?" 君其反而自律，吾何預於民風.[42] The poet then wakes up to see that nobody is nearby, but he still hears a lingering squawk (spelled out as the onomatopoeic "yongyong" 雝雝).[43]

These rhapsodies on the parrot are centered on an ancient human problem: speech is dangerous when the speaker has little control over it. Bird speech serves as a mirror that reflects problems of human speech. Poets easily recognize the similarity between a speaking parrot and someone who has a "sly tongue"—a shorthand for skillful deployment of verbal techniques for argumentation. What makes a talking parrot disturbing to a human poet is that it formally resembles a speaking voice that cannot be disciplined and therefore has the tendency to abuse words. This understanding also assumes that undisciplined speaking is connected with a devious mind, implicitly prioritizing the connection between the speaking voice and the speaker's interiority.

The Unruly Voices of Talking Birds

Bird speech becomes a different type of mirror of human speech in a series of prose narratives produced in the late Ming and the early Qing. Earlier literary portrayals of talking birds, concentrated in poetic forms, frequently regarded talking birds as a counterpart of human speakers

[42] See Zhang Yanghao, "Yingwu fu" 鸚鵡賦, in Chen Yuanlong 陳元龍, *Yuzhi lidai fuhui* 御製歷代賦彙, 130:19a.
[43] Zhang, 130:19a.

and therefore encouraged reading bird speech as a reflection of human sentiment. Several short tales written by Pan Zhiheng and Pu Songling, however, draw attention to the peculiarity of bird speech by underscoring its opacity and inaccessibility to humans. Talking birds make the act of speaking unfamiliar to their human counterparts even though speech is a human thing. As seventeenth-century narratives of talking birds depart from the convention of portraying talking birds as hollow voices to be appropriated and filled by human poets, they reflect a heightened awareness of the incongruity between avian voices and human speech.

Several short anecdotes included in *Gen shi*, the extensive collection of tales, biographies, and other writings compiled by Pan Zhiheng, show that a number of narrators, editors, and listeners took interest in miscommunication and failed communication between avian and human speakers. In *Gen shi*, one category is devoted to collecting zoological information and anecdotes about the family of hawks.[44] Pan wrote a short preface for this category in which he discloses his fondness for hawks, praising them their ability to soar and declaring the sounds they make more pleasing than the calling of the crane (this statement is somewhat unconventional considering that the crane is associated with recluses and immortals, and therefore represents a transcendent state). But hawks are not central characters in the anecdotes included in this category. In fact, in one of the extant editions of *Gen shi* dated 1626, the category "hawk" ends with an entry entitled "Yingwu" 鸚鵡 ("A Parrot") in which hawks are nowhere to be seen. Instead, as its title indicates, the entry introduces an unusually talented parrot through the voice of someone named She Pang 佘滂. Pang opens the account by complimenting Pan Zhiheng as the "Historian of Birds" 鳥官氏之董狐.[45] The story

[44] This category appears in *juan* 10 of the "Za ji" 雜記 ("Miscellaneous Records") section in the Wanli edition (compiled posthumously by Pan's fourth son Pan Liang 潘亮) and in *juan* 2 of "Za ji" in the Tianqi edition (completed in 1626).
[45] Pan, "Yingwu" 鸚鵡, in *Gen shi* (1626), 2:13b.

proper introduces a parrot kept in a dry goods store in the city where She Pang's family used to live. One day, the parrot is brought to a competition with a mynah bird (referred to as a *liaoge* 料哥) from another city in order to test which bird has better verbal skills. The parrot starts by chanting a verse, and the mynah bird immediately echoes it (it is unclear whether the mynah bird repeats the parrot's verse verbatim or recites another poem in response). The mynah bird tries to talk to the parrot but it does not respond with even a single word and remains silent for the rest of the competition. After the mynah bird leaves in frustration, someone asks the parrot why it did not reply. The parrot explains that it wants to prevent its vocal skills being stolen by the mynah bird: "It has more wit than me; its voice is inferior but it is good at transforming its voice in imitation of others. As soon as I open my mouth, [my skill] would be stolen. So I stayed silent to prevent that from happening" 彼黠勝我，音實劣，而善化，開口便為所竊。故密以杜之.[46]

The parrot sets up a contrast between its own approach to using human language and that of its competitor. Whereas the mynah bird is good at imitating the exteriority of an utterance, the parrot is capable of connecting spoken words with authentic interiority. Although the human listeners in the beginning of the story are ready to objectify the parrot's speaking voice by treating its words as mere spectacle, the parrot teaches them to distinguish its voice from the mynah bird's trick by hearing the depth of the parrot's voice. This depth is also made palpable by the parrot's silence. As the parrot deliberately shuts its beak, which is contrary to what the human listeners expect, the humans come to realize that this is a voice with a mind of its own.

The parrot is also distinguished from the mynah bird on the textual level, in that the sounds and words produced by the mynah bird are only described, whereas the parrot's speech is quoted

[46] Pan, 2:13b.

fully. Does the parrot actually speak in pedantic classical Chinese? Or does the quotation indicate that the parrot's speech is already transcribed and circulated in that format?

The ending of this story encourages us to speculate further about these questions. When a high-ranking official wants to purchase this parrot to entertain his sick child, the owner of the bird offers it as a gift. Soon afterward the parrot is depressed and refuses to eat. It chants a short quatrain (in a manner described as "singing"), which is heard and transcribed as the following:

> I was initially a bird at the dry goods store,
> Not knowing the honorable ministers and palace guards.
> As I feel extremely heartbroken from missing my previous master,
> It is hard to use clever speech to win new favor.
>
> 我本山貨店中鳥，
> 不識臺司衙內尊。
> 敢是傷心懷舊主，
> 難將巧語博新恩。[47]

The narrator adds: "Even though later people adjusted the rhyme of the poem, the meaning of the bird's speech is probably not very different from these words" 雖後人叶為韻，其語意當不啻此.[48] The transcription by a human hand, which also involves minor modification in terms of rhyming, allows the parrot to become a poet even though it does not have the ability to write. By showing that the bird is already a poetry-chanting voice before human intervention, this example departs from earlier poetic traditions in which human poets use parrots to voice their own sentiments.

We also sense a discrepancy between the parrot's oral recitation and the textual transcript of that recitation. We cannot help but wonder: Are they even the same poem? Is it possible that whoever wrote down the poem already mistranscribed the sound of the parrot's words to meet

[47] Pan, 2:13b–14a.
[48] Pan, 2:14a.

human expectations of the poetic medium? As the bird can speak but cannot write, it has no control over the words it conveys. As poetry is an anthropocentric medium, it is incapable of preserving the parrot's lyrical voice intact. Although a written poem is often considered to embody a poet's true voice, poetic self-expression is made opaque in this case that involves a nonhuman poet.

The altered quatrain turns out to be the parrot's last words. After the parrot begs for five days to be set free, the official eventually yields. But the parrot dies as soon as it reaches the dry goods store. It earns a reputation as a virtuous "Shouyang parrot" 首陽鸚鵡, which puts it on an equal footing with a human minister who would starve to death to stay loyal to his lord.[49] Bearing testimony to this honorable deed, the parrot's poem makes its voice all the more authentic and indelible. At the same time, the poem serves as a reminder of the unbridgeable gap between a talking bird and a human language.

In another anecdote included in the same category, also featuring a mynah bird, the incongruity between an avian voice and human language leads to dire consequences. The mynah bird belongs to someone named She Xiaoshi 佘小史 from Pan Zhiheng's hometown of Yanzhen 巖鎮, Anhui. This unusual mynah bird is able to hold a conversation like a human. The bird owner therefore treats the mynah bird more as a servant than a pet, asking it to fetch tea and utensils from his house whenever a friend stops by. The bird is praised for its verbal etiquette on such occasions—speaking "without omitting or confusing a single word" 無一言遺誤.[50]

One day, the owner sends the mynah bird to run some usual errands but meets an unusual protest from the bird. Their conversation is recorded as the following:

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[49] Shouyang is the name of the mountains where two brothers, Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊, lived during the transition between the Shang dynasty and the Zhou dynasty. As a gesture of loyalty to the emperor of the Shang, they refused to eat any grain produced in the field of Zhou and retreated into the mountains where they fed on wild herbs. They eventually starved to death.

[50] See "Bage" 八哥, in Pan, *Gen shi*, 2:10b.

> The mynah bird refuses to go, saying: "I had an ominous dream at night." [Xiaoshi] asked what it dreamed about, it replied: "At night I dreamed about a tiger. As tigers can hurt people, I am frightened by them." Xiaoshi laughed and said: "Don't worry, I have already said prayers for you [to drive off any potential misfortune]."
>
> 八哥不行，云：吾夜夢不祥。問何夢，云：夜夢虎，虎能傷人，故畏之。小史笑曰："無懼，吾為汝禳矣。[51]

As the mynah bird is making its way down a busy road, a sparrow hawk suddenly descends from the sky and captures it. The bird cries out desperately in a mixture of classical and vernacular Chinese: "Help me! Help me! I am from the house of Mr. Xiaoshi. Hurry and tell him to save me" 救人，救人！吾小史官人家的，速報官人救我![52] When Xiaoshi learns the bad news, it is already too late. Heartbroken, he immediately sets out with a bow and arrows and shoots the sparrow hawk as soon as he sees it. The dead mynah's feathers are still discernible when Xiaoshi cuts open the predator's belly.

This tragic event stems from a fatal miscommunication between the mynah bird and its owner that comes to light belatedly. Although the bird voices worry about its fate, Xiaoshi does not take its words seriously until they come true. Only when the mynah bird is screaming for help do we realize that it has been misusing human language by referring to itself deictically as a "person" (*ren* 人). The bird recounts its dream in coded language, using the tiger as a metaphor for its predator. At the same time, it speaks in a mannered type of language reminiscent of divination manuals. As a result, the bird owner misses the figurative implications of the bird's words and shrugs them off as nonsense. He apparently thinks that the bird is reciting verbatim a line it has learned somewhere out of context. It only occurs to him belatedly that the bird was trying to tell him what was on its mind.

[51] Pan, 2:10b.
[52] Pan, 2:10b.

This instance also reveals the anthropocentric character of language. The mynah bird may pass for a fluent speaker in an everyday conversation but it does not know how to express itself accurately, or when it tries to do so, it is not taken seriously as a speaker. The language mastered by the bird is a pastiche of human expressions that it hears and memorizes over time, which it may or may not understand. Like a half-educated person, the bird has trouble distinguishing the written from the spoken language and the idiomatic from the unidiomatic. The anonymous narrator notices a deictic misalignment in the bird's speech: "It dreamed about a 'tiger' but met a hawk is because it followed how people speak. People call the tiger 'tiger' while birds call the hawk 'tiger'" 夫夢虎遭鷂，從人言也。人以虎名虎，鳥以鷂名虎.[53] The bird accidentally conflates the specific with the general, mistaking "person" and "tiger" for universal categories (as if they meant the same thing as "victim" and "predator"). Perhaps its assumption comes from its experience: it has always been conversing with "persons," and does not realize that no other speaker considers it to be a "person."

How literally are we to take the bird's unusual reference to itself as a "person"? After citing the example of Zhuangzi, who once dreamed of himself transforming into a bird, the narrator remarks: "People dream about being birds; can it be that birds never dream about becoming humans? Ha! A bird that can not only talk but also talk about having a dream is rather unusual. I therefore wrote this record" 人夢鳥，鳥獨不夢為人耶? 嘻！鳥能言而言及夢又可異矣，故紀之.[54] The narrator's remark alludes to Zhuangzi's comment on a dream he had in which he transformed into a butterfly: "He does not know whether he is [Zhou] who dreams he is a butterfly

[53] Pan, 2:10b.
[54] Pan, 2:11a. We cannot tell with certainty if the narrator is Pan Zhiheng himself as this account consists of information that seems to come from different sources. The narrator's voice is indeterminate throughout the account.

or a butterfly who dreams he is [Zhou]" 不知周之夢為胡蝶與，胡蝶之夢為周與.[55] The narrator's embedded reference invites readers to reflect on the limitations of the human perspective by adopting that of a bird. In the narrator's understanding, the bird dreams of becoming a human and running into a tiger. But that is to assume that we know the denotation, in the bird's mind, of the words "person" and "tiger." Although the bird's speech accidentally exposes the limitations anthropocentrism poses to language, when its human counterparts attempt to make sense of the bird's words, they turn a blind eye to those words' non-anthropocentric implications. The bird's speech reveals an incongruity between human language and nonhuman experience. By unwittingly adopting the anthropocentric logic embedded in language, the mynah bird inevitably misleads its listeners. However, instead of seeing the gap between the language they are familiar with and the language spoken by the mynah bird, the narrator closes the gap with an anthropocentric interpretation of the bird's dream.

This contemporary story is followed by two historical analogues. The first, recounted by the same anonymous narrator, features a white parrot kept by the Tang dynasty palace lady Yang Guifei. One day the parrot tells the palace lady that it dreamed of being killed by a predator. Although Lady Yang teaches the parrot to chant a Buddhist sutra for protection, the parrot eventually falls prey to an eagle just as in its dream. In this incident, the white parrot serves as mirror image of the palace lady, foreshadowing her own fate of dying as a political victim.[56] As the narrator finishes telling this story, someone named She Zhao 佘肇 interrupts and volunteers more information about the owner

[55] See Liu Wendian, *Zhuangzi buzheng* 莊子補正 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 1999), 89–90. The translation is from A. C. Graham, "The Sorting Which Evens Things Out," in *Chuang-tzŭ: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzŭ* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 61.
[56] A number of literary authors from the Ming dynasty further explored this allegorical association between the white parrot and Lady Yang. For an example, see You Tong, "Xueyinü zhuan" 雪衣女傳, in *You Tong ji* 尤侗集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2015), 79–80.

of the mynah bird in the previous story. After losing his avian friend to the sparrow hawk, She Zhao says, Xiaoshi vengefully kills countless sparrow hawks and eagles. After these predators learn to avoid him, he still pursues them by combing through the woods until he is ambushed by a group of hawks one day and almost falls into a river. He then comes to regret what he has done and destroys his bow. Afterwards, whenever he encounters hawks, they play with him like seagulls.[57]

Using this extended story as an interlude, the narrator cites a similar predicament faced by the Warring States general Lord Xinling 信陵君 (?–243 BCE), the son of King Zhao of Wei.[58] One day, just as Lord Xinling is finishing a meal, a dove flies under his table to hide from a sparrow hawk flying above the rooftop. Thinking that the predator is gone, Lord Xinling lets the dove escape, but it is immediately captured by the hawk, which is waiting nearby. Feeling that he has betrayed the dove's trust, the prince announces that he will reward whoever captures that hawk. As a result, over three hundred hawks are captured. The prince decides that killing them all would be an injustice to the innocent ones. Instead, he asks the captured hawks which one of them is guilty of killing the dove. Only one hawk lowers its head, afraid to look up. The prince kills this hawk and sets the rest free. From this he earns a reputation for being a benevolent lord and attracts numerous talented people to join his force.

Under the pen name "Historian of Expansiveness," Pan Zhiheng offers an extensive commentary that contrasts the exemplary model set by Lord Xinling with She Xiaoshi's cruelty toward hawks. This comment is followed by a brief history of the mynah bird's domestication:

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[57] This detail recalls a parable in *Liezi*: someone is so fond of seagulls that he rides on a boat to follow and roam with them every morning. Hundreds of seagulls would come and greet him. Having heard his reputation for attracting seagulls, his father asks him to capture one as a plaything for him. The next morning, when the man rides on the boat, seagulls fly above and none of them descends to get close to him. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 67–68.

[58] For this story of Lord Xinling, see Ouyang Xun and Wang Shaoying, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 2:1589.

people in the area of Jingchu 荊楚 (currently in Hubei province) allegedly trimmed the bird's tongue and taught it to speak. This became a common practice. In a comment that immediately follows, Pan makes a poignant point by drawing from the story of Lord Xinling:

> Human tongues are inferior to the twittering tongues of sparrows. The tongue of the sparrow is vivacious and nimble while the human tongue is stiff and clumsy. Now that Gongye Chang [one of Confucius's disciples, who was known for his ability to interpret talking birds] is gone, who can recognize the skillfulness of the bird's voice? Instead, people deliberately cut the mynah bird's tongue and force it to make human speech—how pitiful it is! When the mynah bird lowers its head and appears to be sad, who would know it is not laughing at us people for being doves while wanting to turn mynah birds into doves as well!
>
> 人之有舌，不若雀舌之睆晥也。蓋雀舌活則便，人舌硬則拙。世無公冶，誰辨其工？乃務斷鸜鵒之舌，強令作人言，嗟夫！安知鸜鵒之低首悲愁，不笑吾人之為鳩也而乃欲鳩鸜鵒乎哉！[59]

Although it is not uncommon for premodern Chinese poets and commentators to state that the human tongue is inferior to its avian counterpart, the way that Pan argues for this idea is rather novel. According to Pan, trimming the mynah bird's tongue is not a technique for making the bird's chirping more intelligible but rather a manipulative move, masking the limited intelligibility of human speech by resetting the standard of verbal communication. Pan indicates that the standard of intelligibility is both artificial and anthropocentric by lamenting the absence of an expert in the bird's native tongue to discern its artfulness. Pan's argument echoes the point indirectly made by Ouyang Xiu in "Hong yingwu fu" 紅鸚鵡賦 ("Rhapsody on the Red Parrot"): teaching mynah birds to speak leads human beings to confine themselves in speech without knowing what they are missing.

These short accounts reflect a collective interest in regarding talking birds as voices autonomous from their human counterparts. But their ability to speak their own minds does not quite make them pass for humans. Instead, they serve as a mirror image for their human

[59] Pan, "Bage," in *Gen shi*, 2:12b.

counterparts in a different way from Lady Yang's white parrot. Xiaoshi's mynah bird reveals verbal communication failing on the part of the human listener rather than on the part of the speaker. The bird's owner pays a high price for failing to see that the tongue spoken by the bird misaligns with his own language. The parrot from the dry goods store dies out of its loyalty to its owner, but it also leads the human readers to ponder whether such a remarkable act of integrity can still be found among their human contemporaries.

The anecdotes in *Gen shi* encourage us to denaturalize the act of speaking. However strongly avian speaking voices resemble their human counterparts, their interiority and exteriority are perceived as separate domains in tension with each other. After all, we human listeners can only perceive talking birds from the exterior. The attempt to access a bird's perspective is futile. In these stories, the words uttered by talking birds create a momentary impression that they have minds of their own, which we can perceive through things they say aloud. But birds' speech may obscure rather than illuminate their intent; the interiority of talking birds is thus doubly opaque to human listeners. When Xiaoshi begins to take seriously the mynah bird's dream, it is already too late. For the parrot to leave a name as a poet, it needs to use a speaking voice heard by human ears. But the bird's poetry-chanting voice cannot be adequately transcribed and preserved on its own terms: the domain of poetry is anthropocentric. Although bird speech makes an impression on a human listener as a lively exteriority, a speaking voice, it evokes an elusive depth that resembles interiority but is only partially intelligible.

Avian Narrators

But is the depth that humans may perceive in an avian voice the same as interiority? The anonymous human narrator of "A Mynah Bird" in *Gen shi* seemed to equivocate: witness the aforementioned comment, "People dream about birds; won't birds dream about becoming people?

Ha! (The fact that) a bird can not only talk but also talk about having a dream is rather unusual. I therefore wrote this record" 人夢鳥，鳥獨不夢為人耶? 嘻！鳥能言而言及夢，又可異矣，故紀之.[60] It is noteworthy that the narrator mentions the dream as something the mynah bird *talks about* (言及) rather than something it has. This comment voices skepticism at least rhetorically: Is saying that one had a dream the same as being able to dream? Is interiority nothing but an impression made on others through our intelligible use of language?

These questions have radical implications for human speech. In any interpersonal communication, when someone speaks, what the listener hears is simply the exteriority of the speaker's voice. The speaker's interiority is an impression (if not an illusion) that the listener conjures up and sustains as long as the conversation makes sense. Strictly speaking, any utterance, no matter how intelligible and transparent it appears to be, is opaque to the listener. From the listener's perspective, no hard boundary exists between human and avian speech.

Several tales of talking birds written in classical Chinese by the seventeenth-century writer Pu Songling show a different approach to using talking birds to render language opaque to human ears. These tales are included in *Strange Tales from Liaozhai*, a collection of nearly five hundred stories that the author completed over the course of over four decades. Most of the stories follow the tradition of *chuanqi* 傳奇 (tales of the marvelous). Whereas the loosely linked anecdotes with incoherent storytelling voices in *Gen shi* are akin to *zhiguai* accounts of the strange, all of the following *Liaozhai* tales reflect the author's effort to create sophisticated characterization and plot lines.

More than half of the *Liaozhai* stories portray nonhuman beings—ranging from fox spirits and ghosts to flowers and insects—transforming into humans; only three stories feature talking birds. After their metamorphoses, these beings speak just like humans. (By comparison, when

[60] Pan, *Gen shi*, 11a.

human beings are turned into a nonhuman form, they usually lose their ability to speak.) For most nonhuman speakers to have human-like voices, they must first obtain a human form; however, talking birds such as the parrot and the mynah bird are trained to speak outside the realm of the fantastic. They speak *like* and not *as* humans. Although talking birds may not strike us as the strangest thing at first, they show us that something as familiar as language may turn out to be a very strange thing indeed.

Pu's experiment with the opacity of bird speech was informed by earlier literary conventions. He composed his own set of four quatrains in the style of the eleventh-century poet Mei Yaochen's bird speech poetry. Under the title of "Bird Speech," these poems incorporate the sounds made by the white-breasted water hen, the partridge, the pelican, and the cuckoo. While one can easily understand the central theme of Mei's bird speech poetry, the symbolism in Pu's quatrains is more ambiguous. Let us observe the final poem in the sequence, which features a speaking cuckoo:

> (You) may as well go back! [*Buruguiqu*!]
> Gold is not like rain.
> Although raindrops are many,
> There are still spots that are untouched by them.
> (You) may as well go back!
>
> 不如歸去。黃金不似雨。雨點雖然多。還有不沾處。不如歸去。[61]

Like earlier bird speech poems, this quatrain features deliberately fragmented syntax and abrupt transitions between lines. Unlike the birds in earlier poems of this kind, who actively seek to engage human listeners in a conversation, this cuckoo's speech resembles a rambling monologue akin to nonsense. The cuckoo's words are not fully intelligible because they are out of context: we cannot tell with certainty what it is talking about. Based on the second line, "gold is not like rain," and the cuckoo's imploring tone, it might be urging people not to gamble, pursue fortune in another way, or

[61] Sheng Wei, *Pu Songling quanji* 蒲松齡全集 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1998), 2:392.

squander money.[62] Whereas the cuckoo is a familiar trope for homesickness in premodern Chinese poetry, this poem gives its call a new meaning by connecting it with unarticulated concerns about expenditure. The cuckoo's voice is made unfamiliar also by appearing as a disembodied voice talking in circles, which further enhances the opaque quality of the uttered words.

Pu clearly wrote one story, "Niaoyu" 鳥語 ("Bird Language"), with bird speech poetry in mind. The following discussion will consider this story, along with two other tales, "Gouyu" 雊鴝 ("A Mynah Bird"), and "A-bao" 阿寶.[63] These stories have not received much attention in existing scholarship, and their connection with the conventions of bird speech poetry has been completely overlooked. If we examine these tales of talking birds side by side, we will see that they shed new light on how talking birds further render language opaque in a narrative system. By developing avian voices that are not only independent but also subversive, these stories call into question the purported distinction between human and avian speaking. By presenting the disconnect between the exteriority and the (presumed) interiority of bird speech, they model a new way of understanding speech and the role of voice in narratology.

"Niaoyu" introduces an anonymous Daoist who travels among villages for food. One day, the Daoist hears some twittering orioles nearby. He tells the head of the household that offers him food to be careful about fires, reporting that the orioles were saying: "Big fires are hard to put out—how terrifying" 大火難救，可怕![64] Everybody present laughs at the Daoist's words. These incredulous listeners also shrug off the idea that birds see things that elude their human

[62] Pu was deeply concerned about gambling, which is reflected in several tales in *Liaozhai*, such as "Nianyang" 念秧.
[63] In addition to talking birds, Pu Songling wrote many stories about other types of birds in *Liaozhai*, such as pigeons ("Ge yi" 鴿異), crows ("Zhuqing" 竹青), cranes ("Qin xia" 禽俠), and a kind of songbird called "Qinjiliao" 秦吉了 ("Aying" 阿英).
[64] Zhang Youhe, *Liaozhai zhiyi huijiao huizhu huiping ben* 聊齋誌異會校會註會評本 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 3:1276.

counterparts. On the next day, an unexpected fire breaks out in the house and spreads to several neighboring houses. Someone immediately finds the Daoist and calls him an immortal (someone with the gift of prophecy). The Daoist responds: "I simply understand the bird's language. Why call me an immortal?" 我不過知鳥語耳，何仙也![65] This reply also reads as a reminder that words uttered by the Daoist do not necessarily embody his own mind.

After a series of events foreseen by birds come true one after another, those listeners show greater interest in knowing nonhuman perspectives. As a flock of sparrows is perching on a tree nearby, onlookers urge the Daoist to interpret, and the Daoist reports: "'The sparrows said: 'on the sixth day it lives, on the sixth day it lives; on the fourteenth and the sixteenth it dies.' So I guess this family is having two babies. Today is the tenth, so both of them will die within the next five or six days" 雀言：初六養之，初六養之；十四、十六殤之.[66] This tragic event turns out to be true. The county magistrate learns of the incredible event and sends an invitation to the Daoist. During the Daoist's visit, a flock of ducks walks by, and the magistrate asks the Daoist to eavesdrop on them. The Daoist says that the magistrate's wife and concubine must be in conflict as the ducks are saying "Alas, alas! She is more favored! She is more favored" 罷罷！偏向他，偏向他![67] As it turns out, the magistrate has just left his house to avoid a heated argument between his wife and concubine. The magistrate therefore recruits the Daoist. At this moment, the narrator interrupts with a further disclosure: the magistrate is in fact corrupt. The next day, the same flock of ducks reappears, and the magistrate again asks the Daoist what they are saying. The Daoist reports that the ducks are compiling an inventory of the magistrate's possessions, including the bribes he has taken: "'They said: 'candles: one hundred and eight; silver ingots: one thousand and eight" 彼云：蠟燭一

[65] Zhang, 3:1276.
[66] Zhang, 3:1276.
[67] Zhang, 3:1276.

百八，銀朱一千八.[68] Although the shamed magistrate suspects that the Daoist is mocking him, he rejects the Daoist's request to resign. Several days later, a cuckoo is suddenly heard in the middle of a banquet hosted by the magistrate. A curious guest asks the Daoist what the cuckoo is saying. The Daoist's reply startles everybody present: "The bird said: 'lost job and left'" 丟官而去.[69] The enraged magistrate immediately has the Daoist expelled. The bird's words soon come true as the magistrate is convicted for corruption.

The enigma of the story centers on the idea that talking birds observe, judge, and gossip about humans. As the narrative invites us to perceive the interiority and the exteriority of avian voices as separate things through different ears, it emphasizes the gap between human and nonhuman speakers. It creates this effect also by leaving an ambiguity unresolved at times: Do birds have their own minds and "languages"? Or does the Daoist use the pretext of interpreting for birds to speak his own mind covertly? By showing that the source of a perceived speaking voice may not be locatable, the story asks us to rethink who is actually speaking.

The other tales further explore the disconnection between exteriority and interiority and the source and perceived effect of a speaking voice. "Gouyu" is one of the few stories in *Liaozhai* written by someone other than Pu Songling. This short anecdote is told through the voice of someone named Wang Fenbin 王汾濱 and recorded by a scholar-official named Bi Jiyou 畢際有 (1623–1693), who hired Pu Songling as an in-house tutor for years. The fact that the story is told by a narrator and recorded by a different author reveals that it has already been recounted multiple times.[70] It introduces an unusual friendship between a mynah bird and its human owner, which

[68] Zhang, 3:1277.
[69] Zhang, 3:1277.
[70] Sun Dahai points out that Pu Songling may have created this story based on something that Bi Jiyou had already written. See Sun Dahai, "*Liaozhai zhiyi* qingdai pingzhu yanjiu" 《聊齋誌異》清代評註研究, PhD diss., (Beijing daxue, 2020), 45.

reminds us of the parrot from the dry goods store in *Gen shi*. In this story, someone in the narrator's hometown keeps a mynah bird and teaches it to speak. For a couple of years, the bird accompanies its owner wherever he goes. As they are reaching Jiangzhou 绛州, a city in the northwest part of Shanxi province, the owner runs out of travel money while they are still far from home. Seeing its owner in distress, the mynah bird comes up with a solution:

> The bird says: "Why don't you sell me? If you send me to the prince's mansion, you should get a good deal of money, so that you won't worry about the expenses on the way home." The owner says: "How could I bear to do that?" The bird responds: "Don't worry. Take off as soon as you receive the money, and wait for me under a big tree to the west, twenty *li* from the city."
>
> 鳥云："何不售我？送我至王邸，當得善價，不愁歸路無貲也。"其人云："我安忍！"鳥言："不妨。主人得價疾行，待我城西二十里大樹下。"[71]

The owner agrees, and takes the bird to the city. While engaging each other in a conversation, they attract the attention of a group of onlookers, including someone with a direct connection to the prince. Although their conversation is performed as an urban spectacle akin to a puppet show, in which the human master appears as a puppeteer, we would soon realize that the human is in fact the avian mastermind's puppet. The prince offers to buy the bird, but the owner declines at first, saying that he is reluctant to sell something so important to him. The prince turns to the bird instead:

> He asks the bird: "Would you like to live here?" It replies: "I would." The prince is delighted. The bird adds: "Give [my master] ten silver ingots; don't offer more." The prince is even more delighted, and he immediately gave the owner ten silver ingots.
>
> 王問鳥："汝願住否？"言："願住"。王喜。鳥又言："給價十金，勿多予"。王益喜，立畀十金。[72]

In this key moment of negotiation, the prince acknowledges the bird not only as an independent voice with a mind of its own but also as a voice that counts more than his owner's. The bird's voice

[71] Zhang, 1:397.
[72] Zhang, 1:397.

also conveys a stronger sense of authority and agency than the human owner's. Its words not only play a determining role in sealing the deal but also indicate that the mynah bird is the one that comes up with plans. The prince immediately pays up, and the owner leaves while pretending to be upset. After chatting with the bird for a while, the prince feeds it with meat. Once the bird finishes eating, it makes a request: "Your humble servant wants to take a bath" 臣要浴.[73] The prince has someone bring a gold basin to be filled with water, and opens the cage for the bird. How the mynah bird speaks here is also noteworthy. Unlike the mynah bird in *Gen shi* who misidentifies itself as a human, the mynah bird in this story skillfully manipulates the internal structures of language to trick its new master. Although it verbally subordinates itself to the prince by using honorifics, it covertly reverses the hierarchy between the master and the attendant by subjecting the prince to its whimsical demand. As a result, the mynah bird's command of language tends to be not only autonomous but also subversive.

When the bird finishes bathing, it flies around, talking with the prince. None of these movements make the prince suspicious of its motivation. As its feathers become dry, the bird suddenly flies up. Although the bird pretends to remain in the prince's control as long as their conversation continues, its leavetaking reveals the contrived nature of its subordination. It bids farewell in the Shanxi accent: "Your humble servant is taking off" 臣去呀![74] Is the bird's faked Shanxi accent intended to be a kind of mockery of its human counterparts? Or is this a strategy for creating a dramatic exit? Although we never get a chance to find out why the bird fakes the accent, this seemingly superfluous detail draws attention to the exteriority of its speaking voice and the sense of mystery it produces.

[73] Zhang, 1:397.
[74] Zhang, 1:398.

The bird disappears in the blink of an eye, leaving the prince and his attendants lamenting in vain. The prince immediately seeks after the bird's owner but he is nowhere to be found. Looking back, the feigned accent might be the bird's tactic for disguising its place of origin to prevent the prince from tracking it down. Later, someone else reports seeing the owner with the bird in a market in the city of Xi'an.[75]

The irony is self-evident: although the prince acquires the mynah bird as a plaything, the bird eventually plays him. As the mynah bird's speaking voice shapes the narrative through piecemeal dialogues, it acts as the central, the most effective, narrator of the story. The human narrator Wang Fenbin simply relays a complete written version of a script the bird had in mind all along. As the written record can only illuminate what happens but not what is intended, part of the story remains untold as the mynah bird bids farewell not only to the prince but also to the narrative world it has created. The story leaves us marveling at the fact that the bird is capable of exceeding and tricking human imagination.

Two comments on this story added by two nineteenth-century commentators, He Yin 何垠 and Dan Minglun, reflect that the mynah bird's subversive voice accrues meaning through interpretations of its story. Dan makes the following comment:

> Nowadays as well there are a lot of scams. Plotted and carried out by humans, they can neither be predicted using one's judgement nor be ferreted out using one's instinct. What kind of knowledge do tiny birds possess? And how is it that they can devise a plot on behalf of humans? From this we understand without any question that the bird must have been a human in a previous life.
>
> 今之騙局亦夥矣。以人謀之，以人為之，已不可以理測，不可以情窺。小鳥何知，而又代人謀？此其前身不待問而知矣。[76]

[75] Zhang, 1:398.
[76] Zhang, 1:397.

To Dan, a scheme created by a bird embodies an opaque mastermind that outstrips the con men of his own time. Dan apparently does not believe that a mynah bird could singlehandedly conduct such an elaborate trickery, which leads him to entertain the idea that the bird must have been a reincarnation of a manipulative person in the past. Dan's reasoning can be spelled out as the following: a bird that manages to have a cunning voice must somehow be a human.

The other commentator, He Yin, also ponders what stands behind a cunning nonhuman voice in a commentary that appears after the story proper: "The bird is deceitful; even though it can speak, does it not have the heart of a beast" 鳥詐，雖能言，不亦禽獸之心乎?[77] But his reasoning is opposite from Dan's: the bird's ability to speak does not make it akin to a human. The accusatory term "the heart of a beast" is simultaneously used literally and metaphorically, emphasizing the savage nature of the bird while comparing the bird to greedy people. Both commentators are unwilling to acknowledge that the mynah bird speaks as well as a human does. While these nineteenth-century commentators are openly hostile to the talking bird, not a single detail in the story proper directly supports their anthropocentric interpretation. Whereas those who shaped these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts seemed to take interest in the talking bird as a new phenomenon of nonhuman autonomy, the nineteenth-century commentators felt obliged to regard it as an embodiment of the perennial problem that speech is the territory of human manipulation.

The Two Sides of an Avian Voice

"A-bao," a much longer and more elaborate story written by Pu Songling, goes so far as to imagine a human speaker who accidentally acquires an avian voice. By revealing both the inside and

[77] The character *qin* 禽 in the compound *qinshou* 禽獸 (referring to beasts in general) means fowl. Zhang, 1:398.

the outside of a talking parrot and the gap between them in an imaginative way, the story invites us to ponder the question of what interiority means to a talking bird in a new light.

The story begins with a characterization of the protagonist Sun Chu, a penniless scholar with a foolish character:

> He was born with six fingers, and such a simple fellow was he that he readily believed any nonsense he was told. Very shy with the fair sex, the sight of a woman was enough to send him flying in the opposite direction; and once when he was inveigled into a room where there were some young ladies, he blushed down to his neck and the perspiration dripped off him like falling pearls.
>
> 生有枝指，性迂訥，人誑之，輒信為真。或值座有歌妓，則即遙望卻走。或知其然，誘之來，使妓狎逼之，則赧顏徹頸，汗珠下滴。[78]

As a prank, someone tells Sun that he should propose to A-bao, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy merchant, who receives marriage proposals from many men of power but has yet to meet a perfect match. So Sun does. At first, A-bao does not take her suitor seriously. She makes up an excuse to turn him down by telling the go-between to tell him that she will marry him if he is willing to cut off his extra finger. But Sun takes her words seriously, chops off his extra finger immediately and nearly dies from bleeding. Startled when she learned this incident, A-bao playfully requests that he "cut off the 'silly' from his reputation" 戲請再去其癡.[79] Firmly believing that he is not foolish, the scholar begins to realize that she has been fooling him and becomes disheartened about his marriage proposal to her. But he falls in love with the girl at first sight when he sees her napping under a tree during a festival. He is so transfixed that his soul parts from his body and follows her home. After his soul stays with her for three days, his body is on the verge of dying at home. His family finally gathers that he might have lost his soul and hires a shaman to bring his soul back. With his soul

[78] Zhang, 1:233. The translation, with minor modification of romanization, is from Herbert A. Giles, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 115.
[79] Zhang, 1:234. The translation is from Giles, 116.

restored, Sun continues to waste away pining for A-bao, and he still longs for another chance to be near the girl.

However, when he is on the verge of dying from lovesickness, he goes through a miraculous metamorphosis:

> Again he became very ill, and lay on his bed unconscious, without taking any food, occasionally calling [A-bao] by name, at the same time abusing his spirit for not having been able to follow her as before. Just at this juncture a parrot that had been long with the family died; and a child, playing with the body, laid it upon the bed. Sun then reflected that if he was only a parrot one flap of his wings would bring him into the presence of [A-bao]; and while occupied with these thoughts, lo! the dead body moved and the parrot flew away. It flew straight to [A-bao]'s room, at which she was delighted; and catching it, tied a string to its leg, and fed it upon hemp-seed. "Dear sister," cried the bird, "do not tie me by the leg; I am [Sun Zichu]." In great alarm [A-bao] untied the string, but the parrot did not fly away. "Alas!" said she, "your love has engraved itself upon my heart; but now you are no longer a man, how shall we ever be united together?"'

> …復病，冥然絕食，夢中輒呼寶名，每自恨魂不復靈。家舊養一鸚鵡，忽斃，小兒持弄於牀。生自念倘得身為鸚鵡，振翼可達女室。心方注想，身已翩然鸚鵡，遽飛而去，直達寶所。女喜而撲之，鎖其肘，飼以麻子。大呼曰："姐姐勿鎖，我孫子楚也。"女大駭，解其縛，亦不去。女祝曰："深情已篆中心。今已人禽異類，姻好何可復圓？"[80]

The parrot responds in a mannered tetrasyllabic rhythm: "As I'm able to be near your fragrant presence, my wish is already fulfilled" 得近芳澤，於願已足.[81] After A-bao sends someone to observe the scholar's body, which lies still like a corpse, she tells the parrot that she would marry him if he resumes his human form. The parrot responds bitterly: "(You're) fooling me" 誑我.[82] While creating a comic effect, the bird's speech also betrays a shrewdness that was previously absent in the scholar. Prior to this unexpected metamorphosis, the scholar was depicted as a passive character, constantly falling prey to pranks set up by others (including A-bao, who had suggested

[80] Zhang, 1:236. See also Giles, 118–19.
[81] Zhang, 1:236. The translation of this conversation is mine, as Giles's translation does not capture the stylistic features of the bird's utterance.
[82] Zhang, 1:236.

that he get rid of his extra finger) and speaking only once in the story. The parrot's response also carries an accusatory tone, especially if we recall how many times A-bao has tricked the scholar already. A-bao immediately swears that she will keep her word. The dialogue pauses as the narrator inserts an exterior description of the parrot: "The bird tilted its head as if it were thinking about something" 鳥側目若有所思.[83] This moment of silence emphasizes the autonomy of Sun's mind by revealing its opacity. As A-bao takes off her slippers, the parrot snatches one of them as a pledge in case she changes her mind again and flies away despite the girl's effort to stop it. This is a bold gesture that one would never expect from the previously foolish and passive scholar: for a girl from a good family like A-bao, having her slipper taken by a man makes it look like that their relationship has already been physically intimate, which would compromise her virtue. We get a stronger sense of the agency of Sun-as-talking parrot when we see how A-bao is set up by the parrot, which transforms the dynamics of previous interactions between the girl and the scholar.

As soon as the parrot returns to Sun's house with the slipper, it falls to the ground dead, and Sun wakes up again in his body. As A-bao's slipper is now in Sun's possession, as if two lovers have exchanged personal tokens, she insists that she will not marry anyone but Sun. The parrot's action eventually brings an unlikely marriage to fruition. After marrying A-bao, the scholar goes a series of major life changes, including an unexpected death from illness and miraculous resuscitation, and survives them intact. He also succeeds in the imperial civil service examination although he has been set up to fail: a group of ill-intentioned colleagues have tricked him into practicing examination essays on seven obscure topics, which end up being exactly the topics on the actual exam. The emperor hears about these unusual events and summons the scholar who is now an official in the

[83] Zhang, 1:236. The portrayal of a bird's gesture as a way of evoking its interiority is also found in Pu's other stories about birds, including those that do not speak. For an example, see "Zhuqing," in Zhang, 4:1516–20.

imperial academy. Impressed by the story Sun tells, the emperor later meets with A-bao as well and rewards them. The once foolish and passive scholar is now living the dream.

Even though the episode of Sun's metamorphosis takes up no more than several lines, it deserves closer examination. As soon as the scholar becomes the parrot, the narrator begins to refer to him using a third-person pronoun that is used to refer to a person, a nonhuman creature, or an inanimate object. The deictic ambivalence makes him potentially either human or nonhuman. Sun is animated as a new character in the story as soon as he begins to speak with a parrot's voice, disclosing his true identity to A-bao. Even after the scholar-turned-parrot tells A-bao who he is, however, the narrator continues to refer to Sun's body, which is dying at his home, as "the scholar" 生. This detail also further separates Sun's newly found avian voice from his human body, an uncanny effect that the story continues to enhance.

When the scholar takes up the parrot's voice, he acquires a new cleverness. The story encourages us to see that the parrot's voice is not only autonomous but also automated. Strictly speaking, it is an acousmatic speaking voice that cannot be located in any body—neither the dead parrot nor the previously reserved scholar. We cannot attribute the source of the voice's agency to any individual speaker or body other than the act of speaking itself. It is an awkwardly embodied voice that highlights the incongruity between the voice and its body. Even the classical Chinese in which the voice speaks sounds inconsistent: bookish phrases makes the voice appear affected, whereas the conciseness of the two-word reply enhances the sarcastic undertone in its poignant response "(You're) fooling me." But this speaking voice animates the scholar in a way that allows him to break free from his prior characterization; it gives him a new life in the narrative space. Although we observe how this speaking voice makes sonic impressions those who hear it and how it indexes the presence of a thinking mind, the place where that exteriority and interiority meet is a gap that the voice embodies rather than bridges.

The talking birds in these three tales lead us to see that an intelligible speaking voice does not necessarily illuminate the speaker's perspective. What these examples reveal is not so much a difference between human and nonhuman speaking as a distinction between two different end goals in speaking—to express oneself and to communicate. Whereas the speaker's interiority is central to self-expression, communication can be achieved without it. From a communicative perspective, any utterance perceived by a listener is potentially meaningful; whether it is inherently meaningful (i.e. intelligible) is a separate issue. An avian speaking voice always communicates but it often does not offer a window into avian interiority. Talking birds therefore invite us to decouple the act of speaking from interiority (although their connection is usually naturalized in human speech) and to observe speech in a new light.

Furthermore, in these three *Liaozhai* stories, the interiority of a talking bird is perceived as a negative space framed by its exteriority. What the birds say indicates that they see and know more than their human counterparts. Their speech represents the tip of the iceberg of their unexpressed minds, an impression that cannot be proven. Avian interiority exists only as something external and inaccessible to a human observer. As I have mentioned above, any effort to inhabit a bird's perspective would inevitably replace that perspective with human interiority. As avian speaking embodies an unfathomable depth despite its intelligible surface, the nonhuman speakers are able to remain autonomous and uncontrollable in the domain of language that previously tended to assimilate them.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses a range of poetry and prose narratives from the third to the seventeenth centuries centered on the portrayal of twittering, chirping, screeching, and talking birds as articulate speech. Whereas poetic imagination from the third to the eleventh centuries naturalizes

"speaking" avian voices of birds like owls, cuckoos, and pelicans by means of anthropomorphism, later literary representations of parrots and mynah birds reflect a heightened awareness of the discrepancy between avian and human speech. By focusing on conversations between human beings and talking birds, several tales produced in the seventeenth century show that avian speech's exteriority—qualities that allow the speaking voice to make a sonic impression on a listener—and interiority—the thoughts and feelings that make the voice meaningful—do not form a unity as seamless as in human speech. Taken as a whole, these birds ask their human readers to imagine speech as something surprisingly unfamiliar.

Communication rarely proceeds according to an ideal scenario; the connections among words, the voice that utters them, and the mind from which they originate can break down in unexpected ways. John Durham Peters sees such a moment of breakdown as a time that makes a media theory possible: "It is one of the central claims of philosophical phenomenology and its many branches that the normal or natural or unnoticed background becomes visible only in a time of crisis or breakdown. Media usually stay in the middle or the background until they are disturbed, at times by analysis, in which case they become objects of theory and practice."[84] Words may obscure rather than illuminate the poet's intent, and a speaking voice may not be fully intelligible. The literary portrayals of talking birds foreground malfunctioning verbal communication, while poetics revolving around the idea that poetry speaks one's intent precludes "mistakes" as such. What I propose here is not only a shift of perspective—paying closer attention to the medium of a communication than to the content of the communication—but also an understanding that a speaking voice's expressive function should be examined separately from its communicative function. To have a speaking voice is not necessarily to activate an outlet for one's interiority and subjectivity. Instead, one's speaking

[84] John Durham Peters, "The Media of Breathing," in Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson eds., *Atmospheres of Breathing*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), 180.

voice might have nothing to do with one's individuality—it could mean nothing more than playing a role in enabling a network of communication. This understanding is inspired by the distinction between language for enabling communication and language for conveying consciousness proposed by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann and extended by the literary theorist Cary Wolfe to reflect on forms of posthumanist communication.[85] Hearing these loquacious nonhuman voices and observing the conditions under which they become intelligible would make us stop taking language for granted and treating it as transparent.

A talking bird presents one such opportunity for us to unlearn our human voices. The avian voice turns naturalized elements of communication into things that are unfamiliar and opaque to human speakers. It asks us to focus on the opacity of speech and language instead of probing them for interiority. Nonhuman speech therefore reveals the limitations of the anthropocentric way we use language to communicate. Through the avian voices, we sense that speaking is an inherently acousmatic action. What we perceive as intelligible speech partly results from our own willingness to conflate the effect with the source of what we hear by involuntarily projecting anthropocentric, idealized notions of what a voice is. Alterity is at the heart of the act of speaking, which sometimes makes the familiar question "Who is speaking?" impossible to answer. Acknowledging the alterity of speaking and exploring the gap among a speaker, a listener, and speech and the gap between the voice and the body would be one of the first steps toward a poetics of the voice that upends human assumptions about what speech is for.

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[85] Wolfe proposes that "what is needed, then, is a theory of language that takes account of the fundamental *difference* between the psychological and the communicational dimensions, even as we need to be able to explain their obvious interactions and interrelations in and through language." See Cary Wolfe, "Language," in W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen eds., *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 237. For a detailed review of Niklas Luhmann's proposition for disarticulating consciousness and communication and the resonance of this idea in Jacques Derrida's critique of phenomenology, see Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010): 20–29.

CODA

The three types of alternative voices examined in this dissertation share one feature: they are noisy, literally and metaphorically. As sounds that constantly generate excess by disrupting standard notions of voice, body, and *yan*, they manifest a transgressive and creatively deconstructive quality. By telling stories about these voices, my dissertation closely examines the literary conditions that allow them to sound strange, transgressive, and even subversive without enlisting the concept of noise. Like the concept of voice, noise is another analytical category that does not have a counterpart in premodern China. But the noisy features of whistling, *kouji*, and talking birds offer fresh perspectives on how we can think with noise.

There has been a rise of interest in noise among theorists and scholars in recent years, especially in the studies of literary modernism and avant-garde artistic forms, for the many productively deconstructive and transgressive potentials that noise embodies as a theoretical concept. On this aspect of the concept, Jacques Attali has offered a powerful examination of noise as a symptom of institutionalized control—by means of regulation, repression, and exclusion—in a capitalist society.[1] Attali suggests that his work is not an interdisciplinary research on noise but rather "a call to theoretical indiscipline, with an ear to sound matter as the herald of society."[2] This proposition reflects an understanding that noise is not merely a theme or an object for theorization but an interpretive framework in itself. Attali indicates that to study noise is also to take it as a metaphor for the messy structures, blurry borderlines, and understudied forms of friction between the obvious and the unobvious and between the dominant and the marginal.

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[1] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 3–20.
[2] Attali, 5.

As Marie Thompson points out in her recently published book that reconceptualizes noise, noise has been discussed mainly by means of two approaches—an object-oriented one and a subject-oriented one—each of which has strengths as well as shortcomings. Whereas an object-oriented definition of noise tends to isolate noise from the process of the listener's perception and other social and psychological factors that influence how a certain sound is received, a subject-oriented definition of noise tends to produce an endless list of relativist understandings that make the concept even more vague. At the same time, both approaches are usually used to assign negative connotations to the notion of noise, turning it into a trope for aesthetically unpleasant, socially detrimental, and semantically ambiguous things. Drawing from affect theory, Thompson proposes a relational, ethico-affective approach to extend the open-endedness and the sensitivity toward ambiguity characteristic of the subject-oriented approach and the technical consistency with regard to the definition of noise of the object-oriented approach and to consider the potential of noise to be a productive and generative concept.[3]

Extrapolating from the Chinese texts I have discussed here, the human voice is a borderline between usually demarcated territories rather than a stable thing with intrinsic value. The very notion of voice is produced by the process of mediation rather than a thing that exists prior to or independently of an act of communication. "Sound would start to resemble the vocalization that we make out of it," says Michel Chion.[4] Echoing Chion, I contend that only through interaction with other voices and human assumptions about what they are does a voice become something meaningful. My approach to the concept of the voice is sympathetic with Attali's approach to noise. I consider the human voice as something caught up between a concrete thing and a metaphor—it is

[3] Marie Thmopson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 13–14.
[4] Michel Chion, *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 51.

a site where the line between the sonic aspects and metaphorical associations of the voice is constantly troubled.

Proceeding from this understanding, the notion of the voice implies a listener, whose reaction to it reveals not so much the voice's distinctiveness from other types of sound as a sense of incommensurability. By foregrounding the friction between voice and *yan* and the process through which this interplay displaces boundaries among mere sound, speech, and noise in the ears of human listeners, my discussion resonates with Thompson's analysis of noise. The noisy quality of whistling, *kouji*, and talking birds is a generative and creative resource that persistently inspired their premodern Chinese literary authors. Lending an ear to these voices allows readers to reassess their own assumptions of what counts as a meaningful form of communication and to realize that a voice can be simultaneously meaningful, desirable, and disruptive.

The rest of the conclusion will examine two Chinese texts, written over a millennium apart, both of which take a taxonomical approach to analyzing noise. I arranged this unlikely dialogue to point to other directions that foregrounding the noisy aspects of a human voice can take us. Even though the earlier of these two texts resonates more closely with the majority of the literary texts analyzed in this dissertation, I will begin by examining the later one; this sets up a contrast that does not so much reiterate the discrepancy between premodern and modern conceptual frameworks as it highlights undertheorized aspects of the concept of noise relevant to the discussion of the human voice.

In 1922, the psychologist Zhang Yaoxiang 張耀翔 published an article titled "Zayin" 雜音 ("Noisy Sounds") in *Psychology* 心理, a journal he had created earlier that year. Zhang had just returned to China and started teaching at the Beijing Advanced Normal School (now Beijing Normal University) after five years of studying in the United States where he received a M.A. degree in psychology from Columbia University in 1919. In the article, Zhang proposed a quantitative

approach to analyzing noise (*zayin* 雜音), using premodern Chinese texts, especially poetry from antiquity to the medieval periods, as his conceptual laboratory. According to Zhang, whereas there exist around 11,000 types of aurally discrete musical sound that are discussed in technical texts, there are around 550 types of noise that are not analyzed in any Chinese or Western books. This article was intended to fill in this gap. For Zhang, although his focus was the Chinese language, the lack of positive understanding of noise was both universal and culturally specific.

Zhang's article was among several projects of statistical analysis he launched in the 1920s in response to Liang Qichao's proposition that Chinese language, literature, and culture should be examined as information networks, as Anatoly Detwyler has pointed out in an investigation of the early history of conceptions of information produced by Republican-era intellectuals, psychologists, and artists.[5] In addition to analyzing noise, Zhang also conducted statistical research on the role of sight 色 and emotion, among other sensory aspects of Chinese literature that have yet to be explored quantitatively. Detwyler observes that Zhang relied on premodern texts as the primary resource for data-mining in these projects due to a practical constraint—the lack of laboratory infrastructure at Chinese universities at that time.[6] In 1924, Zhang initiated a debate that created a rippling effect on a larger scale. Zhang was worried that the excessive use of the exclamation mark in vernacular Chinese poetry, which to his eyes visually resembled arrays of bullets or bacteria, would spread passivity and pessimism and harm the national ethos, a position that Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), one of the most radical and influential writers from the Republican era, ridiculed.[7] In contrast, Zhang's other projects

[5] Anatoly Detwyler, "The Aesthetics of Information in Modern Chinese Literary Culture, 1919–1949," PhD diss., (Columbia University, 2015), 29.
[6] Detwyler, 60.
[7] For a careful examination of this debate and the conflicting opinions and approaches developed by Zhang and Lu Xun to using the exclamation point, see Xiaoyu Xia, "Exclamation Points and Elliptical Hope," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2020), 205–15.

underway in the 1920s have received much less attention perhaps because the arguments he made there are more ambiguous and less catchy. These alternative experiments came to a halt by the late 1920s, when the journal stopped running and Zhang and his colleagues began to invest in fields of psychological research with a more direct impact on programs of social engineering.[8]

Zhang's "Zayin" deserves closer examination since this article made the first attempt in Chinese history to theorize noise as a coherent analytical category. He starts the article with a statement: "'Zayin,' also called 'zaoyin,' is a type of auditory sensation as opposed to 'yueyin' [musical sounds]" 雜音亦名噪音，是聽覺之一種，與樂音對稱.[9] The terms *zayin* 雜音 and *zaoyin* 噪音, which today in modern Chinese unequivocally refer to noise, appear only sporadically in premodern Chinese texts, mainly in phonological scholarship. Zhang is acutely aware of the challenge posed by the asymmetry between music and noise. He cites many examples from premodern Chinese poetry, such as the Tang dynasty poet Yuan Zhen's depiction of the cicada's chirping—which might sound close to melody to someone else's ear—as "screeching clamor" 嘶噪 (*sizao*) , to make the point that musical sound and noise cannot be demarcated in a scientific way. Preemptively countering potential disagreement with his choice to take a literary approach to develop a positivist understanding of noise, Zhang elaborates his reasoning in brackets, saying that poets make unusually sophisticated observations of the senses of sound and sight even though they are not psychologists.[10] Citing several empirical examples, Zhang reinforces the idea that music is not free from accidental noise (such as the screeching sound produced from dragging a bow on an

[8] Detwyler, "The Aesthetics of Information in Modern Chinese Literary Culture," 59–60.
[9] Zhang Yaoxiang, "Zayin" 雜音, *Xinli* 心理 1, no. 2 (1922): 1.
[10] Zhang, 1.

erhu 二胡, a type of bowed instrument with two strings) and that one can discern musical patterns in an unpatterned mundane sound (such as the sound of hammering a nail).[11]

With a nod to the idea that noise poses a categorical challenge, Zhang states that the focus of his article is what he calls "special noise" 特色雜音 rather than noise in general. This "special noise" is onomatopoeia: a type of literary sound transcribed as something unmusical (whether the original sound of which this literary sound serves as a representation is musical or noisy is irrelevant). It is worth pointing out that Zhang treats *xiao* as an onomatopoeia for a tiger's roar; he is also familiar with the tradition of bird speech poetry and cites the rendition of a partridge's call as, "don't go, brother.".[12] (If Zhang were to leaf through my dissertation, he would think that almost all of the unusual voices discussed here—whistling, howling, barking, crowing, neighing, clashing, splattering, crying, twittering, screeching and so on—are special noise.) At the same time, Zhang excludes the types of noise that are mentioned in premodern Chinese texts but not transcribed into onomatopoeias, such the sound of beating laundry. Zhang posits that if a type of noise is not assigned a special adjective after several thousand years of Chinese literary history, it is simply not special. Furthermore, Zhang counts noise based not on its source but its linguistic effect: even though both *fei* 吠 and *yinyin* 狺狺 are textual notations of a dog's barking, they should be understood as two different types of special noise. Based on these criteria, Zhang counts 342 types of special noise specific to the Chinese language, which he divides into twelve sub-categories: 14 types of sound emitted by children, 93 types of sound made by adults, 18 types of sound associated

[11] Zhang, 1. Zhang would later make this observation repeatedly in his book *Ganjue xinli* 感覺心理 (*Psychology of Sensation*) published in 1947. Although when he wrote "Zayin," Zhang was motivated by the goal of classifying and counting something that resists the logic of quantitative investigation, he ended up reaffirming the point that noise poses a challenge to quantitative research in his book two decades later. See Zhang Yaoxiang, *Ganjue xinli* 感覺心理 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1947), 73–77.

[12] Zhang, "Zayin," in *Xinli*, 8.

with a group of people, 58 types of twittering, screeching, and calling of birds, 22 types of vocalization produced by beasts, 13 types of insect chirping, 38 types of sound of water, 16 types of puffing and blowing of wind, 4 types of raining, 8 types of thunder, 35 types of assorted artificially made sound (e.g. engine sound), and 23 types of other sound.[13] Zhang's discussion ends on a nationalistic note: "I don't believe that anyone can find over 340 special adjectives for noise from the literature of another country in the world. I will leave this case open and dare anyone to solve it!" 我不信世上再有第二國文學，其中能尋出三百四十餘種專門形容雜音詞。敢懸此案，請求攻破.[14]

But the article formally ends by quoting a gāthā written by the Song dynasty poet Su Shi:

> If you say the zither's notes reside in the instrument itself,
> When it is laid in its case, why doesn't it still sound?
> If you say the notes reside in the player's fingertips,
> Why can't I hear them from your fingers themselves?[15]
>
> 若言絃上有琴聲，
> 放在匣中何不鳴？
> 若言聲在指頭上，
> 何不予君指上聽？

Unfolding as an extended rhetorical question, this poem suggests that the music of the *qin* is a media problem: it cannot be reduced to the materiality of the musical instrument or the bodily techniques of the musician. Instead, the *qin* sounds as a result of the contact or rather friction between two media—the musical instrument and the musician's fingers. By attaching the poem in place of a conclusion, Zhang seems to invite his readers to read it as an allegory for his method for understanding noise. This poetic and ambiguous gesture is nonetheless in contrast with the

[13] Zhang, "Xinli," 14–15.
[14] Zhang, "Xinli," 15.
[15] The translation is by Ronald Egan, in Qian Zhongshu, trans. Egan, *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 294.

unambiguous statements that Zhang posits in the article, which place the concept of the noise squarely in the category of language—more precisely, a national language. The moment that he stipulates "special noise" as onomatopoeia, he already precludes the possibility of seeing noise for what it is—a thing that exceeds the category of sound.

Zhang's experiment involves a kind of essentialism to which a prince from the Six Dynasties posed an alternative. Much can be gained from this type of anachronistic thinking, as I have shown throughout the dissertation. In this case, the Six Dynasties example would lead us to consider the noisy aspect of the human voice in a different way from how noise is understood in our contemporary world. Chen Shuqi 陳叔齊 (569–608), a younger brother of Chen Shubao 陳叔寶 (553–604)—the last emperor of the short-lived Chen dynasty (also the last of the Six Dynasties), compiled an anthology called *Lai ji* 籟記 (*Record of Piping*). It consists of forty-two short verses that he himself composed in the style of *Chu ci* 楚辭 (*Songs of Chu*) shortly after the end of the Chen dynasty.[16] All the poems have the same formulaic opening: "Mr. Chen hears it and composes the following" 陳子聞而賦之. This rhetorical arrangement allows Chen to cast himself first in the role of a listener and second as an author who composes each verse as a response to each sound that he heard. Chen came up with a taxonomy of sounds as a way of classifying his poems, which looks similar to Zhang's at first but reflects a drastically different conception of noise as well as its relationship with language. Chen groups all forty-two verses into three categories: The Piping of Heaven 天籟, the Piping of Man 人籟, and the Piping of Earth 地籟—an unmistakable adaptation

[16] This style, which had a significant influence in the development of *fu*, originated from the work of the ancient poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340–278 BCE), which is known for its sorrowful tone conveyed with or without a specified first-person speaking voice. Chen considered his poetry an extension of the *maixiu zhiyin* 麥秀之音 (songs of blooming wheat crops)—poetry and songs that memorialize fallen countries—and that of Qu's *Li Sao* 離騷.

of Zhuangzi's Three Pipings. The verses in the first category focus on portraying environmental sounds, such as that of whistling wind, thunder, and rain. The second category features verses composed on sounds of human activity, ranging from the nonlinguistic, such as weaving, laundry-beating (a type of noise that Zhang deemed insignificant), sighing, and wailing, to the linguistic, such as singing. The last category foregrounds the sounds of animals, including birds and cicadas.

What makes Chen's anthology unusual is the way the forty-two verses are organized not to foreground the style or content of the poems but to embody a conceptualization of a poet's voice as the result of his or her listening. This conception of the human voice is fully summed up in his preface, which begins with the following words:

> The beginning of all things had neither sound nor scent. As soon as the opposing *qi* are divided, things are prompted to breathe. There is therefore sun in the sky and the advent of winds and thunders. As the movement of things formed patterns, the twelve pipes came into existence. The human being is akin to the pivot of the Way. So when one's ear is touched (from the exterior), as one listens to an empty vessel, one hears pounding waves; as one talks to an empty mountain, one receives echoes from the valley.
>
> 夫一元上始無聲臭也。二氣方析，斯喘動哉。是以乾坤晝而風雷至，往復定而律呂存。人肖玄樞，耳為感際，故聆虛器則潮震，語空山則谷應。[17]

At first glance, this opening appears to rehearse the origin story of sound in the same vein as correlative cosmology and Zhuangzi's theory. Arising from otherwise hollow bodies (which act similarly to the Piping of Earth), a sound is not innately meaningful but is a process of resonance produced by cosmological movement. But it is noteworthy that Chen uses this understanding of sound to emphasize the role of one's ear. This passage indicates that listening is a generative process through which latent resonances between different sounding bodies materialize. Chen concludes the opening section by reiterating that all sounds arise because of the movement of *qi* (breath).
He reflects on the role of listening as the following:

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[17] Chen Shuqi, *Lai ji* 籟記, in Zhou Lüjing 周履靖, *Yimen guangdu* 夷門廣牘 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1940), 4:1a.

> The ancient people said: music is one, but those who are happy hear it and feel happy, while those who are sad hear it and feel sad.
>
> 古人云：樂，一也。喜者聽之喜，悲者聽之悲。豈靈造之變更，亦人心之遷適也。[18]

This citation recalls one of the main theses in "Sheng wu aile lun" 聲無哀樂論 ("Music is without Sadness or Joy"), a philosophical treatise written by the third-century musician and scholar-official Ji Kang 嵇康 (223–263), a close friend of Ruan Ji's, who died as a victim of political conflict.[19] If we juxtapose Chen's personal experience with his conception of listening as the means of animating an authorial voice, it becomes clear that Chen seeks to explain one particular feedback loop: affected by his saddened heart, his own listening is the reason that his poetry appears excessively sad. But Chen shares this revelation not because he feels that he owes an apology to his readers for deviating from the proper way of composing poetry. Chen specifies his intended audience as people who share his sufferings, stating that "I dare not to speak with gentlemen with well-balanced minds" 非敢語于中和之君子矣.[20] The gentleman with a well-balanced mind refers to the ideal image of what a sage person should be in the Confucian classics. Such a gentleman would constantly cultivate himself to attain a peaceful and virtuous state of mind, which subsequently would allow him to cast positive influence on people around him. Chen is aware that his poetry would be regarded as excessively sentimental and socially detrimental from the perspective of the Confucian discourse, which prioritizes poetry as a means of effectuating a moral program and shaping harmonious interpersonal relationships within a society.

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[18] Chen, *Lai ji*, 1b.
[19] Written in the form of a debate between two eloquent speakers on the topic of whether emotion is intrinsic to or independent from music, Ji's treatise sums up a range of conflicting opinions on the social functions of sound developed within different schools of thought. For Ji's treatise, see Dai Mingyang 戴明揚, *Ji Kang ji jiaozhu* 《嵇康集》校註 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962), 196–232.
[20] Chen, *Lai ji*, 1b.

Instead, what Chen sees as the point of inscribing a personal voice with his poetry is the following: lending an ear to someone or something else's voice is the prerequisite for him to lay bare his own heart. Whereas Zhuangzi uses the Three Pipings to animate a radical vision where *yan* is destabilized and dismissed, Chen triangulates sound, words, and poetry in order to explore an alternative means of conveying one's interiority through *yan*. In this way, Chen not only extends Zhuangzi's theory but also transforms the ancient thinker's deconstructive approach into a generative one. Chen places himself in a role somewhere between a transcriber or a collector and an author. Although most of the poems in the anthology are imbued with melancholic imagery and allusions to tragic historical events, the sad feelings they embody seem generic and do not trace back to any individual subject. We cannot tell where Chen's own sadness begins or ends. Even in a line from a poem called "Xiangdi" 巷笛 ("Flute-playing in Alleys"), which unequivocally expresses nostalgia for a fallen regime, we cannot tell whether the speaking voice belongs to the poet or someone or something else: "facing the sorrowful winds and gazing out in sadness, missing the country that was, anguish overflows" 臨悲風而悵望兮，懷故國以多憂. The poet's ear displaces his voice as the primary means of composing poetry and revealing his own mind. Listening allows the poet to connect with manifold human and nonhuman bodies that are capable of simulating sad feelings on their own. Chen's personal sentiment in turn dissolves in the collective expression of melancholy, joined by winds announcing seasonal change, leaves falling from branches, bells signaling the advent of the night, another person's sighing, and manifold other sounds that pass for voices with emotions.

In this way, Chen turns literature into a medium for listening to a collective ensemble of meaning-laden voices that might resonate with his own sentiments but carry broader significance than what he projected onto them. In this model, self-expression is achieved in the form of literal and metaphorical echoing, echoing that acts as a sonic mechanism as well as a way of giving and

receiving sympathy. Perhaps the prince found true sympathy by hearing other voices that channel his private agony.

This conception of the personal voice of an author destabilizes the boundary between the individual and the collective, the human and the nonhuman, and the vocal apparatus and the ear, which resonates with many other theoretical insights on alternative aspects of the human voice contained in literature from the third to the seventeenth centuries. While these ideas contribute to an alternative theory of the human voice from premodern China, it is not a theory in a singular sense but rather a cacophony. Some parts of it are not articulated or even rendered in words. Despite my effort to draw attention to its patterns, it stays unruly and noisy. It persistently asks us to listen and to think again whether we actually understand our own voices. Just like the Zhuangzian Three Pipings, this alternative theory continues to inspire echoes from unexpected or unlikely sources. Anything to which you are willing to lend an ear becomes a voice.

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APPENDIX I

Translation of Pan Zhiheng's "Su the Tonguemaster" 蘇舌師

The blind man Su was a native of the eastern district in Beijing. He could not see anything with his eyes, but he mastered all types of cleverness related to the tongue. Not a day went by when he was not invited by the noblemen in the capital. Among his skills, one-tenth was presented before an audience while nine-tenths were deployed behind the audience's back. The one-tenth were things he [as well as others] was able to do, and the nine-tenths were things only he could do. Playing stringed instruments and singing to convey his feelings fully was the one-tenth that he would perform before an audience. [But] if you shut him in a room and lean against the wall to listen: it is sometimes as if you are wandering in a forest, with hundreds of birds warbling; sometimes it is as if you are touring in a huge garden, with cows mooing and horses neighing. Sometimes it is as if you are caught up in a noisy city, with roosters crowing and dogs barking and children crying; [sometimes it is as if you witness [scoundrels fighting, caught up in passing wheels and horse hooves that run tumultuously and raise dust in the air. The skills that cause a sensation and shock the audience belong to the nine-tenths that he did behind the audience's back. A listener said: "Is this the upper limit of your skill? Can you see things with your tongue? By taking a look at your tongue, I can tell that you are a descendant of the Qin empire."[1] Su the blind master responded: "The old Qin empire used the tongue to connect six kingdoms, they accomplished this just by using the tongue. How can I do that? When I sit inside a room, it is as if there are no walls, and from the heaven to the earth, there is nothing that I cannot transmit and imitate with my body. Little by little, turning into a rooster, I start crowing: and then a flock of birds takes flight, and suddenly I grow ten thousand wings; little by little, turning into a horse, I start neighing: and then a herd of horses gallops by, and suddenly I run with ten thousand hooves. I imitate an official, a patrolling guard, a substitute soldier,[2] or sounds of day and night, mixing everything to produce sounds.[3] I listen to all of the sounds as if they were one sound, and I master the one [sound] and shut my beak. If people listen to me, in the end one voice becomes ten thousand. As for the wind that produces ten thousand sounds out of the holes in the ground, does it use ten thousand ways to make those sounds?[4] This is how I use my tongue: my entire body is the tongue; my five sense organs are the tongue; and even a single hair or a single pore of mine is the tongue. I become unaware of either my tongue or my body; only then do I achieve this skill. I use my thought to accomplish my skill; it is not that my tongue is wise, but rather that I attain wisdom through my tongue. Attaining wisdom through my tongue means simply that I do not let my tongue bring harm to my body, but rather that I use my tongue to nourish my life. If the tongue from the Qin survives, it is just enough to harm one's life, which is what I don't do. I'm quite delighted that I cannot see anything. If I were given the ability to see, how could I perfect my skill?" The guest said: "Great." Since then, people address [Su] as the Master of the Tongue.

蘇瞽，北京東院人。雙目無見，而舌根之慧，無所不通，長安貴人延請無虛日。其技面陳者十一而背聘者十九；一所能也，九所絕也。彈絃奏肉，曲盡其情，此面陳之一也。閉之室，倚壁而聽之：忽若游茂林而白鳥哢音也，忽若閱大苑而牛馬嘶風也。忽若臨市塵而雞

[1] The listener refers to the strategists working for the Qin empire.
[2] A substitute soldier is someone who receives money to serve in the army in place of the payer.
[3] This sentence borrows from a line from Zhuangzi's "Da zongshi."
[4] This idea alludes to Zhuangzi's Three Pipings.

鳴犬吠，兒女啼號；猾豪爭鬨，輪蹄夾擊，雜沓奔馳，囂起氛上；若震一方而驚四座，此背聘之九也。客曰：“子技至此乎？子將以舌視乎？吾視子舌，知為秦之苗裔矣。”蘇瞽曰：“祖秦以舌連六國，此徒用舌者也，余則安能？吾之坐一室也，芒乎若無四隅，俯仰縱橫，莫不能以身傳而象之。浸假而鳴，群飛而翔。忽生萬翼，浸假而嘶，羣逸而奔。忽驟萬蹄，為官長，為邏卒，為踐更，為晝為夜，雜而成聲。吾聽之若一，吾執一而合喙，眾之聽之，遂以一而為萬矣。彼吹萬也，孰萬使之哉！吾所以用舌者：四體，舌也。五官，舌也。一毛一竅，皆舌也。吾不知有吾舌，亦不知有吾身，而後能成此技也。成之，以想者也，非舌慧也，通乎慧也。通乎慧者，舌不能為身殃，吾以舌養吾生耳。秦之舌存，適足以戕其生，吾不為也。且吾甚樂乎其無視也。令予有目，且得通乎技哉？”客曰：“善”。遂稱為舌師。

APPENDIX II

Translation of Pan Zhiheng's "Daoist Ma's Music of the Hands" 馬手樂

Daoist Ma lived at a shrine in Huliu. He imitated the music of the orchestra in the big cities, and made smaller musical instruments from bamboo, wood, metal, and leather to mark the beat. The sounds they made were disconnected and uneven, as scattered as wind and rain and as disordered as grass and weeds. They were called "The Ten Brocades." They produced harmony by freely mixing one note with another, with no individual note following another. So they were also called "The Ten Reversals." Ma said: "Why must music be made with an instrument? The way that Cook Ding in the past butchered an ox fits the rhythm of the Mulberry Forest Dance.[1] Why must one distinguish between sounds in the kingdom of body language? If I extend both of my arms, there are [the differences between] palms and fists, backs and fronts, fingers and joints, bones and flesh, plucking and pressing, the bent and the stretched. As for what I touch alternately with lightness or with pressure, hastily or slowly, there are the differences between the thick and the thin, the supple and the brittle, the firm and the shrinking. The number of sounds reaches more than one hundred. How could there be only ten of them!" Ma then played the music [for the audience]. He marked the beat with his tongue; in addition to that his lips, teeth and cheeks all harmonized with it. The listeners could not fully comprehend all the variations.

> The Historian of Expansiveness comments: Now I know a singular sound is connected with myriad sounds. How can one say that silk is inferior to bamboo, and bamboo is inferior to flesh,[2] or that *gong* cannot be *shang*, and *shang* cannot be *yu*! *Lü's Examinations*[3] said: "One's heart is not one's arm, and one's arm is not a drumstick…."[4] Someone who has their heart reach the rest of their body can make even wood and stone respond to them; how much the more if someone knows how to make use of their arms without any musical instruments at all? Therefore, I say: From the Music of the Hands I understand the minuteness of "The Ten Brocades" and the tininess of "The Ten Reversals." Who is able to talk with his body so that I could talk to him with my hands? Who is able to butcher an ox, so that I could analyze sound with him?

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[1] It is a type of dance performed in early Chinese ritual ceremonies for paying respect to the ancestors.

[2] The flesh alludes to the voice; silk refers to stringed instruments, and bamboo refers to bamboo flutes, as in the case of a famous conversation between the general Huan Wen and his aide Meng Jia documented in *A New Account of Tales of the World*. Huan asks: "When I'm listening to performers, silk is inferior to bamboo, and bamboo is inferior to flesh. Why would that be?" Meng replies: "Because in each case you're getting closer to what's natural." Translation by Judith Zeitlin with modifications. See Zeitlin, "From the Natural to the Instrumental," in Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin eds., *The Voice as Something More: Essays toward Materiality*, 59.

[3] More commonly known as *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals* 呂氏春秋, this text is a late Warring States collection of treatises on politics compiled in around 241 BCE.

[4] The quote leaves out the final phrase: "yet, still one can make wood and stone [musical instruments] respond."

馬道士，居虎瘳之神祠。仿郡城之戲樂，用竹、木、金、革之小器而節其音。其音斷續不齊，雜如風雨，亂如蓬麻，名曰“十錦”。間錯成韻，各不相沿，亦曰“十反”。馬之言曰：“樂，奚以器為哉？昔庖丁解牛，乃合桑林之舞。形語之國，奚必殊音？自吾舒雙臂，有掌有拳，有背有面，有指有節，有骨有肉，有抑有按，有屈有伸，而輕重疾徐間之所觸，亦有厚薄、柔脆、堅衄之異，數之至百且溢，豈惟十哉！”於是為一奏。而節之以舌，惟唇齒頰輔咸和焉，聽者莫能盡其變。

亙史曰：吾今而知一音之通眾音也。何絲之不可竹，竹之不可肉，宮之不可商，商之不可羽哉！《呂覽》曰：心非臂也，臂非椎、非石也。心之所通，而木石應之，況能運臂者乎？故曰：吾于手樂而知錦之細、反之微也，孰能形語者而與之手語？孰能解牛者而與之解音哉？