GU TANG SHIGUI AND
THE MAKING OF COMMENTED POETRY ANTHOLOGIES
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CHINA

BY

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DISSERTATION
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in East Asian Languages and Cultures in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

This study is intended to explore the reasons for the great impact of *Gu Tang Shigui* in the seventeenth century China through examining this poetry anthology from the perspective of *pingdian* style commentary. I argue that *Gu Tang Shigui* is not merely an academic anthology in which the Jingling’s poetic ideal was fully represented. It is also a poetry anthology deliberately compiled to meet the educational needs and satisfy the cultural pursuit of the majority of the readers in the late Ming society.

Chapter one demonstrates that the successful publication and circulation of *Gu Tang Shigui* was fundamental to establishing the reputation of the Jingling School. Even though this anthology was severely criticized after the Ming fell, the scholars’ criticisms also ironically show the deep and far-reaching influence this anthology had been.

Chapter two explores the genesis and developments of *pingdian* style commentary in history. I demonstrate that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun devoted almost all their energy to *Shigui* project, but the *pingdian* form that they chose for *Shigui* was not a good literary criticism form in their contemporary scholars’ opinions. By examining *pingdian* form in history, I argue that *pingdian* form combines the features of proofreading marks, textual scholarship, and literary criticism, and eventually evolves into a unique form of practical criticism: full exploitation of margin space, multiple-angle examination of major text, and close interaction with texts and readers.

Chapter three explores the reasons Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun chose *pingdian* form instead of *shihua* form. I contend that Zhong and Tan deliberately chose
pingdian form to achieve their two major goals: theoretic expression and educational function. Zhong and Tan’s writing style of commentaries matched the unique features of pingdian form and served well its educational purpose. Therefore, pingdian style commentaries became one of the key factors that resulted in Shiguī’s well reception among the late Ming readers.

Chapter four investigates the multiple roles and approaches of a compiler of commented poetry anthology. I maintain that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun clearly knew a compiler’s dual roles. They never downplayed their role as a reader. Instead, they highlighted their reading experiences in poetry learning and always liked to share what they read and how they read in commentaries. Meanwhile, they associated their reading experiences closely with the cultural concepts in the late Ming society.

The dissertation concludes by putting Shiguī and the pingdian form into a larger historical context. And the tendency of writing pingdian form in the Qing also proves the great value of pingdian form in terms of education.
Acknowledgements

It is very hard to express in words my gratitude to Professor Zong-qi Cai, my advisor at University of Illinois. An extraordinary intellectual, Professor Cai encouraged me constantly and provided the best guidance during my study in Illinois. His care and generosity made my life away from my family an easier one.

My sincere thanks to the other two professors, Rania Huntington and Kai-wing Chow whose courses I took in the early years at University of Illinois have greatly enriched my knowledge and inspired my further research. And their valuable comments on my project greatly helped shape my final arguments. Thanks also goes to Professor Ruppert, whose kindness and consideration during my whole graduate experiences always made me feel so warm.

I am also very grateful to my mentors at Peking University, Professor Zhang Shaokang, and especially Professor Zhang Jian, my M.A. advisor. They guided me into the academic world and taught me how to build a solid foundation of my own research. Without their guidance, I could hardly further my research to that far.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends at both Peking University and University of Illinois. I specially thank Liu Qinghai, my best friend in Mainland China, who offered great help in checking first hand resources for me. Special thanks also go to E Li and Tonglu Li, my colleagues at UIUC, who read my dissertation and provided many valuable comments and suggestions in how to improve this project.

Thanks also go to the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at UIUC, who support for my study in UIUC.
I would like to thank my parents. My father Cui Yonghui and my mother Wang Xiuman began to teach me how to become a sincere, kind, and responsible person since I was a little child. Although my father passed away three years ago, his words would be always memorized deeply in my heart.

At last, thanks goes to my husband Kunlun Liu. Thanks for your love, care, and support, and most for the beautiful accomplishment of our lives, our sons Shawn and Daniel. You make my life complete, and you are my life. My Heart will always go with you.
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Introduction

It is known that the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) witnesses the rise and decline of many literary schools, propelled by an enduring debate about literary creativity. What is the most crucial factor for the creation of a great poem? Should a poet’s top priority be to express his spontaneous feelings or to excel in poetic form and style?

Figuring prominently in this debate are four literary schools: the Former Seven Masters 前七子, the Latter Seven Masters 后七子, the Gong’an School 公安派, and the Jingling School 竟陵派. Both the Former Seven Masters and the Latter Seven Masters of the mid-Ming favored the classical styles and forms of poetry, especially those of the Tang poetry. Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1472-1529), the leading figure of the Former Seven Masters, even claimed that “[perfect] poetry must be that of the High Tang 詩必盛唐.”¹ They vehemently advocated emulating poetic models from the past. So the Seven Masters are often labeled as the “returning to the ancients” schools 復古派 (fugu).

Several decades later, the Gong’an School and the Jingling School successively appeared in Hubei Province. These two schools relentlessly attacked the theoretical stance and poetic practices of the Seven Masters schools, raising the clarion call of writing about one’s true feelings and experience. These two schools are often mentioned together as the two most influential anti-fugu schools in the late Ming.

However, this traditional conflation of the Gong’an School and the Jingling School is disputed by Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910-1998). After reviewing a great many

works of literature in the seventeenth century, Qian concludes that the Gong’an School was never powerful enough to challenge the dominant position of the Seven Masters and that it was the Jingling School that played the important role in neutralizing the Seven Masters’ impact on the late Ming literary circles. He writes:

When later generations talked of the Ming poetry, they always regarded the Gong’an School, the Jingling School, and the Former-Latter Seven Masters as the tripartite confrontation, and following one another. I examined the poets’ (discussions) in the late Ming and the early Qing, and found that the Jingling School and the Seven Masters were the two to contend against each other, but the Gong’an School was not strong enough to match them.

後世論明詩，每以公安，竟陵與前後七子鼎立驂靳；余覽明清之交詩家，則竟陵與七子體兩大爭雄，公安無足比較。²

Qian’s conclusion seems contrary to the discussions of most of the early Qing scholars who tended to list the Seven Masters, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610), the leader of the Gong’an School, Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574–1625), and Tan Yuanchun 譚元春 (1586–1637) as the towering figures of Ming poetry and poetics. However, a literary

school’s ability to compete with other schools may be assessed from two perspectives: the quality of its theoretical discourse and poetic practice and the impact it has produced on the literary circles or even the entire society. When we examine both schools in term of poetic practice, the Gong’an School and the Jingling School indeed both originated from Hubei province and successively became the leading schools in the literary circles of the late Ming because of the development of their unique poetic styles, namely Gong’an ti 公安體 (Gong’an style) for the Gong’an School and Jingling ti 競陵體 (Jingling style) for the Jingling School. While considering the impact that both schools produced in the literary circles or in the late Ming society, Qian no doubt correctly observes the disparity between the two schools. Then what factors resulted in the much more distinguished influence of the Jingling School in the late Ming and the early Qing?

Gu Tang Shigui 古唐詩歸(Repository of Ancient and Tang Poetry; hereafter Shigui), a 51 juan-poetry anthology with a large number of pingdian style commentaries appended, was instrumental in establishing the reputation of the Jingling School.

Shigui is a unique anthology. Its impact was overwhelming and enduring in the seventeenth century China. During the first three decades of its publication, it was well

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3 There are three different terms used to identify the Jingling writing styles, namely “Jingling ti” 競陵體, “Zhong-Tan ti” 鍾譚體, and “Zhong Bojing ti” 鍾伯敬體. “Jingling ti” has been used frequently to summarize the general writing style of the Jingling School’s. For example, it appeared in Zhong Xing’s biographic note in the History of the Ming Dynasty 明史 (Chapter 288). “Zhong-Tan ti” 鍾譚體 was first used by Qian Qianyi in the Liechao shiji xiaozhuan 列朝詩集小傳 (Biographies of the Ming Poets). This term emphasized the great influence of the two leaders of the Jingling School in the late Ming society. “Zhong Bojing ti” appeared first in Zhong Xing’s own narrative. In “Pan Zhigong shixu”潘秩恭詩序 (Preface to Pan Zhigong’s Poetry), Zhong Xing mentioned that there were “people imitating his writing style” 擬鍾伯敬體者. This term is mainly used to indicate Zhong Xing’s personal writing style.

received. The selections of poems fascinated the late Ming readers. The poetic ideal and aesthetic thoughts expressed in this anthology had been echoed by the literate people from all over the country.  

5 Shigui’s format, namely commented poetry anthology, had been adopted then by many scholars in their own poetic anthology projects.  

The fall of the Ming dynasty soon ended Shigui’s popularity, but its influence had not gone together with the fallen dynasty. In the following decades, Shigui was still one of the most frequently discussed poetry anthologies in literary circles. However, the previous compliments changed to blames and attacks. The features favored by the late Ming readers had also been regarded as trash by the early Qing scholars. It seems that only after thoroughly denying Shigui’s value could the Qing scholars begin to rebuild a new model of poetic criticism. This momentous trend of attacking Shigui from a different side demonstrates the deep and wide influence of this anthology in the early Qing.

Criticisms of the Jingling School in the Early Twenty Century

The diametrically opposed opinions in the discourse upon the Jingling school no doubts called Shigui’s quality and influence into question: is this commented poetry

5 “After Shigui came out, … Cai Fuyi and etc.in Fujian province fell in this work and followed the Jingling School; Zhang Ze, Hua Shu and some other Wu people also heard the sound and echoed the Jingling School. They all respect the Jingling words as the principles.” Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊. Jingzhiju shihua 靜志居詩話 (Remarks on Poetry in Jingzhi House) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 502−503.

6 Although the genre commented poetry anthology appeared much early before Shigui, most scholars of poetry study would prefer using other genre, such as remarks on poetry (shihua 詩話). However, after Shigui made an overwhelming influence in the late Ming, many great scholars, such as Qian Qianyi, Wang Fuzhi, and She Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1769) etc. also began to publish the similar commented poetry anthologies although they still thought that it is a prestigious genre for poetry. Please read Chapter Two for detailed analysis on this genre’s development after the Song dynasty.
anthology a great contribution to Chinese literary criticisms or a poorly-done work that does not deserve any attention at all? What is the relationship between its questionable quality and its overwhelming influence? What kind of role did Shigui play in both the literary world and the society of the seventeenth century China?

Unfortunately, these issues attracted little attention after the mid-eighteenth century since all the works of the Jingling school had been banned in the Qianlong Regin. It was not until the Qing fell that the Jingling school had reentered the field of literary study. As Chen Guanghong pointed out in his comprehensive work A Study of the Jingling School, thanks to the advocating of the late Ming literature, during the May Forth New Culture period, the Jingling school was again brought to the scholars’ attention. Essays on the Jingling Schools appeared and some Jingling scholars’ works had been republished during this period. However, the scholars mainly regarded the Jingling school as a main follower of the Gong’an School. 7 It was Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 (1893–1984) who first truly valued the Jingling school’s independent contribution to the late Ming literature and literary criticisms.

In the History of Chinese Literary Criticism, Guo Shaoyu used a special section to discuss the Jingling school, including a brief summary of Zhong Xing’s and Tan Yuanchun’s major poetic ideas, the discussion of attacks on the Jingling schools made by the early Qing scholars, and the analysis of the differences between the Gong’an school

7 In Jinglingpai yanjiu 竟陵派研究，Chen Gonghong explains that the May-Fourth scholars did not give full attention to the study of the Jingling school for three reasons: first, they mainly place the Jingling school as a subsidiary of the Gong’an school; second, their studies focus only on the Gong’an and the Jingling’s essay instead of poetry and literary criticisms; third, although the May-Fourth scholars advocated the late Ming literature, they might do it not from a literary perspective. Chen Guanghong, Jinglingpai yanjiu 竟陵派研究, pp. 2–5.
and the Jingling school in terms of poetic criticisms and literary creation. By doing so, Guo intended to reevaluate the Jingling school from a fair academic angel. This ten-page section for the first time confirmed an independent position of the Jingling School in the history of the Chinese literary criticism.

Interestingly, Guo Shaoyu did not vigorously praise either the Jingling style or the Jingling poetic criticism while examining the Jingling School and the later generations’ attacks. Instead, he managed to explain the major contribution and the major problem of the Jingling school in rather an objective fashion:

We know the theory that *ling* (spirit) reverts to *hou* (depth), and thus know the Jingling style. It is not appropriate to see the Jingling theory only as low grade thoughts. The difficulty to approach the ancient poetry lies above. The reason for Zhong and Tan to be denounced is because they were not able to reach the level they advocated. … What could they do then?

知靈歸于厚之說，則知“竟陵”作風，未可便以小品目之了。古人之詩所以難於入手，即在這上面；鍾、譚之

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8 Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Zhongguo wenxue pipingshi* 中國文學批評史 (*The History of Chinese Literary Criticisms*) (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 249–258. In this section, Guo points out that the builders of a literary school have often been regarded as heroes while they are blamed for the mistakes. The Jingling school also suffered the same situation.
所以為人詬病，又因為不曾做到這一層。...這真是沒

辦法的事。⁹

*Ling* and *hou* are two fundamental terms of the Jingling poetic theory. ¹⁰ Here, Guo confirms that this theory of the Jingling school is comprehensive and should be regarded as a masterful work. However, Zhong and Tan’s practice in literary criticism and literary creation simplified their theory, which eventually proved detrimental to their reputation in the history of Chinese literature. Although the Jingling scholars knew their weaknesses, they did not show a talent for fixing the problems.

Guo Shaoyu’s summary on the Jingling School no doubt made a breakthrough in the Ming literature and literary criticism study. However, his incisive comments on the three perspectives of the Jingling practices had not been well followed by the later scholars. Either was his rather objective view on both the Jingling School and its attackers in the early Qing.

Qian Zhongshu is another important scholar who made important remarks on the Jingling school in the 1940s. Different from Guo Shaoyu who examined the significance of the Jingling poetic theory in general, Qian Zhongshu sorted out a large quantity of remarks on the Jingling school made by the seventeenth century scholars and briefly touched upon the major issues those scholars discussed. Generally speaking, Qian

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⁹ Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, *Zhongguo wenxue pipingshi* 中國文學批評史, p. 258

¹⁰ For more detailed explanations on these two terms, see the fourth section of Chapter Three.
criticized the Jingling literary practices, endorsed the contribution of the Jingling poetics, and argued that the Gong’an school could not match the Jingling’s:

As for talks on poetry, Zhong’s and Tan’s knowledge and aesthetic taste were deep and subtle. They were not as shallow and rash as Yuan Hongdao’s shouts. Zhong and Tan had a high level of aspiration for poetry but had not accomplished it. They were different from ones who looked at the way of poetry but could not see it. Therefore, Zhong and Tan’s talks on poetry should not be totally denied.

然以說詩論，則鍾、譚識趣幽微，非若中郎之叫囂淺鹵。蓋鍾譚于詩，乃所謂有志未遂，並非望道未見，故未可一概抹殺之。12

Here, Qian argued that although Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun were not able to successfully put their poetic theory into practice, scholars should not casually deny the value of the Jingling achievement. Obviously, Guo Shaoyu and Qian Zhongshu reached more or less the same conclusion by approaching the Jingling School through different

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11 For example, while talking of the use of particles, Qian Zhongshu severely criticized Zhong Xing’s poem for having too many particles. Qian said: “The Jingling school used particles for the purpose of affectation. So their poems were narrow and pedantic. … This is to labor over poems but get the poems illogical and ungrammatical. (竟陵派用虚字，出於矯揉造作，故險而酸…一則苦做詩而文理不通). Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書. *Tanyi lu* 談藝錄, p. 78.

ways: they both differentiated the Jingling poetics from the Jingling practice, endorsed the Jingling’s poetic ideas, and criticized the Jingling’s literary criticism and creation. And they both touched upon the point that the incomplete practice of the Jingling School was simply due to Zhong and Tan’s limited talents, which led to relentless attacks.

The Last Thirty Years’ Scholarship on the Jingling School in the Field of Literature and Literature Criticism

Guo Shaoyu’s and Qian Zhongshu’s remarks on the Jingling poetics and literary practice are incisive and inspiring. However, as Chen Guanghong points out, both ideas has not been well followed since then. It might be because of a long period of silence in the study of the Jingling school, but more importantly, the major attitudes toward the Jingling school in scholarship has been totally changed since the 1980s. In 1983, Wu Tiaogong first published an article entitled “A Defense for the Jingling School.” In this article, Wu vigorously denied many charges made by Qian Qianyi and other early Qing scholars, and intended to return the justice to the Jingling School. Soon afterwards, Zhang Guoguang compiled a collection of articles, discussing the contribution of Jingling School to Chinese literature. With the republication of Zhong and Tan’s collections of

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poems and essays in the 1990s, some editors of their collections such as Li Xiangeng and Chen Xingzhen respectively wrote essays to echo those defenses for the Jingling School. The central argument shared by all the above articles is that the Jingling School contributed to the Ming literature and the Ming literary theory and criticisms very much through the compilation of *Shigui* and their own writing practice. In the meantime, they all more or less criticized the previous scholars as either not fully understanding the Jingling’s poetic ideas or as the apologists of the traditional poetics who did not allow different voices from that of the orthodoxy. However, most of them often went to great lengths to criticize the late Ming and early Qing scholars instead of sorting out the basic historical resources of the Jingling practice or giving serious consideration to the Jingling poetic theory, literary criticisms, and literary creation. The high quality academic research on the Jingling study in this period mainly came from two scholars in Fudan University, namely Wu Guoping and Chen Guanghong.

According to Chen Guanghong, Wu Guoping began his research on the Jingling school since the middle 1980s. In the 1990s, Wu consistently published a series of academic papers covering many issues of the Jingling study, which have been collected and published as a book entitled *The Jingling School and the Ming Literary Criticisms* 竟陵派與明代文學批評 in 2004. In these papers, Wu researches into the Jingling school

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mainly from two perspectives: textual research and theoretical perspective. In textual studies, Wu provides clear account of major activities, practices, and social life of the Jingling scholars. In particular, he examines the Zhong Xing’s and Tan Yuanchun’s personal responses to the late Ming factional struggles and argues that the Zhong Xing’s deep depression in such a turbulent period helped him form a deep and remote literary style. Wu also investigates the editing process of *Shigui*, especially the division of labour between Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun while compiling *Shigui*. This detailed study helps explore Zhong’s and Tan’s respective literary ideals and criticisms.

On the theatrical level, Wu explains the fundamental ideals of the Jingling poetic ideas and literary criticisms in a systematic way. As Chen Guoqiu summaries, Wu finds Zhong and Tan’s three major contributions to Chinese literary theories: first, Zhong and Tan “proposed the concept ‘poetry is live thing 詩為活物,’ which provides a new method for poetic appreciation and criticisms.” Second, Zhong and Tan “developed a rich literary theory when rectifying the Seven Masters and the Gong’an School.” Third, Zhong and Tan “summarized some valuable experiences on creating narrative poem, which fills in the gaps in the field of Chinese poetic theories.”

In 1993, Chen Guanghong’s *The Chronicle of Zhong Xing’s Life* was published. In this work, through collecting and examining a large amount of first-hand historical

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20 Chen Gonghong, *Jinglingpai yanjiu 竟陵派研究*, p. 11.

materials, Chen outlines Zhong Xing’s major life story with rich details, including his major literary practices and political activity, his social life and relationships with his family members, close friends, famous literary scholars from different regions, civil examination classmates, and officials, etc, and his personal experience in the important historical events through his life, etc., Chen’s excellent work not only greatly helps to grasp the major literary activities and practices of both Zhong Xing and other Jingling members, but also provides scholars with a grand historical picture of the rise and the development of the Jingling School in the late Ming.

In 2006, Chen Guanghong published another comprehensive research work entitled A Study of the Jingling School 竟陵派研究. In this in-depth study, Chen explores the three major aspects of Jingling School, the historical background of the late Ming, Zhong and Tan’s literary activity, and the Jingling poetics and the literary creation. In the first part of this work, while examining the beginning of the Jingling School, Chen not only introduces the major social issues related to the Jingling School, including late Ming factional struggles, the changes of the academic trend, and the rising of the Chu style, but also discusses the influences of a series of historical events on Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s literary thoughts. In studying of Chu’s local development, Chen also argues that the rising of the Chu style results mainly from the huge influence of Li

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23 Here, Chu Style 楚風 mainly indicates the Gong’an style and the Jingling style.
Zhi’s 李贄 (1527–1602) theory of “child’s mind”童心說, and the social and economic
development of the Chu area.  

In the second part, Chen examines Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s literary
activities in detail, including their respective personalities, their major social activities
with literati and officials in local area, Jiangnan area, Beijing, and other places, along
with the literary publications of Zhong Xing’s and Tan Yuanchun’s. The minute
examination of Zhong Xing’s and Tan Yuanchun’s activities at different stages largely
helps investigate the evolution of the Jingling poetic ideas and the Jingling style. The
third part of this work focuses on the Jingling poetics and the Jingling style. Besides
systematically summarizing the major ideas of the Jingling literary thoughts and literary
criticisms, Chen also for the first time discusses Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s poems
in terms of literary style, syntax, and diction. Chen argues, for example, that although
Zhong and Tan were blamed very much for using many particles in poems, this practice
actually was their positive attempt to subvert the traditional way of writing poems.  

Chen Guanghong’s detailed analysis of the Jingling’s literary style and practices echoes
Qian Zhongshu’s earlier remarks on Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s poem, and no
doubt provides more abundant sources for a better understanding of the Jingling poetic
theory and criticism.

Generally speaking, Wu Guoping and Chen Guanghong contribute to the Jingling
study in two aspects: first, they both approach the Jingling school within a large

26 See note 56.
landscape of the Ming and the Qing literature and literary criticism. They systematically summarize the major issues of the literary criticisms in the Jingling works, accurately explained the significance of the literary theory proposed by the leading figures of the Jingling school, and affirm what the Jingling scholars achieved in the field of poetry and poetics. Second, they both sort out the social activities and practices of the Jingling scholars.

However, there are still some fundamental problems which have not been well addressed in their studies. One of the most important problems here is how the Jingling School produced such a huge influence in the seventeenth century from both the positive and the negative perspectives. In other words, what factors of the Jingling School result in their large number of the followers in the late Ming society if this work lacked aesthetic tastes and in-depth knowledge? Qian Zhongshu proved the huge influence of the Jingling School with solid textual research, but did not truly explore the reasons for this phenomenon. Recent scholars often took the results as start point of their research, and end it with a conclusion that the Jingling School made a high quality literary theory and criticism which deserved such many followers and huge impact. For example, Wu Guoping thinks that because of the Jingling School’s wide and huge influence in the seventeenth century, we should make clear its significance of their poetics and literary criticism. So Wu tries to summarize the Jingling School’s great contributions to the Ming literature and literary criticism.

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Indeed, a literary school may deserve followers and admiration because of their contributions, but it is highly questionable whether the Jingling School’s contribution to Ming literature and literary criticism is great enough to have such a huge influence. As I have pointed out earlier, different from the current scholars in the field of the Jingling study, Guo Shaoyu and Qian Zhongshu made a comparatively reserved evaluation of the Jingling’s achievement, particularly in literary criticisms and literary creations. In the meantime, scholars from the field of Chinese literature also pay little attention to the Jingling School. In *History of Chinese Literature* edited by You Guo’en 遊國恩 (1899–1978), Wang Qi 王起 (1906–1996), and others., the description of the Jingling School occupies only one third of a page while that of the Gong’an School is longer than two pages.\(^{28}\) Even with the upsurge of the Jingling study in the recent thirty years, literary historians still remain indifferent to the so-called great contribution of the Jingling School. For example, in two famous versions of *History of Chinese Literature* respectively edited by Zhang Peiheng and Luo Yuming, and by Yuan Xingpei,\(^{29}\) the editors only gave the Jingling school about a couple of pages’ description.Ironically, although Zhang and Luo are colleagues of Wu Guoping and Chen Guanghong, they have not even mentioned the Jingling School’s literary theories and criticisms in their *History* at all but given one


\(^{29}\) Similar as other previous versions of *History of Chinese Literature*, in Yuan Xingpei’s versions, the Jingling School has been give one page and a half description while the Gong’an School has about four – page narration. Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, *Zhongguo wenxueshi 中國文學史 (Hisotry of Chinese Literature)* (Beijing:Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), pp. 226–228.
In this section, they recognize the Gong’an School as the one raising the banner of “xingling” 性靈 (spirit), and affirm “the great significance of the Gong’an School’s literary theory in the history of Chinese literature.”

Obviously, not only did the early Qing scholars strongly question the quality of the Jingling literary theories, criticism, and literary creations, many current scholars in the field of Chinese literature also have not given much credit to the Jingling School. In this way, is it safe for us to conclude that the Jingling school’s contribution to the late Ming literary circles was great enough to produce the overwhelming influence?

While discussing the great impact of the Jingling School in the late Ming society, Chen Guanghong thinks that Shigui 诗归 played the fundamental role in building the great reputation of the Jingling School. Without this anthology, Chen maintains that the Jingling School would not be able to surpass the Gong’an School, let alone compete against the Seven Masters. Regarding the reason why Shigui was so widely received in the late Ming society, Chen argues that Shigui 求 satisfied the needs of the times to undermine the pedantic style of poetry, and Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun showed the reader a distinguished deep-subtle style. Meanwhile, Chen also points out that the new

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31 Ibid., p. 286.


33 Ibid., p.247.
form of literary criticism Zhong and Tan adopted in *Shigui* was a crucial factor in setting the literary fashion in the late Ming society.  

Here Chen Guanghong correctly observed that the Jingling School achieved great fame as a leader of literary fashion through editing and publishing *Shigui*. However, something is still unclear in Chen Guanghong’s analysis. Given that *Shigui* made an impact in the literary circles of the late Ming, how great was this impact, and how large were the literary circles in the late Ming? As I have cited in the earlier section, Qian Qianyi described that almost all the “literate people” (承學之士) wanted to get a copy of *Shigui* and reversed it as a classic work. Could we regard all the literate people here as the member of literary circles in the late Ming?

It is known that poetry was no longer one of the imperial examination courses since the Southern Song. The Qing scholar Wu Qiao 吳喬 (1611-1697?) once described the huge influence of this change on poetry learning:

Tang people assigned great importance to poetry. There were monks and prostitutes who were able to write poems. The gentry would wipe off their eyes and wait for these poems. It was the same story in the Northern Song, because the scholarly honor and official ranks lie in poetry and rhythmic essays. Since official rank had been linked to classics and their significance, in the Southern Song there

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34 Ibid., p.248.
In Wu Qiao’s eyes, the main reason for people in the Tang and the Northern Song to attach great importance to poetry writing is because the writing of poetry and rhythmic essays were subjects of imperial examination courses at that time. The Tang and the Northern Song people practiced the poetry very much in order to pursue gongming, namely the degrees of the imperial examinations. However, when poetry was excluded from the imperial examinations, people would never make the same efforts to write poems as before. The same hold true for people in the Ming and the early Qing.

Indeed, “the examination field was the major arena for legitimate and formal struggle for ascendance in the social hierarchy of Ming China.” Therefore, the examinees had to dedicate themselves to the preparation of the imperial examinations, namely learning and practicing the bagu wen 八股文 (eight-legged essays). Poetry, which could not directly benefit examinees, had been regarded as a useless genre. As Zhang Jian correctly observed, learning and practicing bagu wen was the correct way for

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young people to go in the Ming, while writing poems was regarded as a wrong one. Therefore, parents and tutors of examinees pushed their sons and students very hard in *bagu wen* learning, and young students had been strictly forbidden from poetry learning. It was only after one passed the imperial examination that a student could begin to learn and write poems.\(^{37}\)

Then how many of the Ming students could successfully pass the civil service examinations, and begin their poetry learning? When describing the rate of success of the examination, Kai-wing Chow says: “The majority of candidates had to spend decades fighting over the extremely small quota of graduates. After 1450, the metropolitan examination success rate of provincial candidates was between 7.5 and 10 percent. The second half of the sixteenth century was a further decline in the success rate from 7.1 percent in 1549 to 6.4 percent in 1601. The extremely low rate of success and competitiveness of the examination kept the majority of the examinees from obtaining the ultimate metropolitan degree.” \(^{38}\)

As noted above, the late Ming students had to devote all their energy to the preparation of imperial examinations, but the successful candidates were just in a very limited number. Then questions appeared: first, how should we understand the so called “literary circles” of the late Ming? Were the changes that happened in the literary circles of the late Ming enough to make great effects in the society? Second, as Chen Guanghong argues that *Shigui* satisfied the needs of the times to challenge the pedantic


style, then whose needs were these, professional scholars of the poetic style and theory or most students who dedicated their life to imperial examinations? According to Qian Qianyi’s description, “the literate people” should not refer to the limited amount of the successful students in the imperial examinations, but the much larger number of students in the society. If these needs indeed belong to examinees in as well, why did they care about the innovation in the poetry style or poetic theories made by a new literary school? Or specially speaking, for what reason, would they like to get a copy of Shigui and reverse it as a Confucian classic? Is it simply because that they were tired of the pedantic style of poetry advocated by the Seven Masters and yearned for some fresh style?

Obliviously, current scholars of the Jingling study have not well answered the questions: what features of Shigui truly impressed the late Ming people and let them buy and read this commented poetry anthology?

The Recent Studies of the Jingling School and the Ming Print Culture in the Field of History

While academic papers and works on the Jingling school in the field of literature and literary criticism have begun to appear in greater number in recent years, the Jingling study has also attracted a lot of interest from the field of the Ming history study. In 2004, Shang Chuan specially published an article “The Jingling School and the Late Ming”39 in order to echo this new research focus in the literary scholarship and bring it to the attention of the scholars in the field of history. In this article, Shang argues that the

Jingling School was a late Ming literary school bearing distinctive late Ming cultural features, and its form, content, style, and spirit all met those of the late Ming.40 These cultural features, as Shang mentions, were closely related with the development of cultural commercialization in the Ming dynasty. Zhong and Tan’s roles were cultural pioneers in this process, and they accurately understood the changes of the readership and the readers’ favors in the late Ming.

Shang Chuan’s article brings a new angle of view to the Jingling Study. Different from Wu Guoping, Chen Guanghong, and other literary scholars who mainly examine the influences of the late Ming political changes on the Jingling scholars, Shang first emphasized the important role that the cultural commercialization played in the late Ming society and also in the process of the formation and the development of the Jingling School. This point also echoes Guo Shaoyu’s criticisms of the Jingling School in his The History of Chinese Literary Criticisms. While discussing Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s major problems in the poetic styles and literary criticisms, Guo once said:

As for poetry, although Zhong and Tan had their own insights, they were still tainted by the habit of the Ming scholars who only wrote for living. Thus, people felt that the Jingling people did not have enough knowledge. They only expanded their horizon in literature, so they also had many improper practices.

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40 Ibid., p. 44.
Here, Guo Shaoyu pointed out that a bad habit shared by most Ming scholars was to make a living by writing. Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun were not exceptions in this regard. This bad habit, in Guo’s eyes, directly hindered Zhong’s and Tang’s own learning and understanding of poetry and poetics, which eventually resulted in fatal flaws in the Jingling literary theory and criticism.  

Different from Guo Shaoyu’s critical tones on this cultural phenomenon in the late Ming, Shang Chuan, by contract, talks of the late Ming scholars’ involvements in commercial activity in a positive tone. First, Shang thinks the heavy involvement of scholars in the cultural commercialization greatly helped form a new cultural tendency in the late Ming. This new cultural tendency, as Shang summarizes, favored pursuing one’s own interest. One of the reasons for the well reception and huge impact of Shigui, in Shang’s viewpoint, is just because Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun successfully grasped this new cultural tendency. In the meantime, Shang argues that Zhong and Tan should be regarded as two of the cultural pioneers in this process, who broke the tradition and

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41 Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, Zhongguo wenxue pipingshi 中国文学批評史, pp. 249–250.

42 Ibid., p. 252.

spread their literary ideas to the entire society through compiling *Shigui*. On Zhong and Tan’s shallow knowledge that Guo Shaoyu criticized, Shang agreed that Zhong and Tan indeed were not able to detach themselves from the involvement of commercial activity in the late Ming, but Shang refutes the charge that Zhong and Tan did not read literature. By contract, Shang thinks that Zhong and Tan read many more literary works as compared with their contemporaries.

Second, along with the process of this cultural commercialization, the readership of the literary works in the late Ming gradually changed. Shang Chuan thinks, literature at that time did not merely belong to a small number of literati in the upper circles, but had become a part of cultural life of common people. In this way, the one who truly led the cultural fashion in the late Ming society were not those literati with high official ranks but people from the lower-level society. As for *Shigui*, it perfectly won favor with majority of readers in the late Ming society.

Indeed, Shang Chuan’s argument about the changed readership in the late Ming society echoes Qian Qianyi’s term “literate people.” And the recent scholarship on the print culture in the late imperial China goes one step further to prove the changes of the readership in the publishing boom appeared in the sixteen and seventeenth century China from a textual perspective.

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44 Together with Zhong and Tan, the Three Yuan of the Gong’an School and Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 are also regarded as cultural pioneers by Shang Chuan. Shang Chuan 商傳. “Jinglingpai yu wanming shidai.” 竟陵派與晚明時代, p. 34.


46 For detailed summary of the recent scholarship on the print culture study, refer to Note 32 in Kai-Wing Chow’s *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China*, p. 300.
It is known that the second half of the Ming dynasty saw remarkable developments in commercial print culture. As a result of this publishing boom, first, a large quantity of woodblock books had been printed and distributed. People who had no previous access to printed books could thus readily buy books in the open market and even build a private collection. In the meantime, books were no longer luxury goods in the late Ming, but were sold in a wide range of price according to multiple prints. Consequently, “books were affordable not only to the gentry, merchants, and officials, but also to ordinary urban workers.” In this way, people, “including aspiring students, holders of lower-degrees, pretty rural landlords, owners of small business, and women from gentry families, joined the traditional elites to make up a new reading public.”

Second, in order to meet the diversified needs of the new reader, the commercial press printed books in a variety of genres, such as cannons, study-aids, classics, stories, poetry, prose, plays, encyclopedias, travel guides, and etc. The abundant books with multiple genres provide tools for people not only to get educated and learn new things, but also to entertain themselves in daily life, grow interest and respect for the art, literature, drama, and musical performance etc., and follow the fashion trends.

Third, many complex strategies were used by the commercial publishers to enrich the contents of books and improve the book quality in order to increase sale volume. For example, illustration became popularly used in various printed books in this period. Also, the color editions appeared in a large quantity and soon became favorites of the book


collectors. In the meantime, the publishers often invited famous scholars to take part in the procedures of book production. Those scholars might write prefaces for published books, become one of the editors of anthologies, or comment the books. All these activities turned out to be good advertisements for published books.

Fourth, many civil examination students and scholars were involved in the commercial publishing. Most of them made a living by working for commercial press, but some of them successfully built their reputation or became leading figures in different areas by taking advantage of their experiences related to commercial publishing. Zhong Xing was a representative figure of those who had taken advantage of the publishing power in building his fame. In 1610, Zhong Xing got his jinshi degree in the same year as Qian Qianyi did, one of the most famous and talented poets and scholars in the Ming Dynasty. Unlike Qian Qianyi, who took up the post of Prime Minister in Chongzhen Reign, Zhong Xing had been merely a minor official through his entire life. However, Zhong Xing soon became a widely known critic of poetry in the late Ming, and even overtook Qian Qianyi who had already gained considerable literary fame among his contemporaries in his young age.\(^49\) The main reason for Zhong Xing to succeed is his involvement of commercial publishing. As Kai-wing Chow has demonstrated, although Zhong Xing was not a publisher, he was heavily involved in publishing. “There are at least thirty-seven titles published in the late Ming bearing the name of Zhong Xing as author, editor, or compiler.”\(^50\) These published works covering a variety of genres, gained him a wide reputation as a critic, particularly on poetry. Here, Chow specially points out

\(^{49}\) Ding Gongyi 丁功谊, *Qian Qianyi wenxue xiaolun yanjiu 錢謙益文學思想研究 (A Study of Qian Qianyi's Literary Thoughts)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), p. 50.

that the three-color edition of *Gushi gui* published by the famous Min family in Zhejiang province became a best seller at that time. \(^{51}\)

This study is intended to explore the reasons of the great impact of *Gu Tang Shigui* in the seventeenth century China through examining this poetry anthology in the perspective of *pingdian* style commentary. I argue that *Gu Tang Shigui* is not only an academic anthology in which Jingling’s atheistic ideal was fully represented. Rather, it is also a poetry anthology deliberately compiled to meet the educational needs and satisfy the pursuit of cultural fashion by the majority of the readers in the late Ming society.

The second effort will take the form of the following questions: what is the unique feature of *pingdian* style commentary? How did people learn poetry through *pingdian* style commentaries in poetry anthologies? What is the reason for people to buy poetry anthologies and learn poetry in the late Ming? Or what was the function of poetry at that time? These questions bring up anew an old question in Chinese poetic history: how to evaluate the contribution of *Gu Tang Shigui*?

Chapter one demonstrate the fundamental role that *Shigui* played in the rise and fall of the Jingling School. I argue that the successful publication and circulation of *Gu Tang Shigui* was instrumental in establishing the reputation of the Jingling School. Even though this commented anthology had been widely and harshly attacked and severely criticized in the early Qing, the great pains that the early Qing scholars had taken in order

\(^{51}\) *Ibid.*
to attack *Shigui* also clearly show how deep and wide influence this poetry anthology once had.

Chapter Two conducts a survey of *pingdian* style commentary in history. I explore the formation of *pingdian* style commentary, namely its close relationship with proofreading marks, punctuation marks, and annotations. I argue that the *pingdian* form decides the instructive function of *pingdian* style commentary.

Chapter Three explores the reason for Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun to choose *pingdian* style commentary instead of *shihua* (remarks on poetry) form to achieve their ambitious goals. I argue that by compiling *Shigui*, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun not only attempted to express their own poetic ideals, but also intended to fulfill its educational function by taking advantage of the unique features of *pingdian* style commentary.

Chapter Four investigates the role of comment-writers in *Shigui*. I argue that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun were speakers in the role of readers while compiling the *pingdian* style commentaries for *Shigui*. They never downplayed their roles as readers, but highlighted their reading process in the poetry learning. They always liked to share with readers what they read and how they read in *pingdian* style commentaries. Meanwhile, they related their reading experiences closely with the fashion concepts in the late Ming society.
Chapter 1

The Historical Significance of *Gu Tang Shigui*:
Popularity, Criticism, and Attacks on *Pingdian* Style Commentaries

*Gu Tang Shigui* 古唐詩歸 is a commented poetry anthology edited by Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun. *Shigui* comprises a 15-juan *Gushi gui* 古詩歸 (*Repository of Ancient Poetry*) and a 36-juan *Tangshi gui* 唐詩歸 (*Repository of Tang Poetry*). One of the most noteworthy features of *Shigui* is Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s highly personalized commentaries. In these commentaries, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun fully expressed their poetic ideals through examining each selected poem in detail. Thus this poetry anthology is known as the most important representative work of the Jingling poetics.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that the successful publication and circulation of *Gu Tang Shigui* was instrumental in establishing the reputation of the Jingling School. Even though this commented anthology had been widely and harshly attacked and severely criticized in the early Qing, the great pains that the early Qing scholars had taken in order to blame *Shigui* also clearly show how deep and wide influence this poetry anthology once had.
I. **Gu Tang Shigui’s Influence in the late Ming**

The editing of *Shigui* was completed in 1614, and published three years later for the first time. In the following three decades, *Shigui* were reprinted at least seven times, including a fancy three-color edition reprinted by Min family, one of the most famous commercial publishers in the Ming dynasty. The frequent reprints of *Shigui* did not result from the shortage of works of the same genre in the book market. As shown in the chart below, poetry anthologies edited by famous scholars continually appeared from Wanli Reign (1573–1620) through the end of the Ming.

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53 In 1617, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun successively wrote prefaces to *Shigui*. Chen Guoqiu also demonstrated that this anthology should be first published in 1617. Chen Guoqiu 陳國球. “Shilun Tangshigui de bianji, banxing, jiqi shixue yiyi 試論唐詩歸的編集,版行及其詩學意義” (Tangshi gui’s Editing, Publishing, and Its Significant in Chinese Poetics) in *Shibian yu weixing---Wanming yu Wangqing de wenxue yishu* 世變與維新—晚明與晚清的文學藝術 (*Changes and Innovations—Literature and Art of the Late Ming and the Late Qing*), edited by Hu Xiaozhen 胡曉真. (Taiwan: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica 2001), p. 24.

All the above poetic anthologies share some common features with *Shigui*: first, their poems were selected from the earliest time through the Tang dynasty. Second, their editors were all renowned scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For examples, Li Panlong 李攀龍 was the leader of the Latter Seven Master in the mid-Ming.

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55 The data in the template are summarized from *Zhongguo gujishanben shumu* 中國古籍善本書目 (*Catalogues of Chinese Ancient and Rare Books*).
His anthology *Gujin Shishan* 古今詩刪 had been long regarded as the most important *fugu* poetry anthology. Cao Xuequan 曹學佺 was one of the leading scholars in Fujian province at that time. Zhong Xing highly praised Cao’s comments on *Shigui* and the Jingling poems in his letters to friends.\(^{56}\) Tang Ruxun 唐汝詢 also had a good reputation for his poetry and poetics. Although he became blind at the age of five, Tang’s poetic talents impressed Qian Qianyi so much that Qian called him “an extraordinary person of the generation” 一代異人.\(^{57}\) As for Tang’s edited poetic anthology, Qian Qianyi highly praised his excellent annotations on Du Fu’s poems in his *Tangshi jie* 唐詩解. Third, all these poetry anthologies were published in the late Ming. Li Panlong’s *Gujin Shishan*, Feng Weina’s 馮惟納 Shiji 詩紀 and Zhang Zhixiang’s 張之象 Leiyuan 類苑 were published in the Wanli Reign. It is generally believed in current scholarship that *Shiji* was the major textual source for Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun to edit *Shigui*. *Shijie*, Zang Maoxun’s 賣懋循 Shisu 詩所, Cao Xuequan’s *Shixuan* 詩選, and Lu Shiyong’s 陸時雍 *Shijing* 詩鏡 were published in the last two decades before the Ming fell when *Shigui* had been reprinted at least six times.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{56}\) Zhong Xing mentioned several times in his letters to friends about Cao Xuequan’s comments, and thought his points were good to them. See “Yu Gao Haizhi guancha”與高孩之觀察 (A letter To Gao Haizi) in *Yinxuixuan Ji* 隱秀軒集 (*Collected Works of Zhong Xing*) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), p. 474, and “Yu Tan Youxia”與譚友夏 (Letters to Tan Yuanchun) in *Yinxuixuan Ji*, p.473.

\(^{57}\) In *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳, Qian Qianyi highly praised Tang’s talents on poetry, and thought his annotations on Du Fu’s poems even surpassed previous scholars and delivered new meanings in some sense. See *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* (Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), p. 527.

\(^{58}\) See no. 7 for the six versions of *Shigui* printed in this period.
Considering the similarity between those poetry anthologies and *Shigui* in terms of genre, content, and editors’ reputation, we might be surprised to see the disparity among them regarding the current existing versions and copies. As the chart shows, there are at least seven different Ming versions and sixty-two copies of fifty-one-juan Gu Tang *Shigui* in fifteen Mainland libraries. However, the extant versions and copies of other anthologies are much fewer than those of *Shigui* are. The only existing version of *Shiji* was printed in 1614, three years earlier than *Shigui*. Anthologies like *Leiyuan*, *Shisuo*, *Shijie*, and *Shiji* were printed separately for ancient poetry and Tang poetry in the beginning, but they had not been reprinted as often as *Shigui* had. Cao Xuequan’s *Shixuan* and Lu Shiyong’s *Shijing* were both first printed in the Chongzhen reign (1627–1644), but both anthologies had only one version left today in the Mainland libraries. *Gujin shishan* is no doubt one of the most famous and most influential poetry anthologies throughout the Ming Dynasty. Nevertheless, there are only two versions and fifteen copies left in the mainland libraries now.

If we consider the different fates of the above anthologies after the Ming fell, we may better understand how difficult it was for *Shigui’s* versions and copies to be preserved in the Qing dynasty. Wide as its distribution was in the late Ming, *Shigui* as well as its two editors was severely criticized after the Ming fell. Until the Qinglong Reign (1736–1795), *Shigui* was listed as a banned book by the government. It is quite clear that the circulation of *Shigui* became very difficult in the Qing dynasty. By contrast, Li Panlong’s *Shishan* and Cao Xuequan’s *Shixuan* were included in the *Siku quanshu*

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59 “*Shigui, 51 juan*” in *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (*Annotated Catalog of the Complete Imperial Library*), Chapter 193.
(Completed Library of the Four Treasures) in the Qianlong Reign. Under these circumstances, we shall be shocked to see that the existing copies and versions of *Shigui* are much more than those of *Shishan*. And we have reasons to believe that the sales volume of *Shigui* in the late Ming must be much greater than those of *Gujin shishan* and other poetry anthologies and thus more copies of *Shigui* are preserved till today.

The above comparison clearly tells that *Shigui* must have been produced in a large number in the late Ming. This situation could also be corroborated by the seventeenth century scholars’ descriptions on *Shigui*:

*Shigui* came out. The overwhelming popularity of this book caused the shortage of the print paper at that time.

《诗归》出，而一时纸贵！

“Shortage of the print paper” is an allusion to “Zuo Si zhuan” 左思传 (The Biography of Zuo Si) in *The History of the Jin Dynasty*. It is said that Zuo Si wrote a “Sandu fu” 三都賦 (*Fu on the Three Capitals*). The rhapsody was so well written that people at that time all made a copy of it. Soon paper was in short supply and the paper price rose. Later, this allusion was used to refer to how widely a book is read. Here, Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1707), a famous early Qing scholar, aimed to show the popularity of *Shigui* in the book market of the late Ming by using this allusion.

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A great number of copies in the book market soon became a solid base of the wide circulation and reception of *Shigui*. Indeed, after it was published, *Shigui* soon spread around the entire literary circles of the late Ming:

The literary circles are dazzled by *Shigui* today / He Jingming and Li Mengyang are known by few people.

词坛近日眩《诗归》，大复空白知者稀 61

After *Shigui* was circulated, scholars who did not talk about it would be regarded as low-taste.

当《诗归》初盛播，士以不谈竟陵为俗 62

He Jingming 何景明 (1483–1521) and Li Mengyang were the leaders of the Former Seven Masters. They devoted themselves to the *fugu* movement, and earned fame in the sixteenth century. However, according to Wang Duo’s 王鐸 (1592–1652) poetic lines, after *Shigui* was published, few people still favored He Jingming and Li Mengyang’s literary tenets. Even though Wang’s words might have exaggerated the real situation, it is reasonable to assume that the Jingling School had successfully replaced the dominant position of the previous schools in the late Ming literary circles because of the


62 Zou Yi 邹漪. *Qi Zhen yecheng* 啟禎野乘 (*Misellaneous Talks in the Tianqi and the Chongzhen Reign*).
appearance of *Shigui*. In the meantime, Zou Yi’s 邹漪 (1615–?) comment also tells us that *Shigui’s* publication set up a new standard of literary taste for the late Ming literary circles. The majority of scholars at that time regarded the Jingling style as elegant.

Not only literary circles, but also the readers throughout the country were fascinated by this anthology and admired it as a classic:

After several years, (Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s) *Gu Tang Shigui* prevailed in the world. Each literate person would place one copy at home and revere it as if it were edited by Confucius.

数年之后, 所撰《古今诗归》盛行于世, 承学之士, 家置一编, 奉之如尼丘删定。63

*Shigui*...was circulated and studied throughout the world, and it was revered as the golden rule and precious precept.

《诗归》之作，...举世传习，奉为金科玉条。64

It is well known that the six works alleged edited by Confucius had long been regarded as the great classics. While harshly attacking the Jingling School in the seventeenth

63 Qian Qianyi. *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳, p. 570.

64 Ibid., p.572.
century, Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) had to compare Shigui to Confucian classics in terms of popularity. The well reception of Shigui in this late Ming society was thus evident.

II. Criticisms on Gu Tang Shigui and the Jingling School Before the Ming Fell

Clearly, Shigui became a best seller soon after it was published. Its impact on literary circles or even the entire society is overwhelming. Then a question arises: was this impact produced from Shigui’s high quality in terms of in-depth knowledge and aesthetic sensibility? The great number of criticisms and attacks on Shigui hereafter no doubt place a huge question mark on the quality of this poetry anthology.

Right after Shigui was published and circulated, some scholars began to show their strong disagreements with the majority of Shigui readers. Hao Jing 郝敬 (1558–1639) is one of them. When talking about the contemporary poetry, Hao Jing directed his criticism to Shigui by attacking Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s standards for selecting and evaluating poems stated in “Preface to Shigui.” In this preface, Zhong Xing expressed his strong dissatisfaction with the current learning on ancient poems.


65 Ding Gongyi 丁功谊. Qian Qianyi wenxue xiangyan jiu 錢謙益文學思想研究, p. 50.

and easy-to-learn ancient poetry, but not knowing the “true poetry” (真詩).\textsuperscript{67} Thus, Zhong Xing selected poems presenting “the poet’s deep feelings, single moods, lonely behavior, and tranquil state despite the noisy and miscellaneous circumstances” (幽情單緒，孤行靜寄于宣雜之中)\textsuperscript{68} and regarded them as “true poetry.” However, Hao Jing refuted Zhong Xing’s “true poems” from two perspectives:

Poetry is the way of sounds, so we should see sounds as the fundamental key. However, the recent scholars like something different and denigrate the sounds as merely a tool of poetry. They seek for a new way, the so-called “deep feelings, single moods, lonely behavior, and tranquil state despite the noisy and miscellaneous circumstances.” Those scholars claimed that they would be open-minded, have the power of mediation, and travel alone outside of the world. Their words sound strange to me. …Nowadays what people are chasing are extremely superficial, extremely narrow, and extremely familiar poems, and look for some so-called words of spontaneous spirit. …The arrogant people take what most people don’t know and

\textsuperscript{67} Zhong Xing 鍾惺. “Shigui xu” 詩歸序 (Preface to Shigui) in Yinxiuxuan ji 隱秀軒集. p. 236.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
cannot do (as what they seek). How could this be the
Sage’s intent to compose poetry?

詩者，聲音之道，自當主聲。晚近好異，詆此為途逕。
別求所謂幽情單緒孤行，靜寄於喧雜之中者，自謂虛懷
定力，獨往冥游於寥廓之外，則幾乎語怪矣。...今以衆
之所趨，為極膚、極狹、極熟，別求所謂性靈語，...。
傲人以不知不能，豈聖人興詩之意乎？

First, Hao Jing thought that the fundamental issue of poetry is not “deep feelings and
single moods,” but sounds. Second, in Hao Jing’s eyes, Zhong Xing’s standard for
selecting poems totally betrayed the Sage’s original intention of initiating poetry.
Therefore, Hao criticized Zhong and Tan for not only failing to show “true poetry” but
misguiding the reader by neglecting importance of sounds.

While Hao Jing’s criticism of Shigui mainly focused on the general poetic
ideals expressed in Shigui, another late Ming scholar Xu Xueyi 許學夷 (1563-1633)
examined this anthology in a much more detailed way. In Shiyan bian ti 詩源辯體 (The
Source of Poetry and Debate on Genres), Xu severely criticized Shigui in terms of
knowledge, aesthetic tastes, and commentaries. In a long comment, Xu Xueyi pointed out
that Zhong and Tan tried to surpass previous scholars by seeking something odd and
weird instead of elegance and righteousness. For example, Zhong and Tan discarded most

Quanming shihua 全明詩話, vol. 4, p. 2909.
famous poems written by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), Liu Zhen 劉楨 (186–217), and Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) simply because their poems look familiar and easy-to-learn for the reader in the late Ming. Zhong and Tan also tended to add awkward and simple comments in an odd way. Xu thought, although Yuan Hongdao of the Gong’an School discarded the classical tradition, he at least wrote poems from his heart while Zhong and Tan actually destroyed the poetic tradition by pursuing something odd.

Hao Jing’s and Xu Xueyi’s attacks on Shigui had little impact on the late Ming literary circles due to the late publications of their works. For Hao Jing, most of his works had been edited and published by his students after his death. However, Xu Xueyi’s attitudes toward the publication of his comments on the late Ming literary circles were worth pondering. Shiyuan bianti was first published in 1613, one year before Zhong and Tan began to edit Shigui. In this sixteen-juan work, Xu rethought the development of poetic tradition from Book of Poetry to the Tang. Soon after, Xu began to add new remarks to his work. Shiyuan bianti was finally done with thirty-six juans in total, including many comments on the literary works, poetics, and famous scholars of the Ming. Although Xu had a chance to publish his entire work in his lifetime, he really had no confidence countering the huge impact of Shigui at that time:

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71 Ibid.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun set up Shigui as principle. I really don’t dare to comment on this anthology since Shigui has been admired much by the contemporary world. … If my work could not be circulated, my efforts are not valuable; if it could, my comments would be just appropriate to let the later generations talk about this popular anthology. Could later people be convinced by scholarly titles, official rankings, and titular honors?

伯敬，友夏則定為詩歸以爲法，時以一時宗尚不敢置喙，故縱心至是，不知宇宙之大，萬世公論自在。使此書不行，固為無益；若行，适足資後人口吻。後人豈能以科名官爵服人耶？

Obviously, Xu did not expect his comments to challenge Shigui’s dominant position at the time, but wished that his words could influence the later generation some day. Nine years after Xu died, Xu’s son-in-law, Chen Suoxue 陳所學 published the thirty-six-juan version with two-juan supplementary collections, but that was only two years before the Ming fell. Xu may have already anticipated the day when Shigui would be harshly

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73 Xu Xueyi 许學夷. Shiyuan bianti 詩源辯體, Chapter 36, no. 43, p. 372.

criticized and unappreciated by the reader, but he may not have imagined how harsh and severe the attack on the Jingling poetics and *Shigui* was in the fifty years after he died.

Xu Xueyi’s mixed attitude toward *Shigui* demonstrates how influential this poetry anthology was in the late Ming. In fact, Xu’s response was not an exception in the late Ming. Many scholars had to guard their speech while facing the immense popularity of *Shigui* among the readers. Therefore, even for some compliments on *Shigui*, we have to take them to great consideration. For example, the leader of the Restoration Society (*fushe* 復社) Zhang Pu’s 張溥 (1602–1641) praise on *Shigui* is really questionable. In a preface to his friend Zhang Ze’s 張澤 poetic anthology, Zhang Pu said:

The Jingling School’s achievements in tracing the origins should not be denied. Before *Shigui* was circulated, the two previous poetry anthologies respectively compiled by Gao Bing’s 高棅 (1350–1423) and Li Panlong 李攀龍 were prevalent in the literary circles, but the sounds of the Han and the Wei were missing and could not be heard.

然而窮流測源，竟陵之功，腰不可誣也。前此所習高李二選，流滿詩家，漢魏之音缺焉無聞。77

75 Gao Bing’s anthology here refers to *Tangshi pinhui* 唐詩品匯 (*Categories of the Tang Poetry*).

76 Li Panlong’s Anthology here refers to *Gujin shishan* 古今詩刪.

77 Zhang Pu 張溥. “Zhang Caochen shixu” 張草臣詩序 (Preface to Zhang Ze’s Poetry) in *Qiluzhai ji* 七錄齋集 (*Collected Works of Zhang Pu*), Chapter One.
In Zhang Pu’s opinions, Gao Bing’s *Tangshi pinhui* and Li Panlong’s *Gujin shishan* resulted in the ignorance of ancient-poetry learning. *Shigui*’s appearance thus provided the reader with the opportunity to learn the Han and the Wei poetry. Therefore, Zhang Pu affirmed *Shigui*’s accomplishments. Also in this preface, Zhang expressed his agreement with Zhong Xing’s view that a judgment on a writer’s personality should come before the appreciation of one’s poems. Based on Zhang Pu’s compliments on *Shigui*, some modern scholars thus concluded that Zhang Pu actually advocated the Jingling poetics.\(^7\) However, if we carefully examine Zhang Pu’s poetics and his relationship with Zhang Ze, it is not difficult to find that Zhang Pu actually adopted a very reserved attitude toward *Shigui* and the Jingling style.

Zhang Ze was a member of the Restoration Society and also a close friend of Zhang Pu in Jiangsu province. In 1633, Zhang Ze edited Tan Yuanchun’s poems and published them in Jiangsu. The colophon of this collection showed a long list of editors, including Zhang Pu, Yang Tingshu 楊廷樞 (1647), Gu Mengling 顧夢麟 (1585–1653), Zhang Cai 張采 (1596–1648), and some other important figures of the Restoration Society. In the preface to this collection, Zhang Ze said that he had been fond of Tan’s poetics for quite some time and that he admired Tan’s personality and enjoyed his work.

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very much, even though he had never met him. Therefore, this led Zhang Ze’s contemporaries and scholars of the later generations to regard him as one of the followers of the Jingling School. However, Zhang Pu disputed this labeling:

Some Scholars maintained that Zhang Ze’s poetry mainly came from the Jingling style. … I alone would not agree with it. From ancient till now, a writer’s intention and a reader’s intention are not the same in the beginning. Because an excellent reader gains a reputation of conducting a good selection of poetry, people thus evaluate him as a writer according to his good reputation as a compiler of selected poetry anthology. This judgment almost set up a frame to his writing style. Today, we can see Zhang Ze’s poetry is broad, deep, spiritual, and simple in style. But people still regard him as the one who admires the Jingling style, and thus labels him. Is it fine to label “The Nineteen Ancient Poems” (古詩十九首) and “The Official of the Lu River” (廬江小吏) as the Jingling works simply because they have been anthologized by the Jingling School?


稱草臣之詩，多言係自竟陵…。予獨以為不然。夫作者之意與夫觀者之意，古今遠近，其初不謀。因夫善觀者而有選之之號，即以選者之美號而量乎作者，則幾於域之矣。今以草臣之詩，蒼遠身後，靈朴幽越，極命作者必為竟陵之尊尚，而即被以其名，將所謂《古詩十九首》與夫《廬江小吏》諸作登竟陵之選者，皆名之竟陵，可乎？

Here, Zhang Pu took pains to argue that Zhang Ze was not a Jingling follower. In his opinion, although Zhang Ze edited Tan Yuanchun’s poetry anthology, it did not mean that Zhang Ze shared the same writing style as the Jingling scholars. Therefore, people should judge Zhang Ze’s writing style based on his own poetry, but not Zhang’s selection of Tan Yuanchun’s poetry.

Zhang Pu’s demonstration might sound unconvincing, but his intention is worth pondering. Thanks to this preface, we can more clearly perceive Zhang Pu’s attitudes toward Shigui and the Jingling poetics. In the second half of this preface, Zhang Pu also praised Zhang Ze for never forgetting to follow the ancient way while reading the Jingling works. This praise directly contradicts Zhang Pu’s previous compliments on Shigui. Obviously, in Zhang Pu’s opinions, learning from the ancient is totally different from reading the Jingling works even though Shigui included a collection of the Han and

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81 Zhang Pu 張溥. ""Zhang Caochen shixu" 張草臣詩序 in Qiluzhai ji 七錄齋集, Chapter One.
the Wei poetry. In this way, Zhang Pu only admitted that *Shigui* had played a positive role while cleaning away the influence of previous poetic anthologies. For the poetics and aesthetic taste presented in *Shigui*, Zhang Pu never gave a single word of praise in his work. Instead he disliked the Jingling poetics and style very much:

Zhu Wei left me and went to Dongting Lake. I wiped my tears and saw him off, “Alas, Mr. Zhu just bore the sorrow of losing his parents! Now he is going to start a tough journey!”… At that time, Zhu Wei was in mourning of his loss and became gaunt and emaciated. His essay on mourning his brothers also shared the melancholy Chu style, and had few joyful words. … After Zhu Wei came back, he said that he had befriended Xu Bozan as I had expected. … While looking at his bookcase, I saw Xu Bozan’s essays there. I read them and was much happier to find that they were elegant and deep, all about the classics! I became overjoyed.

雲子別予而之洞庭也。予泣而送之曰：嗟乎！雲子棘人之哀，今又將為羈旅乎？… 蓋是時，雲子既黨在憂，神體累削，為其兄弟之悲者，大都有幽楚之氣，少歡樂

82 “The melancholy Chu style” (幽楚之氣) here refers to the Jingling style. Chu 楚 mainly indicate Hubei province, where Jingling belongs to.
Zhu Wei 朱隗 (? −?, style Yunzi 雲子) was one of the eleven members at the initial stage of the Restoration Society. In the preface to Tan Yuanchun’s anthology, Zhang Ze mentioned that Zhu Wei, Xu Qian 徐汧, and he had studied the Jingling poetics together for ten years. Qian Qianyi regarded Zhu Wei as a follower of the Jingling School. Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) and Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 also respectively pointed out that Zhu Wei was a follower of the Jingling style in his early life, but later his poetic style was totally changed. In the above preface, Zhang Pu thought that Zhu Wei’s literary style once shared that of the Jingling school. However, after becoming a friend of Xu Bozan, Zhu Wei began to change his style. This made Zhang Pu very happy. In the later section of this article, Zhang Pu draws an analogy between the principle of human being and that of writing. He thought that elegant and deep style of writing is just like a master, while other styles only vile characters. Therefore, when Zhu Wei showed a firm stance to

83 Zhang Pu 張溥. “Xu Bozan gaoxu” 許伯赞稿序 (Preface to Xu Bozan’s Essays) in Qiluzhai ji 七錄齋集, Chapter Three.


85 Qian Qianyi. Liechao shiji xiaozhuan 列朝詩集小傳, p. 573.

86 Wang Fuzhi 王夫之. Mingshi pingxuan 明詩評選 (Selected Poems of the Ming) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), Chapter Six, pp. 326−327.

abandon the Jingling style and begin to learn classics and traditional styles, Zhang Pu was thrilled.

It is well known that the Restoration Society was the most influential nationwide organization in the late Ming. It was first founded in 1624 and had held member meetings in Jiangsu for three times from 1629 to 1632. More than two thousand members from all over the country attended the third meeting.\(^8^8\) For Zhang Pu himself, he got the *jinshi* degree in the civil service examination of 1631. However, famous and influential as Zhang Pu was in the late Ming society, he still hesitated to express his opinions in a clear way while commenting on *Shigui* and the Jingling poetics. It is not simply because Zhang Pu did not want to harshly criticize the literary style that his close friends like Zhang Ze and Zhu Wei favored, but because of the overwhelming influence of the Jingling School in the late Ming.

No matter how much Hao Jing, Xu Xueyi, and Zhang Pu disliked the Jingling poetics, they all consciously or unconsciously avoided criticizing *Shigui* and the Jingling style in public. Even Qian Qianyi, the prime minister, who attacked the Jingling school most harshly in the early Qing, also guarded his speech with caution during this period.\(^8^9\)

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\(^8^8\) In Lu Shiyi’s *Fu She jilue* 復社紀略 (*A Brief Record of the Restoration Society*), three members meeting were listed: the first meeing was held in Yin Mountain, Jiangsu province in 1629; the second meeting was in Jinling, Jiangsu province, 1630; the third meeing was held in Tiger Hill, Jiangsu province in 1632. It was recorded that more than thousand people attend the third meeting. Later Wu Yingji 吳應箕 edited two-chapter *Records of Members in the Restoration Society* 復社姓氏錄, and his grandson Wu Mingdao 吳銘道 supplement another chapter to it. There were more than two thousands and two hundreds names in this record.

\(^8^9\) In *Qian Qianyi wenxue sixiang yanjiu*, Ding Gongyi 丁功宜 discussed in details how Qian Qianyi criticized *Shigui* in the Chongzhen Reign. At that time, Qian Qianyi mainly focused on the trivial mistakes of poems cited in *Shigui*, and thus Qian Qianyi tried to imply that Zhong and Tan were even short of basic knowledge of poetry. In his narrative, Ding Gongyi also mentioned that Qian’s friends, such as Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1594–1640), Li Liufang 李流芳 (1575–1629), Xu Bo 徐波 (1590–1663) all had good
Their complicated attitudes proved from a different angle how greatly the Jingling school influenced the late Ming readers.

### III. Criticisms on *Gu Tang Shigui* and the Jingling School After the Ming Fell

As I have demonstrated above, some scholars began to question and criticize *Shigui* soon after it became a best-seller book. Although some of their comments sound stern and harsh, these criticisms on *Shigui* were mainly focused on the discussion of poetic traditions and aesthetic ideals. However, this situation totally changed after the Ming fell. In the early Qing, *Shigui*, the Jingling poetic style, and the Jingling figures had become the targets of public criticism. Every scholar would like to attack *Shigui* or the Jingling School in a few paragraphs in their works. The criticisms of *Shigui* and the Jingling School also went beyond the poetic debate and reached many other fields, including politics, philosophy, morality, history, personality, and so on. For example, some scholars such as Qian Qianyi and Zhu Yizun blamed Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun and their poetics for misguiding people morally. In this way, the Jingling school not only destroyed the poetic traditions and corrupted social values, but also

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relationship with Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun. Ding Gongyi, *A Study on Qian Qianyi’s literary thoughts*. (Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), pp. 98-99. These reasons may result in the relatively reserved attitudes of Qian Qianyi to the Jingling School in his early period.

90 Qian Qianyi. *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳, p. 570.

resulted in the destruction of the state. Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671) directly attacked the Jingling poetics as the sounds of a falling state.\(^{92}\)

Not only the Jingling works and style, but also the leading figures of the Jingling School were not spared severe attacks. Wang Fuzhi attacked Zhong Xing for awarding Ma Shiying 马士英 (1591?–1646) a *juryo* degree on the August of 1615. Ma later became Prime Minister in Chongzhen Reign (1627–1644) and was known as a treacherous court official.\(^{93}\) Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613–1682), the famous seventeenth-century scholar, specially wrote an essay entitled “Zhong Xing” to enumerate and severely reprimand Zhong Xing’s daily immoral behaviors. Gu also condemned Zhong Xing for writing comments on *The Book of Poetry* for commercial publishers in order to seek fame and fortune. Gu even thought Zhong Xing should be responsible for ruining the late Ming society through editing and publishing *Shigui*.\(^{94}\) It is clear that the early Qing scholars had gone out of their way to blame Zhong Xing. Yu Huai 余怀 (1617–1696), an early Qing scholar, once sighed about this situation, “There was a tendency to learn Zhong and Tan’s (poetry and poetics in the late Ming); there was also a

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\(^{92}\) Fang Yizhi 方以智. *Jigutang wenji* 稽古堂文集 (*Collected Works of Fang Yizhi*), Chapter Two.

\(^{93}\) In *History of the Ming Dynasty*, Ma Shiying 马士英 has been listed in Chapter 318 “Jianchen” 奸臣 (*Biography of evil officials*).

tendency to censure Zhong and Tan (in the early Qing).” (學鍾、譚有習氣，罵鍾、譚也有習氣)\(^{95}\)

*Shigui* could not avoid the fate of being severely criticized and attacked in the early Qing, either. As early Qing scholar He Yisun 賀貽孫 (1605–?) once described, his contemporaries took pains to look for trivial errors in the *Shigui* while attacking it.\(^{96}\) The attacks on *Shigui* cover a variety of aspects, including genre, historical information of poetry and poets, poetry selection, *pingdian* style commentary, typos, and etc. Interestingly, instead of criticizing the weakness of the Jingling poetics, many famous scholars chose to single out minor errors in *Shigui*. Those errors may come from wrong citations, inaccurate annotation on allusions, misspellings, or misunderstanding of historical events. By ridiculing the shallow and evident mistakes in *Shigui*, they aimed to prove that this poetry anthology not only was unqualified for its best-seller reputation, but even was not worth learning or reading at all:

As for *Shigui* of recent times, it is full of wrong explanations and misspellings. [Feng Shu] lists and corrects these mistakes one by one … As Feng Shu’s poems prevailed in the world, there must be someone who reads his poems, learns about his knowledge, criticizes the

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\(^{96}\) He Yisun 賀貽孫. “Shifa”詩筏 (Poetry as a Boat). *Qing shihua xubian* 清詩話續編, p. 197.
current vulgar learning, and follows the traditions of “Air” 風 and “Odes” 雅 … I write a preface for Feng Shu not only to praise him, but also to tell the poetry learners the correct way to learn.

若近世之《詩歸》，錯解別字，一一舉正。…己蒼之詩行世，必有讀其詩而知其學者，於以針砭俗學，流別風雅…余為之序，非以張己蒼，亦以爲學詩者告也。97

Here, Qian Qianyi directed his criticism toward Shigui and told the reader that Shigui was full of mistakes and not worth learning at all. Feng Shu 馮舒 (1593-1645) whom Qian Qianyi highly praised in the above paragraph is known for having written Shiji kuangmiu 詩紀匡謬 (Rectifying Errors in A Record of Poetry). Although the title Shiji kuangmiu means to rectify errors in Feng Weina’s A Record of Poetry, Feng Shu actually intended to attack the “heretical ideas” presented by Shishan and Shigui.98 Therefore, Feng listed many mistakes in Shigui and explained in detail how absurd those mistakes were. Then what are those mistakes? For example,

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97 Qian Qianyi. “Feng Jicang shixu”馮己蒼詩序 (Preface to Fen Shu’s Poetry) in Muzhai chuxueji 牧齋初學集 (Collected Works of Qian Qianyi, the First), (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2009), p. 1087.

98 In the Self-preface to Rectifying Errors in Records of Poetry, Feng Shu thought that the poetics at that time was corrupt mainly because of the heretical ideas spread by Shishan and Shigui. Therefore, he made this work to correct the source of poetry learning, and then to confront the bad influence of the Seven Masters and the Jingling School.
In the *History of the Han Dynasty*, “Lianshiri” (Selecting a Date) and other titles have been all listed on the left side of each chapter. They are “Lianshiri, yi” (Selecting a Date, the First), and “Dilin, er” (God Comes, the Second). It is known that “Jiaosi ge” (Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices) is the title of these nineteen poems, and “Lianshiri” is only to separate each chapter. It is the same as “Xue’er” (Learning) and “Weizheng” (Governing) in the *Analects*. Since Guo Maoqian’s 郭茂倩 (1041–1099) *Yuefu shiji* (Collection of the Yuefu Poetry) first listed the title “Jiaosi ge” and moved “Lianshiri” and etc. to the next line, *Shiji* followed this way. Thus the later generations learned *Shiji* without paying attention to its original source. Zhong Xing remarks, “making the title so ancient and profound!” Isn’t it so wrong! If so, then the title “Xue’er” would be more peculiar and prominent!

《漢書》《練時日》等俱列在章左曰：練時日一，帝臨二，足知《郊祀歌》是此十九篇之題，而練時日等俱以此分章。亦如所謂《學而》，《為政》耳。自郭氏《樂府》首列《郊祀歌》之題，移置練時日等為次行，
In this piece from the *Shiji kuangmiu*, Feng Shu intended to show how ridiculous Zhong Xing’s commentary on the title of *yuefu* song “Lianshiri” was by explaining the origin of the poem title in detail. Clearly, Zhong Xing had not read enough literature before writing this remark.

Although Feng Shu specially wrote a work to show the mistakes in *Shigui* and *Shishan*, he did not single out all the mistakes in these two anthologies. Other scholars also pointed out many such mistakes in *Shigui*. The following was one of the most-often cited notes showing Zhong Xing’s lack of basic knowledge:

The recently prevalent anthology *Shigui* is extremely ridiculous. “Duangexing” 短歌行 (The Short Song) by the Wen Emperor of the Wei 魏文帝 (r. 220–226) says “Long reciting and signing, I missed my father!”長吟詠嘆，思我聖攷. “Shengkao” 聖攷 refers to his father Emperor Wu of the Wei 魏武 (155–220). But in *Shigui*, it was changed to “shenglao” 聖老, and the following comment says “the word of shenglao is fantastic!”…The above are all

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fabrications without textual research! Aren’t they villains without any scruple!

又近日盛行《詩歸》一書，尤為妄誕。魏文帝《短歌行》：長吟詠嘆，思我聖攷。聖攷，謂其父武帝也。改為聖老，評之曰，聖老字奇。…此皆不考古而肆臆之說。豈非小人而無忌憚者哉？

Gu Yanwu’s remark was mainly aimed at Zhong Xing’s comments in Shigui. The above paragraph is only one of the mistakes Gu pointed out in his essay. According to Gu, by changing “shengkao”聖攷 to “shenglao”聖老, Zhong Xing not only showed his lack of basic knowledge of history, but also willfully distorted the original meaning of the poem and thus guided the poetry learning in a totally wrong direction.

Gu’s criticism on Shigui and Zhong Xing’s comments has a widespread influence in the Qing. While editing Siku quanshu zongmu 四庫全書總目 (General Catalogue of the Four Treasures of the Imperial Library), Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) also cited this comment and concluded that Zhong and Tan often arbitrarily changed or distorted the original words of the ancient poems. Those critiques on Shigui by famous scholars in the early Qing soon formed a trend of deprecating Shigui. Till the Qianlong Reign, Shigui and Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s other works had been listed as banned books by the

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100 Gu Yanwu. “Gaishu” 改書 (Changing Books) in Rizhilujishi, Chapter 18, p.839.

Qing government. According to Chen Guanhong, although the official reason to ban these works was because of the anti-Manchu’ phrases and poems in their works, the disreputable influence of the Jingling School in the world was also responsible for the ban. From then on, it was difficult for scholars to get any manuscripts or printed works of Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun. The Jingling School had eventually faded from the limelight.

As I have demonstrated above, *Shigui* was a best seller in the late Ming. However, a best seller may not guarantee the excellence of a work in terms of knowledge, aesthetic tastes, and ideas. The criticisms on plenty of errors of basic knowledge of the poetry and history in *Shigui* no doubts could be perfect supporting evidence for the point that *Shigui* was not a well-done poetry anthology and the two compliers did not have enough knowledge to comment on classical poems and teach the readers about poetry.

Nevertheless, this anthology’s influence was immense. It had been accepted by the majority readers of the late Ming society. This significant accomplishment could be hardly achieved by any other late Ming poetry anthologies that were of high quality. Therefore, it is definitely not enough to examine *Shigui* merely from the perspective of poetic criticism as the most scholars did in the field of literary theory criticisms. The unique features of *Shigui* deserves much more attention. And one of the most important features of this anthology is, in my opinions, the genre—*shige pingxuan* 詩歌評選 (selected poetry anthology with *pingdian* style commentaries).

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102 Chen Guanghong 陳廣宏. *Jilingpai yanjiu* 竟陵派研究, pp. 496-497.
Chapter 2

The Genesis and Evolution of Pingdian Style Commentary: From Proofreading Mark to Literary Criticism Form

As I show in chapter one, Shigui was regarded as poorly-done poetry anthology by the early Qing scholars because it was full of all kinds of mistakes. However, this does not tell that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun were careless compilers. On the contrary, Zhong and Tan devoted themselves to this project, and thus hope that they could make valuable contribution to Chinese poetry:

Of all energy, my entire nine tenths have been devoted to Shigui. And I plan to proofread and print the work by myself. I also intend to form a theory of my own through reading broadly and selecting discreetly between the mid Tang poetry and the late Tang poetry. Then, I would achieve immortality after my death.

蓋平生精力，十九盡于《詩歸》一書，慾身親校刻，且博求約取于中，晚之間，成一家之言，死且不朽。103

The above paragraph tells how much Zhong Xing cherished this poetry anthology. He devoted almost all his energy to this project, hoping that this work would earn him a

great reputation in literary history. With this ambition, he was meticulous at each stage of
the production of this poetry anthology. For example, in order to find the poems that
measure up to their poetic ideal, Zhong and Tan read a great number of poems, but
selected only a few of them.

Zhong Xing’s dedication to this anthology has also been well shown by his efforts
to take care of many small things in this process. As Zhong Xing said in the above, he
was even willing to do the printing by himself. Thus it is not surprising to see that the
manuscript of Shigui had been changed times before it was sent to the publisher, and the
first hand copy of the final version of Shigui’s manuscript was even made by Zhong
himself. 104

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun not only dedicated themselves to this project, but
also discussed related issues with their literati friends. For example, in 1614 and 1615, 105
Zhong and Tan wrote to their good friend Cai Fuyi 蔡復一 (1577–1625) several times to
discuss the poems selected in or excluded from in Shigui. 106 Cai was famous for his

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104 Zhong Xing “Yu Cai Jingfu 與蔡敬夫” (“To Cai Jingfu”): “In two or three months, I stayed with Mr.
Tan and discussed and finalized Shigui project. We changed the manuscript for times, and at last I copied it
by my hand (兩三月中,與譚郎共處,與精定《詩歸》一事,計三易稿,最後則惺手鈔之).”
Yinxiu xuan ji 隱秀軒集, p. 469.

105 According to Zhong Xing’s letters to Cai Fuyi, he and Tan Yuanchun completed Shigui’s compiling
work in 1614. And it has been generally agreed that the first printed copy of Shigui appeared in 1617.

106 Zhong Xing “Zaibao Cai Jingfu 再報蔡敬夫” (“To Cai Jingfu Again”): “Your letter mentions that there
is still room to discuss about poem selection. How about marking them when you are free, and sending
them to me at your best convenience? (來諭所謂去取有可商処,何不暇時標出,乘便寄示?)”
Yinxiu xuan ji 隱秀軒集, p. 471.
official career in the Wanli reign. He also had a good reputation for literary works.

Cai once suggested that some selected poems need further discussion and consideration, such as qingyanshi (love poems).

Zhong Xing also showed this anthology to Cao Xuequan, a Fujian scholar with a good reputation for poetry writing, and got some valuable comments from him. Zhong might have requested comments from Cao for two reasons: first, Cao Xuequan was one of Zhong Xing’s good friends. They had been writing poems to each other since 1611. Meanwhile, they also had some good mutual friends, like Cai Fuyi. Second, as I have mentioned in Chapter 1, Cao Xuequan himself compiled a poetry anthology of twelve dynasties. In other words, Cao enjoyed a good reputation in literary circles of the late Ming. He was well qualified to give any sound advice on Shigui’s compilation. And Cao

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107 Cai Fuyi 蔡復一, style Jingfu 敬夫, was born in Fujian province. According to Mingshi, After Cai died during putting down a minority rebellion in Yunnan province, he was gave a posted as a minster in department of military. In Chapter 249 of Mingshi 明史, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984).

108 In Cai Fuyi’s biographic note in Mingshi, it reads, “Cai liked ancient works and had great knowledge. He was good in writing.” Mingshi 明史, p. Chen Tian 陳田 (1850−1922) also praised Cai’s poem, and said that he often has good lines in his pentsyllabic poems. Chen Tian, Mingshi jishi 明詩紀事 (The Chronicle of Ming Poetry), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), p. 2559.

109 In 1615 spring, Tan Yuanchun mentioned in a letter replying Cai Fuyi, that Cai made several great suggestions on selecting poems in Shigui. For example, Tan Yuanchun was totally conviced by Cai Fuyi’s point about love poetry that Zhong and Tan should not select any love poems expect for one that indeed presented the deep world of meaning. Tan Yuanchun 譚元春. “Zouji Cai Qingxian gong [si]” 訴記蔡清憲公[四] (Reporting to Master Cai, IV). Chen Xingzhen 陳杏珍 ed. Tan Yuanchun ji 譚元春集 (Collected Works of Tan Yuanchun), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), pp. 758−759.

110 According to Chen Guanghong 陳廣宏, Zhong Xing and Cao Xuequan first met each other in Sichuan province in 1611. After that, they often wrote poems and replied to each other. Chen Guanghong, Zhong Xing nianpu, pp. 85–86, 90–91, 221–222.

111 Ibid, pp. 85–86.
Xuequan did offer some critical remarks on *Shigui*. He criticized Zhong and Tan for making too many pingdian style commentaries in *Shigui*, and did not leave any space for the readers to ponder.

Interestingly, Zhong Xing’s feedback to Cao Xuequan’s criticism did not appear in his letter to Cao, but in a letter to another friend Gao Chu (fl.1598), Although Gao was not a famous figure in the late Ming literary circles, he got his *jinshi* degree twelve years earlier than Zhong Xing. In this sense, Gao Chu was Zhong Xing’s senior. According to Zhong Xing’s reply, they had letters discussing *Shigui*’s compilation. In his letter, Gao expressed the similar concern to Zhong Xing’s writing style of *pingdian* style commentary as Cao Xuequan did.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun had many discussions with friends about *Shigui* while compiling and publishing it. Their earnest efforts for this project should not be the reasons that *Shigui* eventually suffered many attacks for its poor quality in the early Qing. Nevertheless, Cao Xuequan’s and Gao Chu’s concerns about *pingdian* style commentary provide some leads for our further study. It is also interesting to find that almost all the other similar poetry anthologies published before or in the same period of *Shigui* did not includ any *pindian* style commentary in their original version. For example, none of the seven other similar poetry anthologies listed in Figure 1.1 include any *pingdian* style commentary. Even for Cao Xuequan, he was involved in the discussion with Zhong Xing

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and witnessed the broad reception of *Shigui*, but he still chose to include only selected poems in his *Shicang shierdai shixuan* 石倉十二代詩選 without appending any *pingdian* style commentaries. Then why didn’t those scholars choose the same way to express their poetic ideas as Zhong and Tan did in *Shigui*? The low opinions of *pingdian* style commentary among the literary scholars in the late Ming and the Qing might be one of the reasons for them not to use it:

[The people] in this time admire “*pingdian*” style commentary, simply because it is convenient for the beginner to read.

時尚評點，以便初學者觀覽。114

Here, Chen Bangyan 陳邦俊 (fl. 1596) thought that the major advantage of *pingdian* style commentary was to make texts easier for beginners to read. Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1769) even placed *pingdian* together with *jianshi* 箋釋 (annotations), and stated that they both served poetry learners well:

, There is nothing useful about annotations and *pingdian* style commentaries. [I add both of them] in order to show the

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114 Chen Bangyan 陳邦俊, *Guang xieshi* 廣誇史 (*A Sequel to Xieshi*), Chapter 8.
Shen Deqian’s words certainly give us food for thought. Which features of pingdian style commentary made Shen Deqian group it together with annotation and regard it as “vulgar practice” (su俗). Then in Shen or most literary scholars’ eyes, what is the elegant or classic way to properly express one’s poetic ideas?

Although there might be different opinions regarding the best way to write about poetry, most scholars in the seventeenth century agreed that pingdian style commentary was definitely not the correct choice. As Mei-chen Ho proved in her chapter discussing the Ming and Qing scholars’ critiques on pingdian, many scholars in the seventeenth century, such as Zhuo Erkan 卓爾堪 (1570−1644), Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612−1672), and others all thought that pingdian was not a traditional or classic way to express academic thoughts on poetry because this style of commentary was first used in the civil examination aids to help students better understand the writing styles and methods of


116 See Mei-chen Ho 侯美珍 “Ming Qing renshi dui pingdian de piping 明清人士對‘評點’的批評” (“The Ming and Qing Scholars’ Criticisms on pingdian style of Commentary”), Appendix One of “WanMing Shijing pingdianzhixue yanjiu 晚明詩經評點之學研究” (“A Study of Late Ming Shijing Commentary”), PH.D. Dissertation, National Chengzhen University of Taiwan, 1992, pp. 297−298.
eight-legged essays. Therefore, pingdian itself would belong to a popular style instead of a classic one.

Zhong Xing’s and Tan Yuanchun’s dedication to pingdian style commentary forms a sharp contrast with most scholars’ low opinions of pingdian. Then what is pingdian style of commentary? How did it change the form of poetry anthology and the readers’ reading habit? Why did Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun give up the traditional genre of theoretical expression and choose this form? And more importantly, how did it become a double-edged sword in helping Shigui both widely accepted by the reader and severely attacked by the scholars in seventeenth century China?

In this chapter and Chapter Three, I will examine pingdian style commentary in history. I argue that pingdian style commentary combines features of annotation, proofreading marks, and literary criticisms, and forms its own distinguished ones: namely multi-angle examination of major text and its close interaction with major texts and readers.

I. The Genre: Shige pingxuan

As I have mentioned above, the sixteenth and seventeenth century in China witnessed the productions of many poetry anthologies. Among them, only Shigui includes plenty of pingdian style commentaries in the original version. In this sense, although all these poetry anthologies belong to the category of zongji 總集 (collective

117 Ibid., pp. 298–299.
works of various authors)\textsuperscript{118} in the classical catalogue of Ji section 集部, Shigui is different from the other anthologies in terms of form. To be more specific, Shigui is a *shige pingxuan* 詩歌評選 (selected poetry anthology with pingdian style commentaries), namely, a combination of *shige xuanben* 诗歌选本 (poetry anthologies) and *pingdian* 评点 (commentaries).

**Poetry Anthology**

*Shige pingxuan* is first of all a selected anthology.\textsuperscript{119} According to the differences of the stylistic compiling rules, anthologies under the category of *zongji* can be grouped into two sub-categories, comprehensive anthologies and selected anthologies. A comprehensive anthology usually covers many literary works as its compiler may be able to find. For example, in Figure 1.1, Feng Weina’s *Shiji* 詩紀 (*A Record of Poetry*) is a typical comprehensive poetry anthology in the late Ming period. This anthology, as Chen Zhenghong points out, has two distinguishing features regarding its “comprehensive”

\textsuperscript{118} In the classical catalogue of Ji section, anthology is generally classified under the categories of *zongji* 總集 (collective works of various authors) and *bieji* 別集 (collective works of one author). *Zongji* generally covers literary works of more than one writer. And these literary works may belong to different genres, such as *Wenxuan* 文選 (*Anthology of refined literature*), one of the most famous literary anthologies in Chinese history. The poetry anthologies in Figure 1.1 belong to a different situation, namely only one major genre works included in those antholoiges. *Bieji* includes works written by only one author, but these works might belong to a variety of genres, such as poetry, lyric, essays, letters, inscriptions, and etc.

\textsuperscript{119} Although *Shigui* had not been included in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) listed its title and compliers name with a short note commenting this work in “Cunmu 存目”category (only title included). And it belongs to *zongji* category.
status. ⑩ First, *Shiji* is an all-inclusive collection of poems. While editing this poetry anthology, Feng sought to include all the poems that he could find, even for incomplete ones and scattered poetic lines. Second, Feng made a thorough examination and correction on the poetry texts he found. By doing so, Feng intended to preserve the great sources of the ancient poems and provide the reader with the abundant and accurate poetry texts.

Feng Weina’s *Shiji* was the major sources of poems for Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun in compiling *Shigui*, ⑪ but *Shigui* was totally a different story in terms of its sub-genres. Zhong Xing once described the process of selecting poems as “reading broadly, but selecting discriminately.”⑫ In this sense, to record as many poems as possible was not Zhong’s and Tan’s goal in editing this poetry anthology. *Shigui* should be classified in the sub-category of selected anthology. The other six poetry anthologies in Figure 1.1 all belong to the same sub-genre as *Shigui*. By selecting poems which conform to their poetic ideals and aesthetic tastes, these compilers are intended to show the reader their unique thoughts on poetic appreciation, poetic styles, and poetic history.

**Pingdian Style Commentary**

⑩ Chen Zhenghong 陳正宏. *Zhongguo xueshu mingzhu tiyao wenxuejuan* 中國學術名著提要 文學卷 (*Abstracts of Chinese Academic Masterpieces, Chapter of Literature*) (Shanghai, Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp.46−47.

⑪ In the self-preface to *Shiji kuangmiu* 詩紀匡謬 (*Rectifying Errors in A Record of Poetry*), Feng Shu 馮舒 (1593-1645) expressed his ambition to correct the heretical ideas spread by *Shishan* and *Shigui* through rectifying the mistakes in their sources, namely *Shiji*.

Second, *pingxuan* is not only a selected poetry anthology. A great number of *pingdian* style commentaries feature prominently through the entire anthology. The following page is a typical example of *pingdian* used in *Gu Shigui*.

Figure 2.1

This is a typical example of *pingdian*-style commentaries appended to poems, and clearly

123 Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun ed. *Gu Shigui* 古詩歸 (Repository of Ancient Poetry), in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 (Compilation of a Sequel to *Siku quanshu*), Zongji category of the Ji Section 集部總集類, vol. 1589 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), pp. 428−429.
shows several important formal features of pingdian. First, the major poetry texts are in the most striking positions of each page, while commentaries occupy any other positions in this page, such as on the top margins and on the both sides of the poetic texts. Some of them have been even listed between the poetic lines, which in some degree “interrupt” the major text. Second, all commentaries are in smaller print than poetry texts. In the meantime, commentaries in different positions are not printed in the same font sizes, either. Generally speaking, the commentaries listed on the right and left sides of the major texts are larger than those on the top margins and those placed between the poetic lines. The position and the print-size of commentaries were clearly deliberately designed in order to indicate the subordinate status of pingdian style commentary to the poetic texts themselves. In the meantime, commentaries in different positions may function differently from one another.

*Pingdian*-style commentaries also perform different functions in treating their contents. For example, the commentaries surrounding the poem “Yetian Huangque xing” 野田黃雀行 (“Song of a Brown Wren in Wild Fields”) 124 in the above page deal with different issues related to this poem and its author. “Yetian Huangque xing” was written by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), the renowned poet of the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280). Thanks to Cao Zhi’s great reputation in Chinese literature and history, the complier first positioned a piece of commentary in the space between the poet’s name and the poem’s title (① in Figure 1.1), telling of Cao Zhi’s personal character as shown in his poems.

Commentaries on the top margin, for example commentary ➁ in the above figure, often talk about the use of a specific word or phrase in one or two poetic lines. The two notes at the end of the poem are also different in content from those in other positions. Commentary ➂ talks of the figure’s image reflected in the poem while commentary ➃ furthers the discussion of this yuefu theme in poetry history.

It is rather clear that the compilers discuss a variety of issues related to the poem and its author in their commentaries. The issue can be as large as a distinguishing style of a poetic genre in Chinese history, and it also could be as small as the good use of a single word, but generally speaking, all commentaries perform the function of literary criticism. This is the fundamental feature of pingdian style commentary in terms of content.

II. Ping and Dian in Historical Sources

Ping and Its Genesis

From the above, we can see, shige pingxuan is a genre that combines the selected poems and pingdian style commentary. Therefore, there are two spaces for compilers to express their thoughts. First, compilers can directly show the readers the poetic models which conform to their poetic ideas and aesthetic tastes. Second, compilers could offer further interpretation and evaluation of these poetic models through taking advantage of the marginal space in the page and expressing their own thoughts on the poems. In this sense, pingdian style commentary must be produced centering upon the major texts. This
dependent status of *pingdian* style commentary in an anthology came from one’s reading process.

*Pingdian*, as the term suggests, includes two activities in the process of explication, namely *ping* 評, to comment, and, *dian* 點, to add dots to highlight the parts of a text. According to the explanation in *Guanya* 廣雅, *ping* means “to discuss.” 125 When used in a literary anthology, it refers to the activity of evaluating literary works and writers. For example:

Zhong Rong evaluated the ancient and contemporary poems, and wrote remarks which tell the good works from poor ones.

Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (468? – 518?) was a famous literary scholar of poetics in the Southern Dynasties. His work *Shipin* 詩品 (*Grading of Poets*) earned him a great reputation, and had been regarded as the first *shihua* work (remarks on poetry) by the Qing scholars such as Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠 (1738–1801) and He Wenhuang 何文煥 (fl. 1770). 127 In this

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125 *Guanya* 廣雅, “評，議也.” (*ping* is to discuss).


127 In Chapter Five of *Wenshi tongyi* 文史通義 (*A Comprehensive Treatise on Literature and History*), Zhang Xuecheng said: “The source of *shihua* is *Grading of Poets*.” Ye Ying 葉瑛 ed. *Wenshi tongyi*
work, Zhong Rong evaluated more than 120 poets and their pentasyllabic poems. He classified these poets into three grades as “shangpin 上品” (high grade), “zhongpin 中品” (medium grade), and “xiapin 下品” low grade. Zhong Rong also appraised each poet’s unique literary style and writing skills in a piece of remark and listed it after the poet’s name. In this sense, “ping” in the above note summarized a full set of Zhong Rong’s practice of literary criticism while compiling Shipin. The word ping should refer to a typical practice of literary criticism in the pre-Tang period.

_Dian_ and Its Genesis

_Dian_ 點, by the contract, seems to be irrelevant to literary scholars’ appreciation of works from the beginning. According to modern scholar Zhang Bowei, _dian_ 點 of _pingdian_ should be explained as _biaodian_ 標點 (punctuation mark), such as, period, comma and so on. In this sense, “to add black dot” is to put punctuation marks in the texts. However, although the small black dot had ever been used as punctuation marks before the Tang, _dian_ 點 was not directly related to punctuation at that time. Then

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what literary functions did dian 點 serve in the pre-Tang and the Tang texts? How did this function help form Song literary scholars’ reading habit? How had it been eventually associated with scholars’ practice of appreciating and commenting on literary works? By checking the use of dian 点 in historical texts, I argue that, dian 點 mainly functions as proofreading mark in the pre-Tang and the Tang period, but later take an abundant meaning. Till the Southern Song, it referred to two major functions during reading process: one to facilitate proofreading while the other is to mark out sentences. Dian’s meaning in pingdian came from the combination of these two functions: first, dian is used to highlight the significant sentences of the major texts with small dots or circles. This dian was borrowed from that of proofreading. Second, dian’s function as punctuation marks needs the scholars to rethink the meaning of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Third, no matter what dian functions are, its position is always fixed. Dian is always placed close to the major text. In other words, dian could not exist without texts. This feature of dian eventually decides the positions of pingdian style commentary, which has always been placed with major texts.

(I) Dian 点 in the Pre-Tang and the Tang Literature

In Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 (Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters), Xu Shen 許慎 (58? –147?) explained the original meaning of dian 点 as the following:

Dian is small black (something).
This explanation tells that *dian* in the very beginning corresponds to the black mark such as “•”, “、“”, etc. According to Guan Xihua’s study on punctuation marks before the Tang dynasty, marks such as “•,” “、“” had a variety of usage. One of them was to function as punctuation mark. However, the word *dian* referred to a different function. It is to add marks to words which need to be deleted or changed. For this function, *Dian*’s image may look different from Xu Shen’s description. Sometimes *dian* was even shown in different colors.

The earliest definition of *dian*’s function is from “Shiqi 釋器” (Explanations on Devices) in *Erya 尔雅* (Approach to Language):

*Dian* means “to exterminate.”

While annotating this sentence, Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324) said:

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132 In chapter 5 of *Erya 尔雅, Shisanjing zhushu 十三經註疏* (The Thirteen Classics with Annotations and Explanations), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, ), p. 2600.
Dian is to cross out characters by pen.

以筆滅字為點

In Guo’s further explanation above, dian was mainly used in the process of proofreading, and its function was to mark the mistaken words in the text. For example:

(Mi Heng) grasped brush and wrote. No dot has been added to [the completed], but its language was very beautiful.

攬筆而作，文無加點，辭采甚麗。

This episode describes how talented the Eastern Han writer Mi Heng 褚衡 (173–198) was in literature. After he got an assignment, Mi Heng immediately wrote a beautiful essay. In the meantime, no part of this essay need to be further changed. Here, the part with “dots” added in an essay refers to where need to be changed or rewritten. Therefore, an essay without added dots implies that Mi Heng completed this essay perfectly in his first try. Dian’s function as a mark for proofreading is very clear.

This use of dian also appeared a couple of times 135 in Shishuo xinyu 世說新語 (A New Account of the Tales of the World). For example:

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133 Ibid.
134 “Wenyuan liezhuan (xia) 文苑列傳下” (“The Biographies of Literary Experts II”) in Hou Hanshu 後漢書 (The History of the Later Han), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, )
[Guo Xiang] then annotated “Fall Water” and “Extreme Happiness” two chapters himself and rewrote [Xiang Xiu’s annotation] on Chapter “Horse’s Hoof”. As for other chapters, [Guo Xiang] just made slight changes on sentences or words [of Xiang Xiu’s annotations].

（郭象）乃自注《秋水》、《至樂》二篇，又易《馬蹄》一篇，其餘衆篇，或定點文句而已。\(^\text{136}\)

This paragraph tells what Guo Xiang 郭象 (252–312) did himself while annotating Zhuangzi 莊子. The background story is that Xiang Xiu 向秀 (227–272) first annotated Zhuangzi, but did not publish it. Later, Guo Xiang got Xiang Xiu’s annotations on Zhuangzi, and only made some changes based on Xiang Xiu’s version, but published it under his name. Here, “dingdian wenju 定點文句” has been explained differently in the current scholarship. In some authorized dictionaries, such as Ciyouan 辭源 (The Origin of Words)\(^\text{137}\) and Hanyu dacidian 漢語大詞典 (Comprehensive Dictionary of Chinese), dian in this paragraph has been explained as “to add stops to the texts” or “to add punctuation.”

\(^{135}\) For another case, please see Passage 67 of “Wenxue 文學” (“Literature) in Shishuo xinyu 世說新語, Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫. Shishuoxinyu jianshu 世說新語箋疏 (A New Account of the Tales of the World with Annotations), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), p. 245.


However, according to Yu Jiaxie’s 余嘉錫 (1884–1955) note on this story’s historical background, we can see, *dian* should refer to something different. Yu’s note says that *Si Ku* 四庫 recorded the previous scholars’ work on the comparison of Xiang’s annotations on *Zhuangzi* with those of Guo’s. Their comparisons show that some annotations Guo Xiang made actually just added or deleted some sentences or words of Xiang Xiu’s annotations. Thus, Yu Jiaxi concludes, this comparison could be regarded as the evidence to prove that Guo Xiang once changed the sentences or words of Xiang Xiu’s annotation. 138

Thanks to Yu Jiaxi’s note, “*dingdian wenju* 定點文句” should be understood as Guo Xiang’s practice of changing text. Therefore, the explanation of *dian* as “to add full stops to the texts” or “to add punctuations” is not correct. Rather, *Dian* here should still refer to the practice of proofreading, namely “to cross out characters by means of pen.”

*Dian* in pre-Tang sources referred to the practice of proofreading. Then what did *dian* look like in this practice? Guan Xihua studied punctuation marks in Dunhuang materials and points out that a function of “•” (a small black dot) in Dunhuang sources is to cross out characters in the text. 139 However, this image of word *dian* had been gradually changed by scholars and professionals while proofreading historical sources. More precisely, while checking historical texts, scholars took advantage of colors to distinguish the sentences or words which need be deleted from those good ones.

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The Tang historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) once made a detailed explanation on how a scholar should use dian in colors while checking historical works in Chapter “Dianfan 點煩” (“Crossing out the prolix texts”):

…Today, I imitate their practice. Those prolix pieces which had been copied from ancient, historical, and biographic texts are all added dots by me using pens (the color of dots came from red powder and yellow). All characters with those dots need to be deleted then.

今輒擬其事，抄自古史傳文有煩者，皆以筆點其煩上。
其點用朱粉、雌黃並得。凡字經點者，盡宜去之。^{140}

Here, Liu Zhiji made clear two rules while using dian in proofreading work. One is dian’s position. While checking a historical text, a historian should first put dots on those lengthy descriptions in the text, and delete all those dotted parts later. The other is dian’s color. According to Liu Zhiji, these dots should be in red or yellow.

Yellow color was the most often used color to delete mistakes in the premodern China. For example, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591) once said that he should be cautious about using yellow color to change:

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To proofread books is not easy. ····· I have not read all the books in the world, (so I) cannot use yellow color (to changes the text) in a presumptuous way.

校定書籍，亦何容易。···觀天下書未編，不得妄下雌黃。141

While annotating this paragraph, Wang Liqi 王利器 (1911–1988) cited the Song scholar Song Qi’s 宋祁 (996–1061) words. It reads:

The ancient people all used yellow paper to write books. Therefore, those books have been called as ‘yellow chapter.” Yan Zhitui said: “(I) have not read all the books in the world, (so I) cannot use yellow color (to changes the text) in a presumptuous way.” Yellow color is similar to paper’s color. So this color is used to delete mistake.

古人寫書，盡用黃紙，故謂之黃卷。顏之推曰: “讀天下書未編，不得妄下雌黃。” 雛黃與紙色類，故用之以滅誤。142


The paper used in the pre-Tang was yellow. Therefore, scholars’ purpose to use yellow color in proofreading was to make all the mistakes or prolix texts disappear from sight.

The use of red color in proofreading is a different story. To be more specific, red color is used to differentiate mistaken part from the rest of the text. This use of red color was not an occasional case that merely happened in the process of proofreading. As Zhang Bowei points out, *zhubi* (red pen) had been used times in the texts in the pre-Tang sources. For example, Dong Yu 董遇 in the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280) used red pen and black pen to differentiate the annotations on the texts of Confucian classics. Zhang Bowei also mentions that the use of these colors in the texts became common after the Southern Qi and Liang. In most cases, the purpose of using red color pen in the texts is to highlight that part of the text.\(^{143}\) Indeed, before summarizing *dian*’s use in proofreading, Liu Zhiji also mentioned that the color pen was used in the previous dynasties for the purpose of making catalogues:

> Once in Tao Hongjing’s *Classic of Materia Medica*, for medicines with cold or hot tastes, their titles were respectively dotted in red or black. In Ruan Xiaoxu’s *Seven Records*, the words Wende Palace, were all written

by red pen. Thus, [the color was used to] differentiate each part, and then [we can get to] know the categories.

昔陶隱居《本草》, 藥有冷熱味者, 朱墨點其名; 阮孝緒《七錄》, 書有文德殿者, 丹筆寫其字。由是區分有別, 品類可知

In Liu Zhiji’s eyes, Tao Hongjing’s 陶弘景 (456–536) use of red dots in his work was not different from Ruan Xiaoxu’s 阮孝緒 (479–536) using red pen to write Wende Palace. The use of colors in both cases serves for the purpose of classification. Meanwhile, the red color’s visual effects no doubt help its part catch more readers’ attention after the first sight. In this way, red color used to cross out the mistakes or prolix texts in proofreading has the same visual effects too.

It is apparent that dian primarily refers to the practice to cross out the mistakes in the pre-Tang sources. Sometimes, it was used in colors like yellow or red. This function and image of dian tells us two important features: first, the practice dian happens in the course of reading. The readers need to read, think, and evaluate the texts before making decision of marking any word, sentence, or paragraph with dots. This process itself decides that dian must be accompanied by the text. Therefore, the practice of adding dian itself includes the evaluation of texts, which is very similar to the one of adding pingdian style commentary to the major text.

144 Liu Zhiji 劉知幾. Shitong 史通, p. 433.
Second, although the red color dian was also used to remind the reader of crossing out the mistaken or prolix part in the text, its striking visual effects no doubt help catch the reader’s attention. In this way, it is not surprising to see that red color dot gradually used to highlight the important words and sentences in the texts in the Southern Song, which is a typical mark used in pingdian style commentary.

(II) Dian 點 and Quandian 圈點 in the Song Literature

Till the Song dynasty, dian’s shape and usage underwent some changes. The first change is its function. Dian began to refer to the punctuation marks in the text. As I have mentioned above, although dian’s image, such like “•,” “、”, were often used as punctuation marks in the pre-Tang literature, the significance had been associated with another phrase, judou 句讀. As modern scholars Wu Chengxue and He Shihai demonstrate in their essay, judou 句讀 is a long-standing concept. In the Han Dynasty, scholars already regarded judou as one of the basic skills for children to learn Confucian classics. 145 It is known that the Confucian classics did not include any marks in the beginning to separate sentences. The later interpreters often placed annotations to the place where a sentence should stop. This usual practice actually helped a beginner to make pauses. However, punctuation marks generally had not been added to the original texts in the pre-Tang or the Tang literature. What a reader mostly faces is a long essay or

an entire work without any punctuation inside. Therefore, it is a basic training for a
beginner to learn how to mark out pauses between sentences when reading ancient texts.
Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) once defined an instructor’s responsibility in the famous essay
“Shishuo 師說” (“Discussion on Instructors”) as not only teaching judou, but explaining
its principle for students. 146 Han Yu’s definition shows that judou teaching is essential to
learning classics.

The earliest theoretical explanation of judou 句讀 that dates back to the Tang Dynasty.

Wherever the expression of the scripture stops, it is called

ju. The expression is not stopped, but a dot is placed for the
convenience of chanting and reciting. This is called dou.

According to the Tang monk Zhan Ran 湛然 (711–782), a stop placed in the end of a
sentence was called ju 句 (period) and a stop placed in the middle of a sentence was

146 Han Yu 韓愈 “Shishuo 師說:” “That children’s instructor gave children books and taught them judou.
This is the instructor who teaches the way and solve the problems as I talk.” Ma Qixu 馬其旭 annotated.
Han Changli wenji jizhu 韓昌黎文集校註 (The collected works of Han Yu with annotations), (Shanghai:
Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), p. 43.

147 Zhan Ran 湛然. Fahua wenjuji 法華文句記(Records of Sentences in Lotus Sutra), Chapter One.
called dou 读 (comma). Judou had been used together to indicate the practice to make pauses while reading unpunctuated texts.

Although judou was one of the basic skills for children in learning classics, the practice of judou occurred only in oral speech at that time. More precisely, the instructor would teach students orally, and a student would learn by heart, but the classical texts that they read still remained unpunctuated. Thus, mistakes often appeared in this process, and led to various interpretations and incorrect understanding of the classical texts. Therefore, it gradually became necessary to add judou marks to the texts in order to standardize different versions of the classical texts:

The Emperor ordered the imperial college to gather academicians and Confucian students. Let them add the punctuations and carefully check the West Capital stone versions of the classics against their own versions. Then the imperial college hired the workers who can carve characters and had various categories of texts published and made them accessible to the world.
敕令國子監集博士儒徒，將西京石經本，各以所業本經，
句讀抄寫注出，子細看讀。然後顧召能雕字匠人，各部
隨秩刻印板，廣頒天下。148

This is an imperial edict issued by the Emperor Ming of the Latter Tang 後唐明宗 (r. 926–933). According to the records of the same event in Cefu yuangui 册府元龜 (Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau), the reason for the Emperor to issue such an edict was to radically reform the textbook system in the entire country. Since there were a great number of discrepancies in these versions, 149 it was very difficult for students to tell the correct version. Therefore, the emperor ordered the imperial school to proofread, standardize, and publish the texts of Confucian classics.

The Emperor edict tells us that scholars at that time had already noticed the necessity to add judou marks to ensure a correct understanding of the classics. This edict is also an official approval of publishing classic texts with punctuation marks added.


149 This edict was recorded both in Chapter 50 and Chapter 608 in Cefu yuangui 册府元龜. In Chapter 608, the edict says: “I think to rectify classics is important. Although I have asked officials in imperial colleges to collate information and make annotations for a variety of books, I am still afraid that there occasionally exit mistakes since there are too many books. Ma Gao and his officials in lower rank are all learned scholars. They are respectively experts in Classics learning. I order them to collate and study all books carefully. (朕以正經事大，不同諸書，雖以委國學差官勘注，蓋緣文字極多，尚恐偶有差誤。馬縞已下皆是碩儒，各專經業。更令詳勘，貴必精研)” Wang Qinruo 王欽若 and etc. ed. Cefu yuangui 册府元龜. In Siku quanshu 四庫全書, zibu 子部 11, leishu lei 類書類 (encyclopedia), pp. 35-36.
When *judou* was recorded from oral instruction and marked in a text, it became something presented in written form, namely *biaodian* 標點 (punctuation marks).

*Biaodian*, as the compound itself suggests, is to mark with a dot. It is generally agreed in the current scholarship that the earliest appearance of this compound is in the Southern Song:

> For whatever he reads, he would place punctuation marks. Thus the meaning and significance in text are made manifest. They are self evident without any explanations.

凡所讀無不加標點，義显意明，有不待論説而自見者。  

This paragraph describes how the Song scholar He Ji 何基 (1188–1268) read classics. *Biaodian* 標點 in this context is generally explained as “the mark of *ju* and *dou*”. In other words, *dian* here functions as *judou* did in the pre-Tang and the Tang literature, but it is the presentation of *judou* in the texts.

The change of *dian*’s function was also accompanied by the change of *dian*’s shape. Wu Chengxue argues that *biaodian* in the above text should refer to *quandian* 圈點 (small circle), because He Ji was a student of Huang Gan 黃幹 (1152–1221), one of

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150 Chapter 438 in *Songshi* 宋史 (The History of the Song Dynasty), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), p.12979.

151 *Ci yuan* 辭源, p.877.
the followers of Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200), who had already used small circle in different colors to mark the significant parts of classical texts.  

Indeed, it is very possible that He Ji to followed Zhu Xi’s use of small circles while reading and punctuating classical texts. Another text at that time which mentioned judgments might be a better footnote to the relationship between quandian and judgments mark in the Song:

There are judgments marks in books published by the imperial college or in the Shu state. Only Jianyang books begin to imitate the pattern of proofreading in the imperial library: small circles have been added besides the text. When the reader opens the book, he could clearly perceive its context. This is convenient for the learner.

監，蜀諸本皆無句讀，惟建監本始仿館閣校書式，從旁加圈點，開卷瞭然，于学者為便。  

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This paragraph is from Yue Ke’s 岳珂 (1183–1243) *Kanzheng Jiujing sanzhuan yangeli 刊正九經三傳沿革例* (*The Changing Rules of Proofreading and Rectifying Nine Classics and Three Biographies*). In this note on *judou*, Yue Ke at least told us two important facts about *quandian 圈点* in the Song dynasty. First, *quandian 圈点* functions as a *judou* mark in the books published by the Jianyang publishers in Fujian province. Although the books printed by the imperial college and the Shu publishers in the same period had not included any *judou* mark yet, the Jianyang publishers’ choice at least from one side proved that *quandian 圈点* must have been often used as a *judou* mark by the Song readers in the reading process.

Second and more importantly, Yue Ke pointed out that adding *quandian* to the text as a *judou* mark was actually an imitation of the marks used for the proofreading work in the imperial library. Then what was *quandian*’s function in the process of proofreading?

If there are mis-written characters, cover them with yellow paint and write the correct ones besides; for redundant characters, circle them in yellow; for missing characters, add them besides the characters. There may be no space for

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154 According to *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao 四庫全書總目提要* (*Annotated Catalog of the Complete Imperial Library*), Yue Ke reprinted Liao Gang’s 廖剛 (1070–1143) version of *Nine Classics* together with four other books, namely *Gongyan zhuan 公羊傳* (*The Commentary of Gongyang*), *Guliang zhuan 穀梁傳* (*The Commentary of Guliang*), *Chunqiu nianbiao 春秋年表* (*Chronicle of Spring and Autumn Period*), and *Chunqiu minghao guiyitu 春秋名號歸一圖*(). Then he made one chapter “Zongli 總例” (*Summarized notes on the use of this book*). This one guild chapter was *Kanzheng Jiujing sanzhuan yangeli 刊正九經三傳沿革例*. *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao 四庫全書總目提要*. 

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annotations next to characters, and then write them in the margin above or below the line and circle them in red. …

The correct position to add dots to the end of sentence should be by the side of characters. …For those characters who have been marked for the purpose of explaining sounds, highlight them in red, and then still dot the corner [of characters to show their tones].

諸字有誤者，以雌黃涂訖別書。或多字以雌黃圈之。少者，于字側添入。或字側不容注者，即用朱圈仍于本行上下空紙上標寫。……諸點語斷処，以側為正……諸點發字本処註釋有音者，即以朱抹出，仍點發。155

This paragraph is from “Jiaochou shi 校讎式” (The Patterns of Collating and Proofreading), the earliest essay that explains in detail the rules and marks used in the process of collating and proofreading. In this essay, we can first see that dian, the mark of deleting had changed into quan 圈 (circle). In the meantime, yellow and red colors were still used in proofreading, and their function became fixed: yellow circle was the mark of deleting and the red circle was a mark of insertion.

155Chen Kui 陳騤 (1128-1203) Nan Song guangelu 南宋鈔閣錄 (Records of The Nan Song Academic Institution) Chapter 3 “Chucang 儲藏” (“Collections”), p. 3. In Siku quanshu 四庫全書 史部十二 職官類
Second, *dian* has been associated with a new meaning, *dianfa* 點發, a red mark for the pronunciation of a word. And red ink was used to highlight the words with pronunciations.

The image “small circle” had been used as a proofreading mark and a *judou* mark till the Song dynasty. In the meantime, the image “small black dot” was mainly used to mark pronunciation, unrelated to the meaning of a text. In this sense, *quandian* actually replaced *dian* in proofreading and punctuation. Thus, adding *quandian* implies a sequence of a scholar’s actions: reading, thinking, evaluating words and sentences in a text, and then crossing out words or punctuating the sentences. This process is a process of analysis of the texts, which is very similar to the process of appreciation of a text. In the meantime, adding marks and making changes in the margins is also similar to the process of adding remarks in the margins. As Wu Chengxue points out, when the *judou* mark was not only used as a grammar mark, but also a mark including the significant meaning of literary appreciation, *quandian* actually became a mark for *pingdian* style commentary. In fact, the mark for *pingdian* style commentary often covered the function of both punctuation and appreciation at that time. 156

Indeed, *dian’s* change in function actually makes the process of adding *dian* harder and harder to be separated from the process of appreciating a text. To cross out the mistakes or prolix texts may come from the technical comparisons between different versions of a text, while adding *judou* marks need more accurate understanding of the meaning of each word, sentence, paragraph, or even the entire text. The latter practice is

one part of the reading habit, and it is very easy to be mixed with the practice of appreciating a text. Therefore, quandian was often used together in both context.

The practice of dian has always been closely related to the process of understanding the texts, and the written form of dian has always been placed closely beside the major texts. Pingdian style commentary totally followed the features of dian, and had its positions fixed next to the text.

**Pingdian style Commentary and Annotations**

When remarks have been added to the dian’s position, namely beside the text, they became pingdian style commentary. However, annotations had been placed in the same or similar position long before pingdian style commentary, or even judou mark appeared. Then how could a reader distinguish pingdian style commentary from annotations?

Indeed, the similarity between annotations and pingdian style commentaries is not merely shown in forms. More importantly, they both explain texts. Generally speaking, a piece of annotation is a note to explain the words and sentences in a text, including the meaning of words, compounds, the source of a person’s name, a place name, title of an essay or a book, and historical sources of allusions, and so on. It helps the readers understand the meaning and historical background of each sentence.

**Pingdian** style commentary at its early stage explained the major text, too. It is generally agreed in the current scholarship that the earliest adoption of pingdian form
happened in anthologies of essays, such as Lv Zuqian 吕祖謙 (1137–1181) *Guwen guanjian* 古文關鍵 (*The Principles of Ancient Essays*), Lou Fang’s 樓昉 (jinshi degree 1193) *Chonggu wenjue* 唐古文訣 (*Keys to Respected Ancient Essays*), and Xie Fangde 謝枋得 (1226–1289) *Wenzhang guifan* 文章規範 (*The Standards of Essays*), and others. In these essay anthologies, as Zhang Bowei shows, *pingdian* style commentaries had been added to explain the meanings of words and sentences, reveal the structures of paragraphs and whole essay, discuss authors’ writing skills, and teach the beginners of essays learning. In other words, these works generally serves as text books for the beginners, who intend to take civil examinations in the Southern Song. ¹⁵⁷

Liu Chenweng’s 劉辰翁 (1232–1297) transplanting *pingdian* style commentary from essay criticism to poetry criticisms, as Zhang Bowei points out, was also influenced by the changes of civil examinations. ¹⁵⁸ In 1274, civil examinations were abolished. It was not until Ren Emperor of the Yuan’s 元仁宗 (r. 1312–1320) Yuanyou reign (1314–1320) that civil examination was resumed. In this period of more than forty years, examinees became enthusiastic about poetry again. Thus Liu Chenweng made *pingdian* style commentaries on some famous poetry collections in order to teach his descendants and students. For Liu Chenweng’s such practice, Zhang Bowei cited Ouyang Xuan’s 歐陽玄 (1283–1357) comment to demonstrate. It is interesting to find that in this citation, Ouyang described Liu Chenweng that “Liu’s punctuations and annotations on a variety of


¹⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 578.
works were excellent and many of his own works were marvelous. Thus people all followed him (會孟點校諸家甚精，而自作多奇崛，衆翕然從之).” ¹⁵⁹ Ouyang Xuan’s words tell us how Liu Chenweng’s contemporaries viewed *pingdian* style commentaries. In their eyes, *pingdian* style commentaries were just the same as punctuations and annotations (點校) added to the Confucian classics. *Pingdian* style commentary functioned simply as instructive notes in this sense.

However, Liu Chenweng and his son Liu Jiangsun 劉將孫 (1257 –?) seemed not to agree with Ouyang Xuan’s description of his *pingdian* style commentary. In the preface to Du Fu’s poetry anthology with Liu Chenweng’s *pingdian* style commentaries appended, Liu Jiangsun said:

> Annotating Du Fu’s poetry is the same as annotating *Zhuangzi*. Because when the things about people and words at the current moments have been written down, they all become meaning beyond words and things beyond meaning. [In Du Fu’s poetry,] one word could penetrate endless reading; a character might have a boundless flavor. [Du Fu’s poetry] might be criticized but not be annotated. Some might not be annotated, or not appropriate to be annotated. … [In annotation.] speech would seldom reach person’s feeling, and story would not be given consistently. This work clean

numerous and miscellaneous annotations, and make readers be able to get the spirit [of Du Fu’s poetry]. And criticisms, marks, and picks, are enough to let reader come to understand the poetry. This work is instead a version of Du Fu’s poetry with annotations in Guo Xiang’s style.

注杜詩如注莊子，蓋謂衆人事，眼前語，一出盡變，言外意，意外事，一語而破無盡之書，一字而含無涯之味，或可評不可注，或不可注，或不當注，...常辭不極于情，故事不給于貫也。...是本淨其繁蕪，可以使讀者得于神，而批評標掇，足使靈悟，固《草堂集》之郭象本矣。160

In this paragraph, it seems that Liu Jiangsun contradicted himself by his discussion on annotation of Du Fu’s poetry: he began with a statement that “Annotating Du Fu’s poetry is the same as annotating Zhuangzi”, but later he argued that Du Fu’s poetry might not be annotated (zhu 注) but be criticized (ping 評). This contradiction in words actually tells Liu Jiangsun’s incisive understanding of the different function of these two important terms in Liu Chenweng’s annotation and criticisms. Zhu was to explain meaning of character, word, phrase, or even sentences, but this explanation could merely deliver the literal meaning of a character or word to the readers. However, as Liu Jiangsun argued, to simply read the annotation of a Du Fu’s poem is far from enough. Because, the annotation

of words could neither let the readers experience Du Fu’s deep feelings lying beyond the
words, nor present the complete picture of a story that Du Fu told in his poem. In this
way, Liu Jiangsun concluded that Du Fu’s poetry should not be annotated.

Ping in this context refers to Liu Chenweng’s pingdian style commentary. In Liu
Jiangsun’s eyes, ping is to make readers understand the spirit (shen 神) of Du Fu’s poetry
instead of its literal meaning. The analogy Liu Jiangsun drew between his father’s
annotations of Du Fu’s poetry and Guo Xiang’s annotation on Zhuangzi may tell us how
this shen indicates. It is known that Guo Xiang’s annotations on Zhuangzi were famous
for his incisive explanation of Zhuang Zi’s philosophical thoughts instead of the
meanings of word and sentence. And Liu Chenweng himself also remarked,

No poem has not any implied meaning, but [the readers]
don’t know annotators’ errors.

凡詩未嘗無所託，第不知注者之謬。161

“Implied meanings (suotuo 所託)” here and Liu Jiangsun’s shen should both refer to Du
Fu’s feelings, ideas, and thoughts which are beyond words. The readers could not get to
know this part simply by reading annotations on Du Fu’s poetry, but pingdian style
commentary could provide different interpretations for the reader. This interpretation will
reveal Du Fu’s world of thought and feelings which lie under the literal meaning.

161 Liu Chenweng, pingdian style commentary on Du Fu’s 杜甫 “Chuyue 初月” (“New Moon”)
Liu Jiangsun’s words no doubt pointed out the fundamental similarities and
difference between annotation and *pingdian* style commentaries. They are both
interpretive tools to help the readers understand the texts, but annotations provide the
readers with explanations on the literal meanings of words and sentences and background
knowledge of the literary works. *Pingdian* style commentary focuses on a different aspect
of literary works. To be more specific, *pingdian* style commentary emphasizes the
analysis of the aesthetic features of a text or a poet’s literary style. For example, if a piece
of annotation on a person’s name is one’s short biographic note, a *pingdian* style
commentary on a poet is often a brief summary of one’s general poetic style. In other
words, *pingdian* style commentary is the space for a critic to appreciate the literary
features of a text and make literary criticism. It helps the reader understand the art of a
literary work.
Chapter 3

The Educational Value of Pingdian Style Commentary:

Popularizing Poetry Learning

As we have seen from Chapter II, pingdian style commentary was heavily influenced by the practice of proofreading and punctuating the texts of classics. Pingdian style commentary shared the same process of reading, thinking, and making judgment on the texts. And more importantly, like the proofreading marks and judou marks, pingdian style commentary has also been positioned close to a text. This position on the one hand defines what should be written in pingdian style commentary. In other words, scholars could only discuss issues relevant to the major text or its author.

However, on the other hand, this position also gives a scholar much more freedom to talk of what he likes about the major texts. The multiple-positions around the commented text give him much space to discuss as many issues as he wants to. These issues could be as small as use of a character, a word, or a phrase while it also could be as big as a given aesthetic style’s development in the entire history of Chinese poetry. In these margins, a scholar often randomly writes down his thinking about a poem, an essay, or a collection. This style of literary criticism easily reminds us of another form taken by literary criticisms from the Song Dynasty, namely, shihua 詩話 (remarks on poetry).
I. *Shihua* and Its Similarity to *Pingdian* Style Commentary

*Shihua* is one of the main traditional forms taken by Chinese literary criticisms from the eleventh century. Although the Qing scholars Zhang Xuechen 章學誠 and He Wenhuan 何文煥 traced *shihua* back to Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 *Shipin* (The Grading of Poet), current scholars generally agree that the first *shihua* work should be Ouyang Xiu’s 歐陽修（1007–1073）*Liuyi shihua* 六一詩話 (Remarks on Poetry by Ouyang Xiu). This conclusion is not simply because Ouyang Xiu is the first scholar to name his critical work on poetry as *shihua*. Moreover, as Stephen Owen states,

*Shih-hua* belonged to a group of genres that can be characterized as “informal prose” … Although such informal prose and its use in literary discussion grew out of a rich lineage of T’ang and pre-T’ang anecdotal writing, in the hands of Sung stylists it became a distinctive form, with a studied ease that had its own unique appeal and authority.  

Here, “informal prose.” as Owen explains in the note, refers to “writings such as miscellanies, random notes, and informal letters—genres that were usually excluded from a writers’ official collection.” Owen groups *shihua* genre into “informal prose,” and


thinks the Song scholars made it a unique form. And this unique appeal of *shihua*, as Owen states, is the result of “recording an oral world of discussion on poetry or attempting to recreate the impression of such a situation.” 164 In Owen’s eyes, Ouyang Xiu successfully represented such an oral style in his *Liuyi shihua*. Even for some elegant pieces, they all well served for this unique appeal. And “A similar basis in anecdote and oral discussion of poetry characterizes many of the early *shih-hua* and some of the best later *shih-hua*. “165

Indeed, the *shihua* works in the late imperial China were often presented in a loose order and a random style. This style was also shown in term of content:

> “Remarks on poetry” became anecdotal style, and therefore it could provide material for a chat and entail banter; It could investigate allusions and explore sources; it could be used as a tool to defend members of one’s own faction or attack those who are not; it could be used to give strained interpretation, draw far-fetched analogies, and seek a forced meaning; it could be mixed with an anomalies and illusory dream; it could also be devoted to talking about tonal patterns, rhythms, and syntax. All topics, big or small, refined or crass, are included therein.


In this paragraph, Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 (1893–1984) concluded that *shihua* could be regarded as an all-embracing genre in terms of content and writing styles. As for its contents, Guo thought that *shihua* works deal with a variety of issues, ranging from general issues such like history and fantasy to the minute details of a poem.

Because of the striking similarity between *shihua* and *pingdian* style commentary in term of content, *shihua* works and *pingdian* style commentary in poetry anthologies have often become indistinguishable in form. On the one hand, some poetry anthologies may include a great number of citations from *shihua* works. While compiling poetry anthologies, some scholars cited many remarks from famous *shihua* works and placed them next to a poem to function as *pingdian* style commentary. The famous ones include Cai Zhengsun’s 蔡正孫 (fl. 1239?) *Shilin guanji* 詩林廣記 (*A Wide Record of Poetry*) and Gao Bing’s 高棅 (1350–1423) *Tangshi pinhui* 唐詩品匯 (*The Categories of Tang Poetry*). Cai Zhengsun’s *Shilin guanji* was published at the end of the Song dynasty. In this anthology, Cai selected the famous Tang and Song poems and supplemented each poem with words and remarks made by previous scholars. These remarks had been

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placed either after a poet’s name or at the end of a poem. Gao Bing did the same thing to his poetry anthology, but the positions for cited remarks became more flexible. To be more specific, the cited remarks appear not only under the poem’s title or after poem’s main text, but also between the poetic lines.

On the other hand, pingdian style commentary has been grouped under shihua category, or been directly called a form of shihua. For example, Cai Zhengsun’s contemporary Fang Hui 方囘 (1227–1305) compiled and published a selected poetry anthology called Yingkuilvsui 瀜奎律髓 (Assembled Essence of the Regulated Verse)\textsuperscript{167} in 1282.\textsuperscript{168} In this work, Fang Hui selected the Tang and the Song regulated poetry. Different from Cai Zhengsun’s practice to append famous shihua remarks to the poems, Fang made all remarks by himself. These remarks include annotations, evaluations, and explanations of poetic lines, and aesthetic features of the poem. The latter no doubt should be defined as pingdian style commentaries. However, Fang Hui explained his commentaries in this anthology with these words:

\begin{quote}
The essence of literature is poetry and the essence of poetry is regulated poetry. What I selected is poetry pattern. What I annotated is remarks on poetry.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{168} Li Qingjia 李慶甲 ed. Yingkuilvsui huiping 瀜奎律髓匯評 (Yingkuilvsui with Collected Commentaries), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), p. 8.
Here, in Fang Hui’s eyes, his commentaries after each poem had no difference from the shihua remarks that Cai Zhengsun’s appended to the selected poems in Shilin guangji, though these pingdian style commentaries were all made by Fang Hui himself. It is clear that Fang Hui and Cai Zhengsun did not strictly distinguish these two forms of literary criticisms from each other.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s pingdian style commentaries have also been regarded as shihua remarks. While talking of Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s hard work of making commentaries in Shigui project, the modern scholar Peng Xianzhao thinks that Shigui could be regarded directly as a shihua work since this poetry anthology includes a preface in the beginning and a great number of pingdian style commentaries in the middle. Meanwhile, in Wu Wenzhi’s Ming shihua quanbian 明詩話全編 (The Complete Collection of Ming Shihua Works), editors selected a variety of Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s remarks of literary criticisms, including some Zhong and Tan’s pingdian style commentaries in Shigui, and respectively edited them under the titles


“Zhong Xing Shihua 鍾惺詩話” (Zhong Xing’s Remarks on Poetry)\textsuperscript{171} and “Tan Yuanchun Shihua 譚元春詩話” (Tan Yuanchun’s Remarks on Poetry).\textsuperscript{172} The wording of these titles themselves would to some degree blur the boundaries between shihua and pingdian style commentary, or even make readers understand those pingdian style commentaries in Shigui as remarks in shihua works.

II. Differences between Shihua Remarks and Pingdian Style Commentary

The fact that remarks on poetry and pingdian style commentaries are often mixed together not only tells the blurred boundary between shihua and pingdian, but also calls into question the similarities and differences between these two forms of literary criticism. It is clear that shihua and pingdian present the scholars’ ideas in different forms. As I have shown in the previous section, pingdian style commentary is positioned next to the poems, and is subordinate to the poems in a poetry anthology. By contrast, remarks on poetry occupy the major space in the shihua work. In other words, a poetic line, a couplet, or even an entire poem (for very short one) might be cited in a remark, but they are only the subject to be discussed by the scholars. The major text of a shihua work are always a scholar’s critical remarks instead of poem themselves.


Then how does such a difference in the form between shihua and pingdian influence their contents? Or what else are the unique features of pingdian style commentary as compared with shihua apart from its spatial positioning? As for Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchu, what features of pingdian style commentary attracted them so much that they decided to choose this form instead of shihua to express their literary ideas?

Same Issue but Different Expressions

Before we go into Shigui, let’s make some comparisons between shihua work and pingdian style commentary made by the same scholars. The first comparison is between remarks in Jiangzhai shihua 薑齋詩話 (Remarks on Poetry by Wang Fuzhi) and pingdian style commentary in Sanshi pingxuan 三詩評選 (Three Poetry Anthologies with Pingdian Style Commentaries). These works were all made by Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, a famous seventeenth century scholar on philosophy, history, and literature. Compared with the great number of pingdian style commentaries in Wang’s poetry anthologies, the number of remarks that Wang made in his shihua work is very limited. As for some similar issues discussed respectively in shihua work or in the anthology, Wang Fuzhi seemed to discuss them in some different ways. For example, Wang Fuzhi held Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) in great esteem. In Jiangzhai shihua 薑齋詩話, Wang Fuzhi mentioned Xie Lingyun and his poems in several remarks, but only one of them focuses

173 These three anthologies are respectively are Gushi pingxuan 古詩評選 (Anthology of Selected Ancient Poetry with Pingdian Style Commentaries), Tangshi Pingxuan 唐詩評選 (Anthology of Selected Tang Poetry with Pingdian Style Commentaries ), Mingshi pingxuan 明詩評選 (Anthology of Selected Ming Poetry with Pingdian Style Commentaries).
on Xie Lingyun’s unique features and briefly praised his great contribution to poetry.\(^{174}\)

In the other remarks, Xie Lingyun and his poems are used as a sample to prove Wang Fuzhi’s own poetic theory. For example:

If a person decides on a certain topic, or person, or event, and then first of all seeks to describe its appearance, or seeks some similitude, or seeks flashy rhetoric, or anecdotes and relevant facts, it resembles nothing so much as hacking place, but your never get even the least sliver of the grain. As concept (yi) is the dominate factor, the momentum (shih) follows from it. Momentum is the principle of spirit (shen-li) within concept. Only Hsieh Ling-yün [385-433] was able to grasp momentum so that it would wind sinuously, contracting and stretching in such a way that the concept was completely fulfilled. When concept was completely fulfilled, it stopped without any excess of words. It winds and coils, like clouds and vapors intertwining—a true dragon this, and no painted dragon.\(^{175}\)

\(^{174}\) No. 14, in Chapter 1, “Jiangzhai shihua”薑齋詩話. *Qingshihua* 清詩話 (*Collections of the Qing Shihua Works*), (Shanghai: shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), p.7

把定一題、一人、一事、一物，於其上求形模，求比似，求詞采，求故實；如鈍斧子劈櫟柞，皮屑紛霏，何嘗動得一絲紋理？以意爲主，勢次之。勢者，意中審理也。唯謝康樂為能取勢，宛轉屈伸，以求盡其意，意已盡則止，殆無剩語；天敧連蜷，煙雲繚繞，乃真龍，非畫龍也。^{176}

This remark from “Jiangzhai shihua 薑齋詩話” presents a typical way to discuss a poetic issue very briefly. Wang Fuzhi first raised the issue of writing a poem on a certain topic. Then he expressed his own thinking on this issue: “As concept (yi) is the dominate factor, the momentum (shih) follows from it.” At last, Wang Fuzhi gave the example of Xie Lingyun to further show his poetic ideal.

However, Wang Fuzhi’s comment on Xie Lingyun’s poems is rather general. A reader might not be able to make sense of Wang Fuzhi’s words if he was not familiar with Xie Lingyun’s poems or had little knowledge of poetry writing. This remark could be only understood by the readers who had a good knowledge of poetry, namely, scholars in literary circles.

Wang Fuzhi’s pingdian style commentaries on Xie Lingyun’s poems are totally different story. In Gushi pingxuan 古詩評選 (Anthology of Selected Ancient Poetry with Pingdian Style Commentaries), Wang Fuzhi selected and commented more than 30 of

Xie Lingyun’s poems. Among these pingdian style commentaries, there are some written in the similar ways as the above remark in shihua works. In these commentaries, Wang Fuzhi often directly started his discussion from general understanding of Xie Lingyun’s poems, and did not further explain the unique features of Xie Lingyun’s poems. For example:

In selecting scenes, he often chooses a broad outlines of landscape; for ones when selecting detailed scenes, he often lead us into them through winding paths. That is to go from afar into their depth. He is the only one capable of this through the millennia.

凡取景者，類多梗概；取景細者，多入局曲。即遠入細，千古一人而已。177

This commentary was made on Xie Lingyun’s famous landscape poem “Shibi jingshe huan huzhong zuo 石壁精舍還湖中作” (Written on the Lake, Returning from the Chapel at Stone Cliff). 178 Wang Fuzhi did not focus on Xie Lingyun’s detailed description of landscape, but generally discussed Xie’s skill in picturing landscape, and concluded that Xie made unique contribution to landscape poetry. To compare this commentary with

177 The comment on Xie Lingyun’s “Shibi jingshe huan huzhong zuo 石壁精舍還湖中作”. Gushi pingxuan 古詩評選, punctuated by Zhang Guoxing 張國星 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), p. 218.

the remark cited from Wang Fuzhi’s *shihua* work, we can easily find that Wang Fuzhi discussed Xie’s poem in a same way as he did in his *shihua* work. To be more specific, Wang first brought up an issue, and told how other poets dealt with it, and then he proceeded to Xie Lingyun and pointed out Xie’s unique contribution. Therefore, if this *pingdian* style commentary was taken out from the anthology, it could also stay alone as a coherent remark on Xie Lingyun’s skills in describing landscape.

Still, there are numbers of comments in which Wang Fuzhi focused only on the poem itself. For instance:

> [It is] plain but profound

平固自遠

This brief commentary is made on the general style of Xie Lingyun’s poem “Qili lai 七里瀨” (Seven-Mill Rapids). Different from the previous commentary, this one would not have made any sense if it was taken away from Xie Lingyun’s original poem. The reader could understand this commentary only when it was placed together with the poem “Qili lai”.

There are a number of such *pingdian* style commentaries in Wang Fuzhi’s poetry anthologies. In these commentaries, Wang Fuzhi often began with a short comment on a couple of poetic lines or a brief summary of the aesthetic feature or style of the poem.

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179 The comment on Xie Lingyun’s “Qililai 七里瀨,” *Gushi pingxuan 古詩評選*, punctuated by Zhang Guoxing 張國星, p. 212.
The commentaries could end in this way, but sometimes, Wang Fuzhi went one step further to explore Xie Lingyun’s general writing skills, the aesthetic feature of Xie’s poems, and the importance of Xie’s poem in Chinese poetic history. It is very possible that Wang Fuzhi did not consciously set up any special framework for his *pingdian* style commentaries in his anthologies, but recorded his thoughts while reading the poems. Therefore those *pingdian* style commentaries have to depend on the poems to make themselves meaningful.

_Same Issue, Same Expression, but Different Editions_

The difference between a remark in _shihua_ work and _pingdian_ style commentary poetry anthologies might be even clearer in the Qing scholar Shen Deqian’s 沈德潛 _shihua_ works and poetry anthologies. In 1719, Shen Deqian compiled a poetry anthology _Gushi yuan_ 古詩源 (*The Sources of Ancient Poetry*), which includes a number of _pingdian_ style commentaries. Interestingly, some _pingdian_ style commentaries in this anthology also appeared in his _shihua_ work _Shuoshi zuiyu_ 說詩晬語 (*Talks on Poetry*) which was done in 1731, but some original expressions had been modified. For

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181 Shen Deqian said in his self-preface to _Shuoshi zuiyu_ 說詩晬語 (*Talks on Poetry*), that he read books in a temple in the 1731 spring and wrote down his feeling about the reading in a number of remarks. Then he collected them and edited them as _Shuoshi zuiyu_. Shen Deqian 沈德潛 “Zixu 自序” (“Self-Preface”), in _Yuanshi, Yipiao shihua, Shuoshi zuiyu 原詩 一瓢詩話 說詩晬語* (*The Origin of Poetry, A ladle of Remarks on Poetry, and Talks on Poetry*), (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1998) p.185.
example, She Deqian made a number of pingdian style commentaries on “Gushi shijiu shou” 古詩十九首 (“Nineteen Old Poems”):

Figure 3.1

These two pages are taken respectively from the first page and the last page of “Nineteen Old Poems” in Gushiyuan. On the right-hand page, the first page of this group of poems, Shen Deqian first gave some information on the authorship and dates of these poems in double-columned small-character interlineal comments under the title (commentary ①).

On the left-hand page, he offered three pingdian style commentaries at the end of the last poem of “Gushi shijiushou.” The first commentary (Commentary ②) reads:

“Nineteen Old Poems” are generally experiences and feelings of exiled ministers, abandoned wives, friends who lost contact with one another, covering life and death, old and new. Among these poems, some feelings are implied and others are directly presented. These feelings linger in the poetic lines and have endless modulations in tone. They make the reader feel sad without any reason, and let them spontaneously enter the world of poems. This is the inheritance of “Air of States.”

This commentary talks of the contents of the entire group of poems, the expression of poet’s feelings, and the readers’ reception. And at last, Shen Deqian indicates how highly he regarded this group of poems by tracing its aesthetic features back to “Guofeng 國風” (States of Air), namely Shijing 詩經 (The Book of Poetry) tradition. Commentary ② together with commentary ① reappeared in Shen Deqian’s shihua work Shuoshi zuiyu
説詩晬語, but Shen combined these two *pingdian* style commentaries into one remark, and made slight changes in the wording:

“Nineteen Old Poems” were not necessarily composed by one person at one time. These poems are generally experiences and feelings of exiled ministers, abandoned wives, friends who lost contact with one another, wanderers in a distant land, covering death and life, new and old. In these poems, some [feelings] are implied, some [feelings] are directly presented, and some [feelings] are repeated several times. These poems have no extraordinary and incisive thoughts or spectacular lines. But ancient poems from the Western Capital (of the Western Han) are not at the same level as “Nineteen Old Poems”. It is because [“Nineteen Old Poems”] are the legacy of “Airs of the States” of *Book of Poetry*.

古詩十九首, 不必一人一辭, 一時之作。大率逐臣棄妻、朋友闊絕、遊子他鄉、死生新故之感；或寓言、或顯言、或反覆言，初無奇闢之思、驚險之句，而西京古詩，皆在其下。是為《國風》之遺。\(^\text{183}\)

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The first sentence just copies the underlined sentence in the right-hand page and adds a few words. The second sentence uses most part of the underlined comments in the left page, but makes a more detailed summary of the poems’ contents and deletes the line about the readers. The last sentence about the source of these nineteen old poems was also copied from that of the previous pingdian style commentary.

It is clear that the combination of these two commentaries became a remark evaluating “Nineteen Old Poems” in terms of authorship, contents, styles, and relationship to the Book of Poetry. In this sense, this remark could be independent of the poems that it talks about. However, if the readers were not familiar with these nineteen poems and had little knowledge of Chinese poetry, it would be very difficult for them to totally understand this remark without the text of the poems to hand. By contrast, poetic texts and pingdian style commentaries could complement each other in this regard. On one hand, the reader could get a better understanding of the poems with the help of pingdian style commentaries, while on the other, he could ponder over the commentaries by reciting the discussed poem again and again. In this sense, remarks in shihua work and pingdian style commentaries in poetry anthology are rather different regarding the targeted readers and functions. The former is written and published for well-informed readers, namely experts on poetry or those who have good knowledge of Chinese poetry. Remarks in a shihua work could be regarded as brief reviews of a series of important issues in poetry. But the latter might be compiled for the poetry learners, who are very possibly not familiar with poetry at all or who have no knowledge of poetry at all.
Therefore, *pingdian* style commentary serves as a bridge between the text of poetry and these readers.

### III. *Pingdian* Style Commentary and Poetic Education

Indeed, as Zhou Weide correctly observes, the *shihua* works became more specialized after the mid-Ming. In the meantime, the Ming *shihua* works, as Zhou states, focused more on the theoretical issues of poetry in contrast to the Song *shihua* works which served as records of casual talks on poetry. However, *pingdian* style commentaries were generally made for the educational purpose from the Song dynasty on. In Cai Zhengsun’s *Shilin guanji*, remarks cited from famous *shihua* works appear as double-columned small-character interlineal comments in the end of each poem. While explaining his motive for editing this anthology with *shihua* remarks appended, Cai explained in the preface:

> In my spare time, I selected famous poems written by masters since the Jing and the Song dynasties. I copied these several hundred poems in order to teach my sons and nephews. In the meantime, I collected comments and

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remarks made by previous scholars, and verifiable imitation works. I tried my best to search and cite those sources, and I listed them respectively after each poem. The works appraised by masters are all included in this selected poetry anthology.

暇日采晉、宋以來數大名家及其餘膾炙人口者，凡幾百篇，鈔之以課兒侄，並集前賢評話及有所援据摹擬者，冥搜旁引，而麗于各篇之次。凡出于諸老之所品題者，必在此選。186

Here, Cai clearly stated that he specially made this poetry anthology for his sons and nephews to learn poetry. Therefore, the famous shihua remarks appended should function as supplementary aids to help his children to better understand those poems and their aesthetic features.

Cai Zhengsun not only placed famous shihua remarks in his edited poetry anthology, but also wrote many pingdian style commentaries in another poetry anthology, Tang Song qianjia lianzhu shige 唐宋千家聯珠詩格 (An Anthology of the Tang and the Song Regulated Poems). According to modern scholar Zhang Jian, this poetry anthology was also made for children. Different from Shilin guanji, Cai made a number of meticulous explanations and commentaries on characters, words, structure, and poetic

lines. And these commentaries and annotations mainly helped the readers and the learners
to understand the poems and the writing skills.  

This purpose of making pingdian style commentary could be even clearly seen in
the works by Liu Chenweng and Fang Hui. Liu Chenweng is well known for making
pingdian-style commentaries in various genres, covering history, philosophy essays,
poetry, and biji fiction. Among them, his commentaries on poetry and biji fiction had
earned him good reputation in the later generations. The modern scholar Sun Qin’an even
calls Liu as “the first master of Chinese pingdian style commentary.” Nevertheless,
Liu’s original motive in making pingdian was simply to teach his children and students.
As modern scholars Zhang Jing and Jiao Tong demonstrate, Liu Chenweng’s son Liu
Jiangsun 劉將孫 once mentioned his father would give the commentaries to him and
other students after he finished making commentaries on a work.

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188 Liu Chenfeng’s pingdian works have been edited as Liu Xuxi piping jiuzhong 劉須溪批評九種 (Liu Chenweng’s Nine Kinds of Criticism). For poetry, he made pingdian style commentaries to the poems by the Tang poets Meng Haoran 孟浩然, Wang Wei 王維, Li He 李賀, and Du Fu 杜甫, and the Song poet Lu You 陸游; for fiction, he commented Shishuo xinyu 世說新語; For history, he made pingdian to Shiji 史記; for philosophy, he once commented Laozi 老子, Zhuangzi 莊子, and Liezi 列子.


If Liu Chenweng’s purpose was to teach his children and students, Fang Hui’s intention in writing pingdian style commentaries was to teach the readers to learn poetry. In 1467, Fang Hui’s Yingguilvsui was reprinted. The Ming publisher thought highly of this work for its excellent selection of poems and felicitous comments, and said that the poetic methods of ancient people had been revealed. 191 The educational purpose of this work became very clear in this publisher’s words. Thus it is not surprising to see that Stephen Owen includes this work into the groups of “anthologies to teach composition.” 192

Although anthologies with remarks or pingdian style commentaries appended were well circulated at the end of the Southern Song and the beginning of the Yuan dynasty, such a form was not favored by most scholars in the Ming before Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun except Gao Bing. Like Cai Zhengsun, Gao Bing added some most famous shihua remarks to his selected poetry anthology Tangshi pinhui. As for the principle of selecting shihua remarks, Gao said:

The various schools have made numerous remarks and comments. Some remarks were made on a poet’s general poetic [styles and skills]. I attach them to this poet’s name. Some remarks were on a poem, and I add them either before or after this poem. For remarks on a poetic line, I place them under the line in question. Writings are public assets.


However, scholars through the dynasties have had different aspirations and interests. They made these remarks with great ease. Then the readers are often confused about those scholars’ different tendencies and tastes. Now, I choose their proper arguments and words of apprehension, and record all of them [in this poetry anthology]. As for those strange explanations and inappropriate words, I have not selected any of them.

諸家評論繁甚，其有評論本人詩者，則附於姓氏之後；有評論本詩者，則附於本詩之先後；有評論本句者，則附於本句之下。夫文章公器也。然而歷代辭人志趣不叶，議論縱橫，使人惑於趨向。今取其正論悟語，悉錄之。其或文儒奇解，過中之說，一無取焉。193

Here, Gao Bing provided us with important information about shihua remarks, pingdian style commentaries, and reader receptions of these two forms at that time. First, a large quantity of shihua works had appeared before Gao Bing’s time. This situation might benefit deep discussions of important poetic issues between scholars, but too many shihua works, in Gao Bing’s opinion, did not truly help the reader to find the correct way to learn poetry. Instead, the more shihua works appeared, the more confused the readers would feel when reading these shihua remarks.

Second, Gao Bing reorganized those famous remarks from previous *shihua* works in accordance with poems and poets:

![Figure 3.2](image)

This is a typical page in *Tangshi pinhui*, presenting how the remarks had been organized and placed. After Li Bai’s 李白 (701–762) name, thirteen remarks are attached, discussing Li Bai’s personality and poetic styles. One space is used to separate two sections of remarks. After the title of a group of poems “Gufeng sanshiershou” 古風三十二首 (Ancient Customs, Thirty Two Poems) is a remark about the source of Li Bai’s composition of this group of poems. Three sections of *shihua* remarks on the first poem of this group have been placed in the end of the poem. In this way, although *shihua* remarks were “in a loose chronological or generic order or both,” they became well organized when being placed together with their subjects of discussion.

Third, Gao Bing expressed clearly his criteria for selecting *shihua* remarks:

*shihua* remarks must focus on at least a poetic line or couplet. In other words, discussions

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based on words or compounds had not been selected. In the meantime, he only selected familiar remarks instead of unconventional or unorthodox ones.

Gao Bing’s criteria for selecting and organizing *shihua* remarks obviously stem from a concern for poetic education. By doing so, Gao intended to give the readers some help in understanding poems in the proper way. Meanwhile, Gao distinguished the poems from *shihua* remarks in terms of importance of learning poetry. In other words, poetry is the major subject to learn, but *shihua* remarks only function as aids. Therefore, remarks in a *shihua* work can be rather misleading, but *pingdian* style commentaries in a poetry anthology would be helpful to the learners.

**IV Pingdian style Commentary in Shigui**

As I have shown in the previous section, scholars from the Southern Song through the Ming kept compiling selected poetry anthologies with *pingdian* style commentaries appended. No matter whether these commentaries or remarks were written by compiler themselves, or by scholars with great reputation on poetry, they all function as aids of poetry learning. In other words, *pingdian* style commentary is subordinate to the major text of poetry. Then how did Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun understand this genre? Or which unique feature of this genre attracted them to express their poetic ideals in this form?
Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun first agreed with previous scholars that this genre was a combination of poetry and remarks. However, they thought that poetry and remarks were both important. In other words, pingdian style commentary was not secondary to the selected poems in Zhong and Tan’s eyes. It played a fundamental role in achieving Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s ambitious goals. In “Shigui xu 詩歸序” (Preface to Shigui), Tan Yuanchun once said:

Poetry anthologies, such like *Anthology of Refined Literature*, *Selection of the Ancient and Modern Poetry*, and remarks by Zhong Rong and Yan Yu, all focused on their own carving and decoration, but [these authors] had no time to seek the spiritual, expansive, simple, and gracious style [in these works].

《文選》、《詩刪》之類，鍾嶸、嚴滄浪之語，瑟瑟然務自雕飾，而不暇求于靈迥樸潤。  

*Wenxuan* 文選 (*Anthology of Refined Literature*), edited by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), had been long regarded as one of the most important anthologies of poetry and literature in Chinese history. *Shishan 詩刪* refers to *Gu Jin Shishan (Selection of the Ancient and Modern Poetry)*, the poetry anthology edited by Li Panlong, the leading figure of the Latter Seven Masters. This poetry anthology represented the major poetic ideas of the

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Latter Seven Masters, and strongly impacted the literary circles in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. These two poetry anthologies are respectively the most influential anthologies before *Shigui*.

Zhong Rong and Yang Yu (−?) are authors of two famous *shihua* works before the Ming dynasty. Zhong Rong’s *Shipin* 詩品 had been regarded as the earliest *shihua* work in Chinese literature history by Zhang Xuecheng. Yang Yu was a poetic scholar living in the Southern Song dynasty. His *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 (*Yan Yu’s Remarks on Poetry*), as Stephen Owen describes, “is the most famous and most influential work in the genre of ‘remarks on poetry.’”

Here, Tan Yuanchun juxtaposed poetry anthologies with *shihua* works, and said that he could not find his ideal poetry in those most successful works of these two genres. Tan’s words not only tell his dissatisfaction with these famous works, but more importantly, show us Tan’s understandings of *Shigui*’s genre—a combination of poetry and remarks. In the meantime, Tan’s comments on both genres also show his attitudes towards the two fundamental parts of *Shigui*’s genre: selected poems and *pingdian* style commentary are both important. Tan himself had no intention to view *pingdian* style commentary simply as learning aids in this sense. Instead, he regarded it as a form to express his literary thoughts by elevating *pingdian* style commentaries to the same level as *shihua* genre.

Zhong Xing also highly valued his hard work on *pingdian* style commentaries in a letter to his good friend Cai Fuyi:

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Although this work selects ancient poems, it is instead a work written by our own.

此雖選古人詩，實自著一書。198

To write a scholarly work could be a perfect way to present one’s literary thoughts. Here Zhong Xing thought Shigui was no different from a work written by his own because he had been dedicated to writing pingdian style commentaries during the entire process of Shigui compilation. These commentaries were all his personal understandings and appreciation of the poems, ranging from the minute details to the large issue of poetry history. In this way, Zhong Xing’s literary thoughts had been well represented in his pingdian style commentaries.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun paid great attention to pingdian style commentaries, but questions remain over their choice of this form. If Zhong and Tan intended to form a poetic theory of a literary school and win a position in Chinese poetry history, shihua would have been a good and most frequently used genre to achieve this goal in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Then why did they give up shihua genre and eventually choose a genre, which had been generally used for poetry education since the thirteenth century, to express their literary thoughts?

I think Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s choice resulted from their ambitions with regard to both literary criticisms and poetry education. To be more specific, from the

198 Zhong Xing “Yu Cai Jingfu 與蔡敬夫 (II)” (To Cai Jingfu, II). Yinxuexuan ji 隱秀軒集, p. 469.
very beginning, Zhong and Tan intended to achieve two different goals by compiling
*Shigui*: one was to express their poetic ideals, while the other was to help the readers to
find, understand, and appraise the real poems of ancient people. The theoretical
expression and educational purpose are equally important in Zhong Xing and Tan
Yuanchun’s minds, and also in their words:

When I stayed home, Mr. Tan Yuanchun and I read ancient
poets deeply, got their spirit, selected ancient and
contemporary poems, and entitled it *Shigui*. We slightly
made remarks and annotations in order to reveal what had
been hidden before and make clear what puzzled readers. [In
this anthology,] we bring up ancient spirit and let readers’ to
be in mouths and eyes.

家居復與譚生元春深覽古人，得其精神，選定古今詩曰
詩歸。稍有評註，發覆指迷。蓋舉古人精神日在人口耳
之下。199

To reveal “ancient spirit” (*guren jingshen 古人精神*) was Zhong Xing and Tan
Yuanchun’s lofty ideal of poetry, and to bring this spirit to the readers was also the
mission that Zhong and Tan desired to accomplish. However, “*shao*” 稍 (slightly) here
could hardly show the great efforts Zhong and Tan made for the latter goal in *Shigui*. In

another letter to Cai Fuyi, Zhong Xing more explicitly expressed the same intentions of compiling *Shigui*:

The work *Shigui* is surely a result of scholars’ bearing. … [We] selected the poems with ancient spirit and entitled this anthology *Shigui* in order to let readers’ ears, eyes, and their aspirations all return to the ancient spirit. Because of an old lady’s mind [inside of us, we] often wrote down key words. By doing so, we hope that our teaching could be the light, candle, carriage, and walking sticks for deaf and blind people. This teaching is really not relevant to original appearance of the ancients. I feel myself meddlesome, but I cannot place myself outside of Lu Mount. However, this is really something that I have to do.

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In this paragraph, Zhong Xing clarified his purposes in compiling *Shigui*. Zhong admitted that this poetry anthology was surely scholars’ work. In the meantime, this poetry anthology also played an instructive role in teaching the readers real poetry, as evidenced by the great number of Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s *pingdian* style commentaries. Regarding these commentaries, Zhong Xing had rather mixed feelings. He knew that these *pingdian* style commentaries might not reinforce the expression of his poetic ideas; or in some situation, Zhong Xing did not need to write *pingdian* style commentaries at all in order to accomplish the goal of revealing so-called “ancient spirit.” However, the term “an old lady’s heart” (*laopoxin* 老婆心) tells Zhong’s great determination to urge the readers to choose the right way to learn poetry. “An old lady’s heart” is a Buddhist term referring to a Buddhist master’s zeal to teach his students again and again. By using this term here, Zhong Xing showed his persistence in making *pingdian* style commentaries in *Shigui*. Zhong Xing’s firm stand also tells us that in Zhong Xing’s eyes, poetry education is an equally important mission as that of building his own poetry ideals in literary history. He would not sacrifice the former to achieve the latter goal.

Clearly, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun wanted to take into account both theoretical and educational needs in *Shigui*. If these two parts were perfectly combined and well done in one work, it would definitely attract readers from multiple backgrounds. However, it is never an easy job for one to achieve such an ambitious goal. Indeed, *Shigui* was soon criticized for its many *pingdian* style commentaries:

Cao Nengshi…also said that *Shigui* reveals everything, and falls into the trap of seeking exhaustiveness. The so-
called... ‘to exhaust’ just represents a theory of “no-deepness.” I feel deeply convinced by these comments. However, to reveal everything is [to advise the reader in earnest words and with good intention] as old lady often does. This [kind of commentaries] is deliberately meant for those stubborn and dull people. ”

This paragraph is from Zhong Xing’s letter to his friend Gao Chu 高出. The story goes that Gao Chu once wrote Zhong Xing to criticize Zhong and Tan Yuanchun did not write all the pingdian style commentaries in a “deep” style. 202 Thus, in this letter, Zhong Xing replies Gao Chu and said that Cao Xuequan 曹學佺 (style Nengshi 能始) also made the similar criticisms to his pingdian style commentaries in Shigui. Here, both Cao Xuequan and Gao Chu pointed out that the writing style of pingdian style commentary in Shigui contradicted the poetic ideal of the Jingling school: Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun on one hand advocated “depth” (hou 厚) in literary style, but on the other, they exhausted

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202 Zhong Xing said: “[Gao Chu’s letter said:] …Zhong Xing’s Shigui emphasized “depth” again and again, but his commentaries were often not deep. This is incisive and deep words.”(...以惺所評詩歸，反復于厚之一字，而下筆多有未厚者，此洞見深中之言). Zhong Xing, “Yu Gao Haizhi guancha” 與高孩之觀察. “Yinxiaoxuan Ji 隱秀軒集. p. 474.
every poetic topic in their commentaries without leaving any space for the readers to ponder.

“Depth” (hou 厚) is one of the most important terms in the Jingling poetic theory. As Tan Yuanchun stated in the preface to Shigui, the reason for Zhong Xing and him to study ancient poetry was to achieve this “deep” style in their own writings. 203 For the meanings of “depth” in the Jingling poetics, Wu Guoping thinks that it includes multiple meanings. One of its meanings indicates the combination of deep emotions and abundant contents which enable a poem to have endless meanings beyond the text. This term may also refer to the aesthetic feature that a poet expressed an abundant content with a brief expression. 204 Indeed, “depth” is an often-used term in Shigui to highly praise a poem that has endless meaning beyond the text:

In short, ancient people can make a poem in a few words. Reading it helps the reader to develop a deep and simple style.

總之，古人數字亦可成一篇，讀之使人氣厚而筆簡。205

203 In “Shigui xu 詩歸序,” Tan Yuanchun said: “[I] thus agreed with Mr. Zhong to study ancient learning. We studied ancient poetry with great concentration, and opened our mind to receive widely in order to achieve the “deep” learning. (乃與鍾子約為古學，冥心放懷，期在必厚)” Chen Xingzhen 陳杏珍 ed. Tan Yuanchun ji 譚元春集, p. 593.

204 Wu Guoping. Jinglingpai yu Mingdai wenxue piping 竟陵派與明代文學批評, p. 100.

This is simply extremely true and deep. But if [you ask which] line is good, it is no way to search.

只是極真極厚，若云某句某句佳，亦無尋処。\(^{206}\)

*Hou* 厚 in these two commentaries refers to a poetic style with abundant reserved meanings. These reserved meanings were often achieved by the ancient people through very short expression. In other words, the style of “deep” results from a harmonious combination of simple expression and intended meanings. Sometimes, the character *shen* 深 was also used by Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun to describe their favorite style:

Ancient people did not say it all, but everything was included.

Today, people say it again and again, but that just makes readers feel insipid. Thus, ancient people wrote a poem in a simple but deep style, while contemporary people make a poem in a complex but shallow style.

古人不全說出，無所不有。今人說了又說，反覺索然。

則以古人簡而深，今人繁而淺。\(^{207}\)

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Again, ancient poets’ “simple but deep” style constitutes a sharp contrast with contemporary people’s “complicated but shallow” style. The Jingling scholars clearly advocated the former style and disliked the latter style very much. However, the description that “today, people say it again and again” might be a vivid portrait of what Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun themselves did in their pingdian style commentaries in Shigui. Therefore, Cao Xuequan and Gao Chu thought Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s poetic criticism in Shigui clearly contradicted their poetic ideals.

Zhong Xing admitted in his letter to his friend Gao Chu that he was convinced by Cao Xuequan and his point. However, Zhong was merely paying lip service. In fact, he was rather defensive about the style of his pingdian style commentary. He insisted that these commentaries were specially made for “those stubborn and dull people” (頑冥不靈之人). Zhong Xing’s defense again shows his ambition to change the poetry learning in the late Ming through Shigui. In order to achieve this goal, he would rather give up his favorite writing style while making pingdian style commentaries.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s insistence on exhaustive writing style in pingdian style commentary later resulted in polarized responses to Shigui. For poetry beginners in the late Ming, the great number of pingdian style commentary in unreserved style no doubt provided them with great sources and instructions. As Lien Wen-ping summarizes in her paper on the adult learners of poetry in the Ming dynasty, most Ming students could not learn poetry in their childhood since they had to devote themselves to civil examinations. Therefore, most of these students began their poetry learning after

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208 Lien Wen-ping 連文萍. “Mingdai shizi de xueshi jingyan chutan—yi chengren chuxuezhe de xueshidongji wei zhongxin 明代士子的學詩經驗初探—以成人初學者的學詩動機為論述中心” (On the
they grew up. Among these beginning learners, although some might be born in a family of scholars and be well educated or deeply influenced by elder members of their families, more people had to learn through reading poetry anthologies and poetic works and in this way build their own understanding of poetry and poetic thoughts. In the process of their reading, understanding, and practicing, good learners often began with classic poems, then pondered about their details, accumulated their own experience, and developed their own writing styles. For people who had no background on poetry and were not willing to spend time on poetry learning, they often just bought some poetry learning books, copied lines of ancient poems, and then roughly produced poems of their own. 209

Many scholars of poetry, as Lien Wen-ping points out, would like to play a part in helping students learn poetry. In their works, these scholars often advised the students of correct methods and ways to learn poetry, or criticized the negative influence of previous poetic theories and thoughts, and attacked the use of writing skills of eight-leg essay on poetry writing. 210

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun were just two of those scholars. They tried their best to guide the readers through detailed analyses of a word, a compound, a poetic line, a couplet, or a style, a background story, and a poetic genre. They also harshly criticized the previous literary schools for their wrong advices to the readers and their bad influences to the contemporary poetry learning. They just did as what Cao Xuequan and

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Gao Chu commented on them, “exhausting” every related poetic issues in their words. This practice eventually resulted in the harsh attacks in the early Qing.

Cao Xuequan and Gao Chu respectively criticized the problem of writing style of pingdian style commentary in Shigui. Although Zhong was defensive in this regard, he might not be able to expect that his pingdian style commentary became one of the major targets to be attacked in the later generation. Indeed, after the Ming fell, more and more scholars harshly criticized Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun for making such kind of pingdian style commentary. Mao Xianshu 毛先舒 (1620–1688) was the representative figure among them.

In Shibianchi 詩辯坻 (Poetry Debate by Mao Xianshu), Mao Xianshu specially wrote a chapter entitled “Jingling shijie boyi” 竟陵詩解駁議 (“To Refute the Jingling Poetics”) to criticize the Jingling poetics and its negative influence on the literary circles of the seventeenth century China. In Mao’s opinion, the reason for Shigui to have such a huge negative influence in the late Ming was simply because it was an easy-to-learn anthology for the majority of readers. Mao summarized six major conveniences in Shigui that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun deliberately made for readers to learn poetry. Three of them are related to pingdian style commentary:

In Mr. Zhong’s book, the significance and point is superficial and rough. The readers can immediately understand it after opening the chapter. This is [Shigui’s] first convenience. The arguments [in Shigui] are cunning, simple, easy to start one’s
crafty thinking, hasty, and promptly made. Thus it is easy to violate the traditional principles of poetics. This is the second convenience. [In Shigui] Zhong and Tan highly thought of some poets’ skills in cleverly using a single character in a poem, but they did not value the grand design and well organized structure of a poem. [Zhong and Tan’s such practice would greatly benefit those who had scant knowledge but were] hungry for poem writing. When one gets a little, he would immediately hold writing tablet to write. This is the third convenience.

蓋鍾氏之書，指義淺率，展卷即通，其便一也。持論儇侻，啓人狙智，造次捷給，易絀準繩之談，其便二也。矜巧片字，不貴閎整，龜腸蟬腹，得就操觚，其便三也。  

Here, the word bian 便 (convenience) is not different from any word meaning “problem.”

In Mao’s eyes, the more convenient Shigui was made for the readers to learn, the more serious problems this poetry anthology included, and the more negative influence Shigui would have. The spearhead of Mao’s criticisms is first directed at pingdian style commentaries in Shigui.

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In the first convenience, Mao Xianshu generally criticized that pingdian style commentaries in Shigui were superficially and roughly made. Mao thought that the Jingling literary thoughts presented in the commentaries lacked depth of knowledge and understanding of poetry. So it is very easy for the readers to make sense of the meaning of these commentaries. Such criticism by Mao was generally made regarding the content of pingdian style commentary. This also echoes Cao Xuequan and Gao Chu’s point that Zhong Xing often made “not deep” (buhou 不厚) commentaries in Shigui. To think, Zhong Xing argued that one needed to write his abundant knowledge and experiences in simple words in order to achieve “depth” in poetry style. In this sense, the lack of depth in Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s literary thoughts is possibly one of the main reasons that Zhong could not write his commentary in his favorite style.

Mao furthered his arguments on Shigui’s shallowness in the second convenience and specially discussed how this kind of commentaries resulted in the negative influence on the readers. Mao agreed that Zhong and Tan indeed had some wit, but they often made hasty commentaries on poetry without careful consideration of the poetic issues in tradition. Therefore, this kind of rashly made pingdian style commentaries often simplified the deep thoughts of poetry and poetics. Meanwhile, they often conflicted with “zhishen zhitan”準繩之談 (traditional principle of poetic criticisms). Mao Xianshu’s so called “zhishen zhitan,” as Lin Tzu-yeh explains, refers to the criteria and methods of


213 In “Jingling shijie bianbo,” Mao Xianshu did criticize Shigui, but also listed 38 commentaries with good points that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun made in Shigui. Mao also admitted that Zhong and Tan had “wits”（xiaohui 小慧）, and Zhong made much greater commentaries than Tan did. (no.62). Chapter Four of Shibianchi 詩辯坻. In Qing shihua xubian 清詩話續編, pp. 79 –88.
literary criticism accumulated by poetry scholars through ages. Since Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun often wrote pingdian style commentaries without further exploration of the poetic issues, Mao thought that they often easily deviated from, or even violated the traditional principles of literary criticism.

In the third convenience, Mao switched his focuses from the content of the arguments shown in pingdian style commentary to the poetic topics mainly discussed in Shigui. Mao criticized that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun often liked to ponder on a good use of a couple of words, but did not care about the entire structure and style of a poem. Mao’s point partially echoed Cao Xuequan’s criticisms on Shigui. As I have demonstrated above, Cao criticized Zhong Xing for explaining too much in his pingdian style commentaries and leaving no space for readers to ponder on. This kind of over-explained commentaries is just made up of Zhong Xing’s commentaries on words, compounds, and poetic lines. Meanwhile, these commentaries are often simple, short, and easy for the readers to follow.

Mao Xianshu’s criticisms on Shigui had received many responses among his contemporaries and the later Qing scholars. They all more or less criticized that Zhong Xing attended to trifle or neglected the essences of poetry in pingdian style commentary by mainly seeking for the good use of a couple of words in Shigui:

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As for Mr. Zhong’s *Shigui*, its loss could not cover up its gain, and its gain also could not cover up its loss. …

Generally speaking, Zhong Xing formed the unorthodox viewpoint from his deep heart, and the unorthodox viewpoint involved fragmented points. …

[When] Zhong Xing commented on poetry, he only sought the felicitous choice of words and characters [in a poem] and did not have cardinal principles of poetry in mind.

In the first remark, He Shang (1681?) criticized *Shigui* for its unorthodox ideas and its fragmentary arguments in the anthology. These fragmentary arguments just refer to Zhong Xing’s many commentaries on the use of a word and a compound, or the good writing of one poetic line.

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In the second remark, *dati* 大體 (cardinal principles of poetry) refers to the fundamental elements, which make an entire poem beautifully done. Huang Ziyun 黃子雲 (1691–1754) thought that Zhong Xing did not care these elements at all, but only studied how a poet perfectly used a couple of words in a poem. In this sense, Huang Ziyuan echoed Mao Xianshu’s criticisms on *Shigui* by criticizing Zhong Xing for totally neglecting the essences of poetry.

However, this problem might not only appear in the *pingdian* style commentaries of *Shigui*. The Qing scholar Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805) once criticized the thirteenth century scholar Fang Hui and his *Yinggui lvsui* for the same reason:

Ancient people did not discard the theory of key words in poetry. Even in the Tang Dynasty, the skill in polishing the words became neater and neater. However, the depth and subtlety of the affective images and the loftiness of the sustenance were originally there. Fang Hui shelved the fundamentals and picked up the minor details. For every poem, he clearly marked one couplet, and for one line, he clearly marked one word. [If] people in the world all dedicated to this, then the aim of being tender and gentle would be nonsense. The so-called “the fine variations in sentiment beyond the text” and “tenuous implications
beyond the reach of thought” would also have been unseen. Didn’t the later generations’ delicate theories follow Fang Hui’s step and make such a serious result?

響字之說, 古人不廢, 暨乎唐代, 鍛煉彌工, 然其興象之深微, 寄托之高遠, 則固別有在也。虛谷置其本原,而拈其末節, 每篇標舉一聯, 每句標舉一字, 將舉天下之人而致力於是, 所謂溫柔敦厚之旨蔑如也。所謂文外曲致, 思表纖旨亦茫如也。後人纖巧之學, 非虛谷階之厲也耶？

Xiangzi 響字 indicates the key words in a poetic line. Ji Yun stated that the ancient poets did care about the skill of xiangzi, but this skill was only part of poetry composition. Compared to key words, “affective images “(xingxiang 興象) and “sustenance” (jituo 寄托) were also the fundamental elements of a poem. However, Fang Hui only marked the key words and distinguishing couplet of each poem and made pingdian style commentaries on them, but totally neglected those fundamental parts of each poem. Therefore, Ji Yun harshly criticized Fang Hui for his highly misleading commentaries in Yinggui lvsui, and also thought Fang Hui made a bad start for the later generations.

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217 Wenwaiquzhi 文外曲致 and sibiaoxianzhi 思表織旨 were cited from Chapter 26 “Shensi”神思 (“Spirit Thought”) in Liu Xie’s 劉勰 (465−520) Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragon). Translations of these two phrases are made by Stephen Owen. Stephen Owen, Reading in Chinese Literary Thought, p. 209.

Some scholars, like Qian Zhongshu, thought Fang Hui’s neglect of the major poetic issues in his pingdian style commentaries might result from the original feature of this literary criticism form:

Fang Hui’s pingdian style commentary on Yao He’s “Visiting in Spring” in Chapter Ten of Assembled Essence of the Regulated Verse said: “A poet has big judgments and small structures.” Pingdian style commentary and criticisms lay great emphasis on the words and lines which make up of a poem. However, these criticism forms often overlook the fundamentals of the artistic creations, and regard “the small structures” as the major business to deal with.

Here, Qian Zhongshu argued that the form of pingdian style commentary itself had been mainly used to deal with the issues of words and poetic lines. In this sense, Fang Hui and Zhong Xing just conformed to the special feature of the pingdian style commentary, and made full use of this feature.

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Indeed, as I have pointed out the differences between Shihua works and pingdian style commentary in previous section, pingdian style commentary is more fragmentary in terms of contents. Nevertheless, while facing the fact that pingdian style commentary mostly deals with poetic issues of poetry in the level of words and lines, some scholars of poetry still tried to change this situation and intended to “improve” this form. For example, Gao Bing, as I have showed, only included remarks dealing with at least the poetic lines. In other words, no remarks included in Tangshi pinghui discuss the use of a word or compound in a poem.

Wang Fuzhi also made a great number of pingdian style commentaries in his three selected poetry anthologies, but none of them dealt with the use of a word or compound. Even in some short commentaries, Wang Fuzhi still kept remarking on the general style of a poem instead of any good writing of a poetic line. And the seventeenth century scholar Chen Yunheng 陳允衡 (fl. 1661?) also thought that an ideal pingdian style commentary should get to the point of the poem writing, but not keep discussing words and lines as Shigui did:

There were no circles and commentaries when ancient people selected poetry. However, I want to benefit the learners, and slightly add the finishing touch, which could not be discarded. …The one that convinces me is who tries his best to pursue the ancient way…. However, I rather prefer brief [pingdian style commentaries], letting readers to get the art of composition by their own. This is the most important. It should
not be like *Shigui*, which only liked to discuss words and sentences.

古人選詩，原無圈點。然欲嘉惠來學，稍致點睛畫頰之意，亦不可廢。...衡所服膺者，妄力追古法，...然寧簡略，使讀者自得之章法，是所最重。非如《詩歸》好論字句已也。\(^{220}\)

Here, Chen Yunheng’s critique of *pingdian* style commentary includes two perspectives. The first is what to write. In Chen’s opinions, a poetic critic should only point out the distinguishing part of a poem, which is, as Chen further explained, the “ancient way” (*gufa* 古法) of poem creation.

However, Chen Yunheng argued, the second was more important compared to the content of *pingdian* style commentary. That is how many to write. Here, Chen specially emphasized that the number of *pingdian* style commentary should be small since the best way to help the readers to understand the art of composition was to let themselves figure out the principles of poem creation. In this sense, *Shigui* was perfectly a negative example for Chen since it included an excessive amount of *pingdian* style commentaries and mainly focused on issues of words and poetic lines.

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Chen Yunheng’s ideal model of pingdian style commentary is brief, focused, and right to the point. These requirements actually well match the features of remarks in the Ming shihua works. While the Ming and the Qing scholars made more general and brief discussions in remarks of shihua works, pingdian style commentary often deals with more fragmentary issues, and needs to be closely related to its poem discussed. In this sense, Chen did not really favor the unique features of pingdian style commentary, but would like to draw it closer to that of remarks in shihua works.

As Qian Zhongshu pointed out, the form of pingdian style commentary largely decided the content of commentaries. Some scholars in the Ming and the Qing, like Wang Fuzhi and Chen Yunheng, intended to improve this form through writing pingdian style commentaries fewer in number, more concise in language, and more general and incisive in content. However, these efforts might not be as successful as they were supposed to be. Since pingdian style commentary was made mainly to help beginner readers from the thirteenth century, it had formed its own style to attract the readers.

Different from the scholars above, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun conformed to the traditional features of pingdian style commentary and brought it into a full play in Shigui. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, pingdian style commentary developed from the proofreading and punctuation system, and had survived in the marginal space of each page. Therefore, like proofreading and punctuation marks, pingdian style commentary is centered on the major text. That means, all the commentaries are made on the content of the text, including a character, a word, a compound, or a line of the text, and are well organized by the major text. If being taken away from the text, most of the commentaries are fragmentary and make no sense.
Therefore, Qian Zhongshu thought that pingdian style commentary mainly deals with the technical level of poem writing, but negates the fundamental principles of artistic creations.

Zhong and Tan’s move to make plenty of pingdian style commentaries on the good writing of words and lines simply matched this feature of pingdian form. And the arguments presented in these pingdian style commentaries are simple, clear, and easy-to-understand at a glance. This style of commentary would greatly help the poetry learners to approach each poem from a basic level. In this sense, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun had a thorough understanding of the form of pingdian style commentary. Zhong Xing’s insistence on writing pingdian style commentary in his own way also tells his ambition to accomplish Shigui’s educational function. Indeed, Shigui successfully attracted the majority of readers in the late Ming. In this way, it was worthwhile for Zhong Xing to insist on writing pingdian style commentary in his own way though he had been criticized or even attacked by most of the seventeenth century scholars.
Chapter 4

The Horizons of *Pingdian* Style Commentary:
Multiple Roles and Approaches of a Critic

As I have *proved* in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, *Pingdian* style commentary is positioned next to a poem in a poetry anthology, and it must be closely related to the poem in terms of discussing issues. In this sense, *pingdian* style commentary becomes a secondary text to read in each page of a poetry anthology. This secondary text would largely change a reader’s reading process when it was appended to poems:

**Figure 4.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Poetry anthology</th>
<th>Remarks on Poetry (shihua work)</th>
<th>A Poetry Anthology with <em>Pingdian</em> Style Commentaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Poems" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Remarks" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Poems and Remarks" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As figure 4.1 shows, when one takes a look at a traditional poetry anthology without *pingdian* style commentary, a reader simply reads poems and understands them according to his/her own background knowledge of poetry and aesthetics. For a reader of shihua work, one directly reads a scholar’s remarks on poems. Poems might be mentioned in those remarks, but are mainly fragmentary words or lines. In this sense, a poem is merely an object of being discussed in a remark, but not a reader’s reading text.
However, for a poetry anthology with *pingdian* style commentary, the reading procedure becomes far more complicated. For example, poems in a page are major texts for ones to read, but there also exists *pingdian* style commentaries as the secondary reading texts for the readers. That means, there are multiple reading choices for a reader to make. First, a reader could only focus on poems without giving a single glimpse at those remarks written by compilers. Second, a reader could also only take a good look at those *pingdian* style commentaries and totally ignore the major texts of poetry. Third, the readers could read both poems and *pingdian* style commentary and understand the major poems with the help of *pingdian* style commentaries or make judgments on those commentaries based on his/her own understanding of poems.

These three different reading processes might happen respectively in different group of readers: poetic scholars might scan *pingdian* style commentaries in order to look for some fresh ideas about poetry, while the beginning readers might choose the third reading process to learn poetry by reading both texts. There is also the possibility that all these three happened in one reader’s reading process. If the first and the second choice could be achieved by a reader through reading traditional poetry anthology and *shihua* works, the third one could only happen to readers of poetry anthology with *pingdian* style commentary. In this sense, *pingdian* style commentary largely enriches the reading contents and provides a reader with more reading choices.

The compilers of *pingdian* style commentary in the third reading process play the decisive role in attracting readers’ attentions, making them select this way to read, and helping them successfully achieve their personal goals of readings. In order to fulfill this
duty, compilers need to be very careful with their dual role, namely reader and commentator.

Compilers first are readers. They need to read a variety of poems before they decide whether to include them or not in their poetry anthologies or what to write under each poem. In this process of reading, they simply look at each poem, understand its meaning, and think about its unique feature. In this sense, they are not different from common readers.

However, compilers are professional readers in terms of thinking and delivery. They record their understanding and thinking on those poems mainly from the theoretical perspectives and place them in the margins of each page. These commentaries will show their abilities to appreciate poems as professional readers and to instruct common readers to read and write poems. Thus they should position themselves as knowledgeable scholars, seniors, or instructors in the field of poetry learning and teaching. This position would distinguish the compilers from common readers.

The dual role, in some degree, will make a compiler stay in an ambiguous position. As a reader, the compiler needs to prove that he could read poems much deeper than common readers by making incisive criticisms. In other words, a compiler must present himself as a leading authority on poetry. Meanwhile, a compiler could not deny that he is also a reader, and his pingdian style commentary is merely one of the interpretations of the poems. In this sense, how a compiler specifies and distinguishes his reading process in front of readers would largely decide the readers’ reception of his work.
Indeed, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun attached great attention to their role as compilers of *Shigui*, especially the role as a reader. This is clearly shown in their statement of how to read and learn ancient poetry. As I have mentioned in chapter three, Zhong and Tan intended to form a school of poetics by compiling *Shigui*. This ambitious goal not only resulted from their love of poetry, but also from their strong dissatisfaction with their contemporary poetry learning. In the preface to *Shigui*, Zhong severely criticized the poor condition of poetry learning in the late Ming:

Today there exist people who learn ancient poetry. They mostly selected ancient people’s poems which were extremely shallow, extremely narrow, extremely familiar, and easy to be recited, and thought that ancient [spirit] were in these poems. If [one] asked a smart person to rectify this situation, he must have been beyond the ancient people and made his own poem as something different. However, his difference was actually same as ancient poems that were abnormal and rare. Otherwise, his poems would be rustic ones. Then how could he convince people who want to learn ancient poetry? He could not convince people, but still insisted on his theory and told people that “A myriad of changes [on poems] are not beyond the ancient [works].” When [you] asked him about his learning of ancient [poems], he would go back to talk about those extreme shallow,
Here, Zhong Xing pointed out that the major problems of poetry learning in the late Ming resulted from two wrong directions of reading ancient poetry. One was to learn “extremely shallow, narrow, and familiar” ancient poems. This group mainly refers to Li Panlong, the representative of the Latter Seven Masters, and readers of his Gujin shanshan. The other was not to read and learn ancient poetry, but made his own “distinguishing” poems, which actually confirmed to “dangerous and rare” ancient poems or vulgar one. This group indicated the Gongan School and Yuan Hongdao’s upholding of folk songs.

In Zhong’s opinions, both groups of people did not truly learn ancient poetry. For the former group, they only read ancient poetry which they were very familiar with, but discarded all the other ancient poetry. In this sense, they did not truly understand ancient

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poetry at all. As for the latter group, they did not read ancient poetry but simply tried to make their own “unique” styles. However, what they made actually were also covered in the ancient poetry, and in the meantime these styles were often dangerous to poetry tradition and poetry learning. Thus, Zhong Xing raised an important question: what should a poetry learner read?

In this chapter, I argue that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun were speakers in the role of readers while compiling the pingdian style commentaries for Shigui. In other words, they clearly knew their dual role of compilers, and never downplayed their roles as readers. Instead, they highlighted their reading process in the poetry learning, and always liked to share with readers what they read and how they read in pingdian style commentaries. Meanwhile, they related their reading experiences closely with the fashionable concepts in the late Ming society.

I. Careful Reading

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun made a great number of pingdian style commentaries in Shigui. These commentaries might simply express their reading feelings, discuss a variety of poetic issues, or teach readers about knowledge of poetry. Among these commentaries, Zhong and Tan often mentioned their own reading experiences to the readers, and strongly emphasized the importance of reading process on learning ancient poetry:
[Tan said:] When I read this poem in my young age, I did not feel its subtlety; when I read it a few years ago, I did not feel its depth. This poem is extremely subtle, extremely deep, and extremely fantastic. A hero’s poems could be used to check the later people’s hearts and eyes.

[譚云:] 少小時讀之，不覺其細，數年前讀之，不覺其厚。至細至厚至奇，英雄騷雅可以驗後人心眼。

[Zhong said:] The sound came from changed rhymes. This is my own comprehension after carefully reading [this poem].

[There is another way to translate the last four characters: (if you) carefully read the poem, (you will) comprehend the changed rhymes by yourself.]

[鍾云:] 聲響出於變韻，細讀自悟。

In these two commentaries, Tan Yuanchun and Zhong Xing started from their own personal reading experiences, and told readers what they got in their reading of poems. For example, in Tan’s commentary, Tan showed the readers his different feelings about

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Cao Cao’s 曹操 (155−220) “Dungexing” 短歌行 (“Short Song”) while reading it in different periods of his life. Tan thought that this multiple understanding resulted from the profound significance of the poem itself. In other words, a good poem would provide readers with different reading experiences. Thus it is worthwhile for a reader to read this poem more times in order to get these different experiences and fully understand its profound significance.

In Zhong Xing’s commentary, the former part (“the sound came from changed rhymes”) provided the readers with basic information of this poem, while the latter part could be understood in two different angles, namely the writers and the readers. If Zhong wanted to share his experience with the readers, it showed the reader Zhong’s personal comprehension after careful reading. If Zhong intended to teach the readers about the sound of a poem, this latter part might be Zhong’s message to urge the readers to read the poem carefully so that they could comprehend the sound of this poem by themselves. Either interpretation of Zhong’s commentary tells the importance of careful reading in the learning process.

Indeed, one’s reading process decides how one understands the poem. Zhong Xing knew deeply the fundamental role that a reading process plays in one’s poetry learning, and also in the process of building one’s own literary ideas:

The reason that the Han poetry, the Wei poetry, and the Tang poetry could respectively become one school, and have been fresh until today is because their spirits were various and could be separated into parts to meet different requirements
and selections. Thus the later generation cannot exhaust the ancient poetry.

漢、魏、唐人詩，所以各成一家至今日新者，以其精神變化，分身應取，選之不盡。224

Here, Zhong Xing explored the reason why the Han, the Wei, and the Tang poetry could keep providing readers with something fresh through the ages. That is the variety of ancient poetry in terms of significance and spirit. However, the last two sentences also implies another meaning that the readers’ different ways to approach poems could help dig up different meanings or pictures of those poems. This would become the major sources for one to build their own literary ideas or theories.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun attached great importance to careful reading, and they also put this idea into practice while compiling *Shigui*. This is first shown in their attitudes towards poets and works that they disliked:

[Zhong said:] I did not like this gentleman’s poems in my young age. His complete works include nearly eighty poems. Their tedious and repeated points are very unexciting. Thus what we selected are just these [several ones]. However, his

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brilliant points had already been close to Yuan Jie. Thus it is known that readers should not discard those poems that look not interesting. If only these several of this gentleman’s poems were handed down, this gentleman would have been regarded as a good poet of High Tang. Only when reading his complete works did one feel them boring. Therefore, I realize that one should value careful reading when reading one’s poems, while one should value the quality when circulating the poems.

[鍾云:] 少不喜此君詩。其全集近八十首，冗累處甚不好看，故所選止此。然其高処已似元道州矣。以此知詩之難看者，不當便棄之也。使此君止傳此數詩，則亦盛唐好手，惟讀其全集，故反生厭。因悟看人詩者貴細，自傳其詩者貴精。225

This is a commentary that Zhong Xing made on the Tang poet Dugu Ji 獨孤及 (725 – 777) and his poems. Although Dugu Ji was regarded as one of the pioneers of “Guwen yundong”古典運動 (Classical Prose Movement) in the mid-Tang, his poems had been seldom remarked upon the Ming dynasty. Here, Zhong also agreed that his poems were not attractive. However, Zhong still selected Dugu’s three poems and admitted that Dugu did make some excellent works and the readers should not totally discard Dugu’s poems.

because of his most unattractive ones. Thus, Zhong Xing reminded the readers that if one pored over ancient poems, he would be able to go beyond of his personal likes or dislikes, and find excellent points in one’s unattractive collections.

Second, Zhong Xing argued that one could explore the unknown side of a famous poet by carefully reading all his works:

[Zhong said:] If I didn’t read such kind of poems, I would not have known that Wang Wei had a point of indignation and intensity in his heart.

[鍾云：] 不讀此等詩，不知右丞胸中有悲憤激烈処。226

This is Zhong Xing’s ending commentary on Wang Wei’s 王維 (?−761?) “Xian Shixinggong”獻始興公 (To Zhang Jiuling). “Shixinggong” in the title refers to Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (678−740), a minister and also a noted poet and scholar at that time. This poem was written in 735, the year after Zhang Jiuling promoted Wang Wei to an imperial censor’s position.227 In this poem, Wang Wei expressed his intention to further his career under the leadership of Zhang.

As We known, Wang Wei is a great High-Tang poet and artist, and “is best known for celebrating the joys of private life, removed from the struggle and responsibilities of the government office.” However, Zhong Xing here selected a poem showing Wang Wei’s ambition to further his career in the official circles. Meanwhile, Wang Wei’s relatively straightforward expression of his dignity also makes a sharp contrast to his widely-known image as “a distanced observer” in his landscape poems. Clearly, Zhong found an unknown side of Wang Wei’s personality and a little-known style of Wang’s poem through his careful reading of Wang’s entire works.

Third, Zhong Xing thought that one could easily find good poems of those little-known poets when carefully reading ancient poems:

[Zhong said:] This gentleman had ancient bones and an ancient heart, and also had an excellent tongue and an excellent brush. However, he was not very famous for his poetry in the High Tang because he was young at that time. It is my personality that I never judge a person by his reputation. So did Wang Jiyou to ancient people. He liked to pick up poets or writers who was not famous and had the fewest works included in circulated anthologies. [Those ones] often have a kind of special interest and marvelous logic, and don’t follow writers’ normal manner. This criterion is not

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only applicable to select poets and writers, but also to

calligraphers and painters.

[鍾云：] 此公有古骨古心，復有妙舌妙筆。然在盛唐不
甚有詩名，為其少耳。余性不以名取人，其看古人亦然。

每於古今詩文喜拈其不著名而最少者，常有一種別趣奇
理，不墮作家氣。豈惟詩文，書畫家亦然。230

This is the first commentary that Zhong Xing made on a Tang poet Wang Jiyou 王季友
(714–794). Although Zhong stated that Wang Jiyou was not very famous for his poetry
in the High Tang, he actually won a good reputation for his personality and poems at that
time. For example, Du Fu once specially wrote a poem entitle “Ketan” 可嘆 (“A Lament”)
for his friend Wang Jiyou. In this poem, Du Fu highly praised Wang’s talents and sterling
integrity, and also expressed sadness for his unrecognized talents. 231 The Song scholar
Zhang Jie 張戒 (1125 jinshi degree) could not help sighing deeply: “Great! Wang Jiyou’s
behavior! (偉哉！王季友之爲人也)” after reading Du Fu’s poem. 232 Qian Qi 錢起 (710?
–782?), a famous Mid-Tang poet, also praised Wang’s great personality in a poem
entitled “Song Jiyou fu Hongzhou muxia shi.” 送季友赴洪州幕下詩 (“A Poem to Wang

230 Zhong Xing’s commentary on Wang Jiyou 王季友. In Chapter 16 of Tangshi gui. Zhong Xing and Tan

231 Du Fu 杜甫. “Ketan”可嘆. Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鰲 anno. Dushi xiangzhu 杜詩詳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua
shuju, 1999), pp. 1830–1833.

232 Zhang Jie 張戒. “Suihantang shihua”歲寒堂詩話 (Remarks on Poetry by Zhang Jie), Chapter II. Ding
Fubao 丁福保 ed. Lidai shihua xubian 歴代詩話續編, p. 475.
Jiyou Who is Going to the Duty in Hongzhou”). Wang Jiyou’s poems were also respectively included in the Tang scholars Yin Fan’s 殷璠 (?−?) Heyue yinglingji 河嶽英靈集 (The Anthology of Great Poets in the Tang Dynasty) and Yuan Jie’s 元結 (719–772) Qiezhong ji 篋中集 (Collection in a Case).

Unlike Wang Jiyou’s contemporaries, the Ming scholars paid little attention to him. According to Zhong Xing’s explanation, this might be because Wang was not a famous figure among the High Tang poets. Here, Zhong thought that a poet’s reputation was not what he cared about. By contrast, he often liked to choose some little-known poets’ unknown works, which eventually proved to be more interesting. In this sense, Zhong intended to get rid of the popular preconceived opinions about ancient poets and their works in the late Ming through his careful reading. As a result, he “could find a fresh field of vision inside a widely acknowledged frame of discussion and make distinguishing interpretations to poetic tradition. This is one special feature of Tangshi gui.”

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun kept urging readers to scrutinize ancient poems and discard their own likes, dislikes, and preconceived opinions on those ancient poets. In the meantime, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun also requested the readers to pay great attention to each poem down to the smallest detail:

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[Tan said:] One knows its details, but does not know its brief points. One knows its expression of true feeling, but does now know its heretical points. One knows its bitterness, but does not know its happy points. One knows its intensive points, but does not its subtle points. When one knows all the above, he is able to read this poem.

[譚云: ] 人知其詳処，不知其略処，人知其真処，不知其邪処，人知其苦処，不知其復処，人知其烈処，不知其細処。知此數者，可以讀此詩。

[Tan said:] Every time I recite Mr. Tao Yuanming’s true and dutiful words, I feel that people who lead an idle life are instead root of vulgarity. They have not been free from deliberately making themselves aloof.

[譚云：] 每頌老陶真實本份語，覺不事生産人反是俗根，未脫故作清態。

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[Zhong said:] I read these five characters, and know that it was not easy to describe “drinking wine.”

[鍾云：] 讀此五字知飲酒不易言。  

[Tan said:] The word “return” is deep and clever.

[譚云：] “返”字幽而靈。

From the above commentaries, we can see, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun carefully read poems from the large frame and structure of each poem till to the minute detail, like a use of single word. Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s commentaries are actually their records of feelings while they read. In this sense, Shigui provided Zhong and Tan with space to share their reading feeling with the readers.

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun highlighted the important role of careful reading in one’s poetry learning, but the target of careful reading might mainly refer to poetry itself, but does not cover other relative sources, like annotations, shihua works, historical records, and etc:

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[Zhong said] Although this song has omission or errors and is difficult to be read, the language for its legible part is often great. It is a pleasure [for me] to think of those mistaken words. And I don’t necessarily get the meaning after thinking about these mistaken words. It is hard to talk about [this pleasure] with short-sighted intellectual who [cares more about] chapters and sentences [than reading’s pleasure].

[鍾云：] 此歌雖有脫誤難讀者，然其可讀処，語輒入妙。
誤書思之，便是一快。亦不必思而得之也。難與章句小儒道。239

Although the poem “Qinyin”琴引(The Song of Stringed Instrument) seemed illegible due to some omission and errors in its text, Zhong Xing still enjoyed reading this poem. Here, Zhong clearly showed that he only focused on poem itself, but not something else. In Zhong opinions, the omission or errors in a poem would not influence one’s reading pleasure much. Therefore, the readers should concentrate on their own reading feeling of the poem and enjoy their reading pleasure rather than examining those omissions or errors in other sources.

This idea of Zhong Xing’s would draw the readers’ major attention back to poems themselves and made readers carefully read and comprehend the significance of each poem. However, this practice, especially Zhong’s ignorance of textual examinations, would for sure, result in a great number of attacks in the later generations. It is known that Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun used Feng Weina’s *Shiji* as the major source of poetry. According to Feng Shu’s textual examination, a variety of errors, including title mistakes, typos, wrong words, and etc, were found in this poetry anthology. However, Zhong and Tan took the poetry texts in *Shiji* for granted and did not double check whether these poems were correctly recorded, but devoted their main energy and time to reading poems. Thus, their reading feelings on those mistaken texts, in many early Qing scholars’ opinions, were not accurate and valuable to the readers at all. Therefore, although Zhong and Tan kept claiming that reading ancient poetry played a fundamental role in their poetic theory and criticisms, many early Qing scholars with great reputation, like Qian Qianyi, Gu Yanwu, Wang Fuzhi, all sneered at Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s detailed analysis on the use of words in poems, and ridiculed that Zhong and Tan had no knowledge and did not know ancient poetry at all.

In brief, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun shared their personal reading experiences and interpretations of poetry with readers. This would not only tell the readers how to begin with their learning, but also brought new angles to readers to approach ancient poetry. However, they did not double check the accuracy of poetry texts and directly made personal interpretation on those arguable or wrong texts. This practice would no doubt result in professional scholar’s harsh criticisms. So did their arguable interpretation shown before the readers. Therefore, even though many late Ming poetry anthologies
took *Shiji* as main source of ancient poetry, only Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun suffered severe attacks for it. The reason, in the final analysis, was because of the positive reception of Zhong and Tan’s personal reading experiences and interpretation on those major texts in the late Ming society.

II. Reading Historical Figures

While compiling the selected poetry anthology, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun needed to read plenty of poems in the beginning, selected poems which confirmed their poetic ideals, and recorded their thoughts about these poems. In this process, theoretical issues were not the only thing in Zhong and Tan’s mind. Instead, they often freely expressed their thoughts which seemed “irrelevant” to aesthetic features and writing skills. This is clearly shown in their reading of poem written by famous figures in history.

While reading ancient poems, especially ones written by famous political figures in history, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun often seemed to forget their role as poetic critics, but simply read them as historical stories, discussed those poems and their writers from “irrelevant” perspectives, such as historical and political ones. It seems that at that moment they changed into readers of history, explored the historical figures and their episodes in their own ways, and bluntly expressed their thinking or opinions on these

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political figures and events. Thus, a Qing scholar Wang Xichen 王锡琛 (?−?) once commented on Zhong and Tan’s commentaries in his preface to Shigui: “[Shigui’s] significances belonged to Classics, and its commentaries belonged to history.”(旨則歸經，斷則歸史)241 In the latter part of this preface, Wang highly praised the simple and incisive style of Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s pingdian style commentaries, and even thought that their writing had surpassed that of Sima Qian’s 司馬遷(145−86 B.C.E.) commentaries, one of the most greatest historical commentaries in Chinese history.

Zhong and Tan’s achievements in pingdian style commentary were no doubt vastly inflated in Wang Xijue’s evaluation, but Wang’s words at least tell that Zhong and Tan’s commentaries shared the similar styles as historians. Indeed, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun themselves were very interested in history and liked making commentaries on history and politics. One of Zhong Xing’s friends Qiu Zhaolin 丘兆麟 (1572−1629) even praised Zhong as “an excellent scholar in the field of history and a master in the field of poetry” (史家之巨擘，詩苑之宗工)242 when he printed Qin Han Wenhuai 秦漢文懷 (Collections of the Qin and the Han Essays) edited by Zhong Xing. However, one of the most important criteria for Zhong and Tan to evaluate those historical figures in Shigui was qing 情 (sentiment) instead of their great achievements in their lives.


[Zhong said:] (Xiang Yu) truly had love, and did not break love with (Yu Ji). He would not abandon both his concubine and his horse. This idea was the root cause that he was not able to kill the Han King.

[鍾云：] 真有情，真不負心，妾與馬俱捨不得，此一念便是不能殺漢王之根。243

[Zhong said:] when reading the story that Liu Bang (or the Han King above) was defeated by Xiang Yu, we could see that there were not any emperors who were pure-hearted and extremely honest and kind in either history or today.

[鍾云：] 觀劉季卒負項羽，可見古今無極朴心，極厚道帝王。244

These two commentary was made on “Gaixiage” 垓下歌 (“The Song of Gaixia”) written by Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 B.C.E). It is well known that Xiang Yu was a valiant general in the late Qin. In his early twenties, he commanded the Chu army, gained a decisive victory in the Julu Battle with the larger Qin army, and proclaimed himself “Xichu bawang” 西楚霸王 (the Overload of West Chu). After a long struggle for power


244 Zhong Xing’s second ending commentary on Xiang Yu’s 項羽 “Gaixiage” 垓下歌. Ibid.
with Liu Bang 刘邦 (256–195 B.C.E.), he was defeated and committed suicide by the Wu River. “Gaixiage” was a four-line song chanted by Xiang Yu before he was defeated. In the first line, Xiang Yu described his proud achievement in his young age. Then in the second line, he began to worry about his desperate situation in the battle with Liu Bang. In the last two lines, Xiang Yu sighed with the despair at the thought of his coming loss of his favorite horse and lover Yuji 虞姬 (fl. 202 B.C.E).

Zhong Xing’s first commentary was a remark on Xiang Yu’s personality. In Zhong Xing’s eyes, Xiang Yu was a man full of emotion. His reluctance to abandon his horse and concubine vividly showed his affection to his lover and favorite horse. This personality, in Zhong’s eyes, was just the root cause of Xiang’s eventual failure.

In the second commentary, Zhong went a step further to compare Xiang Yu with Liu Bang, the final winner of the long war between Chu and Han and the first emperor of the Han Dynasty. Zhong concluded that no emperors in either history or today had pure hearts. Similarly, Tan Yuanchun also made a comparison between Xiang Yu’s “Gaixiage” and Liu Bang’s “Dafeng ge” 大風歌 (Song of Big Wind) and thought that Xiang Yu and Liu Bang respectively cared about very different things in their difficult and successful times. 245 To be more specific, Liu Bang only thought about victory and throne, but Xiang Yu diverted his attention from battle to his lover and horse. In this sense, Zhong

245 Tan Yuanchun’s ending commentary on Liu Bang’s “Dafeng ge” 大風歌: “Reading this song together with ‘Song of Yuxi,’ we could imagine what heroes [did] under their favorable conditions or difficult ones, or at the time of their success or failure (與《虞兮歌》互讀, 英雄遭時失時成敗之際可想).” In Chapter 3 of Gushi gui. Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun ed. Gu Shigui 古詩歸, in Xuxiu siku quanshu 續修四庫全書, vol. 1589, p. 381.
and Tan both thought that Xiang Yu’s affection decided his failure in the battle with Liu Bang, and Liu Bang’s success resulted from his ruthlessness.

Interestingly, Zhong Xing used “puxin” 朴心 (pure heart) and “houdao” 厚道 (honest and kind) to judge emperors in history and today. This criterion accorded with the greatest esteem for 情 (emotion) in the late Ming society. In this sense, Zhong Xing’s words “zhenyouqing” 真有情 (truly having love) had already set a high value on Xiang Yu’s characteristics. Such a criterion permeated through Zhong Xing’s evaluation on this kind of famous political figures in Shigui, such like his comparison between Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) and Sima Yi 司馬懿 (179–251):

[Zhong said:] Cao Cao was cruel, but he also had fondness; Sima Yi was also cruel, but he was very ruthless. Cao Cao had some warm spots in his personality, but Sima Yi was entirely cold. Such kind of malicious human nature seemed to be merely used to seize the power of the whole world. And Literature, landscape, friendship, and [affections for women] in boudoirs surely could not distract his attention at all. This is the reason for his ruthlessness.

[鍾云:] 魏武狠，其人卻有情；司馬宣王狠，其人特無情。魏武有熱処，此老一味冷。其一種陰鷙之性，似純
Cao Cao and Sima Yi were both described as evil characters in dramas and novels because they more or less had the intention to usurp respectively the throne of the Han and that of the Wei (220–280) in history. With the wide reception of the long novel *Sanguo yanyi* (The Romance of Three Kingdoms) in the Ming dynasty, Cao Cao’s evil image had been deeply rooted in the heart of common people. However, in this commentary on Sima Yi’s “Yangexing” (The Song of Banquet), Zhong Xing intended to rectify this preconceived opinion of historical figure Cao Cao by saying that Cao was a person with warm spots in personality (有熱処). Zhong’s words of warm spots might be understood in two perspectives. First, according to Tan Yuanchun’s commentary, we could see that he found Cao Cao’s kindness to other people, which could be Cao’s warm spot in his personality:

[Tan said:] People knew Cao Cao’s fierceness, but did not know that the great hero regarded honesty and kindness as the friendly feeling.

[譚云：] 人知曹公慘刻, 不知大英雄以厚道為意氣。247

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This is Tan Yuanchun’s commentary on two poetic lines in Cao Cao’s “Dungexing” 短歌行 (“Short Song”). These two lines read: “[n]ow feasting and chatting after hard times, your hearts consider old kindness done.”\(^{248}\) (契闊談讌, 心念舊恩) Here, “considering old kindness done” (念舊恩) had moved Tan Yuanchun deeply. Compared Cao Cao’s this line with Zhong Xing’s previous commentary on Liu Bang, we could clearly see, Liu Bang did not consider Xiang Yu’s old kindness to him at all\(^{249}\) and eventually killed Xiang Yu in order to seize the throne. However, Cao Cao remembered the previous friendly feeling. In this way, Tan Yuanchun praised Cao Cao for his kindness.

Second, this sentiment could also be understood as the addiction to something. As Zhong Xing explained in his commentary, he thought Sima Yi was a ruthless person because he was very cold and felt no interest in anything else except the throne. Here, in Zhong Xing’s eyes, literature, landscape, friendship, and loves could all be good aspects to show one’s sentiment. This criterion actually echoed the late Ming people’s favor of obsession (pi 癖).

Obsession is an important cultural concept in the sixteenth and seventeen centuries China. As Judith T. Zeitlin states, “Pi is a pathological fondness for

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\(^{249}\) Liu Bang had been defeated by Xiang Yu times, but Xiang Yu did not kill him. See Sima Qian’s biographies of Liu Bang and Xiang Yu in Shiji.
something... And “By the sixteenth century ... [W]hat is truly new in the explosion of writings in this period is the glorification of obsession, particularly in its most exaggerated form. Obsession becomes an important component of late Ming culture, in which it is linked with the new virtues of Sentiment (qing), Madness (kuang), Folly (chi), and Lunacy (dian). ... Obsession had become a sine qua non, something the gentleman could not afford to do without.”

Indeed, Zhong Xing’s judgment on Sima Yi just tells the tight link between one’s hobby (or obsession) and one’s sentiment in the late Ming culture. That is, one’s hobby could fully prove that he is a person with sentiment. This logic had been accepted and followed by many seventeenth century scholars. For example, Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1679) once said: “A man without obsession could not be one’s friend, because he has no deep sentiment (人無癖不可與交，以其無深情也).” Here, hobby/obsession is not only the evidence of one’s sentiment, but also the proof of whether this person is worthy a friend or not.

Besides, obsession had also been closely related with connoisseurship in the late Ming culture. In “Pingshi” 瓶史 (“The History of Vases”), the famous late Ming poet Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 said:

251 Ibid. p. 69.
252 Zhang Dai 張岱. Tao’an mengyi 陶庵夢憶 (Tao’an’s Dream Memories). (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008). p. 80.
Chi K'ang and his metalwork, Wu Tzu and his horses, Lu Yu and his tea, Mi Fu and his rocks, Ni Tsan and his cleanliness - in all these cases they use their obsessions to project their lofty, boundless, unrestrained spirit. When I look around me, those with insipid words and repelling faces are all people without obsessions. Those who are genuinely obsessed sink into and are overwhelmed by their obsessions. It is a matter of life and death for them, they have no time to spare for matters such as money, servants, official positions, or trade.  

稽康之鍛也，武子之馬也，陸羽之茶也，米癲之石也，倪雲林之潔也，皆以僻而寄其磊傀逸之氣者也。余觀世上語言無味面目可憎之人，皆無癖之人耳。若真有所癖，將沉緬酣溺，性命死生以之，何暇及錢奴宧賈之事。 

The logic behind Yuan Hongdao’s words is that obsession tells one’s taste and spiritual substance. In Yuan’s eyes, the one with obsession often had lofty, boundless, and unstrained spirits while one who cares only about money and official position was often terribly boring and repulsive. For Zhong Xing, although he did not directly express such 

an idea as Yuan Hongdao did, he also showed his great respect to ancient people who carefully appreciate the objects in his pingdian style commentaries:

[Zhong said:] When I read and think all the inscriptions, I can see that for small objects and fragmentary words, ancient people all devote every effort to carefully comprehend them.

[鍾云：] 閲諸銘，想見古人於小物碎語，皆以全力付之，以細心體之。255

[Zhong said:] For every small thing, [Du Fu] devoted his all energy and emotion into it. Thus, the readers could not help entering [the world of this small thing].

[鍾云：] 每一小物，皆以全副精神、全副性情入之，使讀者不得不入。256

The first commentary is the ending remark that Zhong Xing made on “Biming” 筆銘 (“Inscription of Brush”) by Emperor Wu of the Zhou 周武王 (1087 –1043). Zhong


Xing highly praised the ancient people for their best efforts to inspect and understand small objects and fragmentary words. The same compliment also appeared in Zhong Xing’s commentaries on Du Fu’s 杜甫 (712–770) fifteen poems on small objects.

Figure 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shigui 詩歸</th>
<th>Tangshi pinhui 唐詩品匯 (The Categories of Tang Poetry)</th>
<th>Gu Jin Shishan 古今詩刪 (Selection of the Ancient and Modern Poetry)</th>
<th>Qianzhu Dushi 錢注杜詩 (Qian Qianyi’s Annotations on Du Fu Poetry)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Kuzhu” 苦竹 (Bitter Bamboo)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Jianjia”蒹葭 (Reeds)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Fangbing Cao huma” 房兵曹胡馬 (Official Fang’s Hu Horse)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bingma” 病馬 (Sick Horse)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Xichi”鸂鶒 (Xichi Bird)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Guyan”孤雁 (A Lonely Wild Goose)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cuzhi”促織 (Cricket)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 10 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yinghuo”螢火 (Firefly)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Guiyan”歸雁 (A Returning Swallow)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yuan”猿 (Apes)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Baixiao”白小 (Icefish)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 16 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mi”麂 (Barking Deer)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 16 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yingwu”鸚鵡 (Parrot)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 15 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ji” 雞 (Rooster)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 16 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Guiyan” 歸雁 (Returning Wild Geese)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>Chapter 18 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figure showed Du Fu’s fifteen poems on objects that had been selected in Shigui. All these fifteen poems are pentasyllabic regulated verses. It is known that Du Fu has been long considered as one of the greatest poets of China. Du Fu’s significant accomplishments of regulated verses remained unsurpassed in Chinese history. However,

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257 Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 ed. Qianzhu Dushi 錢注杜詩. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979). * in the following chart means that detailed annotation was appended to this poem.
these fifteen regulated verses had not absorbed much attention from scholars in the Ming dynasty. For example, as the above figure shows, none of the fifteen regulated poems on objects had been included in Tangshi pinhui, but Gao Bing actually selected 294 of Du Fu’s poems in total. None of these fifteen poems attracted Li Panlong, either, though Li Panlong admired Du Fu very much and even thought that Du’s achievement surpassed Li Bai 李白 (701–762) in regard to ancient songs. Qianyi included all these fifteenregulated poems in Qianzhu Dushi 錢注杜詩 (Qian Qianyi’s Annotations on Du Fu’s Poetry), but only made detailed annotations on six poems. These detailed annotations merely explain the allusions to the titles of those poems, and Qian did not make any further comments on those poems.

In comparison to those Ming scholars who were uninterested in this group of poems on objects, Zhong Xing was fascinated by Du Fu’s different angles of approaching those objects:

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258 It is known that Li Bai made great achievements of ancient songs, but in “Tangshi xuan xu” 唐詩選序 (Preface to Tangshi xuan), Li Panlong said: “As for heptasyllabic ancient-style poetry, only Du Fu did not lose the flavor and style of the Early Tang poetry, and wrote them with great ease. Li Bai’s freely written style was often an arrow at the end of its flight. His poems were often mixed up with long words inside. The hero deceived us!” (七言古詩，唯杜子美不失初唐氣格，而縱橫有之，太白縱橫往往強弩之末，間雜長語，英雄欺人耳). Li Panlong ji 李攀龍集 (The Collected Works of Li Panlong), punctuated by Li Boqi 李伯齊, (Jinan, Shandong province: Qilu shushe, 1993), p.375. Thus Hu Yingling 胡應麟 (1551–1602) once said, “Gao Bing was the first one to advocate Li Bai’s poetry, while Li Panlong took sides with Du Fu poetry.” (廷禮首推太白，于麟左袒杜陵). Hu Yingling 胡應麟. Shisou 詩藪 (The Swamp of Poetry) Chapter 3, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), p. 49.

259 Although Qian Qianyi mainly annotated Du Fu’s poems in Qianzhu Dushi 錢注杜詩 through checking allusions, place names, and titles in a variety of historical sources, he often appended a short commentary after his annotations. And this situation often happened to Du Fu’s poems which he very liked. For Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s such favorite poems of Du Fu, Qian never placed any further remarks besides annotations after the poems.
[Zhong said]: As for these objects, the above fifteen poems respectively include praise, sympathy, deep regret, longing, solace, blame, jeering laughter, appreciation, admonishment, advice, consideration, question others with my words, answer for others in his own words, folly, cleverness, persistence, and extreme quietness. Du Fu distinguished objects to such a high level that even if immortals and Buddha, Sages, emperors, and great people were all here, they could hardly make any change to those poems.

[鍾云：] 以上十五首，於諸物有讚美者，有悲憫者，有痛惜者，有懷思者，有慰藉者，有嗔怪者，有嘲笑者，有賞玩者，有勸戒者、有指點者、有計議者、有用我語詰問者，有代彼語對答者，蠢者，靈細者、巨恆者，奇默者。辨詠物至此，仙佛、聖賢、帝王、豪傑具此，難著手矣。260

In Zhong Xing’s eyes, Du Fu was a true master of depicting a variety of objects and presenting them with their distinguishing features. In other words, for fifteen objects, his writing varied from one by one, and readers could feel fifteen different moods for those

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things. This variety of Du Fu’s writing, in Zhong and Tan’s points, results from Du Fu’s
careful inspection and deep thinking of those objects with his emotion.

[Tan said:] When this old [gentleman] dealt with an object,
he urged [the Xichi birds] again and again. He gave
sympathetic consideration to [the birds] and exhausted his
emotion. He seemed a Buddha that came into being.

[譚云]此老向物，再三丁寧，體悉盡情，活佛出世。[261]

This commentary was made on Du Fu’s “Xichi”鸂鶒 (“Xichi Bird”). Xichi is a kind of
water bird, but it was kept in a cage and raised as a domestic bird. Therefore, Du Fu
showed his strong sympathy to the xichi bird, and comforted the bird that it would not
have to fight with the sky as an eagle did. Du Fu’s deep understanding of xichi bird’s
poor condition and his sympathy and solicitude to this bird impressed Tan Yuanchun
very much. He even compared Du Fu to a Buddha who always shows great ability to
comprehend objects. It is thus clear that Du Fu’s sentiment and comprehension of objects
was just what Tan Yuanchun and also Zhong Xing loved most.

A person’s sentiment and comprehension of objects were two fundamental
elements of the term “obsession.” Thus, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s conjecture

about the ancient people’s attitudes towards small objects actually applauded the major idea of “obsession” in the late Ming culture.

Zhong Xing’s endorsement of “qing” and “obsession” in the major cultural trend of the late Ming decides his negative attitudes towards Sima Yi’s personality. As Zhong Xing described, Sima Yi had no interests in “wenzhang” 文章 (literature), “shanshui” 山水 (landscape), “pengyou” 朋友 (friendship), and “guifangzhiqu” 閨房之趣 (affections in boudoirs). The lack of interests in the first two items would prove Sima Yi as a person without any taste. Or according to Yuan Hongdao’s idea, he definitely belonged to the category of people with “insipid words and repelling face.”

The lack of the latter two terms no doubt showed the Sima Yi’s ruthlessness since affections in boudoirs is also one kind of spiritual substance:

A person can only be happy when he finds something to put into his heart into. Some people put their hearts into chess, some into beautiful women, some into a particular skill or craft, some into writing.²⁶²

人情必有所寄，然後能樂。故有以弈為寄，有以色為寄，有以技為寄，有以文為寄。²⁶³


Here, Yuan Hongdao argued that a human being’s sentiment must have his spiritual sentiment and then one could have pleasure. This spiritual sentiment might be lofty and elegant, but also might be basic and instinctive. However, with Zhong Xing’s description of Sima Yi, we can see Sima Yi did not have such kind of spiritual sentiments at all, but only care about power or throne. In this sense, Sima Yi was totally ruthless person. And Zhong Xing’s commentary on Sima Yi also perfectly echoed the major cultural trend in the late Ming society.

III. Reading Love and Women

Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s evaluations on those famous historical figures reveal the major fashion trends and new moral values in the late Ming culture. Although some of these commentaries seemed to be irrelevant to aesthetic features and writing skills of poetry, the most important criterion which permeated all these commentaries is qing (sentiment). Zhong and Tan kept discussing the love and hobby of these historical or political figures in order to prove whether they had sentiments or not. This practice also resulted from one of the fundamental ideas of the Jingling poetics:

Poetry tells one’s disposition. When one puts his feelings into words, these words tell what is in his heart, but not what one has to say about some condition that forces him to speak. If one thinks that it is necessary for him to speak for some
condition, these words are merely speech for his reputation.

If one cannot help speaking something and he only speaks what is in his heart, these words are speech for his disposition.

夫詩，道性情者也。發而為言，言其心之所不能不有，非謂其事之所不可無，而必欲有所言也。以爲事之所不可無，而必欲有言者，聲譽之言也。不得已而有言，言其心之所不能不有者，性情之言也。^{264}

Here, Zhong Xing regarded poetry as feelings and emotions in one’s heart, but not courteous and formal speech used to deal with some special condition or socialize with others. In this sense, Zhong Xing emphasized that one needs to write his sentiment in a poem, and more importantly, this sentiment must truly happen to the poet, but not be some artificial feelings.

Indeed, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun requested one to write true feelings in poetry. They were not only strict with themselves in poetry writing, but also adhered to this principle while making pingdian style commentaries for Shigui. To be more specific, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun not only made rational criticisms on poetry as professional scholars, but often clearly expressed their strong feelings, such as sadness, anger, and etc. in their commentaries. These commentaries which were full of true

experiences and feelings in some sense presented the vivid images of emotional commentators instead of cold and rational ones:

[Tan said:] Every time that I read a Tang poet’s line “As elder brother, I am very easy to worry; as an orphan in my early age, I often feel sad,” it would touch my sore spot. For that all day, I would be sad. Then I recite “The Song of Orphan” again, and sweat drips down and tears stream down. Normal readers could not be deeply touched, except one who has pure nature and is bearing such a suffering.

[譚云：]予每讀唐人“為長心易優，早孤意常傷”，觸著痛処，终日不樂，又復誦《孤兒行》一過，汗下淚下，非至性人，身當其苦，聳動不來。265

The poetic lines “As elder brother, I am very easy to worry; as an orphan in my early age, I often feel sad” was the first two lines cited from a Tang poet Meng Yunqing’s 孟雲卿 (725? –?) “Shangqing”傷情 (“Sad Feeling”). “Shangqing” was also selected in Chapter Twenty-Four of Tangshi gui. Although Meng Yunqing was a good friend of

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some famous Tang poets, like Du Fu and Wei Yingwu 韋應物 (737–792) and also highly praised by another famous Tang poet Yuan Jie 元結 (719–772),267 his poems absorbed little attention from the Ming scholars. The Qing scholar He Shang 賀裳 (fl. 1681?) once remarked on Meng Yunqing’s poems and said:

Some poets remained straightforward, and were not reserved at all. But this would not stop them from writing good ones. Shen Qianyun and Meng Yunqing were such poets. … For Meng Yunqing’s lines “As elder brother, I am very easy to worry; as an orphan in my early age, I often feel sad,” their words all reached the marvelous level. However, when I read the entire poems, they were all yu sound and jue pitch, but not much gong sound and shang sound.

266 In Du Fu’s poetry collection, there are a few poems describing his friendship with Meng Feiqing, like “Chou Meng Yunqing”酬孟雲卿 (Answering Meng Yunqing). Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鰲 anno. Dushi xiangzhu 杜詩詳注, pp 479–480. Wei Yingwu also had some poems to Meng to show their deep friendship, for example “Guangling yu Mengjiu Yunqing”廣陵遇孟九雲卿 (Meeting Meng Yunqing in Guangling). Quan Tangshi 全唐詩, 25 vols, Chapter 190, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p. 1955.

267 Yuan Jie once edited selected seven Tang poets’ poems and edited them as a poetry anthology entitled “Qiezhongji” 篋中集. This anthology included seven poets’s twenty-four poems. Meng Yunqing is one of them.
Yu, jue, gong, and shang are four of the five musical notes in ancient China. According to “Yueji”（Record on the Subject of Music）in Liji（Book of Rites）, “Gong pitch is emperor, shang pitch is official, jue pitch is people,... and yu pitch is thing.”

In the meantime, yu pitch was regarded as music to express excited modes. In this sense, “yu pitch and jue tone” mainly refers to poems that expressed one’s strong feeling while “gong sound and shang sound” indicate poems that conform to so called “yazheng雅正” (elegant and right) poems.

Here, He Shang agreed that Meng Yunqing’s two lines were good, but he would not highly praise one poem merely because of its one or two excellent lines. In fact, he would evaluate each poem as a whole rather than simply pick up the beautiful lines. Therefore, he did not fully approve of Meng Yunqing’s poems. He Shang’s remark on Meng Yunqing soon was cited by another famous Qing scholar Wu Qiao in “Weilu shihua”围炉诗话 to show his agreement with He’s incisive opinion.

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269 Shisanjing zhushu 十三經註疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), p. 1528.

He Shang’s remark and Wu Qiao’s citation might give us some clue to see why Meng Yunqing had been so ignored by the Ming and the Qing scholars. In contrast to those uninterested scholars, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun gave Meng some credit for his poetry writing. Particularly, Zhong and Tan thought his poems were deeply touching:

[Tan said:] [Meng’s] myriad worries and myriad sufferings can make readers respectively feel their own worries and suffering. [Meng’s worries and readers’ worries were] perfectly united together.

[譚云：]萬愁萬苦，能令閱者各有愁苦，恰好合著。271

Here, Tan Yuanchun thought that “Shangqing” was very moving because of it could remind readers of their own worries and sufferings. These worries and sufferings just refer to “sore spot” (tongchu 痛處) in Tan’s previous commentary, namely his own tough experience. When Tan Yuanchun’s father Tan Wanli 譚晚立 (1561–1607) died in 1607, Tan Yuanchun was only twenty-two years old. As an elder brother, Tan Yuanchun had to take the responsibility of taking care of his mother and guiding his five younger brothers. According to “Tan Yuanchun zhuan” 譚元春傳 (“Tan Yuanchun’s Biography”) in Kangxi Anlu fuzhi 康熙安陸府志 (The Accounts of Anlu County in Kangxi reign of the

Tan Yuanchun was a dutiful son. He respected his mother very much and tried his best to look after his mother after she became blind at the age of 53. His mother had lived eight more years under Tan’s good care. As for his five younger brothers, Tan was very strict with them and carefully guided them to the good direction. Later each of his brothers respectively gained his own reputation. In this sense, although Tan Yuanchun was very successful in taking care of his mother and guiding brothers, the worries and difficulties he experienced in these years could only be known by himself.

Tan Yuanchun’s personal experience as a dutiful son and elder brother tells why he was able to be moved deeply by these two lines. And his emotional commentary also shows his tough experience and true feelings as a common reader instead of a professional scholar. As a compiler, Tan selected this poem mainly according to his reading feelings instead of detailed analysis of Meng Yunqing’s excellent writing skills. In the meantime, as a commentator, Tan shared his own personal experience of life with common readers, but not deep understanding of the aesthetic feature of this poem. In this sense, Tan simply positioned himself in the same level as a common reader was, and he did not hide this fact from the readers at all.

Indeed, Zhong and Tan highly praised qing 情, and liked to include poems which described true feelings and loves. As an emotional reader, Tan Yuanchun was often profoundly moved by the deep feelings described in poems, and made impassioned commentaries. However, it seems that some feelings in poems were often exaggerated in

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Tan’s commentaries. In other words, Tan’s words sometimes went beyond the major
texts, and became his yearning for true love.

[Tan said:] [This poem was filled with] deep sorrow and
resentment. What is under the pen is all blood, and what is
on the paper is all the soul. [This poem] should be related to
the loving person through the ages.

[譚云：] 悲甚怨甚，筆下全是血。紙上全是魂，當與千
古有情人相關。273

This commentary was made on Wang Xun’s 王筠 (481–549) “Xinglunan”行路難 (The
Hard Road). The poem presents a wife’s love and longing for her husband in a distance
through describing in detail how she made clothes for her husband. Before Zhong Xing
and Tan Yuanchun made commentaries on this poem, the Ming scholar Yang Shen 楊慎
once praised Wang Yun’s detailed descriptions:

These several lines (lines 12–16) describe the complication
and subtlety of making clothes. It is just like words said by a
sewing woman. This poem could be said as detailed since it
reaches to this level.

273 Tan Yuanchun’s ending commentary on Wang Yun’s 王筠 “Xinglongnan”行路難. In Chapter 14 of
Gushi gui. Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun ed. Gushi gui 古詩歸, in Xuxiu siku quanshu 續修四庫全書,
數句敍裁衣曲折纖微，如出縫婦之口。詩至此可謂細密矣。274

In this remark, Yang Shen commented on the distinguished aesthetic feature of this poem in precise terms. That is, the process of making clothes had been described so vividly and detailed that it was just like words from a sewing lady. Yang Shen’s words had been applauded by Zhong Xing in his commentary, saying that “[this poem] made a delicacy from dolor (從憂苦中釀出一段精細).” 275 It is clear that Wang Yun’s detailed description had been approved by scholars in the later generation.

However, Tan Yuanchun’s commentary does not sound appropriate compared with Yang Shen’s and Zhong Xing’s. “Beishen yuanshen” 悲甚怨甚 (deep sorrow and resentment) is slightly changed from Wang Yuan’s words “hanbei hanyuan” 含悲含怨 ([I] keep the sorrow and resentment) in the last second lines of the poem. But for the remarks “what is under the pen is all blood, and what is on the paper is all the soul,” the main character’s longing seemed exaggerated in some degree. The last sentence in this commentary might be Tan Yuanchun’s words in his heart. This poem should be written by a loving person. In this sense, this commentary is more an expression of Tan Yuanchun’s ideal poem of love than an accurate remark on Wang Yun’s poem.


Although some of Tan Yuanchun’s commentaries on love poems might not be accurate or appropriate, Tan Yuanchun always liked to talk about love and one’s courage to pursuing love in his commentaries. When he read tragic romance that true love between young people was not allowed or even forbidden by their families, he were outraged by conventional morals and strongly encouraged young people to bravely pursue their love:

[Tan said:] From the ancient time till now, how many handsome scholars and pretty girls had been dragged by their stupid and obstinate parents, could not become partners, and carried their love to death. [When I] read “Ziyu’s Song,” I became better aware that Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement with Sima Xiangru was the best and smartest plan. This plan could not be used by one who is not brave enough or had no experience.

[譚云:] 古今多少才子佳人，被愚拗父母扳住，不能成對，齎情而死。讀紫玉歌益悟文君奔相如是上上妙策，非膽到識到人不能用。276
This commentary was made on Princess Ziyu’s 紫玉“Ziyu ge”紫玉歌 (“Ziyu Song”).

Princess Ziyu was the little daughter of King Fuchai 夫差 (r. 495−473 B.C.E.) of the Wu state in the Spring and Autumn Period. The background story goes that Princess Ziyu felt in love with a young man named Han Zhong 韓重. Han went to ask King Fuchai for his permission to marry Ziyu, but his request was rejected. After Han left on an extended trip, Ziyu pined for Han so much that she soon died. When Han returned, he went to Ziyu’s grave to mourn Ziyu’s passing. Ziyu appeared before him in spirit and sung the song “Ziyu ge”. In this song, Ziyu told her miserable love story with Han Zhong and expressed her unswerving love to Han.

In the commentary, Tan Yuanchun first expressed his righteous anger when seeing true lovers who cannot be together. He blamed these young people’s parents for imposing their stupid and stubborn ideas on their children. And then, daringly, he advocated Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement with Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179−127 B.C.E.) as the best thing for these loving young people to do. Here, the romance of Zhuo Wenjun (fl. 2nd century B.C.E.) and Sima Xiangru is a typical scholar-beauty love story in history. Zhuo was the daughter of a very rich businessman Zhuo Wangsun 卓王孫 in Sichuan province. She was talented and beautiful. When Sima Xiangru, the famous poet in the Western Han, visited her father, the young widow felt in love with him, and eloped with him at that night.

Zhuo Wenjun’s and Sima Xiangru’s startling behavior had been harshly criticized and attacked by scholars in the later generations. For example, the Ming scholar Yang Shen once read this episode in Sima Xiangru’s biography in Shiji 史記 (Records of the
Grand Scribe). He couldn’t help questioning Sima Qian: “Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement at night was not hidden. What is the reason?” Here, Yang Shen was obviously not satisfied with this episode, and showed his strong disagreement with Zhuo Wenjun’s and Sima Xiangru’s violation of the Confucian morality.

Yang Shen’s concern might represent most orthodox scholars’ opinions in late imperial China. In this sense, it is not surprising to see that scholars severely attacked Tan Yuanchun for making such a stunning commentary to support Zhuo Wenjun’s behavior:

The Qing writer Cheng Yuwen wrote Yuanyang die. In his self-preface, he cited Tan Yuanchun’s words, saying: “From the ancient time till now, many handsome scholars and pretty girls had been dragged by their stupid and obstinate parents, could not become partners, and carried their love to death. [When I] read ‘Ziyu’s Song,’ I became better aware that Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement with Sima Xiangru was the best and smartest plan.” If such kind of obscene words came out of a person’s mouth, everyone would curse him for saying that. To my surprise, someone dared to write such words into book, and even published it in the world. Tan’s commentary advocated disorder and encouraged depravity. Officials should have executed Tan, burned his books, and changed his house into hut in order to protect Ritualism.
國朝程羽文撰《鴛鴦牒》⋯其自序引譚元春之說，謂：
「古來多少才子佳人，被愚拗父母板住，不能成對，齎情以死，乃悟文君奔相如是上上妙策。」云云。此等傷風敗俗之語，若出於口，人人唾駡，不謂竟有敢筆之於書，更出而問世。其倡亂導淫，有司當誅其人，火其書，廬其居，以保存名教。

Here, the late Qing scholar Liu Shengmu 劉聲木 (1876–1959) was outraged by Tan’s approval of Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement. Although Liu was born almost three hundred years later than Tan Yuanchun, he still harshly criticized Tan for guiding people into licentious status and maliciously cursed Tan for his shocking words. Later, he argued that speech like Tan’s would have extremely bad influence on common people. This bad influence could even be thousands of times worse than Li Zicheng’s 李自成 (1606–1645) and Zhang Xianzhong’s 張獻忠 (1606–1647) rebellion did. It is known that Li Zicheng’s and Zhang Xianzhong’s rebellion directly resulted in the fall of the Ming dynasty. This comparison between Tan’s stunning commentary and Li Zicheng’s rebellion clearly tells how much Liu Shengmu detested Tan Yuanchun’s words, and to

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278 Liu Shengmu 劉聲木: “[Such kind of speech’s] pernicious influence [on people] was thousands of times more than Zhang XianZhong’s and Li Zicheng’s (其流毒比之張獻忠、李自成，奚啻千万倍).” Liu Shengmu. Changchuzhai suibi xubi sanbi sibi wubi 蕭楚齋隨筆續筆三筆四筆五筆, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), p. 71.
what degree an orthodox scholar thought this kind of remarks would destroy the conventional morality.

Although Tan Yuanchun was severely attacked by later scholars for such a stunning remark, when we take a close look at the literary works and scholars’ word in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we could easily find that Tan Yuanchun was not alone. Rather, his words actually echoed some famous late Ming scholars’ supporting remarks to Zhuo Wenjun’s brave behavior in front of love. For example, Li Zhi once defended Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement as good choice, too:

At that time, If Miss Zhuo was like Miss Meng Guang, she would have asked her father Zhuo Wangsun for advice. I know that Zhuo Wangsun would certainly not have listened to her. Alas! Narrow- minded people are not worthy of making plans with. [Then] Zhuo Wenjun would have lost her good partner and failed to take this good match for her marriage. As for this situation, it is better for Zhuo Wenjun to make decision as early as possible, bear the little blame, and achieve the great plan.
Here, Li Zhi thought that Zhuo’s behavior to violate the Confucian morality was merely “little blame” (小恥), but taking the great match for marriage was the big thing (大計) for Zhuo Wenjun. Thus, Li Zhi regarded Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement as a smart and wise choice for her life. This is not different from Tan Yuanchun’s “the best and smartest plan” (shangshang miaoce 上上妙策). Not only Li Zhi advocated Zhuo Wenjun’s behavior, the famous late Ming playwright and scholar Tan Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550 –1616) also wrote poems to praise Zhuo Wenjun’s courage and insight. In this sense, Zhuo Wenjun’s shocking decision to elope with Sima Xiangru gained her good reputation for being a brave and wise woman in the late Ming. Thus, Tan’s commentary simply gave his approval to this popular idea in this period.

Second and more importantly, Tan Yuanchun’s supporting attitudes towards young people’s longing for and pursuing their true love also satisfied a great number of readers of romantic stories. It is known that scholar-beauty romantic story was one of the most often written themes in play and fiction in the late imperial China. Tang Xianzu’s

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Mudan ting 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion), telling of a young girl Du Liniang 杜麗娘 bravely pursued her love, was a best representative for drama of this theme. This play made huge influence after it was published. Tang Xianzu’s contemporary Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578 –1642) once described this situation: “When Tang Xianzu’s Mudanting was published, every household circulated it and read it. It almost knocked down Xixiangji 西廂記 (Romance of the West Chamber). (湯義仍《牡丹亭夢》一出，家傳戶誦，幾令《西廂》減價）” 281 Xixiangji written by Wang Shifu 王實甫 (1250–1307?) in the Yuan dynasty is another story of young people consummating their love without their parents’ approval.

As for fiction, Robert Hegel describes that, one of the “extremely productive genre in vernacular fiction” in the sixteenth and seventeenth century China “was the caizi jiaren or ‘talented scholar and beautiful maiden’ romance. …At least 50 of these generally short novels appeared from the middle of the seventeenth through the end of the eighteenth centuries.” 282

The good productions in this theme and well reception of this kind of stories and plays in the Ming and the Qing tell that there existed a great number of readers of this genre in the late imperial China. In this way, Tan Yuanchun’s words would easily please this group of readers. Interesting, different from the previous dramas, in which young people often discarded the traditional morality when pursuing their true love, these


romantic fictions in the early Qing, as Robert Hegel points out, “all conform to the masculine standards of the Confucian tradition.”

This might due to the rise of Confucianism after the Ming fell. In this sense, Tan Yuanchun’s stunning words were made to applaud the popular idea of pursuing love in the late Ming, but could only be widely received in the late Ming society.

Tan Yuanchun advocated young people’s behavior of bravely pursuing their true love. This idea was often accompanies with his remarks on woman’s intelligence. In other words, Tan Yuanchun affirmed that some female poets were very talented and intelligent, and they deserved better treatment:

[Tan said:] [Zhuo Wenjun] had such excellent speech and writing. She was truly good partner for Sima Xiangru. [If Sima Xiangru] did not elope [with Zhuo], who else could he wait for?

[譚云：] 有此妙口妙筆，真長卿快偶也，不奔何待？

This is Tan Yuanchun’s ending commentary on Zhuo Wenjun’s poem “Baitou yin” (Song of White Hairs). According to Xijing zaji (The Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital), the background story of this song is that Sima Xiangru planned to take a concubine after he got rewards from Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty.

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283 Ibid.

Zhuo Wenjun thus wrote this song to complain that Sima Xiangru did not remain faithful to their love. Sima Xiangru felt shame after he read Zhuo’s poem and gave up his original idea.285

The discussions about “Baitou yin” mainly focused on two perspectives in the Ming and the Qing. One is the authorship of this poem, and the other is the excellent writing skill. For the first issue, Feng Shu 馮舒 once mocked that Tan Yuanchun’s conclusion in this commentary sounded very silly because there was no solid evidence to prove that this poem was truly written by Zhuo Wenjun. 286

Although Feng’s argument on the authorship of “Baitou yin” might not be wrong, his attack on Tan Yuanchun’s commentary seems rather unfair. Although Tan might need more evidence to prove Zhuo Wenjun’s authorship of this poem, most Ming and Qing scholars took Zhuo’s authorship for granted. For example, the Ming scholar Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1495–1575) claimed that Zhuo Wenjun’s first two lines in “Baitou yin” were very elegant, and must be words from the Han poet.287 In Gushi pingxuan 古詩評選 and Gushi yuan 古詩源, Wang Fuzhi 王夫之288 and Shen Deqian 沈德潛 both listed


this poem under the name of Zhuo Wenjun without questioning her authorship. Shen Deqian also appended a commentary after the poem title which cited the background story from *Xijing zaji*. It is clear that many scholars in the Ming and the Qing had thought that Zhuo Wenjun was the author of “Baitou yin”. Feng Shu definitely could raise a question in regard to Zhuo’s authorship, but his spearhead was only directed at *Shigui* and Tan Yuanchun’s commentary on this poem. In this sense, his judgment on Tan’s words was not sound and convincing.

The other perspective discussed about “Baitou yin” among scholars is its aesthetic features as Xie Zhen did in his *shihua* work. However, in this commentary, Tan Yuanchun did not discuss either the unique aesthetic features of the poem or Zhuo Wenjun’s excellent writing skills. Rather, he again went back to Zhuo and Sima’s love story and thought that Zhuo’s talent could well match Sima Xiangru’s. Therefore, it was a correct choice for Sima Xiangru to elope with Zhuo Wenjun.

Interestingly, as a poetic critic, Zhong Xing also ignored the unique feature that “Baitou yin” has as a poem, but read it like a story:

[Zhong said:] [Zhuo Wenjun was] so [talented] that [Sima Xiangru] could bear her envy. How could foolish women in the world be so jealous of others? [Zhuo Wenjun] had a kind of words that embarrassed Sima Xiangru very much. Therefore, Sima had to stop [taking a concubine].

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Wenjun’s elopement and her envy both resulted from her talent.

[鍾云：] 如此方耐他妬，世上愚婦人如何妬得。
有一種極難為長卿語，長卿不得不止。文君之奔與妬生
于才耳。290

Here, Zhong actually applauded Tan’s commentary through thinking highly of Zhuo Wenjun’s intelligence, too. To think, du 妨 (envy) was one of the “qichu” 七出 (seven taboos) for women since the Han Dynasty.291 A woman would be easily charged with envy if she tried to stop her husband from taking a concubine. Zhuo Wenjun’s “Baitou yin” was just the evidence to show her envy. However, Zhong Xing thought compared with that of other common women, Zhuo Wenjun’s envy could be tolerated. This was simply because of her intelligence. With her intelligence, she bravely pursued her love by eloping with Sima Xiangru. Because she was talented, she could not allow her husband’s inconstancy of love. At last, she used her intelligence to successfully save her marriage. Therefore, Zhong Xing thought Zhuo’s talents distinguished herself from other women in the world, and with her intelligence, even her weakness became not that detestable.


291 Although qichu appeared after the Tang dynasty, its content mainly came from “qiqu”七去 in Dadai Liji 大戴禮記 in the Han Dynasty. Item “七出三不去” in Wiki: http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%B8%83%E5%8E%8B%E4%B8%8D%E5%8E%8B
While highly praising Zhuo Wenjun’s intelligence, Zhong Xing also criticized Sima Xiangru’s disloyalty to his love:

[Zhong said:] If Sima Xiangru and Su Boyu had not done anything to break their wives’ hearts, the two women’s fantastic talents would not have been inspired. However, [the two gentlemen] did not change their minds until their wives’ poems had been completed. They could be regarded as men who have stupid roots. It says that talented gentlemen have affection. I don’t believe it.

[鍾云:] 相如、伯玉，不作負心事，不能發二婦之奇。
然必待詩成而後易慮，可謂鈍根。曰才人有情，吾不信也。⑨2

This is Zhong Xing’s ending note on “Pangzhong shi”槃中詩 (“Poem in a Plate”) by Su Boyu’s wife 蘇伯玉妻 (fl. the Han Dynasty). Similar as “Baitou yin,” this poem was also written by a wife to her husband. The background story tells that Su Boyu 蘇伯玉 (?–?) was on duty in Sichu province. He stayed there and had not returned home for a while. His wife was living in Chang’an, and missed him very much. Thus she wrote this poem.

In the poem, the wife directly expressed her longing for Su Boyu. She Deqian once praised this poem, and said: “The key to make Su Boyu feel remorseful all lies in her gentle and sweet tone, but not in her resentment and anger. This lady had deep feeling. (使伯玉感悔，全在柔婉，不在怨怒。此深於情)”

Zhong Xing also admired this female poet much, and praised her for her fantastic thinking. Besides, he also made an interesting comparison between this poem and “Baitou yin.” In his eyes, the reason for these two female poets to respectively write to their husbands was simply became their husband broke their hearts. Here, Zhong sympathized with these talented women, and criticized their husband as stupid persons. Interestingly, Zhong even stated that he did not believe those so-called “talented gentlemen” had affection. The logic behind this statement is that the abandoned women were in love with their husbands while their husbands were heartless to them. In this sense, the fundamental principle underlying Zhong Xing’s judgments on both sides of wives and husbands is also qing 情 (sentiment).

Zhong Xing’s sympathy for abandoned women and his denunciation of heartless husbands would easily make a good impression on female readers of Shigui. In fact, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun included a number of female poets’ works, and often

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295 Zhong Xing said in the beginning of this commentary: “The poem was fantastic, thing in the plate was fantastic, and thinking was fantastic. Such excellent essay and clever skills would surpass the others through the ages.” (詩奇，槃中事奇，想奇，高文妙技，橫絕千古). Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun ed. Gu Shigui 古詩歸, in Xuxiu siku quanshu 續修四庫全書, vol. 1589, p. 399.
more or less mentioned the unique female quality and women’s simple but
genuine expression of love. For example:

[Zhong said:] female poet’s poems must be gentle and lovely.

[鍾云：] 女人詩定帶嫵媚。296

[Zhong said:] soft, gentle, modest, and courteous. It is still
female tone.

[鍾云：] 輕婉卑順，卻是婦人語調。297

[Zhong said:] This is imperial concubine Ming’s lyric, so
gracious and simple.

[鍾云：] 此明妃词也，何等宛質。298

[Tan said:] As for the female’s deep temperament,
straightforward talk, and distinctness, scholars and talented
gentlemen should regard this poem as the first one.


[譚云：] 女人氣幽，語快，逼真，文人秀士者，當以此為第一。^299

[Tan said:] It is interesting that the three characters “poetry and book are worthless” came out of a woman’s mouth.

[譚云：] 詩書賤三字，出女人口中便趣。^300

Such kind of commentaries on female poets’ works had appeared for many times in *Shigui*. In these commentaries, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun seemed to deliberately separate these female poems from gentlemen’s ones through telling the unique female features presented in the poems. In the meantime, Zhong and Tan showed rather lenient attitudes to female’s true feelings about their lovers, as we have seen from Zhong’s criticisms on Sima Xiangru and Su Boyu. Thus, it is not surprising to see that *Shigui* would absorb many female readers’ attention.

The other side of this story is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the critical mass of literate women gradually came into being. While studying the women culture in the seventeenth century China, Dorothy Ko finds that “in the seventeenth century, …in every Jiangnan city and in every generation there were women who wrote,

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published, and discussed one another’s work. The growth in the number of educated women, together with expanded opportunities for them to interact with one another and with society at large, created a critical mass that had not existed before. Hence, the role that literate women played in the culture of seventeenth-century China was qualitatively different.”

Further, Dorothy Ko points out that “women participated in the publishing boom in Ming-Qing Jiangnan not only as readers, but also as authors and publishers. …Poetry anthologies appear to have been more popular.”

Indeed, “to edit and publish works of female literature became a fashion” in the late Ming. As Zheng Yanling states, more and more poetry anthologies by female poets had appeared since Tian Yiheng’s 田藝衡 Shin shi 詩女史 was published in 1577. The influential poetry anthology Mingyuan shiguī 名媛詩歸 (Poetic Retrospective of Famous Ladies), which was attributed to Zhong Xing, was also published in the late Ming period.

Whether Zhong Xing complied this poetry anthology is still open to question, but it does not matter to the fact that Zhong Xing must have earned a good reputation among the female readers in the late Ming. If this anthology was indeed edited and commented

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301 Dorothy Ko. Teachers of the Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China, p. 29.

302 Ibid., p. 59.


304 Ibid.

305 Title was translated by Dorothy Ko. Dorothy Ko. Teachers of the Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China, p. 61.
by Zhong Xing, the influential position of this poetry anthology in the late Ming would tell us the tremendous support Zhong Xing had won from female readers. If not, this attribution itself tells that the publisher clearly knew Zhong Xing’s influence among the female readers in the late Ming. In the meantime, Zhong Xing’s friendly and sympathetic attitudes toward female poets and their various suffering would not make this attribution sound unbelievable to the readers in the market. Therefore, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun’s attention to female poets and their commentaries in *Shigui* to support true love, analyze the unique feature of women poetry, and sympathy to women’s suffering would all help them gain more female readers in the late Ming society.

As I have proved in the third chapter, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun intended to achieve two ambitious goals while compiling *Shigui*: one was to form a theory in Chinese poetic history and the other was to fulfill an educational function and change the dissatisfying condition of the poetry learning in the late Ming. *Pingdian* style commentary thus became the best form for them to express their theoretical ideas and to instruct readers about poetry. While compiling *pingdian* style commentaries in *Shigui*, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun had clear intentions on several important issues. First, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun never tried to hide their identity as readers of poetry. Instead, they always enjoyed their reading experiences, and liked to share with readers. More importantly, they again and again reminded readers of the fundamental role that reading process played in one’s poetry learning.
Second, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun did not position themselves as rigorous instructors even for those instructing commentaries, but more like friendly seniors to tell beginners what they have experienced in their learning process. Meanwhile, they often freely expressed their thinking, understanding, and feelings on ancient poems.

Third, some of their commentaries seem “irrelevant” to their ambitious goals of compiling *Shigui*. However, the fundamental ideas permeate all these “irrelevant” commentaries are always one’s true sentiment. With this idea in heart, Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun also echoed some cultural trend in the late Ming society, like obsession, scholar-beauty theme stories, and women poems, which would gain a variety of readers for their anthology.
Conclusion

*Gu Tang Shigui* (Repository of Ancient and Tang Poetry) is one of the most influential poetic anthologies in the seventeenth century. The great impact of this anthology may be measured in terms of the immense popularity it enjoyed in its own time and the “notoriety” it gained during the Qing. *Shigui’s* innovative features, for example, its format of presentation and its *pingdian* style commentaries, have no doubt contributed to the anthology’s enviable success in the market place and made it liable to accusations of all sorts by the orthodox-minded Qing critics.

If *Shigui* was the key to the Jingling School’s success and failure, *pingdian* style commentary played a fundamental role in turning *Shigui* into a best seller and a target to be attacked. Although Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun stated again and again that they intended to form a poetic theory of their own and achieve immortality in Chinese literary history, an equally important goal of Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun to make such an anthology, namely to teach the readers true poetry 真詩, eventually decided their choice of expression form, *pingdian* style commentary.

Zhong Xing thoroughly understood the features of *pingdian* form and took it into a full play in *Shigui*. Although this choice resulted in many criticisms or even attacks in the field of literary circles, the compilers’ efforts were amply rewarded by *Shigui’s* wide circulation and reception in the late Ming society. These rich returns quickly absorbed more attention to *pingdian* form from both the publishers and purely literary scholars. And the educational value of *pingdian* form was fully recognized. Even though the Qing scholars disliked *pingdian* form very much as I have shown in Chapter Two, *pingdian*
style commentary had been appended in many poetry textbooks or poetry anthologies for beginners. For example, the modern scholar Zha Pingqiu once pointed out that anthologies of Tang poetry with pingdian style commentaries appended became one of the main textbooks in the late Ming private schools.  

“Even the most popular and influential of poetry collections, the *T’ang-shih san-pai shou* (Three hundred T’ang Poems; compiled by Sun Chu 孫洙, 1751 chi-shi degree), circulated in editions that contained not only annotations but also p’ing-tien style criticism.”  

Jin Shengtan’s 金聖嘆 (1608-1661), the famous critic in the seventeenth century, also compiled an anthology of Tang regulated poetry and wrote many pingdian style commentaries. In this anthology, Jin Shentan’s commentaries were full of detailed explanations of a poem’s content, structure, and also atheistic features. Sometimes, his commentaries were even mixed together with annotations. For example,

“Man,” indicates Du Shenyan. “Where,” means that Du was far to reach after he went through Dayu Mount (大庾嶺). …… It is very clever to place “spring wind” between “two places” and “more than ten thousands

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miles.” Thus “when” in the last line is connected with this line.

人，即員外也。何處，言過嶺以去，杳莫可問
也。……兩地萬餘裡，中間插春風字妙，便接出末句
之何時。308

This *pingdian* style commentary was made on Shen Quanqi’s 沈佺期 (656?-714?) poem “Yaotong Du Yuanwai Shenyan guoling” 遙同杜員外審言過嶺 (“Reply to Du Shenyan Who Passed Through Dayu Mount”). Du Shenyan 杜審言 (645?-708) is another famous early Tang poet, and Shen Quanqi’s good friend. In 705, Du Shenyan and Shen Quanqi respectively passed through Dayu Mount 大庾嶺. This poem was written by Shen Quanqi to reply Du Shenyan’s poem of the same theme.

Jin Shengtan’s commentary begins with explanations on the meaning of words and ends with a comment on the clever use of “spring wind.” Clearly, Jin Shengtan intended to explain clearly every minute detail of a poem to the readers, including the meaning of a word and the good use of a phrase. In this sense, Jin Shengtan’s *pingdian* style commentaries lead the readers to understand a poem from the meaning to aesthetic feature, and serve for poetry beginners.

The famous Qing scholar Shen Deqian also wrote a number of *pingdian* style commentaries in six poetry anthologies that he compiled, though he knew the poor

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reputation of pingdian form among literary scholars. Compared with Shigui, She Deqian’s Gushi yuan did not include many commentaries, but he clearly stated in the preface that he made commentaries and annotations in order to serve for poet learners.\(^{309}\) In this sense, Shen admitted that the educational function is one of his intentions to make these poetry anthologies.

Wang Fuzhi might be an exception in the Qing who did not give much attention to the educational value of pingdian style commentaries. In his three poetry anthologies, pingdian style commentary still occupied a remarkable position, but Wang’s commentaries are much more like appreciation of poems rather than explanations of why it was good and how to write a poem. Unfortunately, Wang Fuzhi’s three poetry anthologies had not been printed until beginning of the twentieth century.\(^{310}\) Therefore, his anthologies and commentaries had little impact on the Qing readers. Thus, we might clearly see the fundamental role that the book market played in the circulation of a poetry anthology. Zhong Xing and Tan Yuanchun printed Shigui three years after it was completed and had it reprinted at least seven times in three decades, while Wang Fuzhi and his students never put his works into book market at that time. In this sense, Shigui’s success does not merely benefit considerably from Zhong and Tan’s deliberately choosing and writing pingdian form. The prosperous book market in the late Ming also provided Shigui with the most fertile soil.

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309 See no. 115.

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