

# Medieval Poetry, Liang to Mid Tang

Prof. Luke Bender

EALL 301/601, "Ancient and Medieval Chinese Poetry"

## Course Description

This semester's class will focus on Chinese poetry and literary theory from the sixth century through the end of the eighth.

Though the late Southern Dynasties were often denigrated as decadent by Tang writers, the period provided both the poetic and the theoretical bases upon which these same Early- and High-Tang poets and theorists developed their own definitive styles and concerns. By reading a broad range of poetic genres—including *yuefu*, court poetry, exile poetry, and even a few *fu*—alongside what remains of contemporary literary theory and criticism, we will track the complicated struggle with the past that defined the literary scene throughout the first two centuries of the Tang, up to the more radical departures of the Mid-Tang era.

This class is designed to be accessible for students who do not specialize in the literature of this period, and simultaneously to provide an in-depth introduction to research for students who might decide to work professionally with these materials. Every week we will thus have a short selection of readings in the original, accompanied by a longer selection of readings that will be provided both in the original and in English translation. Please read as much as you can of these supplemental texts, as they will provide the context necessary for in-depth discussions of the primary texts we will translate.

Of course, much more is relevant for each week than we can possibly read in the time we have this semester. This is true even when it comes the late Six Dynasties and the Early Tang, from which only the slightest fragments of a rich and vast literary culture survive; it is even more true when we get into the High and Mid Tang, where the magnitude of what remains to us starts to make gains upon the magnitude of what has been lost. If we read broadly, therefore, we run the risk of shallowness; if we read a single poet's work, or a single theme, in depth, then we run the risk of missing the larger picture. In the assignments for the class, I have attempted to compromise: to choose a few poets each week to read with some sustained attention. The hope is that this will provide us both some breadth and some depth; but students are invited to read around what I have assigned, either within these poets' works or in the works of their contemporaries, for their written assignments. There are whole eras and whole topics (e.g., the poetry of the Northern Dynasties) that we are skipping over, along with the corpora of many great poets.

The schedule of readings is, at this point, provisional, and may change depending upon who ultimately decides to take the class. Please feel free to reach out to me to discuss your interests, and what you would like to get out of the course.

### Prerequisites:

The prerequisite for this course is one year of Classical/Literary Chinese (or *kambun/kobun*), either at Yale or elsewhere. Modern Chinese is not required, and students are not expected to know the pronunciation of the texts we will read in Mandarin (i.e., Korean, Japanese, Cantonese, etc. pronunciation is fine). Students who have never taken Literary Chinese but have reason to believe that they can handle the course readings (e.g. native speakers of Chinese or Japanese) should consult the instructor.

As a warning, some of the texts we will read are quite difficult. That is, unfortunately, the price of admission for much literature in the sixth and seventh centuries. Students who have trouble with a particular reading should work together with classmates, and, if the texts still prove impenetrable, should write to me at least one day before class. In some cases, if you send me your best attempt at a translation, I will be willing to provide you with my own working translations so that we can spend class time discussing the texts in more detail.

### Readings

All assigned readings for this course will be found on Canvas.

As background, please read David R. Knechtges, “From the Eastern Han through the Western Jin (AD 25–317)”; Xiaofei Tian, “From the Eastern Jin through the early Tang (317–649)”; and Stephen Owen, “The Cultural Tang (650–1020)” in Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, eds., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, volume I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Tian and Owen also have more in-depth discussions of Liang and Tang poetry, respectively. See Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star* and Owen, *The Poetry of the Early T'ang*, *The Golden Age of Chinese Poetry: The High Tang*, *The End of the Chinese Middle Ages*, and *The Late Tang*. These books are not required, but you may want to consult them nonetheless.

The bibliography that could be given for this class is immense. For topics in Han and Six-Dynasties literature, consult David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2010); these volumes will be on reserve at Bass Library. I will provide a basic bibliography on Tang poetry as well.

### Requirements

The major work of this course is coming to class prepared to discuss the readings. That means translating the assigned poems, familiarizing yourself with the material that is provided in translation, and reading any secondary materials assigned for the week.

Students should also post a comment, question, or a response to someone else's comment or question on the discussion board on Canvas every week, preferably by the evening before class. These

comments can be simple requests for translation help, or they can be observations about a poem, or an author, or a period, or they can be the beginnings of arguments you might want to make about our texts, or research questions you develop while reading them. You can also respond to others' comments, or offer translation help. The purpose of these comments is to ensure that we get into depth in our in-class discussions.

Undergraduate students enrolled in EALL 301 will submit three written assignments, the first due October 11, the second November 15, and the third December 18, all by 5:30pm. These assignments are flexible. You may do some combination of extra annotated translations and short close-reading papers. Extra translations should involve the full, annotated translation of at least 36 lines of poetry. Close-reading papers should be 3–5 pages long, and may concern any of the poetry we have read, or that has been provided to you in translation. Any undergraduate who wishes to write a final research paper instead should consult the instructor.

Graduate students will normally submit one final research paper of around 18–22 pages. Please talk to me about your topic by November 15th. Graduate students who are not specialists in Chinese literature, and who want to write either on an adjacent topic, or would prefer an alternate sort of assignment (such as three short papers or annotated translations), should consult with me in the first few weeks of class.

### Criteria for Evaluation:

weekly preparation: 50%

written work: 50%

### Statement to Students on their Academic Integrity

You may not under any circumstances present anyone else's work, words, or ideas as your own. Please be sure to review Yale's Academic Integrity Policy (<http://yalecollege.yale.edu/new-students/class-2019/academic-information/intro-undergrad-education/academic-honesty>) and the resources for understanding and avoiding plagiarism available at the Center for Teaching and Learning (<http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources>). If you are ever unsure as to whether a particular example does or does not constitute plagiarism, please consult the instructor before submitting your work.

### Schedule of Readings

#### September 3: Course Introduction

No readings. An introduction to the digital and print resources necessary to work with the materials of the class.

#### September 10: *Yuefu* and Old Poems

Basic background reading in the earlier poetic traditions that inform Liang and Early Tang poetry. Selections from “Han” *yuefu* 樂府, the “Nineteen Old Poems” 古詩十九首, the poetry of Ruan Ji 阮籍, the *yuefu* of the southlands, and the creation of the frontier *yuefu* subgenre.

As you read these poems, note where they survive. Almost all are recorded, and were probably fixed, in anthologies from either the Qi or the Liang.

### September 17: Liang Poetry

A selection of what survives from the poetry of the Liang dynasty. We will focus on Xiao Yan 蕭衍 (Liang Wudi), Wu Jun 吳均, Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽, and Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (Liang Jianwendi). Translations of one instance of group court composition involving Xiao Gang, Liu Xiaoyi 劉孝儀, Liu Zun 劉遵, Wang Taiqing 王臺卿, Xu Ling 徐陵, and Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾.

As you read this week, pay attention to the sources given by Lu Qinli as to where these poems survive. Poems that only survive on Tang encyclopediae, or only in encyclopediae and *Wenyuan yinghua*, are sometimes only fragments, and should be treated with caution. Note the paucity of sources and the way those sources determine the content of what survives.

### September 24: Liang Literary Theory

The Liang dynasty represents the first real flowering of explicit literary theory and literary criticism in China. Much of this has been previously translated into English (including the entirety of *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍), allowing us to read a significant percentage of what survives. We will also translate a few brief pieces.

As you read this material, bear in mind what poetry remains to us from the Liang itself. How do the literary values articulated in these theoretical and critical texts diverge from, shape, or reinterpret the poetry we have read so far?

### October 1: After the Liang

Readings in the poetry of Liang courtiers who lived out the remainder of their lives under other dynasties, particularly Yu Xin 庾信, Xu Ling 徐陵, Jiang Zong 江總, and Chen Shubao 陳叔寶 (Chen Houzhu).

We will also read *fu* on the Liang's collapse by Yu Xin, Shen Jiong 沈炯, Jiang Zong, and Yan Zhitui 顏之推. As you read, consider how these *fu* depict the Liang, and in particular, how they make the Liang into a painful or useful past.

### October 8: Poetry of the Sui and Early Tang, through 650

Poetry from the Sui and the first decades of the Tang survives only very fragmentarily, albeit in venues that prejudice survival in rather different ways from what we have read so far. Following Jia Jinhua's 賈晉華 useful tabulation of surviving court poetic occasions in the Zhenguan reign, we will read two instances of group composition preserved in the *Hanlin xueshi ji* 翰林學士集. We also read more broadly in the poetry that survives of Li Baiyao 李百藥, Yu Shinan 虞世南, Wang Ji 王績, and Shangguan Yi 上官儀.

### October 15: Sui and Early Tang Literary Theory

The early Tang produced a brief flood of literary criticism and literary theory, though nothing nearly so systematic as the *Wenxin diaolong*. Many of these texts derive from imperial projects, and aim

both to justify the study of *wen* and simultaneously to provide parameters for its normative practice. It is in this period that attitudes towards the Southern Dynasties begin to take shape. We also see in this material the beginnings of the “*fugu*” 復古 impulse, which has often been identified as an important current in Tang literature, and in particular, as the current that would eventually lead to the innovations of the Mid Tang.

### October 22: The Four Elite Writers of the Early Tang

This week we will be reading selections from the poetry, *fu*, and prose of the so-called “Four Elite Writers of the Early Tang” 初唐四傑: Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰, Luo Binwang 駱賓王, Wang Bo 王勃, and Yang Jiong 楊炯. These writers were not a real social group, and they belong to two separate generations. But they were all noted in their time and in the decades that followed for their splendid (and often very difficult) parallel prose, and for moving away in their poetry from the grace of court poetry. This is not a coincidence, since these were among the first writers of the Tang to successfully claim cultural authority apart from a high government office.

### October 29: The *Fugu* Impulse, Early and High Tang

The literary “revolution” supposedly sparked by Chen Zi’ang 陳子昂 has often been accounted one of the most important turning points of the Early Tang, both for the development of High Tang poetry and for the so-called “Confucian revival” of the Mid Tang. We will read his *ganyu* 感遇 poems alongside similar series of “ancient airs” written by Wang Ji, Zhang Jiuling 張九齡, Li Bai 李白, and Yuan Jie 元結. As it turns out, the impulses of this genre in the Early and High Tang periods do not seem to be very “Confucian” after all.

### November 5: Exile of the Court Poets

This week, we will be tracking the careers of Song Zhiwen 宋之問 and Shen Quanqi 沈佺期. These poets were among the most successful poets of Wu Zetian’s court, but both were exiled to the distant south after her incipient Zhou dynasty was overthrown. There, they wrote some of the most interesting poetry of their careers, poetry that foreshadowed the High Tang.

Availing ourselves again of Jia Jinhua’s reconstructions of the *Jinglong wenguan ji* 景龍文官記, we will also read a few group compositions of Zhongzong’s reign. These poems will give us an opportunity to discuss the development of the formal prosody known as “regulated verse” 律詩 or “recent-style verse” 近體詩.

### November 12: High Tang Poetry I

The High Tang period witnessed the flourishing and diversification of the poetic art. We will read a fairly broad selection of poetry in translation, and focus in our translations on Meng Haoran 孟浩然 and Wang Wei 王維. These two writers are often treated as a pair, but they have very different styles, and represent different parts of the fragmenting social world of poetry. Both represent a sort of poetic grace, but grace of very different kinds.

I will also provide you with translations from two High Tang texts of poetic theory, the “*Lun wen yi*” 論文意 attributed to Wang Changling 王昌齡 and Jiaoran’s 皎然 *Statutes of Poetry* 詩式.

**November 19: High Tang Poetry II**

This week we will be reading the High Tang poets most known for their *yuefu*, or for texts in *yuefu*-adjacent genres, such as frontier poetry. We will focus on Wang Changling, Li Bai, and Cen Shen 岑參. I will also upload Wu Jing's 吳兢 "Yuefu guti yaojie" 樂府古題要解; just skim this briefly.

We will also peruse three High Tang anthologies: the *Guoxiuji* 國秀集, the *Heyue yingling ji* 河嶽英靈集, and the *Yutai houji* 玉台後集. Consider the different aesthetic sensibilities of each. Consider also the way each situates the art in contemporary social contexts.

**December 3: New *Yuefu***

This week will focus on the so-called "New *Yuefu* Movement" of Bai Juyi 白居易 and Yuan Zhen 元稹. We will read a few scattered precursors of the movement, including famous poems by Du Fu 杜甫. We will also read the main theoretical statements about New *Yuefu* by Bai Juyi.

In this final class, we will also spend some time discussing the way the art of poetry has changed from the Liang dynasty, and in particular, the way that the art's relationship with the past has changed over three hundred years.