

Divination in the Works of the *Shishuo* Genre, China and Japan¹

Nanxiu Qian

Rice University

I. Introduction

In his book, *Mapping China and Managing the World*, Richard J. Smith offers an explanation for the “staying power of divination in China,” which “both embodied and reflected many of the most fundamental features of traditional Chinese civilization.” Although it always had a certain heterodox potential, divination “was not fundamentally a countercultural phenomenon.” Rather, enjoying abundant classical sanction and an extremely long history, “Chinese mantic practices followed the main contours of traditional Chinese thought.”²

This article aims to add support to Smith’s argument, albeit from a perspective that fluidly trespasses the boundaries between the “heterodox potential” of divination and the “main contours of traditional Chinese thought.” Through examining mantic practices and theories recorded in a

¹ This article is revised from my paper for the Conference on “Divinatory Traditions in East Asia: Historical, Comparative and Transnational Perspectives,” Rice University, February 17-18, 2012. Great thanks to Professor Richard J. Smith for his thorough comments and suggestions, and to Ms. Amber Szymczyk for her editorial help. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

² Richard J. Smith, *Mapping China and Managing the World: Culture, Cartography and Cosmology in Late Imperial Times* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 151.

specific group of literary texts, this article argues that divination was a significant, if not indispensable, component in the self-fashioning of certain iconoclastic intellectuals, men and women, from the Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220–420) period to the late Qing 清 (1644–1911) dynasty in China, and from the Heian 平安 (794–1185) period to the Edo 江戸/Tokugawa 徳川 (1603–1868) period in Japan.

This body of literature includes the famous Chinese literary work known as the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (conventionally translated as *A New Account of Tales of the World*, hereafter *Shishuo*), compiled by the Liu-Song 劉宋 (420–479) prince Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444) and his staff, as well as later imitations of the *Shishuo* in both China and Japan—a total of thirty-seven separate items in my collection. Together they are known as *Shishuo ti* 世說體 (the *Shishuo* genre).

My article explores this rich archive of literature, written in classical Chinese (also known as the literary Sinitic),³ from the following three viewpoints: First, it identifies divination as a coherent and enduring aspect of *renlun jianshi* 人倫鑑識 (judgment and recognition of human [character] types, more succinctly translated as “character appraisal”), a major Wei-Jin intellectual practice that recognized and evaluated human character types and socio-political situations. Second, it examines the profusion of divinatory methods over time (from the Wei-Jin to the late Qing) and across space (China and Japan) that appear in *Shishuo ti* works, showing how they were configured and reconfigured under certain specific social, political, and

³ For this term and its significance in East Asian culture, see the report on the international conference “Reconsidering the Sinosphere: A Critical Analysis of the Literary Sinitic in East Asian Cultures,” Rice University, March 30–April 1, 2017 at <http://sinosphere.rice.edu/>.

intellectual circumstances. Third, taking an explicitly gender-focused approach, this article evaluates women's roles in mantic practices and the significance of their participation in the divinatory traditions of China and Japan.

II. Divination and Character Appraisal in China

The *Shishuo xinyu* records the surprisingly freewheeling social and intellectual life of Wei-Jin China by means of a great many short and extremely colorful anecdotes. By characterizing and categorizing diverse Wei-Jin personalities, this sui-generis work grew out of, and in turn registered, the practice of character appraisal—a major intellectual activity identified with the Wei-Jin ideology known as Abstruse Learning (*Xuanxue* 玄學, a.k.a. Mysterious Learning or Dark Learning).⁴ According to the esteemed Sinologist Erik Zürcher, *Xuanxue* provided a reinterpretation of Confucianism “primarily based on the philosophy of the *Book of Changes*, mingled with ideas extracted from early Taoist [Daoist] thought (notably from *Lao-tzu* and *Chuang-tzu* [*Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*]).”⁵ It also borrowed concepts and constructions that had been newly introduced to China by Buddhism in order to fill an apparent “vacuum” in the

⁴ For background, see Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu [jianshu]* 世說新語箋疏 ([Commentary on the] *Shishuo xinyu*), commentary by Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫 (1884–1955), 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993); trans. Richard B. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976). For the connections between the Wei-Jin *Xuanxue* and the *Shishuo xinyu*, see Nanxiu Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shishuo hsin-yü and Its Legacy* (Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), chapters 1–3.

⁵ E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 1:46.

scholastic metaphysics of Confucianism.⁶ All these intellectual resources helped to establish the early standards and methodologies of character appraisal.⁷

At its center, the *Shishuo* features primarily *Xuanxue* scholars who were celebrated for their colorful and somewhat irreverent personalities, their wide-ranging philosophical and artistic accomplishments, their outspoken criticism of contemporary politics, and their love of nature and freedom. In short, their lives and exploits exemplified the Wei-Jin intellectual spirit.

A major spiritual resource for these individuals, pertinent to the focus of this article, was the notion of the “Perfected Person” (*zhiren* 至人) from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* 莊子. This term refers to one who avails of the “right course” (*zheng* 正) of Heaven and Earth, rides the changes of the “six vital energies” (*liuqi* 六氣), and is thus able to wander the cosmos without any constraints or limitations.⁸ This Perfected Person possesses special qualities and capacities, as described by Zhuangzi in his discussion of a closely connected variant notion, the Spiritual Person (*shenren* 神人)—a being

... with skin like ice or snow, and gentle and shy like a virgin girl. The Person doesn’t eat the five grains, but sucks the wind, drinks the dew, climbs up on the clouds and mist, rides a flying dragon,

⁶ See *ibid.*

⁷ For the connections between Wei-Jin *Xuanxue* and character appraisal, and a study of the *Shishuo* tradition, see Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China*.

⁸ See *Zhuangzi* [jishi] 莊子[集釋] ([Collected commentary on the] *Zhuangzi*), “Xiaoyao you” 逍遙游 (Free roaming) commentary by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), *juan* 1A, 1:17; trans. see also Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 32.

and wanders beyond the four seas. By concentrating his [or her] spirit, this Person can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful.⁹

...肌膚若冰雪，(綽)[淖]約若處子。不食五穀，吸風飲露。乘雲氣，御飛龍，而遊乎四海之外。其神凝，使物不疵癘而年穀熟。

Such Persons, according to the *Zhuangzi*, absorb natural essences and in so doing they develop transformative powers over the world. Accompanying this idea of transformative cosmic power is a “feminine” image—expressed in descriptions of beauty, gentleness and nurture. In this egalitarian view, spiritual perfection and human efficacy were clearly available to women as well as men.

The Eastern Jin (317–420) elaboration of the Perfected Person ideal by adepts of both *Xuanxue* and Mahāyāna Buddhism suggests mantic ability. Drawing upon the *Zhuangzi* to interpret *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* and vice versa, the adepts of this period re-conceptualized the Perfected Person to represent “an amalgamation of secular and Buddhist thought.”¹⁰ In their vision, especially as expressed by the eminent monk Zhi Dun 支遁 (314–366), the Perfected Person possessed a spirit, *shen* 神, which was at once decidedly quiet and extremely alert. Standing firmly on this immovable and creative self, the Perfected Person does not yield to outside powers but remains open to an ever-changing phenomenal world, employing a limitless repertoire of appropriate responses.

⁹ Ibid., *juan* 1A, 1:28; trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 33, modified. Cheng Xuanying’s 成玄英 *shu* 疏 commentary on the *Zhuangzi* “Xiaoyao you” points out that the *zhiren*, the *shenren*, and the *shengren* 聖人 (Sage) “are in fact one” (*qishi yiye* 其實一也); *ibid.*, *juan* 1A, 1:22.

¹⁰ Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest*, 1:123.

Such a Person can thus muster all kinds of intellectual and empathetic resources from the past and the present, and can act sensitively and effectively in accordance with the changes of the world. In the process, the Perfected Person's spirit brings that Person's inner attributes to his or her appearance, bridging the gap between the Person and the outside world. As a result, "when the Person's inner qualities are intelligent, his/her spirit appears luminous" (質明則神朗). "With a luminous spirit [the Person] foresees the future and makes ensuing judgments. Being able to understand the past and the present with good judgment (*jian* 鑒), the Perfected Person can thereby know the future" (神朗則逆鑒，明夫來往常在鑒內，是故至人鑒將來之希纂).¹¹

Eastern Jin character appraisal appropriated Perfected-Person qualities in its evaluation standards. The Person's capacity to "foresee the future and make ensuing judgments" (*nijian* 逆鑒) naturally became an indispensable component of the ideal personality portrayed in the *Shishuo*. In classifying the thousand-plus *Shishuo* episodes into thirty-six personality types, the

¹¹ Zhi Dun, "Da Xiao ping duibi yaochao xu" 大小品對比要抄序 (Preface to a *Synoptic Extract of the Larger and Smaller Versions [of the Prajñāpāramitā]*), in Seng You 僧祐 (445–518), *Chu Sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collected bibliographic records of Buddhist scripts and treatises) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), *juan* 8, 300–301. For Wei-Jin understanding of the function of *shen*, see Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China*, 152–55. Zhi Dun may also have incorporated the quality of the Confucian Sage from the "Zhongyong" 中庸 (the mean), which maintains that the Sage, being the "most sincere" (*zhicheng* 至誠), is capable of predicting the future (*qianzhi* 前知)—the rise and fall of the state, and the good and the bad fortune of a person; see *Liji* [zhengyi] 禮記[正義] ([Orthodox commentary on] *The record of ritual*), "Zhongyong," *zhu* 註 commentary by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), *shu* 疏 commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), in Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Commentaries on the thirteen Chinese classics), 2 vols. (1826; rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), *juan* 53, 2:1632.

Shishuo authors devoted the category “Technical Understanding” (Chapter Twenty) primarily to mantic practices, with similar cases sporadically spread throughout the entire work, especially in the chapter titled “Recognition and Judgment” (“Shijian” 識鑑), which focuses on character-appraisal activities. Divinatory practices in these cases not only displayed a person’s mantic talents, but also served as a means of recognizing and judging the character traits of others, and how they might respond to situational changes. Contextualized by the *Shishuo* genre as a form of character analysis, divinatory practices were never purely techniques (*shu* 術); rather, they always interacted with insightful perceptions and deep understandings of human personalities.

In a more general sense, character appraisal was a way of divining that predicted a person’s future by synthesizing all sorts of divinatory methods and theories, trespassing between the natural and supernatural orders (which were actually inseparable from the standpoint of traditional Chinese cosmology), and observing a person and/or a situation from multiple perspectives. Later *Shishuo* imitations invariably followed this taxonomic scheme (see Appendix), with modifications to fit the particular socio-political and cultural circumstances of each *Shishuo ti* work.

The opening episode from the chapter “Recognition and Judgment” can serve to showcase the *Shishuo*’s deceptively simple anecdotal approach:

When Cao Cao [155–220] was young, he had an interview with Qiao Xuan [fl. late 2nd cent.]. Xuan told him, “The whole realm is now in disorder, and all the warriors are struggling like tigers. Aren’t you the one who will control the situation and get it in order? . . . You really are [i.e. can be] an intelligent hero [*yingxiong*] in an age of disorder, and a treacherous rebel in an age of order. I regret

that I am old now and won't live to see you come to wealth and honor, but I will entrust my sons and grandsons to your care." (7/1 [Chapter 7/Episode 1])¹²

曹公[操]少時見喬玄，玄謂曰：“天下方亂，群雄虎爭，撥而理之，非君乎？然君實是亂世之英雄，治世之奸賊。恨吾老矣，不見君富貴，當以子孫相累。”

This episode exemplifies an enduring character-appraisal practice that amounted to a form of divination: Qiao Xuan as a “diviner” predicted Cao Cao’s political future in terms of two radically different possibilities available to a person of his particular character. The episode does not detail the mantic methods that Qiao employed; his prediction may have resulted from a combined set of factors: Cao Cao’s facial structure (*mianxiang* 面相; a type of divination known generically as “physiognomy” [*fengjian* 風鑑, *kanxiang* 看相, *kanren* 看人, *xiangren* 相人, etc.]), his remarks, his body language, and information about Cao’s background, behavior, and character gathered from other sources. In other words, the evaluative methods he employed may have ranged from the explicitly mantic to a variety of social, political and psychological variables.

There is no indication of Cao Cao’s reaction to this appraisal. But judging from Qiao’s decision to “entrust” his offspring to Cao’s care, we may surmise that both he and Qiao must have been comfortable with both possibilities—whether Cao became an “intelligent hero” or a “treacherous rebel.” According to Liu Jun’s 劉峻 (462–521) commentary on the *Shishuo*, when

¹² Citation of the *Shishuo xinyu* will be quoted from the *Shishuo xinyu* [*jianshu*] and marked by chapter number/episode number; trans. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 196, modified.

Cao heard a similar remark about his character on an earlier occasion, he “laughed out loud,” for what clearly mattered to Cao Cao was capability, not morality.¹³

The *Shishuo* characterization of Cao Cao is consistent with his image in conventional historical accounts. Cao lived through the collapse of the Han 漢 (206 BCE–220) dynasty, at a time when the Yellow Turban Rebellion (184–188) had torn the entire empire asunder, and contending warlords were keeping it divided. The times desperately required capable officials to help restore order. In the fifteen years of the Jian’an 建安 reign (196–220), Cao Cao, as the regent/prime minister of the declining Han and the founder of the future Wei 魏 regime (220–265), ordered a search for talented persons on four separate occasions.¹⁴ His view was that “a time of peace and order honors moral behavior, whereas a time of anarchy and disorder values contributions and ability” (治平尚德行，有事賞功能).¹⁵ Accordingly, he openly advocated abandoning moral standards in favor of “selecting only those who possess ability” (唯才是舉),¹⁶

¹³ Liu Jun’s commentary on *Shishuo xinyu*, 7/1.

¹⁴ The dates of these four orders are, respectively, the eighth year (203), fifteenth year (210), nineteenth year (214), and twenty-second year (217) of the Jian’an reign; see Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Records of the Three Kingdoms), *Weishu* 魏書 (History of the Wei), “Wudi ji” 武帝紀 (Basic annals of Emperor Wu), 5 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, 1982), *juan* 1, 1:32, 1:44, and Pei Songzhi’s 裴松之 (372–451) commentary, 1:24, 1:49–50.

¹⁵ Cao Cao’s order issued in the eighth year of the Jian’an reign, quoted in Pei Songzhi’s commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, *Weishu*, 1:24.

¹⁶ Cao Cao’s order issued in the fifteenth year of the Jian’an reign, *Sanguo zhi*, *Weishu*, 1:32.

seeking to employ individuals who were “neither benevolent nor filial, but capable of ordering the state and commanding military troops” (不仁不孝，而有治國用兵之術).¹⁷

The relationship between divination and character appraisal is clearer in another *Shishuo* episode in the chapter titled “Admonitions and Warnings” (“Guizhen” 規箴):

He Yan and Deng Yang had Guan Lu construct a hexagram for prognostication, saying to him, “We don’t know if our status will reach the Three Ducal Offices or not.”

When the hexagram was completed, Lu quoted the ancient interpretations, warning them gravely. Deng Yang said, “This is the usual talk of an old scholar.”

But He Yan said, “‘To know the springs of action—how divine!’ This is what the ancients considered difficult. Distant in friendship, yet still sincere in what one says. This is what men of today consider difficult. Today, in one stroke, you have satisfied the requirements of both difficulties. This is what is meant by the statement, ‘Illustrious virtue is a far-reaching fragrance.’ Isn’t there a line in the *Book of Songs* which goes: ‘In my utmost heart I’ve hid it, / What day could I forget it!’” (10/6)¹⁸

何晏、鄧颺令管輅作卦，云：“不知位至三公不？”卦成，輅稱引古義，深以戒之。颺曰：“此老生之常談。”晏曰：“知幾其神乎，古人以為難；交疏吐誠，今人以為難。今君一面，盡二難之道，可謂‘明德惟馨’。詩不云乎，‘中心藏之，何日忘之！’”

Here, the *Shishuo* authors have omitted the details of Guan Lu’s divinatory use of the *Book of Changes*, focusing instead on a character appraisal process that exposes the personalities of all three participants through their mutual evaluations. Clearly aware of the current political

¹⁷ Cao Cao’s order issued in the twenty-second year of the Jian’an reign, quoted in Pei Songzhi’s commentary, *Sanguo zhi, Weishu*, 1:49.

¹⁸ Trans. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 277, modified.

situation, Guan Lu draws upon ancient interpretations of the *Changes* to caution He Yan and Deng Yang against imprudent ambition. In Deng and He in their responses, Deng and He each place a judgment on Guan's character and in turn reveal their own. Deng appears arrogant and frivolous. He quickly dismisses Guan's sophisticated interpretation as "the usual talk of an old scholar," showing his disappointment because he has posed question revealing the political aspirations of the two men. He Yan, unlike Deng, appears modest and grateful. He posits the question because he has sensed threats to his otherwise promising career. He recognizes Guan Lu's divine talent and appreciates Guan's sincerity, showing himself to be, like Guan, a sensitive adept of character appraisal.¹⁹

The following *Shishuo* episode from "Technical Understanding," revolving around Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) exalted reputation as a practitioner of geomancy (*zhan zhongzhai* 占塚宅, *kanyu* 堪輿, *fengshui* 風水, etc.), is similarly revealing, with a rather humorous touch:

Emperor Ming of Jin [Sima Shao, r. 323–325] understood how to make geomantic divinations concerning tombs and houses. On hearing that Guo Pu was undertaking someone's burial, the emperor went in mufti to watch and took the opportunity to ask the head of the household, "Why are you burying him at the dragon's horn? This way you'll bring about the termination of your entire clan."

The head of the household replied, "Guo Pu told us, 'This is a burial at the dragon's ear, and in less than three years there will come a Son of Heaven.'"

¹⁹ Guan Lu's divinatory remarks are detailed in Liu Jun's commentary on this episode. See *Shishuo xinyu* [jianshu], 2:552-54; trans. Mather, *Tales of the World*, 277-80; see also Richard J. Smith's interpretation to Guan Lu's remarks in his *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The Yijing (I-ching, or Classic of Changes), and Its Evolution in China* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 99.

The Emperor asked, “Does this mean the family will produce a Son of Heaven?”

He replied, “It’s not that they’ll produce a Son of Heaven. It’s just that there could come a Son of Heaven asking questions, that’s all.” (20/6)²⁰

晉明帝解占塚宅，聞郭璞為人葬，帝微服往看，因問主人：“何以葬龍角？此法當滅族！”
主人曰：“郭云：‘此葬龍耳，不出三年，當致天子。’”帝問：“為是出天子邪？”答
曰：“非出天子，能致天子問耳。”

This episode considers the two personalities through the lens of an implicit rivalry or tension between them. Guo Pu, a famous diviner well versed in both geomancy and character appraisal, is aware that Emperor Ming, a mediocre diviner, has kept a close scrutiny of Guo’s geomantic activities out of personal jealousy. He thus instructs the head of the household about how to address the emperor’s possible query, as well as how to correct the emperor’s mistake without offending his imperial authority. Although Guo does not actually appear in the scene, his witty and humorous personality steers the conversation.

The divinatory practices in the *Shishuo*, which reveal the social, political, and intellectual circumstances of the times in which they were employed, consisted not only of physiognomy, use of the *Book of Changes*, and geomancy, but also time-honored techniques such as dream interpretation and the analysis of sounds. At least some of these practices, as applied during the Later Han and Wei periods, were documented and theorized in the Wei scholar Liu Shao’s 劉邵 (fl. 168–172) *Treatise on Personalities* (*Renwu zhi* 人物志).

From the beginning of recorded history in China (the Shang 商 dynasty, c. 1600–c. 1046 BCE), dream interpretation (*jiemeng* 解夢, *mengzhan* 夢占, etc.) was a prominent feature of

²⁰ Trans. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 360, modified.

Chinese mantic practice. Not surprisingly, then, the *Shishuo* took dreams very seriously. Here is an example:

When Wei Jie [286–312] was a young lad with his hair in tufts, he asked Yue Guang [252–304] about dreams.

Yue said, “They are thoughts (*xiang* 想).”

Wei continued, “But dreams occur when body and spirit aren’t in contact. How can they be thoughts?”

Yue replied, “They are the result of causes (*yin* 因). No one has ever dreamed of entering a rat hole riding in a carriage, or of eating an iron pestle after pulverizing it, because in both cases there have never been any such thoughts or causes.”

Wei pondered over what was meant by “causes” for days without coming to any understanding, and eventually he became ill. Yue, hearing of this, made a point of ordering his carriage and going to visit him, whereupon he proceeded to make a detailed explanation of “causes” for Wei’s benefit. Wei immediately began to recover a little.

Sighing, Yue remarked, “In this lad’s breast, there will never be any incurable sickness.”
(4/14)²¹

衛玠總角時問樂令[廣]“夢”，樂云“是想”。衛曰：“形神所不接而夢，豈是想邪？”樂云：“因也。未嘗夢乘車入鼠穴，擣齏噉鐵杵，皆無想無因故也。”衛思“因”，經日不得，遂成病。樂聞，故命駕為剖析之。衛既小差，樂歎曰：“此兒胸中當必無膏肓之疾！”

²¹ Trans. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 98, modified.

Here, Yue Guang's response to Wei Jie draws upon the hallowed text known as the *Zhou Rituals* (*Zhouli* 周禮), which lists six types of dreams, all related to one's conscious thoughts.²² The prodigy Wei Jie, however, questions this explanation, arguing that dreams evolve inside of one's brain, which is part of one's body (*xing* 形), beyond the control of one's spirit (*shen* 神). Yue Guang thereupon adduces another explanation, namely *yin*, or cause. But the real point of the episode is, of course, that a sophisticated discussion of dreams gives Yue the opportunity to evaluate Wei Jie's character, revealing the boy's precociousness and stubborn pursuit of answers to his well-informed questions.

Another episode addresses some specific characteristics of Chinese dream interpretation:

Someone once asked Yin Hao [306–356], “Why is it that

[When one is] about to attain office,

One dreams of coffins;

[When one is] about to gain wealth,

One dreams of filth?”

Yin replied,

“Office (**kuân* 官) is basically ‘stinking decay,’

So someone about to attain it,

Dreams of coffins (**kuân* 棺) and corpses.

Wealth is basically ‘feces and clay,’

²² See *Zhouli* [*zhushu*] 周禮[註疏] ([Commentary on the] *Zhou Ritual*), “Chunguan” 春官 (Spring officials), “Zhanmeng” 占夢 (Divination on Dreams), *shu* 疏 commentary by Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (fl. mid 7th cent.), in *Shisanjing zhushu*, *juan* 25, 1:807–808.

So someone about to gain it

Dreams of foul disarray.” (4/49)²³

人有問殷中軍：「何以將得位而夢棺器，將得財而夢矢穢？」殷曰：「官本是臭腐，所以將得而夢棺屍；財本是糞土，所以將得而夢穢汙。」

This explanation weaves together a web of interdependent, correlated, and interrelated causes. It instigates a variety of senses—homophones are caught by the ears and their similar written forms are caught by the eyes, and the “stinking decay” and “feces and clay” are smelt by the nose and seen by the eyes. The interpretation also touches on different dimensions of experience and intellectual life, including linguistic, psychological, ethical, and philosophical. Yin Hao’s answer to the query about dream symbolism reflects, in part, the oppositional logic that was central to certain kinds of dream interpretation,²⁴ but more fundamentally, his explanation reveals Yin Hao’s position as a *Xuanxue* scholar, who engages both Zhuangzi and Confucius’ disdain for rank and wealth.²⁵

²³ Trans. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 117, modified.

²⁴ See Richard J. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* (Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, England: Westview Press; slightly revised paperback edition with a new preface issued in 1993), 245–57.

²⁵ See *Zhuangzi* [jishi], “Qiushui” 秋水 (Autumn Floods): “When Huizi was prime minister of Liang, Zhuangzi set off to visit him. Someone said to Huizi, ‘Zhuangzi is coming because he wants to replace you as prime minister!’ With this, Huizi was filled with alarm and searched all over the state for three days and three nights trying to find Zhuangzi. Zhuangzi then came to see him and said, ‘In the south, there is a bird called the Yuanchu—I wonder if you’ve ever heard of it? The Yuanchu rises up from the South Sea and flies to the North Sea, and it will rest on nothing but the Wutong tree, eat nothing but the fruit of the Lian, and drink only from springs of sweet water.

III. *Shishuo* Imitations in China

Imitation of the *Shishuo* began in the Tang 唐 (618–907) dynasty. Various bibliographic records reveal three *Shishuo ti* works from this period: *Continuation of the Shishuo xinshu* (*Xu Shishuo xinshu* 續世說新書) by Wang Fangqing 王方慶 (d. 702), *Feng's Memoirs* (*Fengshi wenjian ji* 封氏聞見記) by Feng Yan 封演 (fl. 742–800), and *New Account of the Great Tang* (*Da-Tang xinyu* 大唐新語) by Liu Su 劉肅 (fl. 806–820).²⁶ Two points are especially

Once there was an owl who had gotten hold of a half-rotten old rat, and as the Yuanchu passed by, it raised its head, looked up at the Yuanchu, and said, “Shoo!” Now that you have this Liang state of yours, are you trying to shoo me?” (惠子相梁，莊子往見之。或謂惠子曰：“莊子來，欲代子相。”於是惠子恐，搜於國中三日三夜莊子往見之，曰：“南方有鳥，其名為鵯鵡，子知之乎？夫鵯鵡，發於南海而飛於北海，非梧桐不止，非練實不食，非醴泉不飲。於是鴟得腐鼠，鵯鵡過之，仰而視之曰‘嚇！’今子欲以子之梁國而嚇我邪？”) (*juan* 6B, 3:605); trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 188, modified. Mather notes this reference in his comments on this episode; see *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 117. See also *Lunyu* [yizhu] 論語[譯註] ([Annotated translation of the] *Analects of Confucius*), commentary and translation from classical into modern Chinese by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (1909-1992) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 7.16: “The Master said, ‘In the eating of coarse food and the drinking of water, the using of one’s elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds’” (子曰：“飯疏食飲水，曲肱而枕之，樂亦在其中矣。不義而富且貴，於我如浮雲”) (88); trans. D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 69.

²⁶ Wang’s work is not extant today. *Feng’s Memoirs*, written in the early ninth century, covers a broad range of encyclopedic entries. Chapters Nine and Ten consist of thirty-seven historical Tang anecdotes, divided into thirty-six imitative *Shishuo* categories. Liu Su’s work, compiled in 807, follows the *Shishuo* scheme in a more

significant. First, although these works might have added to, or deleted some categories from, the ur-text, their authors always retained the chapters on “Recognition and Judgment” and “Technical Understanding,” showing their appreciation of “character appraisal” as the focal theme of the genre.

Secondly, unlike the original text, Tang *Shishuo ti* works introduced strong Confucian ethical overtones into the genre. As Liu Su put the matter in concluding his *New Account of the Great Tang*, his goal was “to hail the ruler and to humble the subject, and to expel heterodoxy and to return to rectitude” (尊君卑臣，去邪歸正).²⁷ The movement from the *Shishuo*’s relatively neutral classification of human character types to a differentiation between “rectitude” (*zheng* 正) and “heterodoxy” (*xie* 邪) marked a dramatic shift from aesthetic to ethical concerns. As a result, the mantic practices discussed in the Tang *Shishuo ti* works sometimes reveal a self-conscious effort to support political leaders. A good example, as we shall see below (Section V), was an effort to establish the authority of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 684–704), whose rise to power was marked by considerable controversy.

Only two *Shishuo ti* works from the Song 宋 (960–1279) exist today: Kong Pingzhong’s 孔平仲 (1044–1111, *js* 1065) *Continuation of the Shishuo* (*Xu Shishuo* 續世說) and Wang Dang’s 王讜 (fl. 1086–1110) *Tang Forest of Accounts* (*Tang yulin* 唐語林). As is well known, the Song was a period of enormous philosophical energy and diversity—one that witnessed,

rigorous way. It collects around 380 episodes dealing with Tang political and intellectual life under thirty imitative *Shishuo* categories.

²⁷ Liu Su, *Da-Tang xinyu*, “Zonglun” 總論 (Conclusion), punctuated and collated by Xu Denan 許德楠 and Li Dingxia 李鼎霞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 202.

among many other things, a surge of scholarly interest in the *Book of Changes* and other mantic works.²⁸ It was also a time when fierce debates raged about the place and purpose of literature in the dynasty's political, social, intellectual and cultural life.

As members of an intellectual circle headed by the famous scholar-official Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101), Kong, Wang and Su had similar ideological, historical, and literary interests and concerns.²⁹ Perhaps the most important of these was a great esteem for the power and potential of literature. Some prominent thinkers of the early Song period, like Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), felt that literature might work at cross purposes with the pursuit of “truth” as they understood it. They argued that writing (*wen* 文) was, in a relatively narrow sense, simply “a vehicle for the Way” (*wen yi zai dao* 文以載道), not a means of actually accessing the Way itself. But individuals like Kong, Wang and Su believed that writing, as a creative, individual, subjective endeavor, offered the only true means by which to “become one

²⁸ See Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World*, 112–39, and *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers*, 41–44.

²⁹ For the relationship between Kong Pingzhong and the Su Shi intellectual circles, see Zhou Bida's 周必大 (1126–1204) preface to *Qingjiang san Kong ji* 清江三孔集 (Collected works of the three Kongs from Qingjiang) (*Siku quanshu* ed.); Tuotuo 脫脫 (1313–55) et al., *Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song), “Kong Wenzhong zhuan” 孔文仲傳 (Biography of Kong Wenzhong), “Kong Wuzhong zhuan” 孔武仲傳, and “Kong Pingzhong zhuan” 孔平仲傳, 40 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), *juan* 344, 31:10931–34. For the relationship between Wang Dang and the Su Shi intellectual circles, see Zhou Xunchu 周勣初, *Tang yulin jiaozheng* 唐語林校證 (Commentary on a collated edition of *Tang forest of accounts*), 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 1:i-iv.

with the Way.”³⁰ In the eyes of Kong and Wang, the *Shishuo* genre, embracing a kaleidoscopic range of intellectual interests and bringing together diverse literary modes, provided a path to constructing and understanding the authentic “self.”

The category “Technical Understanding” in Kong’s *Continuation of the Shishuo* reflects not only the author’s literary preoccupations, but also the more general explosion of interest in metaphysics and mantic methods during the Song period. The number of entries in this category increased from eleven in the original *Shishuo* to thirty-eight in Kong’s imitation, and the methods now included astrology and astronomy (*zhan tianwen* 占天文; #1, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 26, 38), the analysis of animal sounds (*waming* 蛙鳴, *niaoming* 鳥鳴, etc.; #2, 25), Changes-related divination using oracle bones and/or milfoil stalks (*bushi* 卜筮; #3, 5, 17, 35), physiognomy (*xiangshu* 相術; #4, 6, 7, 14, 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37), yin-yang and five agents mantic methods (*yinyang wuxing* 陰陽五行; #8, 21), numerology (*busuan* 布算; #15), musical analysis (*xuangong* 旋宮; #18), fate extrapolation based on cosmic variables (*tuisuan* 推算; #19), medicine and divination (*yishu* 醫術; #27), and talismanic writing (*fulu* 符錄; #33).³¹ These amplified records of mantic practices reflect not only the greatly enlarged intellectual territory of

³⁰ See Curie Virág, “Bridging the Divide: Literature, *Dao* and the Case for Subjective Access in the Thought of Su Shi,” *Humanities* online journal, www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities (October 23, 2014; accessed August 4, 2017).

³¹ See Kong, *Xu Shishuo*, “Shujie” (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), *juan* 6, 83–90.

the Song dynasty, but also, and especially, the increasing interaction between elite and popular culture that marked this dynamic period.³²

As is apparent from the above breakdown, Kong devoted a great deal of attention to physiognomy, which is hardly surprising, given the emphasis on personal characteristics in the *Shishuo* genre. Here is one example. Jia Ziru 賈子儒 (fl. mid sixth cent.) divined whether the Eastern Wei generalissimo Gao Cheng 高澄 (d. 549, posthumously titled Emperor Wenxiang 文襄 of the Northern Qi) could ascend the throne, saying: “[To tell one’s fate] by looking at one’s seven-foot tall body is not as accurate as observing one’s one-foot face, which, in turn, is not as accurate as observing one’s one-inch eyes. The generalissimo has a thin face and a quick gleam of the eyes—not the appearance of a ruler!” (人有七尺軀，不如一尺面；一尺面，不如一寸眼 大將軍臉薄盼速，非帝王相也) (#14).³³ As it turned out, Gao, who was considered able but arrogant and licentious, was assassinated by his servant Lan Jing 蘭京 before he could seize the throne.³⁴

Like Kong Pingzhong, Wang Dang adopted the original *Shishuo* model, but expanded it into fifty-two taxonomic categories. Although the extant version of the *Tang Forest of Accounts* consists of only the first eighteen chapters, we can see in Chapter Seven, “Recognition and

³² See, for example, Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001) and Liao Hsien-huei, “Exploring Weal and Woe: The Song Elite’s Mantic Beliefs and Practices,” *T’oung Pao* 91.4–5 (2005): 347–395.

³³ Kong, *Xu Shishuo*, “Shujie,” *juan* 6, 85.

³⁴ See Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648), *Bei-Qi shu* 北齊書 (History of the Northern Qi), “Diji disan” 帝紀第三 (Imperial annals, III) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), *juan* 3, 1:37–38.

Judgment,” a number of physiognomic cases (#4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18). Moreover, in his accounts of Tang literati life, which contributed to the flourishing of Tang poetry, Wang recorded numerous instances of divination based on poetic creativity (#1, 15, 16), as well as several involving music-related mantic methods (#5, 7, 14).³⁵ Although both developments had been foreshadowed in the original *Shishuo* chapters on “Literature and Scholarship” (“Wenxue” 文學) and “Technical Understanding,” the *Tang Forest of Accounts* made divination a more explicit theme.

The trend of tying mantic practice to one’s literary/artistic accomplishments was linked directly to the flourishing of the Tang civil examination system, which paved the way for talented men to enter officialdom. Thus, we encounter stories in the *Tang Forest of Accounts* such as the following—this one recorded in the chapter on “Recognition and Judgment”: Li Jue 李玕 lost his father in his early years and became known for his filial devotion to his widowed mother. He was subsequently recommended by the local authorities to take the *mingjing* 明經 examination, which tested one’s elucidation of the Confucian classics. When Li Jue went to see the Huazhou Governor Li Jiang 李絳, the governor looked at him and made the following comments: “With a forehead as illustrious as the sun and as pure as a pearl, you are not an ordinary person. You will be able to obtain the *jinshi* 進士 degree. As for the *mingjing* exam, it is too ordinary a foundation for your glorious future” (日角珠庭，非常人也，當掇進士科。明經碌碌，非子發跡之地). Later Li Jue passed the *jinshi* examination (which required poetic

³⁵ See Wang Dang, *Tang yulin* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 93–101.

creativity along with knowledge of the Confucian classics) and had a successful career, serving not only as governor-general of a few strategic states, but also as prime minister (#18)³⁶.

Most Chinese *Shishuo* imitations emerged in the late Ming and early Qing periods, from the 1550s to the 1680s. The authors of these works, primarily from the lower Yangzi delta, followed the Song *Shishuo* authors, taking literature as the means to reach the Way. This approach became intensified in their sharply negative reaction to the ideas of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200)—known as the School of Principle (*Lixue* 理學)—which had become state orthodoxy in the Yuan 元 dynasty (1279–1368) and continued to enjoy state support during the Ming 明 (1368–1644) and Qing 清 (1644–1912) dynasties. In their effort to rid themselves of the *Lixue* confinement, they acquired a sense of cultural and intellectual distinctiveness not unlike that of their Wei-Jin predecessors. Thus, they naturally sought to transmit their well-wrought discourse of literati spirit through the *Shishuo* genre, including using mantic practices for character appraisal.³⁷

The Ming scholar He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506–1573) inaugurated a frenzy of *Shishuo* imitations with his book titled *He's Forest of Accounts* (*Heshi yulin* 何氏語林). In it, he theorized the *Shishuo* taxonomy by attaching a preface to each of the thirty-six original categories, in addition to two of his own invention. The preface to his chapter on “Recognition and Judgment” reads:

Generally speaking, human feelings are deep, difficult to fathom, and worldly situations are mutually dependent, hard to judge. Is it not even more difficult to predict one's future at a young

³⁶ Ibid., 98.

³⁷ For an introduction to Ming-Qing *Shishuo* *ti* works, see Qian, *Spirit and Self*, Chapter 7.

age, and to know the features of something before it takes shape? The *Book of Documents* says: “Knowing people is wisdom—even the Sage Kings found it difficult”; and the *Book of Changes* says: “To know the springs of action—how divine!” These are not empty words! [...] The Sage has a heart/mind like the luminous mirror; therefore the Sage can comprehend a person in [his/her] entirety. [...] The *Book of Changes* also states: “[The *Changes*] are quiescent and do not move. But if they are stimulated, they penetrate all situations under Heaven.”³⁸ Buddhists, too, maintain: “Eternal quiescence leads to eternal illumination.” Both follow the *Dao*. Later scholars are far away from the [models of the] ancient Sages and worthies, whose evaluations and characterizations of people and their extrapolation and discernment of things and events were often wondrously accurate. [...] Why? It is because scholars after the Later Han favored Daoism and Buddhism, and the Song scholars liked to debate about principles and human nature. Alas, how can one slander the achievements of pure and abstruse learning!³⁹

夫人情深阻而莫測，事勢倚伏而難定。況乎人方幼而審其終，事未形而能知其著，可不謂尤難哉！《書》曰：“知人則哲。維帝其難之。”《易》曰：“知幾其神乎！”不虛耳！... 蓋聖人者，心如明鏡，遇物便了... 《易》稱：“寂然不動，感而遂通。”釋氏所謂“常寂常照”，皆此道也。後世去古聖賢甚遠，然觀其品校人物，推測事幾，多奇中... 何耶？蓋東漢以後尚老釋，宋世好談理性，嗚呼，清虛澄汰之功，又焉可誣也！”

Here, He Liangjun affirms that character appraisal and the extrapolation of situational changes have both been central intellectual concerns since the beginnings of philosophy in China, and

³⁸ *Zhouyi* [zhu] 周易注 ([Commentary on the] *Zhou Changes*), in Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji* [jiaoshi] 王弼集[校釋] ([Commentary on the] *Complete Works of Wang Bi*), edited and collated with commentary by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 2:550; trans., *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*, the Richard Wilhelm translation, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 315, modified.

³⁹ He Liangjun, *Heshi yulin*, *Siku quanshu* ed., *juan* 15, 1a–b.

that their importance had not only been discussed in the major Chinese classics, but had also been validated by certain ideas derived from Daoism and Buddhism.

In the chapter on “Technical Understanding,” for example, He evinces a particular interest in music-related methods (eighteen out of 49 accounts), followed by physiognomy and medicine (seven accounts each). He also provides information on Buddhist esoteric magic (four accounts), as well as more regular divinatory techniques such as astronomy/astrology, numerology, and so forth. A remarkable account concerning music tells about the wretched life of the Tang crown prince Li Xian 李賢 (654–684, posthumously titled Zhanghuai 章懷). The story goes like this: Li Xian composed the “Melody of Precious Celebration” (“Baoqing qu” 寶慶曲) during the reign of his father, Emperor Gaozong of the Tang (r. 649–683), and presented it at the Daoist Abbey of Grand Purity (Taiqing guan 太清觀). Upon hearing this melody, Li Sizhen 李嗣真, a courtier, made the following comments to Abbot Liu Gai Fuyan 劉概輔儼:

[Among the Five Tones of the pentatonic scale (*gong-shang-jue-zhi-yu* 宮, 商, 角, 徵, 羽, equivalent to *do-re-mi-sol-la*)], the *gong* tone in this melody is not in harmony with the *shang* tone, hence there is opposition between ruler and subject; the *jue* tone is in conflict with the *zhi* tone, hence father and son do not trust each other. Moreover, the music abounds in the sound of death and is full of sadness. If this bad omen does not afflict the state, then it will bring misfortune to the crown prince" (宮不召商，君臣乖也；角與徵戾，父子疑也。死聲多且哀。若國家無事，太子任其咎).

Before long, the crown prince was demoted to the rank of commoner and exiled by his mother Wu Zetian (#32).⁴⁰ He Liangjun very likely adopted this story from the *New Account of the Great Tang* by Liu Su, which, however, did not indicate Li Xian as the composer.⁴¹ By adding Li Xian's name, possibly drawn from some other sources, He Liangjun reinforced the mantic dimensions of this story, showing that the poor prince was destined for his tragic ending.

Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620, *js* 1589) was among a number of followers of He Liangjun to compile a *Shishuo ti* work. His chapter on “Technical Understanding” in the Jiao's *Taxonomic Forest* (*Jiaoshi leilin* 焦氏類林) is comprised of forty-eight entries, about the same length as in He Liangjun's book. Jiao, however, spreads his accounts of mantic methods more evenly in the fashion of Kong Pingzhong's *Continuation of the Shishuo*. For instance:

Emperor [Shizong of the Jin, 金世宗 r. 1161–1189] asked his prime-minister, Heshilie Liangbi 紇石烈良弼 [1119–1178], why it was that “every morning and every evening the sun turns red.” Liangbi responded: “That the sun turns red in the morning should correspond to what happens in the east, so Goryeo [Korea] should take the blame. That the sun turns red in the evening should correspond to what happens in the west, so the Tanguts should take the blame. I wish Your Majesty could cultivate your virtue in response to Heaven. That way, any disaster would disappear by itself.” Soon

⁴⁰ Ibid., *juan* 23, 12a. For Li Xian's life, see Liu Xu 劉煦 (887-946) et al., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Old History of the Tang), “Gaozong Zhongzong zhuzi” 高宗中宗諸子 (Sons of Emperor Gaozong and Emperor Zhongzong), 16 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 86, 9: 2831–2832.

⁴¹ See Liu Su, *Da-Tang xinyu*, “Zhiwei” 知微 (Subtle Discernment), *juan* 7, 113.

afterward, Ren Dejing rebelled in the Tangut Empire and Zhao Weichong rebelled in Goryeo, affirming Liangbi's prediction (#48).⁴²

帝[金世宗]問紇石烈良弼：“每旦暮日色皆赤，何也？”良弼曰：“旦而赤色，應在東，高麗當之。暮而赤色，應在西，夏國當之。願陛下修德以應天，則災變自弭矣！”既而夏國有任德敬之亂，高麗有趙位寵之難，其言皆驗。

Another important late Ming *Shishuo ti* work was Li Shaowen's 李紹文 (fl. 1600–1623) *Imperial Ming Shishuo xinyu* (*Huang Ming Shishuo xinyu* 皇明世說新語). Its chapter on “Technical Understanding” focuses on what may be called dynastic destiny—that is, the perceived link between early predictions by diviners and the actual fate of the Ming state (1368–1644). A prominent mantic method displayed in Li's work was the technique known as “fathoming” or “dissecting” characters (*cezi* 測字 or *chaizi* 拆字). Here is an example based on the early career of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋. Zhu eventually became the founder of the Ming dynasty (r. 1368–1398), but at the time of this story he was merely a rebel opposing the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty (1271–1368).

When the future Emperor Taizu [Zhu Yuanzhang] first crossed the Yangzi River, he consulted a diviner whom he encountered on his way, asking: “Now that the whole world is in turmoil, who will become the ruler of all under Heaven?” Zhu told the diviner that he wanted to write a word for him to analyze, and pulled out his sword to draw a line (which stood for the Chinese character “one” [*yi*

⁴² Jiao Hong, *Jiaoshi leilin*, 8 *juan*. *Congshu jicheng xinbian* 叢書集成新編 ed., *juan* 6a, 229. Jiao Hong indicates that he adopted the story from the *History of the Jin* (*Jinshi* 金史); see Tuotuo 脫脫 et al., *Jinshi*, “Heshilie Liangbi zhuan” 紇石烈良弼傳 (Biography of Heshilie Liangbi), 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 88, 6:1955–1956.

一]) on the ground. The diviner immediately kowtowed to Zhu, saying: “A line on top of dirt (*tu* 土), it can only mean that you will be the King (*wang* 王)!”⁴³

太祖初渡江，遇一術士，問曰：“天下擾擾紛紛，屬之誰？”與士曰：“願書字占之。”上即拔劍畫“一”字於地。士俯伏拜曰：“土上一畫，臣獨知為王也！”

The last *Shishuo ti* work to be produced in China was Yi Zongkui's 易宗夔 (b. 1875) *New Shishuo* (*Xin Shishuo* 新世說), compiled during the tumultuous New Culture Movement (a.k.a. the May Fourth Movement; c. 1915–1925). This period was marked by an assault by iconoclastic Chinese intellectuals on virtually every aspect of traditional Chinese culture, from Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism to the family system, from classical literature to divinatory practices. At the same time, these intellectuals embraced new Western ideas and values, including such essentially alien concepts as constitutionally protected freedom, equality, individualism and democracy. Standing in this temporal and spatial border zone, with a clear view of both the past and the present, and of both China and the West, Yi grappled with how to describe and understand a society that had undergone unprecedented changes in the span of little more than two decades.⁴⁴ These developments included the fall of the Qing dynasty and the destruction of the entire imperial system as a result of the Republican Revolution of 1911–12.

⁴³ Li Shaowen, *Huang Ming Shishuo xinyu*, 4 vols. (1610; rpt. Taipei: Xinxin shuju, 1985), *juan* 6, 7ab.

⁴⁴ For an overview of the New Culture Movement and an extended discussion of Yi's work, see Nanxiu Qian, *Spirit and Self*, 339–67. Another compilation from the same period that claimed an affinity with the *Shishuo ti* tradition was Xu Ke's 徐珂 (1869–1928) *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔 (Anecdotes from the Qing period), which consists of some 13,500 stories organized into more than ninety categories. The sections titled *Fangji* 方伎類

Not since Kong Pingzhong's Song dynasty compilation, *Continuation of the Shishuo*, do we find such a preoccupation with divination, with such a wide range of mantic practices discussed. The chapter on "Technical Understanding" in Yi's *New Shishuo* is comprised of thirty-two entries.⁴⁵ The methods include: *Changes*-related divination using oracle bones and/or milfoil stalks (*bushi* 卜筮; #1, 3, 10, 11, 18, 25), deciphering covered objects (*shefu* 射覆; #2), fathoming or dissecting characters (*cezi* 測字 or *chaizi* 拆字; #4, 13), combining medicine and divination (*yibu* 醫卜/醫卜; #5), employing geomancy or siting (*fengshui* 風水 or *kanyu* 堪輿; #5, 6), detecting wind patterns (*fengjiao* 風角; #5, 7, 22), calculating "six waters" (divination) and "wondrous gate evasive techniques" (*liuren* 六壬 and *qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲; #7, 14, 15, 21, 25), interpreting the "eight military diagrams" (*bazhen tu* 八陣圖; #8), practicing physiognomy (*xiangshu* 相術; 9, 16, 27, 28), analyzing music (*xuangong* 旋宮; #12), reading the eight [natal] characters (*bazi* 八字) (#17), correlating the five agents (*wuxing* 五行); #17), employing secret spells from the West (*Xiyu mimizhou* 西域秘密呪; #23), practicing numerology (*shuxue* 數學; #24, 31), engaging in spirit-writing (*fuluan* 扶乩, *fuji* 扶箕 or *fuluan* 扶鸞; #26, 32), consulting the "heavenly eye" (*tianyan tong* 天眼通; #29), and hypnotizing people (*cuimian shu* 催眠術; #30).⁴⁶ Several factors may have contributed to there being such an

("Technicians") and *Mixin* 迷信類 ("Superstitions") include a great many examples of Qing divinatory theories and practices.

⁴⁵ See Yi Zongkui, *Xin Shishuo*, 1st ed. 1918, rpt 1922 ed. in *Qingdai zhuanji congkan* 清代傳記叢刊, ed. Zhou Junfu 周駿富, vol. 18 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1985), *juan* 5, 38b-48b.

⁴⁶ Many of these practices are also discussed anecdotally in Xu Ke's *Qingbai leichao* (see note 43 above).

extensive discussion of these mantic methods: (1) the prevalence of these practices in the Qing, especially at a time of uncertainty, when the dynasty was in decline; (2) the introduction of new divinatory techniques from the West; and (3) a heightened awareness of divination because it was the object of so much criticism during the New Culture era.

In any case, three features of Yi's discussions of divination are worthy of note. The first is the author's preoccupation with dynastic destiny. One story concerns the Manchu Prince Dorgon 多爾袞 (1612–1650), who inquired about the future of his military campaign against the Ming dynasty. The diviner predicted good fortune, adding, however, that the regime “would be gained by a Prince Regent and lost by a Prince Regent” (得之者攝政王，失之者亦攝政王也). The diviner also indicated that the throne would be “acquired by a widow and an orphan and lost by a widow and an orphan” (寡婦孤兒得之，寡婦孤兒失之). Although Dorgon had planned to become Emperor of China after conquering the Ming, he eventually decided to surrender the crown to Fulin 福臨, the six-year old son of his late brother Hong Taiji 皇太極 (1592–1643). Fulin subsequently ruled as the Shunzhi 順治 emperor (r. 1644–1661) with Dorgon as a co-regent, thus fulfilling the prophesy. And when the Qing dynasty fell, it was in the hands of the Prince Regent Zaifeng 載灃 (1883–1951), who ruled together with Empress Longyu 隆裕 (1868–1913), widow of the Guangxu 光緒 emperor (r. 1875–1908), and their adopted son Puyi 溥儀 (1906–1967; #3).⁴⁷

The Shunzhi emperor, for his part, consulted with a Tibetan lama about the destiny of the Qing dynasty. The lama's cryptic answer was, “As long as my body is intact, my dynasty will not be exterminated” (我身不缺，我國不滅). A semantic reading might have put the emperor at

⁴⁷ Yi, *Xin Shishuo*, *juan* 5, 38b-39a.

ease, for all he and his successors had to do, presumably, was not to endanger their persons. But a word analysis (*chaizi* 拆字) of the prediction suggests a more ominous outcome. When the three-year old Puyi 溥儀 ascended the Qing throne, his name, including the character *yi* 儀, became taboo, and had to be modified by the elimination of the last stroke of the radical *wo* 我 (I, me, my). With the initiation of this policy, his “body” was mutilated and the Qing dynasty fell (#4).⁴⁸

A second important feature of Yi’s discussions of divination in the *New Shishuo* is that they include a great many prominent Qing intellectuals—not just professional diviners or clerics. Yi’s work is full of accounts of high-level scholars, including such noted individuals as Lu Qi 陸圻 (b. 1614), Sun Zhi 孫治 (fl. 1661), Jiang Yong 江永 (1681–1762), Lü Liuliang 呂留良 (1629–1683), Shi Kuijiang 史夔江 (fl. 1681), Ji Huang 嵇璜 (1711–1794), Ma Yan 馬嚴 (*js.* 1796), Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872), and even the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736–1795).⁴⁹ Here is an example of Yi’s approach, which cites a physiognomic manual reportedly written by Zeng, a famous late Qing scholar-general:

To know if one is evil or righteous, look at one’s eyes and nose, and to determine true or false, look at one’s lips. To predict one’s success in an official career, look at one’s aura, and to determine wealth, look at one’s spirit. To decide if one possesses independent ideas, look at one’s fingernails, and if one can stir things up, look at the veins in one’s heels. If we want to know if one is well organized, that’s all in one’s spoken words.

Also, if one looks dignified and solemn, such is the sign of a noble person; the same is true if

⁴⁸ Ibid., *juan* 5, 39a.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 38b–48b.

one looks humble, modest, and restrained. If one is good in management, this is the sign of a wealthy person; the same is true if one possesses a merciful heart/mind and is willing to help others.

(#28)⁵⁰

邪正看眼鼻，真假看嘴唇，功名看氣概，富貴看精神，主意看指爪，風波看腳筋，若要看條理，全在語言中。”又云，端莊厚重是貴相，謙卑含容是貴相，事有歸着是富相，心存濟物是富相。

Significantly, Zeng's physiognomic techniques are extremely popular in today's China, where divinatory methods of all sorts have experienced a comeback after decades of government suppression.⁵¹

One divinatory practice that proved especially appealing to scholars in the Qing dynasty was “spirit-writing,” a Tang-Song innovation. Early spirit possession in China did not generally involve literacy, but by the Song period it had come to be associated closely with the scholarly elite, merging over time with the traditions of “morality books” (*shanshu* 善書) and “precious scrolls” (*baojuan* 寶卷) in Chinese popular religion. Its particular importance to Qing intellectuals was its presumed value as a means of providing guidance to examination hopefuls. For instance, in 1843, during the Daoguang 道光 reign, a group of Huzhou 湖州 candidates used spirit-writing to divine the test topic for the upcoming provincial examination. The spirit descending on the altar wrote down two lines: “Between white clouds and red leaves” (在白雲紅葉之間), and “I do not read the *Spring and Autumn Annuals*” (吾不讀《春秋》).

⁵⁰ Ibid., *juan* 5, 46a-b.

⁵¹ Note, for example, the many contemporary online and print versions of *Zeng Guofan xiangren koujue* 曾國藩相人口訣 (Zeng Guofan's physiognomic formulas).

No one was able to figure out the meaning of the two lines until the release of the topic, which required candidates to write essays on a pair of verses taken from the *Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu* 論語). These two verses were located between one that ended with *fuyun* 浮雲 (floating clouds) and one that began with *Shegong* 葉公 (Lord She). Because the character *she* 葉 was also pronounced *ye*, meaning “leaves,” it should have been circled in red ink to draw the reader’s attention to it. Hence, the topic was indeed between “white clouds” and “red leaves”! In addition, the two verses assigned in the topic mentioned four of the five Confucian classics, leaving out only the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), which the spirit had indicated he “would not read” (#26).⁵² Whether this was a true story or one made up as a joke after the examination, the episode exemplifies the kind of Chinese cultural practices involving divination that prized erudition and wit.

IV. *Shishuo* Imitations in Japan

Although Japanese versions of the *Shishuo ti* tended to reflect time-honored Chinese themes and categories, they also expressed distinctly Japanese cultural traits, psychological attitudes, and philosophical positions as they evolved over time. Written in a form of classical Chinese known as “Han writing” 漢文 (pronounced *Kanbun* in Japan, *Hanmun* in Korea, and *Hán văn* in Vietnam), they were more than simply the extended products of Chinese culture. Rather, they were the products of a complex, sophisticated and continuous process of cultural

⁵² Ibid., *juan* 5, 45b-46a. The four *Lunyu* verses are 7.16, 7.17, 7.18, and 7.19, see *Lunyu* [yizhu], 70-71.

interaction, exchange, domestication and transformation that had been taking place in East Asia for many centuries.⁵³ During the Tokugawa 徳川 (1603–1868) period, when all extant Japanese versions of *Shishuo ti* were compiled, the process of transmission and transformation had yielded a number of different perspectives on China, from the Sinophilia of scholars such as Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691) and Kaibara Ekken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714) to the nativist assertion of Japan’s cultural equivalence or superiority to China expressed by writers such as Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622–1685) and Kamo Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769).⁵⁴

Among the eight Japanese *Shishuo ti* works I have located, four devote a chapter to mantic practices (see Appendix). The *Tales of the World in This Dynasty* (*Honchō Sesetsu* 本朝世説), compiled by Hayashi Yoshio 林惣士 (preface dated 1704), is the earliest Japanese *Shishuo* imitation that I have found so far. The author’s life awaits more research. Significantly, it seems that he compiled this work in order to demonstrate, among other things, that Japan’s cultural achievements were no less impressive than those of China. In his words: “The flourishing of our sacred morality, the completeness of our ritual system, the outstanding qualities of our people, and the intelligence of our Way of governing—what is there in any of this that would cause us to be shamed by China?” (神徳之盛，禮典之備，人物之傑，政道之明，何以恥中華乎哉？)⁵⁵.

⁵³ See note 2 above.

⁵⁴ See Wu Weiming 吳偉明 (Benjamin Wai-ming Ng), *Dechuan Riben de Zhongguo xiangxiang: Chuanshuo, rudian ji cihui de zaidihua quanshi* 徳川日本の中國想像：傳說、儒典及詞彙的在地化詮釋 (Tokugawa Japan in the Chinese Imagination: An Interpretation of [Japan’s] Domestication of Myth, the Confucian Canon and Terminology) (Beijing: Qinghua daxu chubanshe, 2015).

⁵⁵ Hayashi Yoshio, *Honchō Sesetsu*, “Preface” (hand copy, 1704), not paginated.

Hayashi Yoshio collected 127 episodes, dating from Japan's antiquity to the Hōgen 保元 reign (1155 – 58) in the Heian 平安 period (794–1185). Although he divided them into only ten categories, he made sure to include one titled “Occult Techniques” (“Fangshu” 方術), a variant of the original *Shishuo* title of “Technical Understanding” (“Shujie” 術解)—thus underscoring his appreciation of the importance of divination in Japanese culture. This chapter consists of eleven episodes, presenting a mixture of supernatural legends and divinatory practices. Among the supernatural stories included is the following one from the famous *Records of Tango Province* (*Tango-no-Kuni Fudoki* 丹後國風土記). It details a love story involving Mizunoe no ura no Shimako 水江浦島子, a refined young man from Tango, and a beautiful fairy girl who, after transforming herself into a turtle, meets Shimako at sea, taking him to visit her fairy island (#1). This same group of records also includes stories concerning Daoist and Buddhist immortality (#3, 4, 6). The divinatory stories include various mantic activities, such as oracle bone divination (#2), astrology (#5, 10, 11), word analysis (#8, 9), and dream interpretation (#9).

One word-analysis story recounts an episode during the reign of Emperor Ichijō 一條 (r. 980–1011) in the Heian 平安 (794–1185) period in which a dog delivers its puppies inside the empress's inner chamber just as the empress is about to give birth to her own child. Her father, Regent/Chancellor Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027), consults Ōe no Masahira 大江匡衡 (952–1012) about this incident. Masahira tells his lordship not to worry:

The [*Kanbun*] character ‘dog’ (犬) has a dot by its side. Move this dot from the side to the top and you have the character for ‘Heaven’ (天), and move the dot below it and you have the character for ‘great’ (太). [Combined with the character for new-born ‘son’ (子)

)], you have the ‘Son of Heaven’ (天子, meaning “emperor”) and the ‘Great Son’ (太子, meaning “crown prince”). Extremely auspicious! Treasure this omen!” (“犬” 字旁點, 加之于上, 則 “天” 字也; 加之于下, 則 “太” 字也。天子也, 太子也, 大吉珍重 !).

The baby boy born to the empress subsequently became the crown prince and assumed the throne (#8)⁵⁶.

Four decades after Hayashi Yoshio produced his *Tales of the World in This Dynasty*, Hattori Nankaku 服部南郭 (1683–1759) published *Account of the Great Eastern World (Daitō Seigo 大東世語)*, an expansive *Shishuo* imitation comprising over eight hundred accounts divided into thirty-one *Shishuo* categories and featuring a painted scroll of Heian 平安 (794–1185) and Kamakura 鎌倉 (1185–1333) personalities. As a prominent disciple of Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728), a passionate admirer of China (although a critic of Mencius 孟子), and the founder of an unorthodox Japanese Confucian school of learning known as Soraigaku 徂徠學, Hattori Nankaku steadfastly championed Sorai’s well-known hypothesis concerning the immutability of human dispositions.⁵⁷ Precisely because each person maintains his/her natural

⁵⁶ Hayashi Yoshio, *Honchō Sesetsu*, “Fangshu,” not paginated.

⁵⁷ As Ogyū Sorai argues in his *Tōmonsho* 答問書 (in reply to queries): “One is endowed with a material disposition by Heaven and parents. . . . One’s disposition cannot be changed in any case. Rice will always stay rice, and beans, always beans” (氣質は天より稟得, 父母よりうみ付候事に候. . . 氣質は何としても変化はならぬ物にて候); as quoted in Tokuda Takeshi 徳田武, “*Daitō sego ron* (1): Hattori Nankaku ni okeru *Sesetsu shingo*” 大東世語論

status, Ogyū Sorai argued, the free development of individuality and the diversity of human personalities make the world work.⁵⁸

Clearly Hattori's compilation of a *Shishuo* imitation that elaborates the Daoist idea of each person "being one's self" was designed as a means by which to advocate his mentor's ideas about human nature. Seen in this light, it made perfect sense for Hattori to locate Heian and Kamakura personalities within a *Shishuo* frame, since the former provided the most illustrious examples of Japanese personalities in history, and the latter helped to highlight the diverse qualities of these "natural" human beings.⁵⁹ Consistent with the *Shishuo*, mantic practices served to characterize Daitō personalities.

Among the seven "Technical Understanding" episodes in *An Account of the Great Eastern World*, four are on physiognomy, two on astrology, and one on medicine.⁶⁰ From these cases we can see how Hattori reconciled the Chinese cultural model with the distinctive "Japanese" features of Daitō life. In two of these stories, the objects of physiognomic attention are not people, but hunting falcons, revealing the warrior traditions of Heian life that were far from the experience of most Chinese elites.⁶¹ In another episode, we learn that after the death of Emperor Kanna's 寛和 (a.k.a Kazan Tennō 花山天皇, r. 984–986) favorite concubine, the grief-ridden

(その一) : 服部南郭における世説新語 (On *An Account of the Great Eastern World* [1]: *Shishuo xinyu* and Hattori Nankaku), *Tōyō bungaku kenkyū* 17 (1969): 96

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, 96-97.

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of Hattori Nankaku's cultural purpose in compiling the *Daitō Seigo*, see Nanxiu Qian, "Daitō Seigo: An Alien Analogue of the *Shih-shuo hsün-yü*," *Early Medieval China* 4 (1998): 49–82.

⁶⁰ See Hattori Nankaku, *Daitō seigo* (Edo: Sūzanbō 嵩山房, 1750), *juan* 4, 11b-14a.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11b-12a.

ruler decides to abandon the throne and leave the palace secretly one night. As he passes by the house of Abe no Seimei 安倍晴明 (921–1005), Seimei happens to look up at the sky and sees an astrological sign indicating an “escape from the position of the Son of Heaven” (天子避位) (#4).⁶² Under normal circumstances, it would be unthinkable for a Chinese sovereign to abdicate, but in Heian Japan, as we learn from reading *An Account of the Great Eastern World*, the Heian emperors lost their power to the Fujiwara regency (ca. 858–ca. 1158) and were relegated to mainly ceremonial and cultural activities.⁶³

Discussions of other Japanese mantic methods in *An Account of the Great Eastern World* shed further light on Japan’s cultural distinctiveness. One story tells us that the Provisional Captain of the Right Division of Bureau of Horses, Fujiwara no Munetada 藤原致忠 (fl. 947–957),⁶⁴ once had a candid discussion concerning astrology with a friend in the man’s room. An arrow suddenly enters the premises and hits a wooden pillar. Alarmed, Munetada says: “I have gone too far! I should not have talked about Heaven in a filthy place and so caused the Star of Fire (Yinghuo 熒惑, a.k.a. Huoxing or Kasei 火星, the planet Mars) to shoot at me! Luckily, this year I have the Star of Wood (Muxing or Mokusei 木星, the planet Jupiter) assisting me, so the arrow hit the wood instead of me.”⁶⁵ Once again, the warrior tradition of the samurai class seems to provide the dominant framework for interpreting this event.

⁶² Ibid., 12b-13a.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of the Daitō political background, see Nanxiu Qian, “*Daitō Seigo*: An Alien Analogue of the *Shih-shuo hsün-yü*,” *Early Medieval China* 4 (1998): 49–82.

⁶⁴ Dates unknown; son *Fujiwara no Yasumasa* 藤原保昌 (958–1036).

⁶⁵ *Daitō seigo*, *juan* 4, 12b.

Another case concerns Fujiwara no Nobunaga 藤原信長 (1022–1094). Nobunaga divines his future by looking into a well, discovering that the reflection of his face bears the omen of a prime minister. He then looks into a mirror in his room but does not see the same sign. After several attempts to obtain the same result, he sighs: “The mirror is near and the well far away. My ascending to the position of prime minister should naturally be in the far future” (鏡近井遠，吾拜相自當遠爾). This prediction, which later proved to be true (he became *Dajō-daijin* 太政大臣 or Chancellor of the Realm at the age of 58), links physiognomy to locations in ways that are uncommon in Chinese works of the *Shishuo* genre.⁶⁶

Inspired by *An Account of the Great Eastern World*, Tsunoda Ken 角田簡 (a.k.a. Tsunoda Kyūka 角田九華, 1784–1855) compiled *Accounts of Recent Times* (*Kinsei sōgo* 近世叢語) (1828), and then *Continued Accounts of Recent Times* (*Shoku Kinsei sōgo* 續近世叢語) (1845). Both works reflect late Momoyama 桃山 and Edo 江戸 intellectual life from approximately 1568 to 1840.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, two figures that loom especially large in Tsunoda’s works are Hattori Nankaku and his mentor, Ogyū Sorai.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 13b.

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion of the *Kinsei sōgo* and the *Shoku Kinsei sōgo*, see Nanxiu Qian, “Jiaotian Jian zhi *Shishuo* fangzuo chutan” 角田簡之《世說》仿作初探 (A preliminary study of Tsunoda Ken’s *Shishuo* imitations),” in Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, ed., *Fengqi yunyang: Shoujie Nanjing daxue yuwai Hanji yanjiu guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 風起雲揚：首屆南京大學域外漢籍研究國際學術研討會論文集 (Wind Rising and Clouds Flying: Collected Essays from the First International Conference on Japanese, Korean, and Vietnam Classics Written in Chinese, Held at Nanjing University) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009): 437–56.

Tsunoda's accounts of Edo mantic practice appear in six entries of the *Accounts of Recent Times* and seven of its sequel, ranging from astronomy/astrology to physiognomy, musical analysis, five agents calculations, and even the tasting of prepared food to reveal the origins of its ingredients and the gender of the cook.⁶⁸ In one entry, Tsunoda applauds Asada Gōryū's 麻田剛立 (1734–1799) achievements in astronomy and calendar-making. Asada studied these difficult subjects by poring over all kinds of books and then testing this written knowledge against the results from his personal observations. He worked so hard that “for nine years his head did not touch the pillow” (頭不觸枕九年). After another ten years of fine tuning, the calendar he constructed had reached such levels of refinement that it could forecast astronomical phenomena “without the slightest deviation” (毫髮無爽). Later, some Chinese merchants brought him two Western calendars, the contents of which fit Asada Gōryū's system in “perfect harmony” (若合符節). Still, there were two separate methods, one for extrapolating the “waxing and waning [of the moon]” (*shōchō* 消長) and the other for “forecasting eclipses [of the sun and the moon]” (*kyūshoku* 求食), which only Asada Gōryū was able to master. Even Westerners could not reach his depth of understanding.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, as Tsunoda Ken notes, Asada Gōryū contributed primarily on the technical level, and he had to wait for another astronomer, Hazama Chōgai 間長涯 (a.k.a. Hazama Shigetomi 間重富, 1756–1816), to offer theoretical interpretations that explained his methods.⁷⁰ These accounts all suggest a tendency in Japan to combine traditional

⁶⁸ See Tsunoda Ken, *Kinsei sōgo* (Tokyo: Shorin 書林, 1828), *juan* 7, 7b-9a; *Shoku Kinsei sōgo* (Tokyo: Shorin, 1845), *juan* 7, 12b-15a.

⁶⁹ *Kinsei sōgo*, *juan* 7, 8b-9a.

⁷⁰ *Shoku Kinsei sōgo*, *juan* 7, 15a.

mantic practices with more modern scientific knowledge, a growing intellectual trend in the Edo period.

V. Women, Gender, and Divination

The *Shishuo* covers six hundred or so historical figures, from the Late Han to the end of the Wei-Jin period (from approximately 150 to 420 CE). Of these individuals, about one hundred are women, most of them portrayed in the chapter titled “Worthy Ladies” (Xianyuan 賢媛). Zhuangzi’s notion of the Perfected Person served as the model and spiritual resource for the *xianyuan* category, exemplified by Wei-Jin women who possessed literary and artistic talents, broad learning, intellectual independence, moral strength, and good judgment. These women, as the *Shishuo* indicates, were full participants in character appraisal, whether they were evaluating others or being evaluated themselves. In this capacity, *xianyuan* often assumed an inordinate influence over both family and state affairs.

For example, Lady Han 韓, wife of the Jin gentleman Shan Tao 山濤 (205–283), was highly regarded at the time for “possessing the ability of recognition” (*you caishi* 有才識).⁷¹ Here *shi* (識) is obviously a contraction of *renlun jianshi* (人倫鑒識) or character appraisal. The following episode, taken from the chapter “Xianyuan,” reveals Lady Han’s talent in this respect:

The first time Shan Tao met Ji Kang [223–262] and Ruan Ji [210–263], he became united with them in a friendship “stronger than metal and fragrant as orchids.” Shan’s wife, Lady Han, realizing that

⁷¹ See Wang Ying 王隱 (fl. 4th cent.), *Jinshu* 晉書 (History of the Jin), quoted in Liu Jun’s commentary on the *Shihshuo xinyu* [*jianshu*], 19/11.

her husband's relationship with the two men was different from ordinary friendship, asked him about it. Shan replied, "It's only these two gentlemen whom I may consider [true] friends [during] my mature years."

His wife said, "In antiquity, Xu Fuji's wife also personally observed Hu Yan and Zhao Cui.⁷² I'd like to take a peep at these friends of yours. Is it all right?"

On another day, the two men came, and Shan's wife urged him to detain them overnight. After preparing wine and meat, that night, she made a hole in the wall, and it was dawn before she remembered to return to her room.

When Shan came in, he asked her, "What did you think of the two men?" His wife replied, "Your own [talent and taste (*caizhi* 才致)] are in no way comparable to theirs. It's only on the basis of your [recognition and judgment of human character types] (*shidu* 識度) that you should be their friend."

Shan said. "They, too, have always considered my judgment to be superior." (19/11)⁷³

山公與嵇、阮一面，契若金蘭。山妻韓氏，覺公與二人異於常交。問公，公曰：“我當年可以為友者，唯此二生耳！”妻曰：“負羈之妻亦親觀狐、趙，意欲窺之，可乎？”他日，二人來，妻勸公止之宿，具酒肉。夜穿墻以視之，達旦忘反。公入曰：“二人何如？”妻曰：“君才致殊不如，正當以識度相友耳。”公曰：“伊輩亦常以我度為勝。”

⁷² Mather's original note: "See *Tso-chuan*, Hsi 23 (Legge V, 187): The son of the Duke of Chin, Chung Erh, was passing through Ts'ao (Shantung). Duke Kung of Ts'ao heard that he had unseparated (?) ribs (*p'ien-hsieh*), and wanted to observe him naked in the bath. Hsi Fu-chi's [Xu Fuji's] wife said, "I observed the followers of the son of the Duke of Chin, Hu Yen [Yan] and Chao Ts'ui [Zhao Cui], and they are both worthy of being ministers of state." (*A New Account of Tales of the World*, 347, n. 2 to 19/11).

⁷³ Trans. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 347, modified.

Here we see that Lady Han is clearly an extremely capable exponent of Wei-Jin character appraisal. In the case quoted above, the persons evaluated by Lady Han were none other than the three leading figures of the Wei-Jin gentry: Ji Kang 嵇康, Ruan Ji 阮籍, and Lady Han's own husband Shan Tao. Significantly, Shan Tao was considered to be the most prominent scholar of character appraisal of his time, and, for this reason, he was appointed to head the personnel selection bureau.⁷⁴ Yet, even he sought his wife's judgment concerning the character of his friends.

As evaluators, women's competence also appears in their use of explicitly mantic methods to assess personalities. For example, when Wang Ji 王濟 (ca. 240–ca. 285) is seeking a good match for his sister, his mother, Lady Zhong (Zhong Yan, 鍾琰; mid-third century),⁷⁵ demands to see the candidate. Thereafter, she comments:

This boy's ability is adequate to raise him above the crowd. However, his background is humble, and if he doesn't have a long life, he'll never get to exercise his ability or usefulness. Observing his

⁷⁴ See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jinshu* 晉書 [History of the Jin], "Shan Tao Zhuan" 山濤傳 (Biography of Shan Tao), 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 43, 4:1223; and the *Shishuo xinyu* [jianshu], 18/3.

⁷⁵ Liu Jun's commentary on the *Shishuo xinyu* [jianshu], 19/12, quotes the *Wangshi pu* 王氏譜 (Genealogy of the Wang Clan): "Lady Zhong's name was Yanzhi" (鍾夫人名琰之). *Jinshu*, "Lienü zhuan" 列女傳 (Biographies of Women), records Lady Zhong's name as "Yan" 琰 (*juan* 96, 8:2510). Mather's *A New Account of Tales of the World* also has her name as "Yan." In this article, I shall keep her name consistent with Mather's translation.

physiognomy and [bone] structure (*xinggu* 形骨), it's evident that he won't live to an old age. You may not contract a marriage with him.

此才足以拔萃，然地寒，不有長年，不得申其才用。觀其形骨，必不壽，不可與婚。(19/12)

To Lady Zhong's credit, the *Shishuo* recounts that "as it turned out, in a few years, the [boy] died." In this case, and in many others, *Shishuo* stories about the participation of Wei-Jin women in character appraisal involve some form of physiognomic analysis in the ontological and metaphysical quest for knowledge about human nature.⁷⁶

As mentioned previously, the mantic practices in Tang *Shishuo ti* works often had to do with augmenting or invigorating imperial authority. In the *New Account of the Great Tang*, Liu Su provides a revealing illustration of the principle of "hailing the ruler and humbling the

⁷⁶ Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 observes in his "Yanyi zhi bian" 言意之辨 (Discernment of the Relations between Words and Meanings): "Generally speaking, the Han scholars were solid, and the Jin scholars aloof. The solid scholars focused on real things, so the Han character appraisal basically employed the methodology of physiognomy—to infer the specific features of the five elements inside his/her body through observing the specific features of his/her appearance. This method continued in vogue during the late Han and early Wei period (as recorded in Liu Shao, *Renwu zhi*). Later on, character appraisal began focusing on observing one's spirit and aura, thus entering the arena of *wu* (無), [the origin of elusive human nature] which could hardly be expressed in words" (概括論之，漢人樸茂，晉人超脫。樸茂者尚實際，故漢代觀人之法，根本為相法，由外貌差別推知其體內五行之不同。漢末魏初猶存此風。[如劉邵《人物志》]，其後識鑒乃漸重神氣，而入於虛無難言之域); in *Wei-Jin Xuanxue lungao* 魏晉玄學論稿 (Preliminary Studies of Wei-Jin *Xuanxue*) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chupian she, 1957), collected in *Tang Yongtong xueshu lunwen ji* 湯用彤學術論文集 (Collected Academic Essays of Tang Yongtong) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 226; see also his "Du Renwu zhi" 讀人物志 (Reading *The Treatise on Personalities*), in *Wei-Jin Xuanxue lungao*, collected in *Tang Yongtong xueshu lunwen ji*, 196–213.

subject,” referencing the case of Empress Wu Zetian—the only woman in Chinese history ever to declare herself an emperor. Later historians have usually portrayed Wu Zetian as an aggressive, self-indulgent, and self-promoting woman, accusing her of usurping the divine imperial throne, like “a hen crowing at dawn” (*pinji sicheng* 牝雞司晨).⁷⁷ Liu Su tells us that her ambition was in fact predicted and encouraged by Tang gentlemen from the very beginning.

When Wu Zetian was barely a toddler, a gentleman named Yuan Tiangang 袁天綱 (ca. 583–ca. 665) who was skilled in physiognomy, paid her family a visit:

At that moment, Zetian, dressed like a boy, was carried out by her wet nurse. Tiangang was astonished to see her, saying: ‘This young boy’s spirit and expression look profound and pure, not easy to fathom.’ He asked her to try walking [*xing* 行], saying: “He has dragon eyes and a phoenix neck, extremely distinguished.” He then observed her from various angles, saying: “If this were a girl, she would become the Son of Heaven.”⁷⁸

則天時衣男子服，乳母抱出，天綱大驚曰：“此郎君神采奧澈，不易可知。”試令行，天綱曰：“龍睛鳳頸，貴之極也！”轉側視之，“若是女，當為天子。”

Gender ironies suffuse Yuan Tiangang’s observations of the future female sovereign. He mistakes Wu Zetian for a boy but notices something unfathomable about her. After evaluating her face, body and movements, he detects in her one feature common to royal males—dragon eyes—and one common to royal females—a phoenix neck. Hence, he pronounces this

⁷⁷ Liu Xu 劉煦 (887-946) et al., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Old History of the Tang) “Zetian huanhou benji” 則天皇后本紀 (Basic Annals of Empress Zetian), 16 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), *juan* 6, 1:133.

⁷⁸ Liu Su, *Da-Tang xinyu*, “Jiyi” 記異 (Recording the Strange), *juan* 13, 193.

androgynous being to be “extremely distinguished,” suggesting that if she were a female and would “act,” she would become an emperor.⁷⁹

Throughout the *New Account of the Great Tang*, Liu Su overlooks gender differences, equating Wu Zetian with other Tang emperors, always referring to her by her imperial title, Zetian, or simply *shang* 上—Her Majesty. In Liu’s accounts of the conversations between the empress and her subjects, she uses the royal pronoun *zhen* 朕, and her subjects address her as *tianzi* 天子 (Son of Heaven); *jun* 君 (My Lord); *bixia* 陛下 (Your Majesty); and so forth.

Later *Shishuo ti* works continue to feature strong-minded, self-sufficient literate women who participate in mantic practices primarily through their evaluation of men. Among the numerous Ming-Qing *Shishuo ti* works, two are devoted exclusively to women, and both are titled *Women’s Shishuo* (*Nü Shishuo* 女世說). The two authors, Li Qing 李清 (1602–1683), a man, and Yan Heng 嚴衡 (1826?–1854), a woman, each endeavored to establish an explicitly female value system. At the center of this joint venture were two pivotal symbolic elements

⁷⁹ The line in which Yuan asks the future Wu Zetian to “try walking” echoes Kuai Tong’s 蒯通 (fl. early 200 BCE) physiognomic judgment on the famous Han general Han Xin 韓信 (fl. early 200 BCE). As recounted by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 – ca. 86 BCE) in his *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記), Kuai Tong says to Han Xin: “Judging from the features of your face, you will obtain at most the rank of marquis; . . . judging from the features of your back [*bei* 背], you will become distinguished beyond verbal description” (相君之面，不過封侯；. . . 相君之背，貴乃不可言). Kuai Tong uses the word *bei* as a pun, meaning both “back” and “betrayal,” advising Han Xin to betray Emperor 高祖 of the Han, Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 206–195 BCE), and to develop his own power. By the same token, in Yuan Tiangang’s comment on Wu Zetian, the word *xing* means both “to walk” and “to act.” Yuan thus implies that if Wu Zetian can “act,” she can become “the Son of Heaven.”

associated with the female body, the “milk” of women’s nurturing virtue and the “scent” of women’s literary and artistic talents.⁸⁰ Yan Heng’s unfinished work does not discuss women’s divinatory practices, but Li Qing registers thirty-two related episodes in his chapter on “Omens of Strangeness” (“Zhengyi” 徵異), which he considered to be equivalent to the category of “Technical Understanding.”⁸¹

Li Qing opens this chapter with a combination of milk and scent values in a story about Meng Jiang 孟姜. This brave young woman embarks, we are told, on a ten thousand-*li* (roughly three thousand-mile) journey to look for her husband among the slave-laborers drafted by the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty (Qing shi huangdi 秦始皇帝) to build what would become the Great Wall. In the process of preparing to make winter clothes for her husband, Meng Jiang touches the bamboos in her courtyard with a needle and their leaves emit silk (#1).⁸² Bamboo is associated explicitly with the “Bamboo Grove aura” 竹林風 of the *Shishuo* tradition, and it serves in particular as a trope for *xianyuan* (although used by Li Qing here in an achronological

⁸⁰ See Nanxiu Qian, “Milk and Scent: Works about Women in the *Shishuo xinyu* genre,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 1.2 (Fall, 1999): 187–236. I am indebted to Katie Conboy’s comments in her introduction to Katie Conboy et al., eds., *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), “Introduction,” 1: “At first glance, the answer to Simone de Beauvoir’s question—‘What is a woman?’—appears simple, for is the female body not the marker of womanhood? The body has, however, been at the center of feminist theory precisely because it offers no such ‘natural’ foundation for our pervasive cultural assumptions about femininity. Indeed, there is a tension between women’s lived bodily experiences and the cultural meanings inscribed on the female body that always mediate those experiences.”

⁸¹ Li Qing, *Nü Shishuo*, c. 1673 ed., *juan* 4, 37b–38a.

⁸² Li Qing, *Nü Shishuo*, *juan* 4, 37b–38a.

way since the historical Qin shi huangdi lived much earlier than the Wei-Jin period).⁸³ That bamboo leaves could miraculously produce silk manifests the will of Heaven to assist the virtuous and talented Meng Jiang in her efforts to protect her husband from the effects of the brutal policies of the First Emperor. This episode frames the entire “Omens of Strangeness” chapter as a collective gallery of virtuous and talented women who protect people and culture with Heavenly blessing and help.

The following three stories of divination, dreams and omens reflect Li Qing’s effort to link the capacity of talented women to generate cultural products with their role in bearing children:

Once, Ren Fang’s [460–508] mother, née Pei, was taking a nap during the day, and dreamed of a five-colored canopy with bells hanging from its four corners falling down from Heaven. One of the bells dropped into her belly. Startled, she thus [became] pregnant. The diviner predicted, “You’ll certainly bear a talented son.” Later, she gave birth to Ren Fang, indeed a person of talent. (#9)⁸⁴

任昉母裴氏，常晝臥，夢有五色彩旗蓋，四角懸鈴，自天而墜。其一鈴落入懷中，心悸，因有孕。占者曰：“必生才子。”後生昉，果有才。

Niu Su’s [fl. early 9th cent.] daughter Yingzhen used to dream of making books and then eating them. Every time she dreamed of this, she would eat several dozen volumes (*juan* 卷), and her

⁸³ For *xianyuan* and Bamboo Grove aura, see Nanxiu Qian, “Women’s Role in Wei-Chin Character Appraisal as Reflected in the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*,” in *Studies in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Cultural History*, In Honor of Richard B. Mather and Donald Holzman, edited by Paul W. Kroll and David R. Knechtges (Provo, Utah: T’ang Studies Society, 2003), 259–302.

⁸⁴ Li Qing, *Nü Shishuo*, c. 1673 ed., *juan* 4, 39a.

writing style would change after she woke up. After several dreams like this, she became well versed in rhyme-prose, eulogy, and literary essays. (#24)⁸⁵

牛肅女應貞嘗夢製書食之。每夢食數十卷，則文體一變。如是非一，遂工賦、頌、文。

A daughter of the Ding family was good at womanly work. On every Double Seventh Day, she would celebrate [the legend of the Weaving Girl] with wine and fruit. Once, she saw a meteor fall onto the ceremonial table. On the following day, she saw a golden shuttle for a weaving loom on a melon, and her ingenious ideas became much improved. (#27)⁸⁶

丁氏女精於女紅，每七夕，禱以酒果，忽見流星墜筵中。明日瓜上有金梭，自是巧思益進。

All three stories share a similar omen-related narrative structure, and all three suggest Heaven's special favor for talented women.

Although a rigorous cult of chastity existed in late imperial China (which, among other things, strongly discouraged remarriage by widows), Li Qing recorded two such remarriages, each of them provoked by a peculiar omen. In the first case, Née Yin's 尹 husband passed away and her father advised her to remarry. Yin pointed to the iron rail of a well, swearing: "I'll do so only if yellow orchids grow on it!" This indeed happened three years later (#7).⁸⁷ In the second case, under similar circumstances, Wu Shuji 吳淑姬 swore that she would not remarry unless her broken jade hairpin could be restored into a single piece. One day, after reading the poetry of a scholar named Yang Ziye's 楊子冶, she decided to buy a volume of his poetry for herself.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 42a.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 42b.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 38b–39a.

Preparing to go out, she opened her jewelry box and saw that the two pieces of the broken hairpin had already come together. She sent the hairpin to Ziye, and the two became husband and wife (諷而愛之，購得一卷，啓匳視簪，已合，遂以寄子冶，結爲夫妻) (#26).⁸⁸

In these two episodes, flowers and a jade hairpin are metaphors for talented women who yearn for the companionate love life denied to most widows in Qing China by the strict and “unnatural” rules imposed by the so-called cult of chastity. Their implicit wishes are granted by Heaven, showing that this cosmic entity, as the *Shishuo* affirms, embraces the Way (*Dao*) of the Natural. Wu Shuji’s case in particular highlights the theme of a woman who seeks happiness on her own terms, and whose wish for a companionate marriage finds its expression in the couples’ common love of poetry.

By the same token, Heaven favored aesthetic values to such an extent that it would break the very bottom line of gender segregation, allowing a woman to visit a man at night for poetic and artistic communication and cooperation.⁸⁹ Li Qing records several such cases. One story tells of the famous Liang 梁 (502–557) poet Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) sitting alone on a rainy night. Suddenly,

the wind blew open the bamboo door. A woman with a reeling tool walked in and sat down [without being invited]. The wind blew the rain like silk threads. The woman ceaselessly reeled the rain

⁸⁸ Ibid., 42b.

⁸⁹ Gender segregation was established in the *Liji*, “Neize” 內則 (Inner Principles), with admonitions such as “Turning seven *sui* (six years old), boys and girls should not sit together, nor eat together” (七年，男女不同席，不共食). These rules were especially rigid during the late imperial period; see *Liji* [zhengyi], “Neize,” in *Shisanjing zhushu*, juan 27–28, 2:1461–1472.

threads blown in by the wind. Whenever the thread was broken, she would use her mouth to tie it up as if tying real silk. Before the candle burned out, she had reeled several ounces. She then stood up and gave the silk to Yue, saying: “This is called ice silk, for you to make ice brocade.” Suddenly, she disappeared. Later, Yue wove the silk into a piece of brocade. Fresh, pure, and luminous, it looked no different from ice. (#11)⁹⁰

風開竹扉，有一女攜絡絲具，入門便坐。風飄細雨如絲，女隨風引絡，絡繹不斷，斷時亦就口續之，若真絲焉。燭未及跋，得數兩，起贈約曰：“此謂冰絲，贈君造為冰紈。”忽不見。約後織成紈，鮮潔明淨，不異于冰。

Although this story is not concerned with divination or omens, it reveals a woman who could serve as an agent of Heaven in the interest of nurturing a male poet. The mysterious visitor reels the quintessence of nature—synthesizing it with her own saliva, the female essence—into a silk yarn, and then asks a talented male to continue a woman’s job, weaving the silk into a piece of fabric. This mysterious act, freely crossing the boundaries between heavenly and human worlds, male and female, womanly work and men’s creative ideas (*si* 絲, silk, *puns si* 思, ideas, thoughts), produces an ice brocade that resembles in its magical and ethereal beauty the Spiritual/Perfected Person in the *Zhuangzi*.

In another *Women’s Shishuo* episode, a young lady pays a nighttime visit to a male musician in order to teach him a zither melody long lost after Ji Kang’s execution by the Simas during the Wei-Jin transition (See *Shishuo* 6/2). Upon taking her leave, the woman tells the man that the melody is not for entertaining a vulgar audience, but for him to enjoy by himself in seclusion (#14).⁹¹ In this episode, the woman operates as an agent of culture, trying to fill in a

⁹⁰ Ibid., 39b.

⁹¹ Ibid., 40a.

missing piece that men had brutally severed from history. Although an unmarried woman was not supposed to be alone with a man, much less spend the night with him, a shared love of poetry and art, as well as a common appreciation of pure spirit, might justify such an intimate gender-crossing relationship.

This female tradition of mystical experiences and unorthodox practices continues to appear in later *Shishuo ti* works. One story in the chapter on “Technical Understanding” in the *New Shishuo* involves Huang Jiangang 黃建剛, a late Qing “Confucian” who acquires the ability to hypnotize people while traveling in Europe. Returning home, he tries out the technique in order to exploit women for immoral purposes, and is chased away from his hometown. He settles down with his wife in a Miao minority region in southwestern Hunan, where he resumes his exploitation of women. Representatives of the Miao people travel all the way to Guizhou province to seek help from a local patriarch, who in turn sends a female disciple to oppose Huang. Upon hearing this, Huang laughs, remarking: “I come from a civilized country; what is there to fear from these [Miao] barbarians?” (我自文明國來，奚憚此野蠻者). But

one morning after Huang got up, and his wife was applying her makeup, a handsome youth waved to her and she absent-mindedly walked [off] alongside him. Huang urgently followed them, only to see the two, hand-in-hand, walking as fast as the wind, whereupon they soon disappeared without a trace. Huang came back feeling despondent, and found the two of them in each other’s arms in the room. Extremely angry, Huang pointed his finger at the youth, and the youth looked back at him. Huang felt the youth’s chilly glare penetrating into his hair like an arrow and making him dizzy. Knowing that he was about to fall into a trap, Huang tried hard to maintain himself. He noticed the youth’s eyes had dimmed, as if they had encountered heavy layers of barricades. The two thereupon competed with each other for about an hour. Finally, the youth clapped his hands and laughed, saying: “Your skill is indeed outstanding, but now what?” Huang retreated to a couch, unable to speak. While the youth was laughing, Huang saw dimples emerge on the youth’s cheeks, giving the

appearance of a girl. Huang suddenly realized [that it was, indeed, a girl]. No longer able to stand up, Huang could only watch the young woman leave, [an experience from which he] did not recover until noon. (#30)⁹²

一日，晨起，妻方曉妝，有美少年向之招手，妻不覺從之行。黃亟逐之，兩人挽臂行如風，頃刻不見。喪氣而歸，則妻方與少年交頸於室也。大忿，急以手指少年，少年亦以目視黃。黃覺少年目光，冷射毛髮，幾欲眩暈，知將中術，爰力持之，手不能舉，勉為支持。視少年亦目光黯淡，如嬰重困者。於是彼此互競，若一時許，少年拍手笑曰：“君術真高，今如何？”黃不覺退居榻下，口噤不能聲。少年笑時，梨渦生頰，儼然一女郎也。黃大悟，然不能起，目送其去，日午乃蘇。

This episode epitomizes the kinds of conflicts that increasingly occurred during the tumultuous late Qing period—struggles between the self and “the other,” between China and the West, between “civilization” and “barbarism,” and between women and men. Ironically, in Huang’s situation, China and the West came to be conflated in a certain limited sense. On the one hand, he was a Confucian patriarch, a representative of China’s civilized culture. On the other hand, he had traveled to Europe, where he had learned a powerful foreign technique, hypnotism, which in turn empowered him.⁹³ With this doubly “civilized” self, Huang dared to bully women—first the

⁹² Yi, *Xin Shishuo*, juan 5, 47a-48a.

⁹³ For the idea that the power of the West made powerful those who appropriated Western ideas and ideologies, see Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11.

Han Chinese and then the Miao people. But, in this case, the “barbarians” had the last laugh: a young Miao girl humiliates Huang and then defeats him in “battle.”⁹⁴

Japanese *Shishuo* imitations also record women’s participation in mantic practices. One “Technical Understanding” episode in *An Account of the Great Eastern World* tells the story of a woman physiognomist. Before the Heian aristocrat Fujiwara no Michiaki 藤[原]道明 (fl. early 10th century) rose to statesmanship, he once went to the market with his wife. They disguised themselves as commoners and walked separately. At one point, they encountered an old lady. She saw the wife first. Looking at the face of the wife, the old lady predicted that the woman would be the wife of a vice prime-minister. The old lady then looked at Michiaki. She pointed at him, saying to the wife, “You should marry this man, because he has distinguished facial features” (亦[宜]配此人貴相也) (#6)⁹⁵.

The *Continued Accounts of Recent Times* includes in its chapter on “Worthy Ladies” a story about another woman physiognomist—the elder sister of the Edo Confucian scholar Nakanishi Tan’en 中西淡淵 (1709–1752). According to this tale, a man who had declared that he would avenge his father’s death came to visit Tan’en. Observing the visitor, the sister commented to her brother: “This man is not one capable of revenge. I see that he has long fingers

⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that the revolutionary Liu Shiwei 劉師培 (1884–1919) had remarked in 1908 that the Miao people were the most defiant against the mainstream Chinese imperial system among China’s ethnic minorities. See Liu Shiwei, “Rangshu” 攘書 (Essay on Dispelling [the Manchus]), in *Liu Shiwei xinhai qian wenxuan* 劉師培辛亥前文選 (Selected Essays of Liu Shiwei Dated before 1911), edited by Li Miaogen 李妙根 with an introduction by Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1998), 22.

⁹⁵ *Daitō Seigo*, *juan* 4, 13b.

and places his shoes untidily” (此必不能復讎者。吾見其爪長，置履不整). As predicted, the man never fulfilled his promise, and lived a rather mundane life selling tobacco (#9)⁹⁶.

VI. Concluding Remarks

More work remains to be done on the relationship between elite literature and popular divination in China and Japan (not to mention the rest of East Asia), but, as I have tried to indicate in this preliminary study, the subject is rich with possibilities. And even if we focus solely on works of the *Shishuo* genre, it is clear that mantic practices in both cultures constituted an integral part of the longstanding social and psychological phenomenon known in Chinese as *renlun jianshi* 人倫鑑識, or character appraisal. Although character appraisal originally grew out of the very specific circumstances of social and intellectual life in Wei-Jin China, it evolved over time and across space in revealing and significant ways.

To be sure, many of the general categories of concern in *Shishuo ti* remained the same, but a number of new ones were invented in response to the values and sensibilities of different authors. Moreover, even within the older categories, important changes took place over time—changes inspired by different political, social, intellectual and cultural circumstances. This was particularly true, of course, when the *Shishuo* genre traveled to Japan from China and became domesticated in various ways.

Finally, because the genre was founded on the ideal of the androgynous Perfected Person, gender equality was always a central concern of the *Shishuo ti*. As we have seen, focusing on these works helps us to appreciate that even under circumstances of social discrimination or

⁹⁶ *Shoku Kinsei sōgo*, *juan* 7, 10a.

difficulty (such as the problems created by the onerous cult of chastity in late imperial China), women, invariably informed by skill in character appraisal, played multiple and often unconventional roles in both China and Japan, divining in a great many creative ways and giving valuable advice to both men and women (often facilitated by divination). When necessary, they also proved to be worthy adversaries of men.

Nanxiu Qian, M.A. Nanjing University, Ph.D. Yale (1994), Professor of Chinese Literature at Rice. Her research interests focus on classical Chinese literature, women and gender studies, and the Sinosphere studies. She has published broadly in English and Chinese, including such as Politics, Poetics, and Gender in Late Qing China: Xue Shaohui (1866-1911) and the Era of Reform (2015), and Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin-yu and Its Legacy (2001).

Appendix: The *Shujie* 術解 (Technical understanding) Tradition in the *Shishuo ti* Works^a

I. In the Chinese Works of the *Shishuo* Genre

	Time	Author	Title	<i>Shujie</i> entries & time covered
1	Liu-Song 劉宋	Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444) & staff	<i>Shishuo xinyu</i> 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World),	11 <i>SJ</i> entries; late Han and Wei-Jin (ca. 150-420); biographical info in Liu Jun's 劉峻 (462-521) commentary
2	Tang 唐	Wang Fangqing 王方慶 (d. 702)	<i>Xu Shishuo xinshu</i> 續世說新書 (Continuation of the <i>Shishuo xinshu</i>), 10 <i>juan</i> , not extant.	Unclear

^a Divinatory episodes spread sporadically throughout each *Shishuo ti* work. The entry number of the chapter “*Shujie*,” which focuses on mantic practices, is provided here as an indicator of the profusion of mantic methods.

3		Feng Yan 封演 (<i>js</i> ca. 756)	<i>Fengshi wenjian ji</i> 封氏聞見記 (Feng's memoirs), 10 <i>juan</i> , compiled around 800 or later.	Tang; no <i>SJ</i> chapter; 5 equivalent entries in "Yunci" 運次 (Order of destinies)
4		Liu Su 劉肅 (fl. 806–820)	<i>Da-Tang xinyu</i> 大唐新語 (New account of the Great Tang), 13 <i>juan</i> , author's preface dated 807.	Tang; no <i>SJ</i> chapter; 5 equivalent entries in "Jiyi" 記異 (Recording the strange)
5	Song 宋	Kong Pingzhong 孔平仲 (fl. 1065–1102, <i>js</i> 1065)	<i>Xu Shishuo</i> 續世說 (Continuation of the <i>Shishuo</i>), 12 <i>juan</i> , earliest extant ed. with Qin Guo's preface dated 1158.	38 <i>SJ</i> entries; Southern & Northern to Five Dynasties (ca. 420–960)
6		Wang Dang 王讜 (fl. 1086–1110)	<i>Tang yulin</i> 唐語林 (Tang forest of accounts), 8 <i>juan</i> .	Originally including 35 <i>Shishuo</i> categories and 17 invented. The remnant version only has the first 18 <i>Shishuo</i> categories, no <i>SJ</i> chapter; Tang (618–907)
7	Ming 明	He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506–1573)	<i>Heshi yulin</i> 何氏語林 (He's forest of accounts), 30 <i>juan</i> , Wen Zhengming's 文徵明 (1470–1559) preface dated 1551.	49 <i>SJ</i> entries; Han to Yuan (ca. 206 BCE–1368); bio info in He's own commentary
8		Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590, <i>js</i> 1547)	<i>Shishuo xinyu bu</i> 世說新語補 (Supplement to the <i>Shishuo xinyu</i>), 20 <i>juan</i> , abridged from <i>Shishuo xinyu</i> and <i>Heshi yulin</i> , Wang Shizhen's preface dated 1556, published in 1585.	20 <i>SJ</i> entries; Han to Yuan (ca. 206 BCE–1368); bio info in original commentaries.
9		Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620, <i>js</i> 1589)	<i>Jiaoshi leilin</i> 焦氏類林 (Jiao's taxonomic forest), 8 <i>juan</i> , author's preface dated 1585, other prefaces, 1587.	48 <i>SJ</i> entries; antiquity to Yuan (ca. 3000 BCE–1368).
10		Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602, <i>jr</i> 1552)	<i>Chutan ji</i> 初潭記 (Writings on the pond), 30 <i>juan</i> , published in 1588.	No <i>SJ</i> chapter; 52 equivalent entries in "Yishu" 藝術 (Specialties and techniques) antiquity to Yuan (ca. 3000 BCE–1368)
11	?	Li Hou 李扈, dates unknown	<i>Xu Shishuo</i> 續世說 (Continuation of the <i>Shishuo</i>), 10 <i>juan</i> , with Yu Anqi's preface dated 1609.	4 <i>SJ</i> entries; Southern and Northern dynasties (420–589)

12		Li Shaowen 李紹文 (fl. 1600–1623)	<i>Huang Ming Shishuo xinyu</i> 皇明世說新語 (Imperial Ming <i>Shishuo xinyu</i>), 8 <i>juan</i> , with Lu Congping's preface dated 1610.	26 <i>SJ</i> entries; early to mid-Ming (ca. 1368–1572)
13		Zheng Zhongkui 鄭仲夔 (fl. 1615–1634)	<i>Qingyan</i> 清言 (Pure talk), or <i>Lanwan ju qingyan</i> 蘭畹居清言 (Pure talk from the Orchid-Fields Studio), 10 <i>juan</i> , compiled 1615, 1st ed. 1617.	13 <i>SJ</i> entries; Han to mid-Ming (ca. 206 BCE–1572)
14		Jiao Hong	<i>Yutang congyu</i> 玉堂叢語 (Collected accounts from the Jade Hall), 8 <i>juan</i> , all prefaces, including the author's, dated 1618.	20 <i>SJ</i> entries; Ming before the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1368–1572)
15		Zhang Yong 張壩 (fl. late Ming)	<i>Nianyi shi shiyu</i> 廿一史拾遺 (Extracts from twenty-one standard histories), also named <i>Zhuxiang zhai leishu</i> 竹香齋類書 (The Bamboo-Fragrance Studio encyclopedia), 37 <i>juan</i> , not seen.	Unclear
16		Lin Maogui 林茂桂 (fl. 1591–1621)	<i>Nan Bei chao xinyu</i> 南北朝新語 (Southern and Northern dynasties [<i>Shishuo</i>] <i>xinyu</i>), 4 <i>juan</i> , author's preface dated 1621.	No <i>SJ</i> chapter; 60 equivalent entries in “Qiaoyi” (Ingenious art); Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589)
17		Yan Congqiao 顏從喬 (fl. around 1639)	<i>Seng Shishuo</i> 僧世說 (Monks <i>Shishuo</i>), 24 <i>juan</i> , author's preface, 1639; other prefaces, 1640.	???
18		Zhao Yu 趙瑜 (fl. Late Ming?)	<i>Er Shishuo</i> 兒世說 (Children <i>Shishuo</i>), 1 <i>juan</i> , publication dates unclear.	No <i>SJ</i> chapter; 5 equivalent entries in “Yizheng” 異徵 (Strange omens)
19	Qing 清	Liang Weishu 梁維樞 (1589–1662, late Ming <i>jr</i>)	<i>Yujian zunwen</i> 玉劍尊聞 (Distinguished accounts of the jade sword), 10 <i>juan</i> , author's preface dated 1654, other prefaces, 1655 or 1657.	10 <i>SJ</i> entries; Ming (1368–1644), bio info in Liang's commentary

20		Li Qing 李清 (1602–1683, <i>js</i> 1631)	<i>Nü Shishuo</i> 女世說 (Women <i>Shishuo</i>), 4 <i>juan</i> , compiled early 1650s, published early 1670s.	No <i>SJ</i> chapter; 32 equivalent entries in “Zhengyi” 徵異 (Strange omens); antiquity to Yuan (ca. 3000 BCE–1368)
21		Wang Wan 汪琬 (1624–1691, <i>cs</i> 1655)	<i>Shuoling</i> 說鈴 (Bell of tales), 1 <i>juan</i> , Wang’s preface dated 1659, 1st ed. 1661.	Not categorized
22		Wu Sugong 吳肅公 (fl. 1662–1681)	<i>Ming yulin</i> 明語林 (Ming forest of accounts), 14 <i>juan</i> , compiled 1662, 1st ed. 1681.	16 <i>SJ</i> entries; Ming (1368–1644)
23		Jiang Yourong 江有溶 and Zou Tonglu 鄒統魯 (both fl. early Qing)	<i>Mingyi bian</i> (Compilation of Ming anecdotes), 10 <i>juan</i> , published early Qing, not seen.	Unclear
24		Wang Zhuo 王卓 (b. 1636)	<i>Jin Shishuo</i> 今世說 (Contemporary <i>Shishuo</i>), 8 <i>juan</i> , author’s preface dated 1683.	5 <i>SJ</i> entries; Early Qing (ca. 1644–1680); bio info in Wang’s commentary
25		Zhang Fukong 章撫功 (fl. early Qing)	<i>Han Shishuo</i> 漢世說, 14 <i>juan</i> , published early Qing, not seen.	Unclear
26		Zhang Jiyong 章繼泳 (fl. early Qing)	<i>Nan Bei chao Shishuo</i> 南北朝世說 (Southern and Northern dynasties <i>Shishuo</i>), 20 <i>juan</i> , not seen.	Unclear
27		Yan Heng 嚴衡 (1826?–1854)	<i>Nü Shishuo</i> 女世說 (Women <i>Shishuo</i>), 1 <i>juan</i> , 1st ed. 1865.	Not categorized; early Qing to Yan’s time (1644–1854)
28	Ming-guo 民國	Yi Zongkui 易宗夔 (b. 1875)	<i>Xin Shishuo</i> 新世說 (New <i>Shishuo</i>), 1 <i>juan</i> , author’s preface dated 1918.	32 <i>SJ</i> entries; Qing (1644–1911); bio info of each character in Yi’s commentary

II. In the Japanese Works of the *Shishuo* Genre

1	Edo Japan	Hayashi Yoshio 林惣士 (fl. 1704)	<i>Honchō Sesetsu</i> 本朝世說 (Tales of the world in this dynasty), 1 <i>juan</i> , hand copy, author’s preface dated 1704.	11 <i>Fangshu</i> 方術 (occult techniques) entries, from antiquity to the Hōgen 保元 reign (1155–58) in the Heian period 平安 (794–1185).
---	-----------	-------------------------------	--	---

2		Hattori Nankaku 服部南郭 (1683–1759)	<i>Daitō seigo</i> 大東世語 (Account of the Great Eastern World), 5 <i>juan</i> , 1st ed. 1750.	7 <i>SJ</i> entries; Heian & Kamakura (1185–1333) 鎌倉 ; bio info of each character in Hattori's commentary.
3		Koshyun Teikan 慧珣定環 (fl. 1788)	<i>Kowa Sesetsu shingo</i> 皇和世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World of the Imperial Japan), 2 <i>juan</i> , author's preface dated 1788. 2 vols.	No <i>SJ</i> chapter; Muromachi 室町 (1336–1573) to early Edo (1603-1867).
4		Ōta Nanbo 大田南畝 (Ōta Fukashi 大田 蕨) (1749–1823) and Imai Kyūsuke 今井久助 (1786–1829)	<i>Kana Sesetsu</i> 假名世說 (Tales of the world in Kana), 2 <i>juan</i> , preface dated 1824, published in 1825 under Shokusan sensei 蜀山先生 and Bunhōtei Sanboku 文寶亭散木.	No <i>SJ</i> chapter; early Edo.
5		Ōta Nanbo & Imai Kyūsuke	<i>Kana Sesetsu kōhen</i> 假名世說 後編 (Tales of the world in Kana, continued edition), not seen.	Unclear.
6		Tsunoda Ken 角田簡 (Tsunoda Kyūka, 1784-1855)	<i>Kinsei sōgo</i> 近世叢語 (Accounts of recent times), 8 <i>juan</i> , Tsunoda's preface 1816, 1st ed. 1828.	6 <i>SJ</i> entries; early—mid-Edo; bio info in Tsunoda's commentary
7		Tsunoda Ken	<i>Shoku Kinsei sōgo</i> 續近世叢語 (Continued accounts of recent times), 8 <i>juan</i> , 1st ed. 1845.	7 <i>SJ</i> entries; Edo; bio info in Tsunoda's commentary
8	Meiji (1868-1912)	Ōta Saijirō 太田才次郎 (fl. 1892)	<i>Shin seigo</i> 新世語 (New account of the world), 1892.	Not categorized