# The Construction of a Unified Style: Poetry Composed by the Kuizhang Academicians in the Early 14th Century

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**Abstract:** The study of classical literature during the Mongol-Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) is often associated with investigating the cultural activities of literary groups. Fueled by the interest in localism, many scholars are understandably more concerned about the strategies of local literati and the role that classical literature played in fourteenth century local societies. However, among the literary groups that emerged during the Mongol-Yuan, the Kuizhang Academicians stand out as a particular literary circle, since the poets involved were affiliated with the court. This paper examines the works of the Academicians, specifically how they attempted to cultivate a literary style that could represent their generation. The paper first examines Yu Ji's literary criticism and then explores how his ideas influenced his follower, Su Tianjue. The paper then turns to an examination of the poems recorded in the anthology *Guochao wenlei* (*Categorized Writings of Our Dynasty*) and demonstrates how Su, the compiler of this anthology, tended to overlook the differences in styles among the courtiers and instead emphasized a certain type of poetry that could reflect Yu Ji's vision. Through a close reading of some of the poetic works composed by the Kuizhang Academicians, this paper seeks to unravel the complexities of the aesthetic preferences of the time.

**Keywords**: Kuizhang Academy, Yuan poetry, Yu Ji, Jie Xisi, Su Tianjue

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## I. Introduction

The study of classical literature of the Mongol-Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) is often associated with investigating the cultural activities of literary groups. Fueled by an interest in localism, many scholars are understandably more concerned about the strategies of local literati and the role that classical literature played in fourteenth century local societies.[1] The civil service examinations were discontinued when the Mongol Yuan dynasty was founded. In other words, the imperial court was no longer recruiting courtiers through a system that tested examinees' ability to compose Chinese poetry and rhapsodies. It might appear that the court was no longer interested in positioning itself as the center of Chinese literary activities and the emperor's role in promoting Chinese classical literature had largely been questioned. However, it would be problematic to arrive at the sweeping conclusion that the court was no longer influential in the Chinese literary realm during the Yuan dynasty. As Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎 reminds us in a series of essays entitled "the Literary Works of Various Yuan Emperors" 元の諸帝の文学, there was a conscious effort made by the court to hire literary talents and fashion itself as a venue for Chinese literature to flourish.[2] Yoshikawa was particularly intrigued by the role taken by Emperor Wenzong 元文宗

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[1] For instance, a comprehensive analysis was conducted by Richard John Lynn on the poetry competition held by the Moon Spring Society in Zhejiang, see "Traditional Chinese Poetry Societies: A Case Study of the Moon Spring Society (Pujiang, Zhejiang, 1286/7)," in *La société civile face à l'État dans les traditions chinoise, japonaise, coréenne et vietnamienne*, edited by Léon Vandermeersch (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1994), 77–108.

[2] Yoshikawa Kōjirō published a series of articles from 1943 to 1944 in *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 under the title "Gen no sho tei no bungaku" 元の諸帝の文学. These essays were reprinted in Yoshikawa's collection, see *Yoshikawa Kōjirō zenshū* 吉川幸次郎全集 (Tōkyō : Chikuma Shobō, 1969), vol. 15, 232–314.

(1304–1332), not only because he was one of the Mongol Yuan emperors who could write Chinese, but also his role in bringing together a group of poets by establishing the Kuizhang Academy 奎章閣 in 1329.

Among the literary groups that emerged during the Mongol-Yuan dynasty, the Kuizhang Academicians stand out as a particular literary circle since the poets involved were tied due to their affiliation with the court. Unlike other literary groups, all members of this literary group were poets recruited from very diverse backgrounds. For instance, Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348), one of the leading academicians in the Kuizhang Academy, was born into a family of officials who used to serve in the Song dynasty. His family was originally from Sichuan, but he had relocated to Jiangsu at a young age and was initially an Instructor of the Confucian School in the capital before taking up the appointment at the Kuizhang Academy. Another academician, Jie Xisi 揭傒斯 (1274–1344), was a native of Jiangxi. Compared to Yu Ji, he had a more humble background and was given the position directly in 1314.[3]

The cultural activities and poetic preferences of the Kuizhang Academy deserve further attention because they sheds light on the collaborative effort made by courtiers and the imperial court to construct a literary world with the court as its centre. Although each academician may have had a different experience before they entered into the court, there are multiple accounts written by the literati to attest to the emergence of an unified style in the capital. For instance, the leading scholar Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄 (1283–1357) made the following observation:

From the time of the Yanyou reign (1314–1320) of Our Yuan dynasty, *belles lettres*

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[3] For a thorough discussion of the background of the academicians appointed to Kuizhang Academy, see Qiu Jiangning 邱江寧, *Yuandai Kuizhang ge xueshi yuan yu Yuandai wentan* 元代奎章閣學士院與元代文壇 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013), 55–99.

flourished day after day. All of the renowned men in the capital modelled themselves on the Wei, Jin and Tang dynasties, and this completely eliminated the flaws of the end times of the Song and Jurchen-Jin. Their works turned toward refinement and rectitude. Poetry underwent a significant change and drew close to antiquity. The poetry of those who came to the capital from the Jiangxi area also completely discarded former practices.

我元延祐以來，彌文日盛，京師諸名公，咸宗魏晉唐，一去宋金季世之弊，而趨於雅正，詩丕變而近於古。江西士之京師者，其詩亦盡棄舊習焉。[4]

Ouyang was not the only person who commented on the emergence of a unified style shared across different poets in the capital in the 1310s. Su Tianjue 蘇天爵 (1294–1352) also argued for the impact of the works composed by Yu Ji and his fellow courtier Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 (1279–1338), stating that:

From the time of the Yanyou reign, we have Master Yu [Ji] from the Shu Province and Master Ma [Zuchang] from Junyi, who were bruited about at the time for their tone of refinement and rectitude. All literati eventually turned to imitate them, and the practices of literary composition are now, alone, at their height.

延祐以來，則有蜀郡虞公、浚儀馬公以雅正之音鳴於時，士皆轉相效慕，而文章之習今獨為盛焉。[5]

Notice that both accounts describe a shift in the style embraced by the literati during the Yanyou era. This shift was facilitated through an imitation of the writings of the academicians in the capital. Both accounts use the term *yazheng* 雅正, which is translated as refinement and rectitude in the cited passages, to capture the aesthetic

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[4] Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄, *Ouyang Xuan quanji* 歐陽玄全集 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 160.

[5] *Quan Yuan wen* 全元文 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), vol. 40, 109.

preference of the Yanyou era. Hon-man Chan has argued that the term *yazheng* was repeatedly used in the Mongol Yuan dynasty to describe poetic works composed by the mid-Yuan literati in the capital.[6] While Chan focuses on tracing what *yazheng* (translated by Chan as "orthodox correctness") entails as a critical term, this paper will instead focus on the discursive construction of *yazheng*. In other words, instead of providing a thorough investigation of what *yazheng* may mean in the Chinese literary traditions, this paper argues that the Academicians deliberately cultivated a sense that their generation shared a common mode of writing, which concealed a diversity of styles.

This paper will begin by exploring Yu Ji's critical remarks and how he focused on cultivating a literary style that could represent his generation. Yu's vision was so influential that his follower, Su Tianjue, summarized the poetic style of the Yanyou era as *yazheng*. The next section will analyze the poems included in the anthology *Guochao wenlei* 國朝文類 (*Categorized Writings of Our Dynasty*) and how Su, as its compiler, tended to overlook the stylistic differences among courtiers in the Yanyou period, instead emphasizing a particular type of poetry that reflected Yu's vision. To illustrate these disparities, the poems of Jie Xisi will be used as a reference point to compare works anthologized in Su's compilation with those in Jie's own literary collection. Through a close examination of these poetic works, this paper aims to demonstrate the complexities of the aesthetic preferences of the Kuizhang Academicians and how the court intended to use Su's anthology to establish its authority on the matter of taste.

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[6] Hon-man Chan, "The Concept of *Yazheng* 雅正 (Orthodox Correctness) in the Chinese Poetic Tradition: with Special Reference to Yuan Period Criticism of Poetry," *Monumenta Serica* 62.1 (2015): 55–109.

## II. The Style of "Our Dynasty": Yu Ji and His Literary Criticisms

The desire to argue that there was a change in poetic style during the Yanyou era originates from the belief that aesthetic preferences are influenced by the socio-political climate of the time. This perspective was proposed by Yu Ji in his "Preface to the *Poetry Collection of Guoshan*" 嶧山詩集序:

The Mandate of Heaven is now in Our dynasty, and its vitality flourished in the deserts in the north. The personages possess grand and magnificent talents, and no one in the world could come close to them. This is why, in terms of martial achievements, they are without peers all under Heaven. No words are adequate to praise them for what passed on from their books and manuscripts. [...] Thereupon, the sounds in their heart-minds are manifested in the form of songs, which can fully illustrate this era's grandeur. The *qi* (vital force) changed when the time arrived, and no one can consciously stop this. This is not something a man with some petty tricks could really hope for. Brilliant scholars emerged, and the most worthy of the people were spread in the central plains as well as the foreign states. Culture flourishes and proliferates everywhere. This has been unparalleled in the recent past.

天運在國朝，元氣磅礴于龍朔，人物有宏大雄渾之稟，萬方莫及焉。是以武功經營，無敵於天下；簡策所傳，有不可勝贊者矣。[……] 於是，則又有發其心聲以為歌詠，足以鳴一代之雄盛。時至氣化，有不能自已者。非偏才小智，可冀其萬一也。士彬彬而起，一時黎獻，布在中外。人文宣暢，近古莫及也。[7]

In his praise of the literary achievements of the Yuan dynasty, Yu Ji alludes to the words of the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs* 詩大序, which states: "The poem is where that which is intently on the mind goes. In the heart-mind, it constitutes intent; coming

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[7] Yu Ji, *Yu Ji quanji* 虞集全集 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2007), 514.

out in language, it constitutes a poem" 詩者，志之所之也；在心為志，發言為詩.[8] However, instead of emphasizing how poetry expresses the thoughts and emotions of an individual, Yu Ji applies this formulation to the collective and suggests that culture flourishes in times of peace. It may be easy to dismiss this as merely an opportunity for Yu Ji to offer praise to the Mongol-Yuan, but a closer examination of his literary collection reveals that he frequently comments on the cultural achievements of different generations. One such example is his "Preface to *the Manuscripts of Master Wenzheng Cao Hanquan*" 曹文貞公漢泉漫稿序:

At an early age, I travelled to the capital and was able to meet with the literati in the imperial court. Most of them were great Confucian scholars from the Eastern Lu area. They demonstrated a calm and elegant ambience, and their essays were richly thorough and extravagant. I followed them and chanted their essays, yet this was not enough to understand their breadth and depth. I tried to look at the limits of their knowledge, but I found myself unable to fathom their limitations. Isn't it because the vital force is strong in the area where the mountains of Gui, Meng and Zulai[9] are located, and thus they could illustrate the brilliance of the culture of the generation?
某蚤歲游京師，得見朝廷文學之士，大抵皆東魯大儒君子也。氣象舒徐而儼雅，文章豐博而蔓衍，從而詠之，不足以知其深廣，極其所至，不足以究其津涯，此豈非龜、蒙、徂徠之間，元氣之充碩，以發揮一代斯文之盛者乎？[10]

As an outsider, Yu Ji is able to witness how the court can serve as a focal point for literati to exert their influence. He praises the literary works of the Shandong Confucians and argues that they represent the pinnacle of literary talent at the time.

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[8] *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 7. The translation is Stephen Owen's; see Owen, *Anthology of Chinese Literature* (New York: Norton, 1996), 37.

[9] Mountains of Gui, Meng and Zulai are located in the Lu area (modern Shandong).

[10] Yu Ji, *Yu Ji quanji*, 497.

Once again, the essay showcases how Yu Ji consciously connects the literary style of a generation with the vitality of a certain place or period. This consciousness urges him to create a style for his own generation, especially after his appointment to the Kuizhang Academy and the brief reinstitution of civil service examinations by the Mongol-Yuan court in 1314. This is particularly evident in the case where the Mongol-Yuan emperor bestowed a plank with his own calligraphy to a temple in Raozhou 饒州, and Yu Ji was asked to write a commemorative essay for the event. He stressed that he was deeply afraid he wouldn't be able to adequately praise the cultural achievements of his generation 深懼不足以奉揚一代之盛典.[11]

Yu Ji believes one of the court's tasks was to foster a particular generation's culture. In a recommendation essay, he used the phrase "the court would certainly wish to establish the discourse of the generation" 朝廷必欲成一代之言,[12] which reflects his mindset while serving the Yuan court. He considered it necessary to create a literary style that could represent his times. Yu wrote that a literary style that could potentially serve as an epitome of his generation should be distinctively calm and composed. He even went so far as to criticize *Chuci* 楚辭 (*the Verses of Chu*) and the poetry written by the Jian'an poets:

When the poems are composed, they should not possess the sound of long sighing about one's despair. For the rhapsodies of Qu [Yuan] and Song [Yu], they inherited the Airs and the Odes section [of the *Book of Songs*] from a distance but emerged from a fallen state or a barren country. The poets from the Jian'an reign (196–220) are also known for their extraordinary strength, but the dynasty they served is not a legitimate one. Certainly they are of no match with the gentlemen of today.

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[11] Ibid., 608.

[12] Ibid., 550.

作為歌詩，無幽憂長嘆之聲者矣。夫屈、宋之辭，遠接風雅，蓋出於亡國陋邦。建安諸人，亦號奇壯，而所居之朝非世正緒，固不可與今之君子，度長比大於當時矣。[13]

Yu Ji proposed that a literary style reflecting a peaceful era should be free from worries and anxieties. Though he didn't use the term *yazheng* (refined and elegant) here, one can infer from his criticism that the style he advocated should follow the principle of *ya* 雅 (Odes) passed down by the *Book of Songs* and be written during the age of a legitimate rule (*zheng* 正). Yu Ji sought to describe a kind of poetry that lacked the rage and anger of Qu Yuan 屈原 and wasn't as sorrowful as the works of the Jian'an poets. His core argument was that the poems of his age should appreciate the world. Yu Ji's vision was idealistic: since the society was at peace, the literature produced by poets living in such a harmonious world should be free from anxieties. He was drawn to a type of poetry that was less likely to express discontent about the socio-political circumstances, and his vision influenced his followers, especially Su Tianjue.

Su Tianjue was born into a prominent family. His father Su Zhidao 蘇志道 (1228–1320) was appointed as the Secretariat in the Department of State Affairs 尚書省 in 1309. Su followed his father to the capital and, at the age of 21, he became a student at the Imperial Academy, where he studied under renowned Confucian scholar Wu Cheng 吳澄 (1249–1333) and Yu Ji. In 1317, he came first in the Imperial Academy's examination and was later appointed and promoted to be an academician in 1329.[14] His studies in the capital and personal connections with most literati at court render his characterization of the courtly style more reliable. Yet the impression he

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[13] Ibid., 514.

[14] For a list of the biographical materials of Su Tianjue, see Wang Deyi 王德毅 et al. eds., *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoren* 元人傳記資料索引 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1979-1982), 2114–2115.

leaves for later readers may also be skewed by his personal preference and ideology.

## III. Creating an "Unified" Style through the Compilation of an Anthology

Since the beginning of the Yanyou era in 1314, Su Tianjue attempted to gather the literary works written by the prominent figures of the Yuan dynasty. The result was the publication of the anthology *Guochao wenlei* in 1334, consisting of 70 *juan* of literary texts. The first 8 *juan* are dedicated to various forms of poetry, including poetic expositions (*fu* 賦), elegiac rhapsodies (*sao* 騷), ritual songs, four-character verse, ancient-style poems, regulated verse and quatrains.

One preface by Wang Li 王理 indicates that this anthology aims to "incorporate the works of the writers of the Jin (most were not Jurchen) and those from the south of the Yangtze River to examine the works composed during the beginning of the dynasty, to describe the works during the Zhiyuan (1264–1294) and the Dade (1297–1307) reign to observe their accomplishments, and to choose the works since the Yanyou era to illustrate their glory" 合金人、江左以攷國初之作，述至元、大德以觀其成，定延祐以來以彰其盛.[15] At first glance, Wang's description seems to be a mere explanation of the anthology's scope. However, the teleological vision embedded in this description is intriguing. Upon closer examination of the authors selected for the anthology, it becomes apparent that Su Tianjue purposefully used it to emphasize the significance of Yu Ji. The table below shows the number of poems chosen for each Yanyou author:

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[15] Su Tianjue ed., *Guochao wenlei* 國朝文類 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1929), "*Guochao wenlei* xu," 1b.

| | Subgenre | Name | Works included |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Juan* 1 | Poetic expositions (*fu* 賦) | Yuan Bao 袁裒 (1260–1320) | 1 |
| | | Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348) | 1 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 (1279–1338) | 1 |
| | | Li Haowen 李好文 (1321 *jinshi*) | 1 |
| | Elegiac rhapsodies (*sao* 騷) | Yuan Jue 袁桷 (1266–1327) | 2 |
| | | Wang Shixi 王士熙 (d. 1343) | 1 |
| *Juan* 2 | Songs (*yuezhang* 樂章) | Su Tianjue 蘇天爵 | 5 |
| | Four-character verse (*siyan shi* 四言詩) | Yu Ji 虞集 | 2 |
| *Juan* 3 | Pentasyllabic ancient-style verse (*wuyan gushi* 五言古詩) | Yu Ji 虞集 | 8 |
| | | Gong Kui 貢奎 (1269–1329) | 1 |
| | | Wang Jie 王結 (1275–1336) | 1 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 1 |
| | | Fan Peng 范梈 (1272–1330) | 1 |
| | | Bozhulu Chong 孛術魯翀 (1279–1338) | 1 |
| | | Hu Kuan 胡寬 (n.d.) | 1 |
| | *Yuefu* poems and songs (*Yuefu gexing* 樂府歌行) | Yu Ji 虞集 | 1 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 2 |
| | | Wang Shixi 王士熙 | 2 |
| | | Fan Peng 范梈 | 1 |
| | | Xin Wenfang 辛文房 (fl. 1304–1324) | 1 |
| | | Jie Xisi 揭傒斯 (1274–1344) | 1 |
| | | Song Ben 宋本 (1281–1334) | 1 |
| *Juan* 5 | Heptasyllabic ancient-style verse (*qiyan gushi* 七言古詩) | Li Cai 李材 (1297–after 1335) | 1 |
| | | Yu Ji 虞集 | 3 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 1 |
| | | Wang Shixi 王士熙 | 1 |
| | | Fan Peng 范梈 | 1 |
| | | Xie Duan 謝端 (1279–1340) | 1 |
| | Mixed meter verse (*zayan shi* 雜言詩) | Zhang Jing 張經 (fl. 1310) | 1 |
| | | Deng Wenyuan 鄧文原 (1258–1328) | 1 |
| | | Li Jiong 李泂 (active in 1324) | 1 |
| | | Fan Peng 范梈 | 1 |
| | Poems of miscellaneous forms | Yuan Bao 袁裒 | 1 |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | (*zati* 雜體) | | |
| *Juan* 6 | Pentasyllabic regulated verse (*wuyan lüshi* 五言律詩) | Li Cai 李材 | 2 |
| | | Yuan Jue 袁桷 | 1 |
| | | Yu Ji 虞集 | 4 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 2 |
| | | Liu Wen 劉汶 (n.d.) | 2 |
| | Heptasyllabic regulated verse (*qiyan lüshi* 七言律詩) | Li Cai 李材 | 8 |
| | | An Xi 安熙 (1260–1311) | 1 |
| | | Li Jing 李京 (n.d.) | 1 |
| *Juan* 7 | | Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) | 16 |
| | | Yuan Jue 袁桷 | 2 |
| | | Deng Wenyuan 鄧文原 | 4 |
| | | Gong Kui 貢奎 | 1 |
| | | Zhang Yanghao 張養浩 (1270–1329) | 1 |
| | | Yu Ji 虞集 | 9 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 4 |
| | | Wang Shixi 王士熙 | 8 |
| | | Song Ben 宋本 | 1 |
| | | Liu Zhi 劉致 (n.d.) | 1 |
| | | Yang Jing 楊靜 (n.d.) | 1 |
| | | Li Yuandao 李源道 (n.d.) | 1 |
| | | Yang Zai 楊載 (1271–1323) | 3 |
| | | Zhou Yingji 周應極 (fl. 1309) | 1 |
| | | Li Feng 李鳳 (1254-1317) | 1 |
| | | Jie Xisi 揭傒斯 | 1 |
| *Juan* 8 | Pentasyllabic quatrains (*wuyan jueju* 五言絕句) | Wang Jie 王結 | 1 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 2 |
| | Heptasyllabic quatrains (*qiyan jueju* 七言絕句) | Wang Jie 王結 | 1 |
| | | Cao Yuanyong 曹元用 (d. 1329) | 1 |
| | | Zhang Yanghao 張養浩 | 1 |
| | | Yu Ji 虞集 | 6 |
| | | Ma Zuchang 馬祖常 | 3 |
| | | Wang Zhiqian 王執謙 (1266–1313) | 1 |
| | | Chen Guan 陳觀 (d. 1318) | 1 |
| | | Xin Wenfang 辛文房 | 1 |
| | | Zhang Chun 張淳 (n.d.) | 1 |
| | | Bao Zhonghua 鮑仲華 (n.d.) | 1 |

The above list shows us many intriguing details about Su Tianjue's aesthetic preference. Firstly, more than 90% of the poets featured in the Yanyou era section were courtiers who had served in the Kuizhang Academy. Yu Ji had the most poems included in the anthology, with a total of 34, followed by Ma Zuchang with 16. Zhao Mengfu should be excluded from our discussion as he passed away in 1322 and is generally not considered a poet active during the Yanyou era. I only included Zhao in the table above because, if we follow the original sequence of the book, he was arranged after Li Cai, who was active after the 1330s. However, this brings us to another problem: under most categories in the book, poets were arranged in rough chronological order, yet only in the "heptasyllabic regulated verse" category is the order slightly off. This may be due to substantially more verses chosen for that subgenre, and hence Su Tianjue did not impose such an arrangement on the poets. This brings our attention to another aesthetic preference demonstrated in this anthology: it places a strong emphasis on heptasyllabic regulated verse in contrast to other poetic forms, such as pentasyllabic quatrains.

One reason for this specific interest in heptasyllabic regulated verse may be related to the topics Su preferred. If we consider the topic of the poems anthologized by Su Tianjue, we can see that under "Pentasyllabic quatrains," only three sets of poems were included, a poetic sequence entitled "The Village" (*Shizhuang* 市莊) by Wang Jie, "Huang the Virtuous Woman" (*Jiefu Huangshi* 節婦黃氏), and "Visiting the Terrace of Li Ling" (*Guo Li Ling tai* 過李陵臺) by Ma Zuchang. All of these poems, including the set by Wang Jie, were moralistic in nature, and none of the quatrains anthologized in Su's compilation touched upon the theme of love or emotions. Turning to the poems anthologized under "Heptasyllabic regulated verse," we can see that most of the poems selected are on topics like parting or "meditations on the past" (*huaigu* 懷古). Some of the more famous quatrains composed during the Yanyou era on the theme of love and

landscape cannot be found in this anthology. I speculate that the disproportion in poetic form allowed Su to highlight the ethical dimension of the poetry composed by the Yanyou poets.

Upon closer examination of the anthology, we can observe that the representation of the "Four masters of the Yuan poetry," namely Yu Ji, Jie Xisi, Fan Peng, and Yang Zai, is quite uneven. Yu Ji has the most poems included in the collection, while the other three poets have fewer. This leads us to consider the differences in individual style among the four masters.

In the "Preface to *the Poetry Collection of Master Fan [Peng]*" 范先生詩序, Jie Xisi commented on an analogy previously made by Yu Ji:

Yu Ji once made a comment on this, saying, "The poems by Yang Zhonghong [i.e. Yang Zai] are like a warrior who had fought a hundred battles. The poems by Fan Deji [i.e. Fan Peng] are like Tang calligraphers following the calligraphy model of the Jin dynasty." He considered me as "a new wife just married for three days"[16] and compared himself to an "old clerk in the court of the Han dynasty." Those who heard this all had a good laugh.
伯生嘗評之曰：楊仲弘詩如百戰健兒，范德機詩如唐臨晉帖。以余為三日新婦，而自比漢庭老吏也。聞者皆大咲。[17]

Jie Xisi argues that Yu Ji's categorization of Fan Peng was inaccurate and proceeds to propose a series of analogies, such as "the clouds drifting in the autumn sky" 秋空行

[16] This is an allusion to the words of Cao Jingzong 曹景宗 in *Liangshu* 梁書 (*the Book of Liang*). In the original context, the image was used as a reference to someone whose actions are restrained. However, in this case, it seems to be a reference to the unruly behavior of a person, as it was believed that a newly-wed wife did not have enough time to learn how to behave appropriately.

[17] Jie Xisi, "Fan xiansheng shixu" 范先生詩序, in *Jie Xisi quanji* 揭傒斯全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 288.

雲 and “the thunder and sweeping rain on a sunny day” 晴雷卷雨.[18] Although Jie did not comment on how Yu Ji described his own poems, the stark contrast between an unruly newly-wed and an old clerk has attracted a lot of attention. Many anecdotal accounts revolve around how enraged Jie Xisi was after hearing Yu Ji’s words.[19] From the preface we have just read, it appears that Jie Xisi’s discontent stems from Yu Ji’s failure to fully capture the poetic style of Fan Peng, but he never seeks to correct Yu Ji’s descriptions of his own works. In any case, Yu Ji’s characterization provides a good starting point for us to ponder the stylistic differences among the court poets in the Yanyou era. To observe the contrast between the Four Masters, we can begin by reading some of Jie Xisi’s poems.

Let us begin by examining the work of Jie Xisi that was included in Su Tianjue’s anthology:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 李宮人琵琶引 | **Song of the *Pipa* of the Palace Lady Li** |
| | 茫茫青塚春風裏 | The green grave was lost in the vast expanse in the spring breeze, |
| | 歲歲春風吹不起 | Every year the spring breeze blows, yet no one arises. |
| | 傳得琵琶馬上聲 | Made known for the sound of *pipa* on horseback: |
| 4 | 古今只有王與李 | Throughout the ages, there are only Wang and Li. |
| | 李氏昔在至元中 | During the Zhiyuan reign in the past, Lady Li |
| | 少小辭家來入宮 | Left home at a young age and entered the palace. |
| | 一見世皇稱藝絕 | Once she met the emperor, her exquisite skills were praised, |
| 8 | 珠歌翠舞忽如空 | And bejewelled singers and dancers faded away all at once. |
| | 君王豈為紅顏惜 | How could it be that the ruler is longing for the fair one? |

[18] Ibid., 288.

[19] See, for instance, Wang Shizhen’s 王士禛 (1634-1711) *Chibei outan* 池北偶談 (Shandong: Ji Lu shushe, 2007), *juan* 16, 322.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 自是眾人彈不得 | This is only because no one can perform like her. |
| | 玉觴為舉樂乍停 | The jade cup was offered up, and the music suddenly ceased. |
| 12 | 一曲便覺千金直 | It feels like one single song is worth a thousand pieces of gold. |
| | 廣寒殿裏月流輝 | In the Guanghan Palace, light shimmers from the moon, |
| | 太液池頭花發時 | While the flowers bloom at the Taiye pool. |
| | 舊曲半存猶解譜 | Of old melodies half extant, she understood the score, |
| 16 | 新聲萬變總相宜 | Of myriad variations in new sounds, she was always just right. |
| | 三十六年如一日 | Thirty-six years passed like a day, |
| | 長得君王賜顏色 | She was always greeted by the ruler with a bright complexion. |
| | 形容漸改病相尋 | Her appearance gradually changed, and she also fell ill, |
| 20 | 獨抱琵琶空嘆息 | Alone, holding the *pipa*, she sighed in vain. |
| | 興聖宮中愛更深 | In the Xingsheng palace, she was more tenderly cherished. |
| | 承恩始得遂歸心 | She received the imperial favor and was able to fulfill her desire to return home. |
| | 時時尚被宮中召 | From time to time she was still summoned by the court, |
| 24 | 強理琵琶弦上音 | And forced herself to tune the strings of the *pipa*. |
| | 琵琶轉調聲轉澀 | The modal pitch of the *pipa* changed, and the melody turned bitter, |
| | 堂上慈親還佇立 | Her loving mother had long anticipated. |
| | 回看舊賜滿床頭 | She looked back at the goods bestowed before now filling the bed |
| 28 | 落花飛絮春風急 | Falling petals and flying catkins—so swift is the spring breeze![20] |

The poem opens with the imagery of the “green grave,” which alludes to the burial place of Wang Zhaojun, a famous Han palace lady from the first century BCE. Despite the arid landscape, her grave was said to be surrounded by green grass. Wang Zhaojun

[20] Su Tianjue ed., *Guochao wenlei*, *juan* 4, 13a–b.

was sent to marry the ruler of Xiongnu as a policy of appeasement and died in the northern borders. Though the spring breeze, a symbol of imperial favor, reaches her grave, it could never bring her back to life. The twist of the poem lies in the fourth line: unlike Wang Zhaojun, whose worth was not recognized in her lifetime, Palace Lady Li met a ruler capable of appreciating her skills in performing the *pipa*.

Once Jie Xisi portrays the imperial favor received by Palace Lady Li, he moves to another set of comparisons, modeling his work on the poems written for another famous woman in history, Prized Consort Yang 楊貴妃 (719–756). Lines 7–8 are a reworking of the scene in which Prized Consort Yang met the Tang emperor, as described in Bai Juyi's (772–846) poem "Song of Lasting Pain" 長恨歌:

| | |
|---|---|
| 天生麗質難自棄 | When Heaven begets beauteous things,<br>it is loath to let them be wasted, |
| 一朝選在君王側 | so one morning this maiden was chosen to be by the ruler's side. |
| 回眸一笑百媚生 | When she turned around with smiling glance,<br>she exuded every charm; |
| 六宮粉黛無顏色 | in the harem all who wore powder and paint of beauty<br>then seemed barren.[21] |

The beautiful ladies of the harem have been replaced by bejeweled singers and dancers whose performances suddenly seemed lackluster once the emperor caught a glimpse of Palace Lady Li's talents. However, one crucial difference sets Li apart from the Prized Consort: the reason for her appreciation. Whereas Yang was lauded for her beauty and

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[21] Bai Juyi, *Bai Juyi quanji* 白居易全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 158. The translation is Stephen Owen's; see Owen, *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, 442.

grace, Li's worth lay in her remarkable ability to perform. But the comparisons don't end there. In line 18, Jie once again alludes to another poem about Consort Yang—Li Bai's (701–762) "Qingping Melody" 清平調:

長得君王帶笑看　　She was always viewed by the ruler with a smile.[22]

Jie Xisi uses the language of love between Consort Yang and the Tang Emperor to describe the imperial favor received by Li. However, Li was no Consort Yang. Her relationship with the Yuan Emperor was not necessarily romantic and was more dependent on her exceptional *pipa*-playing skills. As Jie Xisi indicated in the preface to this poem:

The Assistant Magistrate of the Hu Province, surname Kang, told me that one palace lady Li was particularly skilful at performing *pipa*. In the nineteenth year of the Zhiyuan reign (1282), she entered the palace as a girl from a good family. She gained imperial favor, and the emperor compared her to Wang Zhaojun. During the Zhida era (1308–1311), she served in the Qingsheng Palace. Due to some problems with her foot, she was allowed to return home to help her mother. Wages were given out to her just like in the past. Kang asked me to compose a poem, and thus I wrote "Song of the *Pipa* of the Palace Lady Li."
鄠縣亢主簿言有李宮人者，善琵琶。至元十九年，以良家子入宮得幸，上比之昭君。至大中，入事興聖宮。比以足疾，乃得賜歸侍母，給內俸如故。因亢且乞詩于余，遂作〈李宮人琵琶引〉。[23]

From the preface to the poem, we can understand why Jie Xisi draws the analogy between Wang Zhaojun and Li in his poem. This is because the Yuan Emperor Khubilai

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[22] Li Bo, *Li Taibo quanji jiaozhu* 李太白全集校注 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2015), 598.

[23] Jie Xisi, *Jie Xisi quanji*, 108.

Khan 忽必烈 (1215–1294) made the analogy himself. However, it is worth noting that Li had been serving in the court for over 30 years, and the throne had been succeeded by the khan's descendants. Ultimately, this was not a love story that warrants the comparison between Li and Consort Yang. There are at least two other poems entitled "Song of the *Pipa* of the Palace Lady Li" 李宮人琵琶引 (one by Yuan Jue 袁桷 and another set of poetic sequences written by Wang Shixi 王士熙),[24] and none of them make a comparison between Li and Consort Yang. It is quite clear that Jie Xisi was the only person to borrow the language of romance to describe the imperial favor Li received while she was in court.

Jie's creation here is intriguing because it demonstrates his special sensitivity, which almost carries him away with the analogy he invented. Lines 19–25 describe the physical appearance of the palace lady, using the word *ai* 愛 (cherish) to describe the level of imperial grace Li received, a word often associated with romantic relationships. Jie's description of the sound of Li's *pipa* turning bitter evokes a sense of unfulfilled love. However, unlike the tragic fate of the Prized Consort, who was believed to have caused the An Lushan Rebellion and was subsequently killed, Li received imperial grace throughout and after her service at court. Jie thus erases the analogy by drawing attention to the objects received out of imperial favor and evoking the imagery of the stiff spring breeze at the end of the poem. The last line conveys a sense of nostalgia towards the bygone days that were swiftly blown away and would never return.

This poem is particularly intriguing because it sheds light on why Yu Ji referred to Jie Xisi as an "unruly newly-wed." Upon examining the poem, we can see that Jie had a penchant for using a sensuous language that is not necessarily related to the topic

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[24] Yuan Jue, *Yuan Jue ji jiaozhu* 袁桷集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 402–404; for Wang Shixi's quatrains, see Zhang Jingxing 張景星 et al. ed., *Yuanshi biecai ji* 元詩別裁集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013), 165–166.

he was writing about, yet still striking. Yu Ji was trying to capture how Jie Xisi writes with an unexpected twist by adding sensuous elements into his poetry. If we examine some of Jie's poems, we can see that he tends to write with a melancholic tone, even when the topic does not necessarily warrant such treatment.

Here we can use the poem "Two Virtuous Widows" 二貞詩 to illustrate this problem:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 關右有姬氏 | To the west of the Hangu Pass, there lies a Ji family, |
| | 父子早棄捐 | Whose father and son have long since passed away. |
| | 孀婦奉寡姑 | The younger widow serves her mother-in-law, |
| 4 | 誓死各芳年 | And they pledge to remain faithful despite their blossoming age. |
| | 膏沐誰復理 | Who would bother with hair oil any longer? |
| | 羅襦委篋間 | Their gossamer tunics are left in the storage box. |
| | 辛苦事蠶繅 | Enduring hardship, they labor in silk-making. |
| 8 | 祭祀亦靡愆 | They never committed a fault while offering sacrifices. |
| | 父母既莫奪 | Even their parents could not convince them to remarry; |
| | 媒妁徒空言 | The matchmakers waste their words in vain. |
| | 鳧雁安所施 | Where would the ducks and goose be sent as dowry? |
| 12 | 幣玉視如煙 | They see money and jade as fleeting smoke. |
| | 寧與枯瘁沒 | They prefer to die with haggard and grim faces, |
| | 不為歡樂存 | Rather than to live with joy and pleasure. |
| | 婉婉桃李花 | How exquisite are the blossoms of peach and plum! |
| 16 | 春鳥何翩翩 | Birds dance in flight in spring. |
| | 萬物各知時 | All things recognize their time to flourish. |

姑婦獨纍然　　But the in-laws were left alone in frustration.[25]

This poem sets the scene by describing the background of two virtuous widows who were married into the Ji family. After the deaths of the father and son of the Ji family, the two widows decided to remain faithful to their husbands and not remarry, even though they were still young and attractive. The first twelve lines of the poem are dedicated to portraying the widows' way of life and their strong determination not to remarry, despite the active efforts of their parents and matchmakers to persuade them otherwise. This culminates in the couplet about their resolution to die without pursuing pleasure and joy. A logical conclusion would be to praise the widows' perseverance and bring the poem to an uplifting close, but instead, Jie Xisi turns unexpectedly to a set of imageries related to spring. Contrasting the blooming flowers and dancing birds with the lives of the women, the poem ends with a melancholic tone, suggesting that their devotion to their husbands may have caused them to miss out on the prime of their lives.

By incorporating images of spring, Jie may have intended to emphasize the widows' desolation and evoke sympathy for them. However, the stark contrast between the blooming flowers and dancing birds and the widows' lives also suggests an alternative interpretation: to cast doubt on the reasoning behind their decision to remain faithful to their deceased husbands. Jie Xisi deliberately avoids a straightforward ending, introducing ambiguity that would not be welcomed by Yu Ji and his followers. This is precisely the type of "unruliness" that Yu Ji would like to avoid, and it is understandable why Jie's "Two Virtuous Widows" would not be included in Su's compilation.

Looking back at the "Song of the *Pipa* of the Palace Lady Li" through this lens,

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[25] Jie Xisi, *Jie Xisi quanji*, 94.

we notice that Su Tianjue could potentially include this poem in his anthology because Jie erases the comparison between Li and Consort Yang towards the end of the poem and focuses back on the imperial grace Li obtained due to her performances at court. The sensuous overtones were ultimately tamed in the poem by tying the poem back to the "spring breeze" that appeared only in the beginning when Li was compared to Wang Zhaojun. If we take a look at the anthology *Guochao wenlei* again, we would notice that even when Su decided to include poems written on certain poetic motifs that could be potentially more sensuous, he would choose those that could potentially be read in a moralistic way. For instance, a series of twelve quatrains entitled "Palace lyrics" 宮詞 by Ma Zuchang was anthologized in Su's anthology. Most of the poems in this series seeks to capture the intimate moments in the following way:

| | |
|---|---|
| 繭館繅絲濕翠翹 | Spinning silk from cocoons in the rearing house, her kingfisher hairpin was soaked, |
| 夫人纖指織龍綃 | The lady's slim fingers wove silk from the dragon palace. |
| 羅襦雙珮清晨響 | Paired pendants on a silk gauze jacket chimed in the fresh morning, |
| 只恐君王有晏朝 | She only worried that the ruler had an audience in the late afternoon.[26] |

The poem begins with a sensual tone, describing the hairpins and fingers of a palace lady fully occupied with weaving a silk brocade. The imagery of her jade plaques chiming in the early morning signifies that she has woken up at dawn to rush to the rearing house to work, in anticipation of the emperor's potential attendance at an

[26] Su Tianjue ed., *Guochao wenlei*, *juan* 8, 15b–16a.

imperial audience in the afternoon.

"Palace lyrics" often focus on specific parts of the female body and have a sensual quality. This poem is no exception, as it describes the headwear, delicate fingers, outer garment, and accessories of the palace lady. However, the poem can also be read in a moralistic way: the palace lady is fulfilling her duty while considering the emperor's work responsibilities. The romantic feelings depicted in the poem are delicately balanced with the daily duties of both the palace lady and the emperor. Ma Zuchang's use of sensual language in the poem contains a moralistic message, explaining why Su Tianjue included such poems in *Guochao wenlei*.

Despite the title of Su's anthology suggesting that it is a selection of the representative works of Our Dynasty, this compilation began as a private project. However, after its completion, Su submitted a copy to the court, and an imperial edict was issued to commission the West Lake Academy 西湖書院 to print the anthology. The edict made the following claim:

In particular, the literature of Our Dynasty is flourishing, and a compilation of these works is deemed appropriate for dissemination in the current era. This will promote the great virtues of the state's governance and assist the official historians who may have made omissions. Such a compilation is not without benefit in relation to the classics and official documents. […] Although the works anthologized [in *Guochao wenlei*] are abundant in scope, the selection and omission are mostly related to governance. If the compilation were printed and distributed by the schools of Jiangnan using their funds, it would not only broaden the knowledge of scholars from all corners of the world but also transmit the glory of the literature of this generation.
國朝文章尤盛，宜有纂述，以傳於時。于以敷宣治政之宏休，輔翼史官之放失。其於典冊，不為無補。[……] 雖文字固富於網羅，而去取多關於政治。若於江南學校錢糧內刊板印行，豈惟四方之士廣其見聞，實使一代之文，煥然可述矣。

The edict was included at the beginning of the anthology as an official endorsement of Su's compilation. This demonstrates the completion of a full circle: the court provided a platform for courtiers like Yu Ji and Su Tianjue to gain national recognition and social connections, which allowed them to put their poetic vision into practice. Su Tianjue, in turn, utilized his position and connections to compile an anthology that purported to represent the literary preference of their era. By endorsing and aiding the print of the anthology, the court could then assert that it fostered a golden age marked with literary achievements. Through this process, the court actively engages in the literary field, positioning itself as the cradle of poetic talent and the disseminator of literary prowess.

## IV. Conclusion

In this paper, my aim is to demonstrate how Su Tianjue, inspired by Yu Ji, sought to portray the literature of the Yanyou reign as *yazheng* (refined and rectified). By compiling an anthology that focuses solely on poems that tend to be more moralistic, Su created an impression that most courtiers appointed in the Kuizhang Academy during the Yanyou era wrote poems that were less sensual and luscious. However, this oversimplified view overlooks the complex aesthetic preferences of the time. By examining the works of less represented Kuizhang academicians, such as Jie Xisi, we can clearly see a more intricate aesthetic pursuit beneath Su's representation.

Through a comparison of *Guochao wenlei* and another anthology, *Huang Yuan fengya* 皇元風雅 (*Airs and Odes of the August Yuan*), Chan Hon-man points out that

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[27] Su Tianjue ed., *Guochao wenlei*, 1b–2a.

Su's anthology deliberately omitted poems written in vernacular language.[28] Both Chan's and my observations point in the same direction. Instead of providing readers with a comprehensive picture of Yuan poetry during the Yanyou era, Su Tianjue consciously censored poems that did not fit his poetic vision. While one may conclude from Su's anthology and observations that the literary works composed by the Academicians of the Yuan dynasty exhibited a unified style, we should be wary that this impression may be skewed by our sources.

A case study of *Guochao wenlei* is hence significant for two reasons. First, it allows us to reconsider the roles an imperial court may play in the circuit of literary production, reception and dissemination, and how a sense of court literature may have engendered by the courtiers through the compilation of anthologies. In this particular situation, the Yuan court's direct involvement in upholding a certain literary style came after courtiers actively put their poetic ideals into practice. In other words, the courtiers were not simply following the orders of the court, but rather were agents who could prompt the court to advocate a certain mode of writing.

Secondly, although studying anthologies may provide insight into the formation of court literature, they may not be sufficient as a source for capturing the complexities of the Yuan poetic scene. This is exemplified in the case of Jie Xisi, whose poems included in the *Guochao wenlei* anthology may lead us to underestimate his penchant for poetic innovation. Therefore, a comprehensive review of the poetry collections of individual writers is necessary to gain a more nuanced understanding of the similarities and differences among members of a poetic circle.

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[28] Chan Hon-man 陳漢文, "Su Tianjue de *Yuan wenlei* yu Yuandai zhonghou qi de Dadu wentan" 蘇天爵的《元文類》與元代中後期的大都文壇, *Renwen Zhongguo xuebao* 人文中國學報 21 (2015): 287–323.

# 建構「一代之雄盛」：蒙元治下奎章閣文人的詩風

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**摘要：**宋元以來，文化的重心似有從宮廷轉移到地方的傾向。這讓研究者更關心文人如何建構地方的學術傳統，更著重研究古詩文在蒙元廢除科考時在地方社會發揮的作用。對於元代古詩文的研究，論者一般從不同的社群切入，或闡述他們的文學活動，或分析他們的詩學主張。但在諸多蒙元時期興起的文學團體中，奎章閣文人卻是一顯著的例外。這群學士透過與朝廷的聯繫，形成了一特殊的文學群體。本文將先探討虞集的文學評論，追蹤他的思想如何影響蘇天爵等奎章閣文人，使他們自覺地標舉一種能代表蒙元的詩文風格。本文會進而討論蘇天爵編撰《國朝文類》的做法，從詩文的編選說明他們如何嘗試建構一套代表他們一代的文學風格。蘇天爵刻意抹煞朝臣之間風格的差異，只收錄能夠反映虞集視野的詩歌。在蘇天爵編訂《國朝文類》以後，朝廷下旨讓地方書院編印這部總集，藉此說明蒙元一代詩歌的趨向，讓原來複雜多元的蒙元詩歌呈現出一種更單一的風貌。

**關鍵詞：**奎章閣、元詩、虞集、揭傒斯、蘇天爵