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The Lady and Her Scribes:
Dealing with the Multiple Dunhuang Copies
of Wei Zhuang's "Lament of the Lady of Qin"

INTRODUCTION

Like medieval European literature, written poetry in Tang-dynasty China was always produced, and almost always circulated and received, by means of handwritten manuscripts. Yet while scholars of medieval European literature have devoted considerable attention to the issues at stake when approaching texts produced before the age of print, research on Tang poetry, whether in Asia or the West, has paid little attention to these studies and what relevance they might have for the study of the production and circulation of poetic literature in the particular manuscript culture of the Tang.¹ This state of affairs is understandable: as much European literature considered to be medieval was produced more recently than the Tang and was written not on paper but on the far more durable (if expensive and difficult to manufacture) media of parchment or velum,² a good deal of it is still extant. China's early invention and use of paper, a cheaper but also more fragile material, did mean that literacy and textual production were substantially more wide-spread and common among the upper classes in Tang dynasty China than they were within the same group in medieval Europe. Woodblock printing, which began in the Tang and

¹ There are some exceptions to this generalization. Stephen Owen notes the importance of textual history of Tang poetry and laments how little we know about it in *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1981), pp. 323–24, fn. 5. Xu Jun is one of the few Chinese scholars to deal with the specific issues of manuscript transmission of Tang poetry. See Xu Jun 徐俊, ed., *Dunhuang shiji canjuan jikao* 敦煌詩集殘卷輯考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), pp. 8–52. For Chinese reading practices from the Six Dynasties through the Song and the impact of woodblock printing, see Jean-Pierre Drège, "La Lecture et l'écriture en Chine et la xylographie," *Études chinoise* 9 (1991), pp. 77–111.

² It has been estimated that a single copy of the *Book of Kells* produced around 800 AD required the slaughter of a herd of 150 calves. See Ingo F. Walther and Norbert Wolf, *Codices illustres: The World's Most Famous Illustrated Manuscripts, 400–1600* (Köln: Taschen, 2001), p. 18.

expanded greatly in succeeding periods, further ensured that modern scholars studying the Tang would enjoy access to sources whose great number and variety would be the envy of European medievalists. Yet the fragility of paper meant that the numerous and wide-spread texts were less able than parchment to withstand the forces of time and nature. Chinese sources thus very rarely include physical texts that have survived from the Tang itself. With a paucity of actual manuscripts to study, it is not surprising scholars have not made researching the peculiarities of manuscripts a priority.

The aim of the present study is to begin filling this gap, for scholars of Tang literature are indeed not completely bereft of extant Tang dynasty texts; the cache of manuscripts found in the Dunhuang cave system in northwest China near the turn of the twentieth century provides us with tens of thousands of them. My particular focus will be eight Dunhuang manuscript copies of the late-Tang poet Wei Zhuang's 韋莊 (836–910) lengthy narrative poem on the sack of Chang'an 長安 during the Huang Chao 黃巢 rebellion in the late-ninth century, "Qinfu yin" 秦婦吟 ("Lament of the Lady of Qin"). Rather than address the poem as a literary work as others have done,³ I approach the manuscripts as distinctly physical objects whose numerous differences may well be as important as their similarities to our understanding of the actual material contexts in which Tang poetry was produced and circulated. The theoretical basis for this approach does not come from traditional and modern work on Tang poetry itself; it instead grows out of recent scholarship on medieval European manuscripts that in turn takes much of its inspiration from deconstructionalist and post-structuralist literary theory of the past twenty-five years. In what follows I will give a brief

³ See, for example, Robin D. S. Yates, *Washing Silk: The Life and Selected Poetry of Wei Chuang (834?-910)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Council on East Asian Studies, 1988), and Dore Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry: The Late Han through T'ang Dynasties* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1988). "Qinfu yin" was one of the first poetic works from the manuscripts to enjoy concerted scholarly attention. Lionel Giles, in his 1926 *T'oung Pao* article, "The Lament of the Lady of Ch'in," describes discovering three manuscript copies of the poem in the Stein collection of manuscripts in 1919, just over a decade after Stein took them from Dunhuang. These are the manuscripts that later came to be numbered S692, S5476, and S5477; *TP* 24.4 (1926), pp. 305–80. The great Chinese scholar Wang Guowei 王國維 had previously discussed the content and dating of the poem in his 1923 article "Wei Zhuang de Qinfu yin" 韋莊的秦婦吟, *Beida guoxue ji kan* 北大國學季刊 1.4 (1923), pp. 693–99. For other early scholarship on the poem see Xu, *Dunhuang shiji*, pp. 230–31. See also Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Du 'Qinfu yin'" 讀秦婦吟, *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 11.4 (1936), pp. 951–68. For a summary of various readings of the poem, including recent Marxist criticisms of Wei Zhuang as a reactionary, see Gao Guofan 高國藩, *Dunhuang suwenhua xue* 敦煌俗文化學 (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 1999), pp. 514–22. Finally, most of the important (and less important) pre-1990 Chinese scholarship on the poem, including many of the articles cited above, can be found in Yan Tingliang 顏廷亮 and Zhao Yiwu 趙以武, eds., *Qinfu yin yanjiu huilu* 秦婦吟研究彙錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1990).

introduction to some of the pertinent approaches to textual criticism current in the West and how they relate to the situation in pre-print China. I will then turn my attention to the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts themselves and examine what these documents can and cannot tell us about how Tang poetry existed during the Tang itself.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM IN THE WEST

If scholars of Tang literature have made up some ground on our Europeanist counterparts by now having primary source material to study, we still lag behind them in developing methodologically and theoretically sound approaches to this material. I believe that we have much to learn from the work that has already been done on medieval European manuscripts: both the successes and failures of these studies can be of great assistance to scholars of Tang manuscripts as we develop our own approaches. In what follows I will thus give a brief outline of some of the important trends in Western textual criticism over the last century. This discussion is by no means meant to be exhaustive and will focus primarily on those aspects of Western textual criticism that are most applicable to circumstances surrounding the production and circulation of Tang poetry.

One major branch of Western textual criticism has concerned itself primarily with working backwards from extant texts to recreate an author’s imagined autograph.⁴ As Paul Maas has stated, “We have no autograph manuscripts of the Greeks and Roman classical writers and no copies which have been collated with the originals; the manuscripts we possess derive from the originals through an unknown number of intermediate copies... . The business of textual criticism is to produce a text as close as possible to the original (*constitution textus*).”⁵ Maas and many others took as their methodological basis the Lachmannian or recensionist method (developed by the Prussian scholar Karl Lachmann; 1793–1851) of grouping extant texts into stemma and working backwards to create a text containing the least “scribal ‘corruption.’”⁶ Though practitioners held that the recensionist method allowed the editor to identify and eliminate errors and variation objectively, without

⁴ I use the term “text” in this study to refer to actual physical texts, not in the broader sense that it has come to have in recent literary criticism.

⁵ Paul Maas (Barbara Flower, trans.), *Textual Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p. 1.

⁶ Elizabeth J. Bryan, *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture: The Otho Lazamon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 48. See also James Thorpe, *Principles of Textual Criticism* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1972), p. 108.

having recourse to a vague sense of literary judgment, it suffers from a number of flaws that eventually caused it to fall out of favor. First, it assumes that any one scribe would have been working from only a single copy text. The possibility otherwise would arise that he would “contaminate” a particular stemma by mixing families.⁷ Though the issue here is with written texts, there is ample reason to believe that medieval European scribes (and those of Tang China) would not only use more than one copy text, but might also copy down parts of a work from memory, using the copy texts to fill in where their memory faltered. In either case textual contamination is always a real possibility regardless of its methodological inconvenience.

Second, it depends on the counterintuitive idea that alteration of texts in the course of transmission happens in a very particular and consistent fashion and that scribes are mechanical in their reproduction of previous errors but unreliable in that they will inevitably introduce new ones. As Bernard Cerquiglini states, this form of textual criticism would collapse if it was forced to “think that a scribe, when confronted with an uncertain reading, for example, might be able to improve it or indeed even rediscover the ‘original’ reading.”⁸ Again, the only real justification for this assumption is that the internal logic of this particular method requires it. The recensionists thus not only desire to return to a pristine origin, they require an oddly pristine process of degeneration to accomplish this task.

Lachmannian-based approaches to textual criticism remained influential well into the 1960s, but as early as the first decades of the twentieth century, many scholars sought alternatives. Joseph Bédier focused on using his own knowledge of the literature in addition to “such criteria as coherence of sense, regularity of spelling, and form of grammar,” to find a single “best text” from among extant witnesses, and reproducing it faithfully with little editing.⁹ Bédier did not deny that changes occur in the course of transmission, but rather felt that there

⁷ See Thomas G. Tansell, *Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing* (Charlottesville: U.P. of Virginia, 1990), p. 306. Bernard Cerquiglini opines of this sort of textual criticism that it is a “bourgeois, paternalist, and hygienist system of thought about the family; it cherishes filiation, tracks down adulterers, and is afraid of contamination”; Cerquiglini (Betsy Wing, trans.), *In Praise of the Variant* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U.P., 1999), p. 49.

⁸ Cerquiglini, *Praise of the Variant*, p. 49. See also Thorpe, *Principles of Textual Criticism*, p. 112: “A text is never self-correcting or self-rejuvenating, and the ordinary history of the transmission of a text, without the intervention of author or editor, is one of progressive degeneration.” Though often critical of the Lachmannian approach, Thorpe seems to agree with its basic concept of unidirectional textual degeneration.

⁹ See Thorpe, *Principles of Textual Criticism*, p. 114; Tanselle, *Textual Criticism*, pp. 309–11; and Cerquiglini, *Praise of the Variant*, pp. 54–71.

was rarely a legitimate basis from which one could identify and classify such changes. In this view, recensionists want to eliminate history and its contingencies while Bédier and his followers embrace a text's evolution and the fundamental materiality it displays.¹⁰

Much as the "best text" approach of Bédier might seem the complete antithesis of Lachmannian recensionism, they share a vulnerability to certain critiques. Both approaches ultimately fall back on personal judgment, whether in the identification of errors or in the choice of a "best text" and the slight editorial emendations which are made to it. And Lachmann and Bédier equally sought to bring an air of the scientific to their endeavors, the former by embracing a carefully articulated method and the latter by attempting to avoid the errors and contradictions that would inevitably arise in creating a complex system of analysis. A. E. Housman succinctly punctured textual criticism's pretensions to true science by stating that such a practitioner "engaged upon his business is not at all like Newton investigating the motions of the planets: he is much more like a dog hunting for fleas."¹¹

Beginning in the 1980s, an increasing number of studies of medieval European literature have taken up the ideas and terminology of more recent literary and cultural theory.¹² The new approaches exemplified by these works have soundly rejected the illusory certainty of the recensionist method. And while owing a substantial intellectual debt to Bédier, they have also moved well beyond the idea of a "best text." Modern medieval studies is a diverse field, and I will limit my discussion of these new approaches (that have sometimes been called "the new medievalism"¹³) to a set of issues especially pertinent to my examination of the "Qinfu yin" manuscripts: the repudiation of the author as the final and preeminent determinant of meaning, the rejection of a critical text as a primary object of critical attention, an increased focus on the materiality of actual medieval manuscripts, and the idea that such new approaches to medieval texts actually represent a return to more typically medieval modes of experiencing texts.

¹⁰ See David F. Hult, "Reading it Right: The Ideology of Text Editing," in Marina S. Brownlee et al. eds., *The New Medievalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1991), p. 122.

¹¹ A. E. Housman, "The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism," in *Selected Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1961), p. 132. Cited in Thorpe, *Principles of Textual Criticism*, p. 126.

¹² For a general introduction and complaints that this new orientation was long overdue, see Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, "Introduction: Critical Theory and the Study of the Middle Ages," in idem, eds., *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1987), pp. 1-11.

¹³ See Brownlee, *New Medievalism*, pp. 1-2.

Recent studies of secular medieval literature have largely abandoned any notion of the author as Lachmannian heroic creator of the pristine autographic manuscript. They thus reject one of the primary goals of earlier textual criticism: to come as close as possible to reclaiming this Eden of authorial intent. Scholars' justifications for rejecting this model are varied. For some, such as Elizabeth Bryan, the theoretical issue of structural authority influences their approach.¹⁴ John Dagenais and others see author-centric approaches as inappropriate for the study of manuscript cultures as such a perspective "carries with it both the implicit model of the printed book and all the baggage of the academic study of literary canons."¹⁵ Printed texts, in Gerald Burns's formulation, are closed. That is, they have reached a final form as "print closes off the act of writing and authorizes the results."¹⁶ The authorized results are the property of the author as creator. Manuscripts, instead, follow what Bryan characterizes as Roland Barthes's model of the "open, unendingly processual text."¹⁷ Under such a model the author loses control at what may be an early point in the life of a work. Others can add, delete, and alter. In doing so they establish claims of their own on a work's meaning.

None of these medievalists go as far as to proclaim the author dead. They do, however, see him as operating in a larger context in which he is no longer the prime mover. Recent studies thus emphasize the idea of medieval writing as a collaborative endeavor in which the scribe plays a role equal in importance to the author. The debt to Bédier, with his acknowledgement that he "could not affirm the difference between an intelligent or gifted scribe and an author" is obvious here.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the scribe remained the transmitter and translator of the author, rather than a true collaborator creating meaning together with the author and others. Dagenais, on the other hand, strikingly leaves out the author entirely, arguing that "The manuscript text is constituted by the individuals who created it: scribe, rubricator, corrector, illuminator,"¹⁹ Authors do have a role to play in these new approaches to medieval texts, but it is as part of an ensemble cast.

¹⁴ Bryan, *Collaborative Meaning*, p. 52.

¹⁵ John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1994), p. xvii.

¹⁶ Gerald L. Bruns, "The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture," *Comparative Literature* 32.2 (1980), p. 113.

¹⁷ Bryan, *Collaborative Meaning*, p. 52.

¹⁸ David F. Hult, "Reading it Right: The Ideology of Text Editing" in Brownlee, *The New Medievalism*, p. 124.

¹⁹ Degenais, *Ethics of Reading*, p. 17.

Connected to the lowered position of the author in recent studies is a corresponding negative critique of excessive focus on the creation and use of critical texts. The critical text continues to rely on the phantom of authorial intent and ignores the role of collaborative textual change that better reflects the reality of medieval literary culture. Variation implies a multiplicity of legitimate meanings – a key point of much recent literary theory but anathema to the very concept of a critical text. Focusing on the variation inherent in a manuscript culture, Bryan points out that “Any two manuscripts will embed different sets of traces of signification and erasure, differently configured processes of meaning.”²⁰ A critical text, on the other hand, proclaims itself as the proper object of study, rather than the messy “fallen world of medieval manuscript textuality” found in actual extant manuscripts.²¹ But again, this rejection of the critical text is not complete; scholars critical of much traditional textual scholarship acknowledge a role for critical editions. William Paden sees them as “an instrument of communication” that provides “transition between the medieval mode of existence of lyric song and a modern mode,”²² while agreeing that the experience of reading a critical text necessarily distances one from the medieval world it purports to convey. These criticisms are best seen as an attempt to remind readers, and scholarly readers in particular, that critical texts are just that, works of criticism. They come with their own sets of judgments and cannot be accepted as transparent conveyors of the reality of medieval literature.

The focus on collaboration and a preference for actual manuscripts over critical editions has naturally led to a greater emphasis by recent scholars on the materiality of the textual record. Recent scholars see the materiality of manuscripts not as bringing us closer to the author, as Bédier would hold, but to his collaborators. Transcendent meaning belongs to the realm of authorial intention; physical texts are the work of scribes and other participants in a manuscript culture. Bryan succinctly sums up the reasoning behind this turn to the material:

Multiple meanings abound in manuscripts on several levels beginning with the very literal: Gaps and margins and erasures are literal. Multiple writing agents introduced multiple meanings: Actual humans apart from the author positioned organizational features like ornate initials or chapter divisions in page layout, and decided

²⁰ Bryan, *Collaborative Meaning*, p. 52.

²¹ Dagenais, *Ethics of Reading*, p. 112.

²² William D. Paden, “Manuscripts,” in F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis, eds., *A Handbook of the Troubadours* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1995), p. 321.

what script and quality of script to use, and entered corrections, and made annotations.²³

This emphasis on different modes of meaning and contesting forces at work in a text is emblematic of the new medievalism and the attention to margins, erasures, and multiple meanings betrays its debt to recent literary and cultural theory. Scholars such as Dagenais and Bryan are not trying to make medieval literature accessible to the casual reader and their focus on the material aspects of this literature can be intensely alienating: it forces us to be aware of the very real historical and cultural gaps between the modern reader and the medieval text. These gaps may be discomfiting, but only by acknowledging them can we understand this literature as people actually produced and circulated it.

Indeed, these scholars see themselves not as taking novel perspectives on medieval European literature but as a returning to older ones. They argue that their new approaches are valuable because they ultimately come closer to the way writers and readers in medieval Europe themselves viewed their own literary products. This may seem too convenient, but the argument is a convincing one: there is much evidence that medieval authors themselves often considered their role as one of many in the production of literary texts. Amelia E. Van Vleck argues persuasively that many twelfth-century troubadours not only accepted that their songs would be altered in the course of transmission, but that they actively promoted such a process at times.²⁴ Medieval texts are thus best thought of as collaborative because that is the way in which their creators thought of them. We know that scribes felt at liberty to alter texts, sometimes substantially, because they in fact did so. Paden states, "Not only is the scribe capable of introducing innovative variant readings of a word, a phrase, or a line, but many editors believe that the isolated stanzas of certain songs that turn up in single manuscripts are also the work of the scribes of those manuscripts."²⁵ Variation and the multiple meanings it inscribes are thus not annoying inconveniences to be smoothed away by the critical text but are the very heart of the medieval reading experience. As Dagenais points out, medieval readers did not have "the luxury of waiting around for an 'intelligible' text."²⁶ They read what they had. Likewise, the focus on the materiality of texts, from the handwriting and the layout to the marginalia and the scribal colophons, brings us back to texts as they were read, not as

²³ Bryan, *Collaborative Meaning*, p. 52.

²⁴ Amelia E. Van Vleck, *Memory and Re-Creation in Troubadour Lyric* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1991).

²⁵ Paden, "Manuscripts," p. 316.

²⁶ Dagenais, *Ethics of Reading*, p. 112.

how the modern reader would find them easy to read. This is not to say that the methods of post-structural criticism and medieval reading practice are identical or even share similar goals. But the important role of difference and variation in each allows for a fruitful interaction in which one can help us understand the other. Perhaps it is best to end this discussion with Cerquiglini's blunt but telling statement: "medieval writing does not produce variants; it *is* variance."²⁷

My ultimate goal in this discussion of approaches to medieval texts in the West is to bring some of these ideas to the study of medieval Chinese manuscripts. The key question is whether or not the ideas of recent works on medieval Europe are applicable to the Chinese case, and I believe that they very much are. This question has perhaps been made more complicated by an important and influential article on pre-modern Chinese attitudes towards textual change by Susan Cherniack. Cherniack's carefully researched study does a fine job of laying out a broad picture of Chinese textual criticism from the time of Confucius through the Qing, though her focus is on the Song period. She has read widely in the primary sources and has done the field a great service by bringing such disparate texts and secondary works together. However, her article also contains a number of problematic claims about the similarities and differences between Western and Chinese attitudes towards textual change. To make the case that Western approaches are applicable to medieval Chinese texts, I must first deal with a number of these claims in some detail.

The most fundamental problem with Cherniack's argument is that she takes one particular school of Western textual criticism, the Lachmannian method, as the sole representative approach. She states, "Modern Western textual criticism has come to regard transmission as a wholly degenerative process through which texts become 'corrupted' and 'contaminated,'"²⁸ and that "The role assigned to the Western textual critic is to intervene in this historical process to purge the text of its accumulated filth and disease."²⁹ These comments would be accurate were they to refer primarily to the recensionist method. As a description of the ideas of Bédier or of the new approaches to medieval literature undertaken by scholars in the last twenty years, they are at best misleading and at worst wholly incorrect. Cherniack does note that the idea of a critical edition based on Lachmannian ideas has come

²⁷ Cerquiglini, *Praise of the Variant*, p. 77-78.

²⁸ Susan Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China," *HJAS* 54.1 (1994), p. 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

under criticism by some “contemporary textual theorists,”³⁰ but fails to discuss any of the alternative approaches that they or earlier writers have both proposed and used for many years.

When Cherniack then goes on to contrast these supposed Western notions of inevitable textual degeneration with Chinese perspectives more open to the idea of textual changes, her argument encounters two difficulties: problematic chronological comparisons, and what actually turn out to be striking similarities between the discussed approaches. To characterize Western approaches to texts, Cherniack focuses primarily on the twentieth century, with Lachmann himself being the only earlier figure noted. Turning to “Chinese attitudes towards textual change in transmission,”³¹ she begins with Zi Xia 子夏 in the fifth century BC, discusses Confucius as a foundational figure, and rarely moves past the Song. As a result, her comparison fails to tell us much about the difference between “Western” and “Chinese” textual criticism overall.

In fact, the similarities between East and West on this topic may well outweigh the differences. Modern Chinese scholars produce critical texts in much the same fashion as do their colleagues in the West. The recently published Shanghai guji edition of Wei Zhuang’s works takes as its base text for “Qinfu yin” not the Dunhuang manuscripts – the only authentic Tang and Five Dynasties versions of the work we have – but rather Liu Xiuye’s 劉修業 critical edition of 1947, which is based on his composite editing of all the manuscripts available at the time.³² Indeed, Cherniack makes even traditional Chinese editors sound like the precursors to Lachmann himself when she writes, “An explicit goal of traditional Chinese textual criticism has been to weed out unsanctioned changes in order to restore works to some former or original state 復其舊, 復其原.”³³

But more important for my purposes here is the similarity between medieval European and traditional Chinese approaches to texts. Cherniack notes that “The traditional interpretation of Confucius’s textual work as an act of transmission includes a concept of collaborative authorship that is excluded from the modern Western term.”³⁴ Collabora-

³⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

³¹ Ibid., p. 9.

³² Nie Anfu 聶安福, ed., *Wei Zhuang ji jianzhu* 韋莊集箋注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2002), pp. 322–23. For a discussion of both modern and traditional Chinese textual criticism, see Guan Xihua 管錫華, *Hanyu guji jiaokan xue* 漢語古籍校勘學 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2003), and Chen Qianfan 程千帆 and Xu Youfu 徐有富, *Jiaochu guangyi* 校儲廣義 (Nanjing: Qi Lu shushe, 1991).

³³ Cherniack, “Book Culture,” p. 11. Later, in her discussion of Song critical approaches, she notes “the importance attached herein to ‘author-based’ authority in texts...,” p. 24.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

tive authorship, as we have seen, is not only the focus of recent Western critical approaches, it was the norm for medieval ideas on texts as well. Consider the comments of Derek Pearsal on the Ellesmere edition of Chaucer's writings, which was put together just a few years after Chaucer's death. Pearsal writes, "...clearly the Ellesmere presents a text, not of what Chaucer wrote, but of what his editorial executors thought he should have written, or would have written if he had known as well as they did what he wished to write."³⁵ A notion of collaborative authorship was the norm, not the exception, both in medieval Europe and in recent scholarship on the period.

There is ample evidence that Tang compilers of literary collections similarly felt no compunction about editing the texts they put together, on the level both of individual poems and of larger-scale deletions of works that they felt did not fit their image of the poet in question. Lu Chun 陸淳 (d. 805?) produced a redacted version of the poet Wang Ji's 王績 (586-644) collection in which he "expunged those words of action and made complete [Wang Ji's] ambition to be unbound 祛彼有爲之詞, 全其懸解之志," so as to make the poet better conform to what Lu Chun saw as the ideal models of Tao Qian 陶潛 (365-427) or Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263).³⁶ Discussing the case of a Tang courtesan beloved by her patron for her ability to correct editions of Du Fu's poems in such a way that made them more comprehensible to him, Xiaofei Tian writes, "To the degree that they were engaged in the production of manuscript copies by copying, editing, altering, and revising, we are no longer talking about the readers' reception of a stable text, but about the readers' dynamic participation in the very process of creating a text that is essentially protean."³⁷ The literary cultures of Tang China and medieval Europe were vastly different. Yet the technology of manuscript production and the realities of hand-copied texts resulted in a number of important similarities. Because of this, I believe that students of medieval Chinese poetry can greatly benefit by understanding and sometimes applying the practices of European medieval authors, scribes, and readers and the scholarly approaches of those who study them today.

³⁵ Derek Pearsal, "Editing Medieval Texts: Some Developments and Some Problems," in Jerome J. McGann, ed., *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1985), p. 94.

³⁶ Lu Chun, "Shan Donggaozi ji houxu" 刪東皋子集後序, in Jin Ronghua 金榮華, ed., *Wang Ji shiwenji jiaozhu* 王績詩文集後序 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi yinhang, 1998), p. 388. See also Christopher Nugent, "Literary Collections in Tang Dynasty China," *TP* 93 (2007), pp. 1-52, and discussion in Ding Xiang Warner, *A Wild Deer amid Soaring Phoenixes: The Opposition Poetics of Wang Ji* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 2003), pp. 4-5.

³⁷ Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2005), p. 8.

THE “QINFU YIN” MANUSCRIPTS

The story of the finds at Dunhuang, fascinating in its own right, has been told in many places and need not be repeated in great detail here.³⁸ Briefly, somewhere near the turn of the twentieth century and no later than 1900, either a Daoist monk named Wang Yuanlu 王圓籙 (1849–1931), or his assistant,³⁹ noticed a crack in the wall of one of the temple caves in the Mogao 莫高 complex at Dunhuang. Behind the wall he discovered a massive cache of stacked manuscripts. The bulk of these eventually found their way into the hands of the British archaeologist Mark Aurel Stein (1862–1943) and the French scholar Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) in 1907 and 1908, respectively, and later to the collections of the British Museum and the Bibliothèque National de France.⁴⁰ Examination of the manuscripts eventually revealed a date range of 406 to 995 AD,⁴¹ along with evidence that the caves were sealed in the year 1035 or 1036.⁴²

The total number of Dunhuang manuscripts, including numerous fragments, is now thought to be near 50,000. While most of the manuscripts consist of copies of known Buddhist scriptures, there are also significant numbers of such works as popular narratives and vernacular poetry and prose that have changed the way the development of these genres is now viewed. In addition to the wealth of vernacular and folk literature, there is a small number of works of what would be considered the “high” literary culture of the Tang period, by such poets as Wang Wei 王維 (701–761), Li Bai 李白 (701–762), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), and Gao Shi 高適 (716–765), among others. The importance of the Dunhuang finds to scholars of Tang poetry became apparent soon after their discovery, with one of the highlights being Lionel Giles’s identification of the full text of Wei Zhuang’s lengthy narrative poem “Qinfu yin,” the topic of this study. However, serious

³⁸ The fullest discussion of the discovery and early history of the Dunhuang finds in English is Su Ying-hui’s “On the Tunhuang Studies,” *Chinese Culture* 17.1 (1976), pp. 64–88.

³⁹ This possibility is noted in Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asian Center, 2000), p. 826.

⁴⁰ Other groups of manuscripts were acquired by assistants of Ōtani Kōzui, Sergei Oldenburg, and Petr Kuz’mich Kozlov. A number was also eventually obtained by the Beijing Capital Library and various collectors. See Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, p. 828.

⁴¹ See Denis Twitchett, “Chinese Social History from the Seventh to the Tenth Centuries,” *Past and Present* 35 (1966), p. 35.

⁴² This being the time of the Tangut or Xixia 西夏 invasion of the area. Victor Mair notes that there are no documents in the Xixia language among the manuscripts despite their subsequent occupation of the area. See Victor H. Mair, *Tang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Council on East Asian Studies, 1989), p. 5.

work on the full corpus of Tang poetry from Dunhuang did not begin in earnest until many years later when the texts, those gathered by Paul Pelliot and held in the Bibliothèque National de France in particular, became available in photo-reproduced form to scholars in China, Taiwan, and Japan.⁴³

These finds have opened a new avenue of inquiry in the study of Tang poetry, though one that scholars have approached with caution. This is only appropriate given the limitations of these sources. The Dunhuang manuscripts do provide the fullest set of poetic texts from the Tang period itself or soon after, unmediated by the selection and editing process of the Song print culture. At the same time, we must not overstate the extent to which these texts can be taken as fully representative of Tang literary culture, especially that of the capital region. Some scholars have perhaps been overly sanguine in this respect. Victor Mair points out that with the exception of the Tibetan occupation from 781–848, there was “constant communication between Dunhuang and the rest of China throughout most of the period from the Han to the Tang.”⁴⁴ Xu Jun 徐俊 states that the general situation of poetic manuscripts in Dunhuang accurately reflects “the true shape of the circulation of poetic works in the typical manuscript age of the Tang, Five Dynasties, and early Song.”⁴⁵ These claims should not be dismissed, yet we must keep in mind that Dunhuang had ceased to be a part of Tang China with the Tibetan invasion and did not again fall under Chinese imperial rule until many centuries later. Communication did allow a large inflow of Tang cultural products and influences, but it did not turn Dunhuang into a Chang’an on the frontier.⁴⁶ Dunhuang texts are thus not necessarily the best representatives of Tang manuscript culture, but they remain the only ones we have.

“Qinfu yin” itself may seem an odd choice for the basis of larger claims about Tang poetic circulation. As the longest surviving poem from the Tang it is, by this fact alone, exceptional. It is a very late-Tang poem, dated by Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 to 886,⁴⁷ and thus it is not necessarily representative of how poetry was circulated, for example, in the

⁴³ Such studies as Gao Song’s 高嵩 *Dunhuang Tangren shiji canjuan kaoshi* 敦煌唐人詩集殘卷考釋 (Yin Chuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1982), Huang Yongwu’s 黃永武 *Dunhuang de Tangshi* 敦煌的唐詩 (Taipei: Gongfan shudian youxian gongsi, 1987), and *Dunhuang de tangshi xubian*, are representative.

⁴⁴ Mair, *Tang Transformation Texts*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Xu, *Dunhuang shiji*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Xu notes that most poetry collections found at Dunhuang are by poets from the central regions of China proper, while many individual poems are from poets from Dunhuang itself; Xu, *Dunhuang shiji*, p. 30.

⁴⁷ Chen, “Du ‘Qinfu yin,’” p. 953.

capital region prior to the An Lushan Rebellion. While these objections are valid, they are legitimately outweighed by the primary advantage of “Qinfu yin” as an object for this type of textual study, namely the exceptionally large number of copies of it available in manuscript form. Few if any other poems in the Dunhuang manuscripts exist in more than a few manuscript copies from the period. As such, they provide only very limited evidence for the extent of variation between multiple copies. “Qinfu yin” offers a wealth of opportunities to observe the variations in a text through many different versions. Finally, I believe that the ample length of the poem, while making it unusual, is also to its advantage in that it effectively cancels out the statistical impact of each individual variant. In a typical five-character eight-line regulated poem any single variant character represents a variation rate of 2.5% of the entire poem. In a work the length of “Qinfu yin,” at some 238 lines of seven characters each (1,666 characters in all), depending on the version in question,⁴⁸ much of the statistical “noise” of a single mistake is smoothed out and a more accurate picture of the real types and degree of variation can be developed.

Beyond such practical concerns, “Qinfu Yin” is also a particularly interesting case of the ability of an author late in the Tang to maintain control over his literary works after they had begun to circulate beyond his family or very close circle of friends. This extremely popular poem brought Wei Zhuang a measure of fame and quite literally made his name. In his work *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言, Sun Guangxian 孫光憲 (d. 968) relates that this work became so popular that Wei Zhuang became known as the “Lament of the Lady of Qin’ Graduate 秦婦吟秀才.”⁴⁹ The multiple copies of the poem found in the caves at Dunhuang prove that the poem circulated beyond the formal boundaries of the Tang state during Wei Zhuang’s own lifetime. Yet later in life Wei Zhuang himself came to regret the poem’s success. Sun Guangxian claims that the couplet, “The Inner Treasury was burned to ashes of brocade and embroidery 內庫燒爲錦繡灰 / On the Street of Heaven everywhere one stepped were the bones of officials 天街踏盡公卿骨,”⁵⁰ offended surviving officials and that Wei Zhuang thus began treating his own poem as taboo. When he later composed his “Family Regulations” (“Jiajie” 家戒), reports Sun, “he did not permit the hanging of screens with ‘The

⁴⁸ As described below, some versions have extra characters, others omit certain characters.

⁴⁹ Sun Guangxian 孫光憲, *Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), j. 6, p. 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; these are lines 145 and 146 of the poem.

Lament of the Lady of Qin' 不許垂秦婦吟障子。"⁵¹ Moreover, the work was not included when his brother Wei Ai 韋藹 compiled the *Washing Flowers Collection* 浣花集 of Wei Zhuang's poems. More recent scholars have speculated that it was, in fact, portions of the poem that could be interpreted to show Wei Zhuang's later patron Wang Jian 王建 in a bad light that caused the former to disown his famous work.⁵²

Wei Zhuang both succeeded and failed in his attempts to control "Qinfu yin." The initial loss of control involved a failure to foresee unintended consequences. When he originally composed the poem, probably around 886, it would have been impossible for him to predict that five years or so later he would be serving Wang Jian, who himself had served under Yang Fuguang 楊復光 in a region through which the poem's eponymous lady was shown to pass with some difficulty due to the depredations of local officials.⁵³ Of the concrete measures Wei Zhuang took to distance himself from the poem, we know of only two: forbidding family members to hang scrolls of the text and keeping it out of his primary collection.⁵⁴ These efforts seem to have been successful as the poem disappeared by the early Song save for the two lines quoted by Sun Guangxian.⁵⁵ Thus even if Wei Zhuang could not control interpretations of his work, he was apparently able to control its textual manifestations,⁵⁶ or so it would seem, for just over one thousand years after his death. In fact, dry desert air and some diligent copyists accomplished what Song print culture could not and preserved multiple copies of Wei Zhuang's disowned poem.

In what follows I will use a number of approaches based on the ideas of recent work on European medieval literature to discuss a set of manuscript copies of Wei Zhuang's "Qinfu yin." My interest here is

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 47. Note that this may be a reference to paintings on the topic of the "Qinfu yin."

⁵² See discussion in Yates, *Washing Silk*, pp. xii, 254–55, and Chen, "Du 'Qinfu yin'." The following articles in Yan and Zhao, *Qinfu yin yanjiu huilu*, focus on this issue though others address it as well: Huang Guangsheng 黃廣生, "Wei Zhuang zijin 'Qinfu yin' yuanyin zai xi" 韋莊自禁秦婦吟原因再析, pp. 218–26; Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元 and Liu Chutang 劉初棠, "Wei Zhuang huiyan 'Qinfu yin' zhi you ji qita" 韋莊諱言秦婦吟之由及其他, pp. 275–87; and Zhang Tianjian 張天健, "Qinfu yin' hui yin kao" 秦婦吟諱因考, pp. 288–95.

⁵³ Yates, *Washing Silk*, p. 254.

⁵⁴ The *Washing Flowers Collection* was compiled by Wei Ai in Wei Zhuang's lifetime and with his assistance. It is thus reasonable to assume that the poem was excluded at his request.

⁵⁵ Were Sun's claim that it was these very lines that so distressed the poet correct, then their status as sole survivors would be keenly ironic, though other explanations for Wei's actions are more convincing.

⁵⁶ The key issue here may be that there is no record of the poem's ever having been printed. Had it been, its textual history would have been very different. At least one scholar has suggested the later history of narrative poetry in China would have been quite different as well; see Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry*, p. 120.

not in creating a new critical text (or criticizing previous ones), determining Wei Zhuang's original intent, or discussing the literary merit of the poem. Rather, my goal is to take the initial steps towards articulating how Tang and Five Dynasties readers would have interacted with texts of the poem. I will thus focus heavily on the materiality of these manuscripts, on what makes each one an individual text different from other versions of the poem.

Tang poetry consisted not of disembodied works but of oral declamations and written texts. In our age of print and electronic textual reproduction on a massive scale, it is easy to forget the importance of the physical for a manuscript culture. Most readers in the Tang did not go to a bookstore and buy a book of poems. The poems they read were likely either copied out by a friend or the reader himself. For such noncanonical literature as contemporary poetry, there would have been few of the scribal standards followed by professional scribes copying classical texts for official governmental use. The "Qinfu yin" manuscripts thus provide us with a narrow but revealing window onto Tang poetic literature as it was copied, circulated, and read during the Tang or just after.

Dates and Copyists

We do not know when, exactly, Wei Zhuang composed "Qinfu yin." Thanks to colophons on the manuscript, however, we can date five of the eight Dunhuang versions of the poem with some precision. These colophons also provide limited information about the copyists in many cases. In this section I will outline whatever are the basic facts of production for each one.⁵⁷

P3381: According to a colophon, this manuscript was copied in 905 (天復五年乙丑歲十二月五日) by scholar (*xueshi* 學仕) Zhang Gui 長龜 of the Jinguangming Monastery 金光明寺 in Dunhuang commandery.⁵⁸ The text contains minimal damage and appears to contain the entire

⁵⁷ For my analysis of the "Qinfu yin" manuscripts I have used high-quality photographs that have recently been published in both book form and on the website of the International Dunhuang project. The sources are as follows: P2700: *Manuscripts de Dunhuang et d'Asie Centrale Conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001; hereafter *Manuscripts*) 17, pp. 297–300; P3381: *Manuscripts* 24, pp. 40–42; P3910: *Manuscripts* 29, pp. 203–7; P3953: *Manuscripts* 30, p. 278; P3780: *Manuscripts* 28, pp. 35–37; S692: *Yingcang Dunhuang wenxian* 英藏敦煌文獻 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1990) 2, pp. 116–17; S5834: *Yingcang* 9, p. 172 (note that this is a small fragment that appears to have come from P2700. I thus treat it as part of the latter text in my analysis); S5476: *Yingcang* 7, pp. 172–77; S5477: *Yingcang* 7, pp. 177–82. For manuscripts from the Stein collections, I also made extensive use of the images found at the International Dunhuang Project website: <http://idp.bl.uk/>.

⁵⁸ Giles notes that Dunhuang manuscript Stein 2711 (which does not contain any portion

238 lines of the poem.⁵⁹ If it was indeed copied in 905, this would make it the only one of the surviving manuscripts copied during the Tang,⁶⁰ and within the lifetime of Wei Zhuang himself.

P3780: This manuscript includes conflicting colophons, making it difficult to determine definitively the copyist and the date of copying. Immediately following the text of the poem itself and the title is one column of text written with a brush in a very rapid hand. It names one Yang Dingqian 楊定遷 as the copyist and gives the date of copying as the second year of the Xuande period, seventeenth day of the second year of the *dingsi* year 顯德二年丁巳歲二月十七日, that is, 955. However, following this column and another in the same hand that repeats part of the date, are two columns written with a Tibetan wood pen, like the text of the poem itself. These identify the copyist as scholar-gentleman (*xueshi lang* 學士郎) Ma Fude 馬富德 and give the same date of copying. To complicate matters, after a few random characters written with a brush, another column in pen again names Ma Fude as copyist, but describes him as junior scholar (*xueshi tonger* 學士童兒). A new date is also given with the year being the fourth of the Xuande period. This is quite clearly written as *dingji* 丁己, though this must be an error for *dingsi* as there can be no *dingji* year: both *ding* and *ji* are heavenly stems and thus do not combine in the sexagenary cycle. The day in this column is listed as being the nineteenth and the month remains the same. Xu Jun notes that the correct date should be the fourth year of the Xuande period and thus dates the manuscript to 957. These two copyists continue their back and forth on the opposite side of the scroll with Yang Dingqian insisting that he “copied it with his own hand and that is that 學仕郎楊定遷自手書記之耳也.” Xu Jun sides with Ma Fude; as the columns in pen that identify him as the copyist match the calligraphic hand of the poetic text, I will as well. This manuscript contains the entire poem, but has suffered extensive damage to the first third of the text, making much of it difficult to decipher.

P3910: In booklet rather than scroll form, this manuscript is the only one of the “Qinfu yin” texts to be included in a set of other, unre-

of “Qinfu yin”), dating from the early-tenth century, contains a list of sutra copyists (*xiejing-ren* 寫經人) from the Jinguangming Monastery. The list, however, notes neither Zhang Gui nor the An Yousheng 安友盛 stated as being the copyist for S692 from the same monastery. Giles takes this as indicating that neither was considered skilled enough to work on scriptural projects; Giles, “The Lament of the Lady of Ch’in,” pp. 307–8, fn. 2.

⁵⁹ This manuscript is thus used by Xu as his base text.

⁶⁰ The lack of Tang sovereignty over Dunhuang since the late eighth century perhaps makes this fact less important.

lated texts.⁶¹ The text has suffered minimal damage but only contains the first two thirds of the poem. A colophon giving the date and identifying the copyist implies that either the copyist was working from a truncated version of the poem or simply cut his copying effort short. The two line colophon appears to identify Mi Zhaoyuan 彌趙員 of the Jingtū Monastery 淨土寺 as the copyist. Based on a date given in the colophon, Xu Jun dates the text to 979. He further speculates that it should be attributed to the same copyist as that of S5477, identified as servant Yin 陰奴兒. There is no information in colophons to either of these texts that would definitely prove this conclusion and I thus assume Xu Jun is basing it on the similarities in handwriting and textual variants. As I will discuss in more detail below, I also believe that the copyist for P3910 did indeed copy at least part of S5477, but the question is a complicated one.

P3953: This manuscript is best termed a fragment as it contains less than a third of the full text of the poem found in other manuscripts. The beginning and end of the poem are missing and it is impossible to either date it or identify the copyist.

S692: A colophon dates this manuscript to 919 (貞明伍己卯歲四月十一日) and attributes it to scholar-gentleman An Yousheng 安有盛 who, like the copyist of P3381, was associated with the Jinguangming Monastery. The opening portion of the text is missing and appears to have been torn off, with the remaining text beginning with line 40 and running to the end of the poem.

P2700 and S5834: Two portions of the main text, P2700, appear to have been torn from the scroll. Part of one of these sections is found in a fragment in the Stein collection labeled S5834. A partial colophon found in the latter dates the text to 920 (貞明陸年歲在庚辰拾貳月) but does not identify the copyist.

S5476: A self-contained booklet, this text is missing sections at the beginning and end and thus cannot be dated or attached to a specific copyist.

S5477: This manuscript is also a self-contained booklet missing sections at the beginning. It starts at line 19 and then continues to the end of the poem. Just after line 135, in very light ink, the name servant Yin 陰奴兒 appears. Xu Jun attributes P3910 to the hand of this scribe as well, though does not explain the discrepancy in names (as the short colophon to P3910 names Mi Zhaoyuan as the copyist).

We thus find substantial variation within this set of manuscripts when looking simply at their copying dates and scribes. For dated texts

⁶¹ These are *Chajiu lun* 茶酒論, *Xinhe qianwen huangdi ganci* 新合千文皇帝感辭, and *Xinhe xiaojing huangdi ganci* 新合孝經皇帝感辭.

there is a range from the last years of the Tang (905) to the early years of the Song (979). There are also a number of different scribes connected with the texts in question, with only one pair of texts at least partially copied by the same person. Yet there are also commonalities. At least one pair of texts (S692 and P3381) was copied in the same monastery and another pair, S5477 and P3910, probably shared a scriptorium as well. All the texts for which we have colophons that state where the copy was made were copied in Dunhuang and not brought in from elsewhere.

Formal Variation

The eight manuscript copies of “Qinfu yin” vary significantly in terms of their physical and visual attributes as written texts. In this discussion of the material aspects of the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts, I will first look at visual presentation, from layout to punctuation, and then discuss the general content of these texts, ranging from colophons to correction marks. It will become clear that variation between these texts goes beyond the differing words of the poem to the very experience of reading and dealing with them as material objects.

There are two basic formats found in these manuscripts and they offer the reader very different modes of interacting with the texts. Our typical image of reading in the Tang involves scrolls, and half of the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts follow this format, with P3381, P3780, P2700, and S692 all in scrolls of differing sizes. To take two examples, the sheets of paper attached to make the scroll for S692 are about 27 cm in height; those for P2700 are approximately 22 cm in height. Other than a few random names and dates, none of these scrolls has writing on the reverse side. Three of the manuscripts – P3910, S5476, and S5477 – are not scrolls but rather bound booklets. S5476, for example, consists of eighteen page-sides approximately 14.5 cm high by 10.2 cm wide. These pages are thus substantially smaller in height than the papers used in the scrolls. The poem is written on both sides of pages bound in the butterfly style in which pages are folded in half and then attached by either glue or string.⁶² Multiple string holes are visible near the tops of the pages with a single set near the bottom. S5477, which was also bound in this style, though probably without string, has approximately the same dimensions. With a sample of only eight manu-

⁶² For a detailed description of this style of binding see <http://idp.bl.uk/education/book-binding/bookbinding.a4d#2>, and Pan Jixing 潘吉星, ed., *Zhongguo kexue jishu shi: zaozhi yu yinshua juan* 中國科學技術史, 造紙與印刷卷 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1998), pp. 334–37.

scripts it is difficult to draw conclusions about which format was more popular. My sense is that the greater number of scroll-form manuscripts probably reflects the norm in more central areas of the Tang state. It is true that booklets with these binding techniques are not attested to in central China until the Song. Yet the numbers of manuscripts in this form for a wide variety of genres found at Dunhuang, from religious tracts to secular poems, are substantial, and it seems unlikely that a technique so common in Dunhuang would not be used in numerous other locales as well.

One would expect hand-copied texts to display a degree of variation in the size and layout of the characters and this is indeed the case with the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts, though there is some consistency as well. For the manuscripts in scroll format the column length ranges from the 18 or 19 characters per column found in P2700 to the 29–30 found in the columns of P3780. The other three scrolls are closer to P2700 in average line length with lines of over 23 characters being unusual. The characters on both P2700 and S692 are typically about 1.5 cm in height. This height appears to be standard for most other “Qinfu yin” scrolls except for P3780 in which the characters are about a third smaller and in P3953 in which they are about a third larger. As the photo-reproductions of the Pelliot manuscripts do not give any indication of measurements and scale, some of these measurements can only be conjectural.⁶³ The height of the characters found in the booklets S5476 and S5477 also tend to be between 1 cm and 2 cm high. S5477 however, displays a much greater degree of variance in the size of its characters. This may be due to the apparent poor writing skills of the copyist and the fact that he seems to have alternated between using a brush and a Tibetan wooden pen at different points in the manuscript.⁶⁴

In spite of the general consistency in the size of the characters within this set of manuscripts, there is substantial calligraphic variation. I will leave aesthetic judgments to the art historians, but it is clear to even the untrained eye that none of these texts is copied with the care and precision often found in Buddhist sutras from Dunhuang. That being said, some hands can still be considered more steady and consistent than others. The copyist for P3780 writes in the clearest hand: every

⁶³ I was able to determine characters sizes for P2700 because of the fragment of the text that made it into the Stein collection as S5834. The photo-reproductions of all Stein manuscripts helpfully include scale measurements. My conclusions for other Pelliot manuscripts are based on comparing the relative sizes of the curatorial stamp and the characters, as the photos in *Manuscripts* do not contain any measurements of scales.

⁶⁴ This will be discussed in more detail below.

stroke is easy to identify and the characters have a consistent style and form. The copyist for P₃₉₁₀ (and at least part of S₅₄₇₇) has the slopiest writing: the sizes of his characters are inconsistent and the same character will be written with differently angled strokes at different occurrences. It also appears that he had not mastered use of a brush as the strokes do not show the practiced application of pressure at different points in the lines that one would expect from an experienced calligrapher. Finally, he tends to dip his brush in ink only when it has almost run dry and the characters are barely visible. These are immediately followed by much darker characters in which the fresh ink soaked deeply into the paper and spread out. Other manuscripts fall between these two poles, with P₃₃₈₁, S₅₄₇₆, and P₃₉₅₃ being more consistently written and P₂₇₀₀ and S₆₉₂ being less so. It is worth noting that the scribes for the latter two manuscripts do have much more controlled hands than those for P₃₉₁₀ and S₅₄₇₇ – they simply appear to have written out the text more quickly, frequently merging strokes. All of P₃₇₈₀ and one portion of S₅₄₇₇ is written with a wooden pen; the other six manuscripts are written with a brush. Other than P₂₇₀₀ and P₃₉₅₃, all the manuscripts contain lightly drawn lines to demarcate columns. S₆₉₂ is the only manuscript to contain any sort of punctuation. For the first seventy-two lines of the poem there is a mark off to the side after every seventh character similar to the *dunhao* 頓號 used in modern Chinese punctuation (、).

The primary content of these manuscripts is obviously the words of the poem itself. But as we are examining manuscripts as physical objects, it is important to look closely at content other than those words. This additional content includes information about the title of the work, the copyists, the dates of copying, and even mistakes in the copying process that give a fuller sense of the contexts in which late medieval Chinese readers would have encountered the poem itself. Perhaps the most mundane content is simply the title of the work and attribution to a specific author, but even here there is some variation. Of the texts that include the beginning of the poem (those that have not suffered substantial physical damage at the beginning of the manuscript), all four include the title of the poem as “Qinfu yin,” with the scribe for P₃₉₁₀ writing it twice in succession, the second time in darker ink. P₃₃₈₁ and P₃₇₈₀ further note after the title that the poem is in “one scroll 一卷.” All of these texts may well have originally listed the author as well, though in some cases physical damage to the texts makes it difficult to say for sure. P₃₉₁₀ follows the title of the poem with the phrase “Composed by rectifier of omissions Wei Zhuang” 補闕韋莊撰. P₂₇₀₀

more specifically cites the text as being “composed by right rectifier [of omissions] Wei Zhuang” 右補口韋莊撰. Finally, P₃₇₈₀ includes this same full position title (including the character 闕), though the portion of text that would contain the name itself has been damaged.⁶⁵ Of the four manuscripts that include the end of the poem, P₃₃₈₁, P₃₇₈₀, S₆₉₂, and S₅₄₇₇ all conclude with the phrase “‘Qinfu yin’ one scroll 秦婦吟一卷” and do not list the author or his position again.⁶⁶

Identifying the title and author of literary works is a textual convention familiar to us from the print tradition. Corrections of copying mistakes included in a text itself, however, put us firmly in the world of the manuscript and are a consistent reminder that with the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts we see the constant possibility and reality of human error. These are, as Housman has put it, “the frailties and aberrations of the human mind, and of its insubordinate servants, the human fingers.”⁶⁷ There are two general categories of corrections in these texts: those for errors recognized immediately and corrected before continuing with copying and those noted and corrected at some later point. The first category is easily identified by the placement of the corrected characters. If they directly follow the mistaken character in line of text, we can be confident that the copyist himself probably made them in the course of his labors. That is, before he filled the following space with the next character in the text, he recognized an error in what he had just written and corrected it. In most cases these corrections take the form of a character that the scribe has crossed out and immediately re-written. Sometimes it was clear that the crossed-out character and the correction are essentially the same; the scribe had either made some small error in writing the character or was simply dissatisfied with his calligraphy. In other cases the crossed-out character is a different character altogether, having resulted from reversing characters from his copy text, writing a character with a similar sound, or another of the common types of variation that I discuss in more detail below. The mistaken or dissatisfying character is typically crossed or smudged out with brush or pen strokes, followed by the correct character, though at times a mark to the side of the mistaken character indicating dele-

⁶⁵ Wei Zhuang was appointed to this position in 900, though it is unclear whether his actual appointment was rectifier of omissions for the “right” or “left”; see Nie, *Wei Zhuang ji jianzhu*, p. 521.

⁶⁶ Note that P₃₉₁₀ does not contain the last portion of the poem found in other texts not due to physical damage, but because the copyist simply concluded early, as indicated by the inclusion of a date at this point. See further discussion, below.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Tanselle, *Textual Criticism*, p. 337, from Housman’s address to the Classical Association in 1921.

tion may be used instead. For example, in P₃₇₈₀ the character 避 (“to escape,” “to avoid”) has a deletion mark next to it and is immediately followed by the phonologically and orthographically similar character 璧. In this context the latter is part of the compound 銜璧, a reference from the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 that refers to holding a jade tablet in one’s mouth to show submission.⁶⁸ The character marked for deletion would clearly have been an error. Whether the offending character is crossed out or otherwise indicated as an error, these immediate corrections of errors are common and appear in every one of the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts.

Other corrections appear not in the lines of text proper, but either in the space between columns or the margin above the text and indicate corrections made at some point after the original copying. These corrections take a number of different forms. Some are similar to the crossed-out characters just discussed, but with the correct character written to the side of the column. In other instances characters that were mistakenly omitted in the original copying are written in smaller script next to where they should have originally appeared. One interesting marginal correction is a caret-like mark (v) written next to a character to indicate that it and the preceding character should be reversed. For example, in five of the six manuscripts that contain line 91, the line reads 一從陷賊經三載 (“It has been three years since I fell into the rebels’ clutches”). In manuscript S692, the characters 經 and 三 are reversed and a caret mark has been written next to the former. These marks appear with some frequency in four of the eight manuscripts and are especially abundant in S692, perhaps indicating a touch of dyslexia in this particular scribe. Because these corrections, whether in the form of editorial marks or characters filled in between columns, are not written in the text proper, we can assume that they correct errors that were discovered only after the scribe had copied either the whole text or at least these portions of it. This indicates that all of these texts were probably proofread after their scribes had copied them, whether by the scribe himself or someone else.

These formal differences in the “Qinfu yin” texts should not be ignored, as they contribute to very different reading experiences. The effect of differences between the scroll and booklet formats is a clear example. A scroll puts more restrictions on the reader: he will typically start at the very beginning. Though this may be a very good place to

⁶⁸ *S.v.* duke Yi 億公, year 6; Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed, *Shisanjing zhushu: Zuozhuan* 十三經注疏, 左傳 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan), p. 214.

start, it is not the most dramatic point in the poem and unlikely to be the portion most savored upon rereading. One can skip ahead, but this would probably involve skimming text, even if one were familiar with the poem. The scroll thus forces a certain level of engagement with the text it contains and dictates the order of the reading experience. Scrolls also require more space if one is to open them up, or a take-up reel, in which case the text would have to be rerolled when finished. Thus this format puts restrictions not only on the activity of reading itself, but also on the context in which reading is likely to occur.

Booklets, on the other hand, offer the reader greater freedom. To begin with, they are more compact, both in terms of the size of the page and bulkiness of the shape. The page height of the various “Qinfu yin” scrolls is about the same as the height of a volume of the *Hanyu da cidian*, while the two booklets in question are, intriguingly, similar in both height and width to mass-market or “pocket-sized” paperback books currently sold in the U.S. Booklets also allow the reader to more easily mark and skip to a specific point in the poem without skimming through previous sections. Finally, booklets are not only easily portable, they can be opened and read without a surface on which to spread them out. I noted above that the number of surviving “Qinfu yin” manuscripts is too small to lead to definitive conclusions about the relative popularity of various formats. The fact that Dunhuang was an outpost that was clearly visited by many travelers, however, might explain the substantial number of booklet-format texts found there. Booklets allowed the poem to travel and perhaps circulate more widely than scrolls alone would have.

The significant differences in both the size and style of the written characters in these texts would have resulted in very different reading experiences as well. Reading a carefully copied manuscript like P₃₇₈₀ would unquestionably have been easier than reading a more briskly copied text such as P₂₇₀₀ or S₆₉₂. Modern printed editions use different sizes and styles of print as well, but it is worth noting that they tend towards a much higher degree of uniformity than do the handwritten “Qinfu yin” texts. To give a general analogy, if the writing of P₃₇₈₀ is like the careful script of a primary school teacher’s writing on a blackboard, P₂₇₀₀ is closer to the script a college student might use in quickly taking notes in class, and S₅₄₇₇ might be akin to the writing of a high-school student scribbling a message to pass on to a friend. Though all of these are legible, they make for a diverse set of reading experiences.

Finally, the formal aspects of these texts give us an indication of the reasons why they were copied. One of the conclusions drawn about these manuscripts by the first scholars to discuss them is that the quality of the calligraphy and the diversity of character forms indicated that at least some of these texts were probably merely calligraphy exercises for novice monks. Our examination of the formal and visual aspects of these texts, however, implies otherwise. It seems clear that these texts were copied not for the sake of copying itself, but to be read. They were, after all, bound. It is unlikely that one would go to the trouble of binding together, either in a booklet or scroll, a set of handwriting exercises. The scrolls in question, moreover, with the exception of some scribbling about the copying dates, are blank on the reverse side from the poetic text. Paper in Tang China may have been cheaper and easier to produce than parchment was in medieval Europe, but it was still precious enough that it was often reused if a blank side were available. In fact, many of the Dunhuang texts most important for our understanding of household registration practices and taxation come from registration rolls on the backside of other texts. One can imagine that mere copying exercises would not be accorded the honor of virgin paper, or if they were, both sides would eventually be put to use.

The written words themselves also indicate that these texts were copied to be read. In some of the manuscripts there are various bits of marginalia that would be useful to readers but probably not worth replicating in a copying exercise. For example, in P2700 and P3780, the final character in line 134, 𪛗 (*phiaw*), is followed by the characters 𪛗音, indicating how it should be pronounced. There are similar notes found in both P3910 and S5477 as well. The presence of colophons for many of these texts further implies a level of formality greater than what would likely be accorded practice sheets. As we have seen, many of these texts are precisely dated, with the copyist and his monastery noted as well. Most tellingly, one such colophon, found in S692, indicates that the copyist would typically expect payment for his work. He writes the following brief bit of doggerel: “Today I have finished copying, and should have five measures of rice/Yet the price is high and I can’t get it, what a disaster!” 今日寫書了，合有五升米。高代(賃)不可得，環(還)是自身災。⁶⁹ This short verse is similar to certain scribal comments found in medieval European manuscripts in its use of the vernacular where the original poem itself is in a more literary mode. Xu Jun points out that similar verses are found in colophons to a num-

⁶⁹ This reading is suggested by Xu, *Dunhuang shiji*, p. 252.

ber of Dunhuang manuscripts of a diverse range of genres.⁷⁰ We know nothing of the economics of the book market in Dunhuang but it does appear that scribes like the copyist of S692 were not merely working on their brushwork. They were copying out texts that others would read and they were (or at least would have wanted to have been) paid accordingly for their labors.

Before even addressing the poem itself, we have through these texts drawn closer to the experience of late-medieval Chinese literature as it was enjoyed by its actual practitioners. Critical texts and print-set editions, useful though they are for some purposes, elide the real circumstances of literary production that existed a thousand or so years ago. The “Qinfu yin” manuscripts reveal a world of diverse reading experiences and texts that were far from standardized. The writing in some of these texts is sloppy and the copyists less than skilled, but they may well represent the condition in which much Tang-dynasty poetry was produced, reproduced, and enjoyed before and even well into the age of print.

Textual Variation: General

The variation in material and formal aspects of these manuscripts is an important part of the textual world of Tang and Five Dynasties. Yet no one would consider the actual poem “Qinfu yin” to have meaningfully changed in the course of transmission simply because different versions appeared on different sizes of paper in different handwriting. Indeed, formal variation is only one aspect of the differences between these texts and I will thus now turn to the focal point of this study: the variation found among the words of the poetic texts themselves. After a brief discussion of methodology I will discuss both overall rates of variation between the manuscripts and then address in detail the specific types of variation that I have found in these different texts. My analysis shows that there is a wide range in both the rates of variation between sets of texts and in the types of variation that appear most frequently. Finally, I will draw some tentative conclusions as to what these data can and cannot tell us about how the poem “Qinfu yin” might have circulated in the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods.

Because my goal here is to give a sense of what the actual textual environment might have been like, my approach is to compare pairs of texts. With eight texts in all, there are a total of twenty-eight possible pairs. The most basic comparison gives us the overall rate of variation.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 36–37.

To calculate this figure I note each instance of textual variation and divide the total number of character positions containing instances of variation by the total number of eligible character positions for the given pair. A character position is considered eligible only if both of the manuscripts in a given pair contain physically intact text at that point. If one or both are damaged then the position is not counted, as that would not necessarily indicate variation in the text as originally copied but possibly damage that occurred years or centuries later.⁷¹ I have repeated this process for each of the twenty-eight pairs and have further broken down the results into a number of categories of variation.

There are many advantages to this approach. By looking at sets of pairs and treating them all equally, one does not set off any single text as better than any other or consider it more accurate to an imagined original. My interest is in differences between actual texts rather than between the texts and an abstract ideal of the poem. Another important aspect of this method is that it tells us exactly how much any given text differs from any other given text. This, I believe, provides a more useful picture of how readers in this period would have actually encountered literary works. To a reader, the difference between pairs of texts, say my copy of “Qinfu yin” and my friend’s copy, would surely be more important than the differences across a group of texts. Finally, the data derived from twenty-eight comparisons allows us to tell if certain types of variation are more common in some pairs than in others and thus to make educated guesses about some of the circumstances of copying and transmission for specific manuscripts.

If there is one dominant trend in the variations between these manuscripts it is, well, variety. We find a range from near identity to substantial difference. The pair that shows the highest rate of variation is P3780 and S5477, with variation between the two texts in 280 of 1,342 character positions or 20.9%. This means that, on average, these two texts differ from one another in at least one character position in every seven-character line of the poem. The actual patterns of variation, of course, are not this consistent. Some lines have no variants and others contain many. The fact remains that these two texts differ in some fashion for over a fifth of the poem. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the pair of P3381 and S692. Out of 1,366 eligible character positions, these two manuscripts display variation in only 77, for a rate of 5.6%.

⁷¹ Note that if one text includes a character that another omits not because of textual damage but simply as an omission, this does count as an eligible character position and an instance of variation.

Between these two extremes we find a fairly even distribution of rates with an average of 12.8% variation and median of 12.85%.

When we look more closely at these numbers, certain patterns emerge that give hints about the relationships between some of the manuscripts. We cannot know which of these texts most closely resembles Wei Zhuang's original intention for his poem, but we can see that one of these versions differs from its peers more than any other. Of the top ten pairs in terms of variation rate, six of them include S₅₄₇₇. It differs from most other texts at a rate ranging from 15.5% (P₃₃₈₁) to the 20.9% variation with P₃₇₈₀ noted previously. In fact, the only text with which it displays substantially less variation is P₃₉₁₀, which was clearly copied at least in a large part if not fully by the same scribe. Even more surprising is that these two texts, despite sharing a copyist, still differ at a rate of 12.6%, just below the average rate but more than double the rate of some other pairs by different copyists.⁷² Though these two texts were copied by the same person at the same place and probably in close chronological proximity, on average they display variation in almost every line of the poem.⁷³

In other cases, similarity in the circumstances of copying indeed results in far more similar textual products. From colophons, we know that P₃₃₈₁ and S₆₉₂ were copied approximately fourteen years apart and by different copyists. However, these copyists produced texts with a rate of variation less than half that of P₃₉₁₀ and S₅₄₇₇. The colophons also tell us that both P₃₃₈₁ and S₆₉₂ were copied at Dunhuang's Jinguangming Monastery, and this may be the key to their similarity. It raises the possibility, though it can be no more than speculative, that the copyists were working from base texts that were closely related to one another or even identical. Of course this would likely have been true of the two texts produced by servant Yin as well.

Types of Variation

The substantial differences between many pairs of "Qinfu yin" manuscripts that the overall variation rates show is only a general picture. To understand how texts change over time and in what fashion these manuscripts differ from each other, we must determine not merely the fact of variation but the specific types. In what follows I

⁷² Interestingly, P₃₉₁₀ is in each of the other four pairs that round out the ten with the highest variation rates.

⁷³ In fact, the variation between these texts is even more extreme than this variation rate would imply. As I will discuss in more detail below, P₃₉₁₀ is missing the last third or so of the poem. This omission is not due to damage, but is simply because the scribe cut the poem short.

will discuss eleven different categories of variants in the twenty-eight pairs of “Qinfu yin” texts. Many of these categories will be familiar to students of Chinese textual criticism and textual change in Chinese print culture. Indeed, a number have been described in Susan Cherniack’s article discussed above.⁷⁴ Yet these categories have not, to the best of my knowledge, been applied fully to variation in manuscripts or quantified in a set body of texts as I do here.

Before examining the variants, however, it is important to be clear about the limitations of this and any other categorical scheme when dealing with texts as removed from us culturally, chronologically, and linguistically as the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts. Some of the categories I will discuss below, such as missing characters or reversed characters, are straightforward. Others, however, depend very much on the judgments made by the examiner. Such categories as characters that are phonologically related but graphically dissimilar depend on subjective judgments as to what constitutes similarity and difference. And while many characters have retained the same basic orthographic form over time or can be found in other texts, with phonology we enter into very uncertain territory: reconstructing pronunciations is always an inexact science. Accuracy here is further compromised by the fact that we are examining texts written and recited not in Tang-dynasty Chang’an or Luoyang, but in a distant frontier region where numerous different languages and dialects were both spoken and written. Our guesses at how these characters would be pronounced and heard by the copyists of these “Qinfu yin” texts are thus tentative at best. Even if one can reconstruct rhyming categories with some accuracy, it is doubtful that they would fully represent the range of sounds that might be mutually confused, especially when pronounced with a dialectical or even “foreign” accent. In short, the categories employed here should be taken for what they are: provisional judgments that are open for revision. There is no doubt that another reader examining these same texts would arrive at somewhat different numbers than those given below. I am, however, confident that the general trend of variants I propose would be found by any informed reader.

Variant forms

The first category of variation, “variant forms,” indicates variants that would not have been seen by a contemporary reader as altering the meaning found in that character position. A common example of variants in this category is one in which a character that would now be

⁷⁴ Cherniack, “Book Culture,” pp. 102–25.

considered to be a “simplified” character, such as 冂, is used in one text while another text uses the “complex” form, in this case 門.⁷⁵ There is no difference in meaning here, just as a British writer’s use of the British spelling “colour” rather than the American “color” would not indicate a different meaning of the word. In another example, some scribes use two dots known as a *chongwen hao* 重文號, or duplication mark, to replace the second of a set of repeated characters. Other scribes (such as servant Yin) typically write out the full character a second time. If in a given character position one text has a duplication mark while its pair has a full character, the variation would fall into this category. The meanings are the same, yet the actual written characters are different.

Examples of this category of variants often include more than two possible forms of a character. In line 70, manuscripts S692 and P3910 use the character 嫫, while P2700 and P3780 use the variant form 𠂔. These forms are interchangeable, and the reading of the line is unchanged. But to further complicate matters, manuscripts S5476 and P3381 use what is probably a variant of the second character, 𠂔. As all of these three variations appear in more than one manuscript, it is unlikely that they constitute singular mistakes by a copyist, but are rather simply alternative choices that would have been considered acceptable in the historical orthographic context in which the manuscripts were copied.

Even within a single manuscript a scribe may use multiple forms of a single character. The character 壹, a variant form of the character 一, meaning “one,” is used frequently in the manuscripts but without any discernable patterns.⁷⁶ For example, in line 128, manuscripts S5477, P2700, P3953, P3910, and P3381 use the character 一 in the first and fifth character positions as a counter for amounts of gold and grain respectively. P3780, on the other hand, uses 壹 in both positions. And demonstrating that this is not simply a transcription choice for a given copyist, S5476 uses the character 一 in the first position and 壹 in the fifth, while S692 does just the opposite. In other words, this is not a choice dictated either by a copyist’s overall preference for one form over another, or even for one over another depending on context when the use is numerical. In a related example, the copyist of P2700 frequently switches between using simplified and complex ver-

⁷⁵ For an example of this variant see line 21, character position 3, in which S5476 uses the character 冂 while the other five versions that include this portion of the text use the character 門 instead.

⁷⁶ In general (that is, not in the context of these manuscripts) the more complicated character was often used in official or legal documents, as the character 一 would be much easier to alter into characters indicating other numbers.

sions of the character for gate (門/阂) both as stand-alone characters and as radicals.

Perhaps because this form of variation has little effect on meaning, it is the most frequent type found in these texts, accounting for just over a fifth (21.8%) of the variants overall across all pairs. But it is important to note that this figure is only an average and does not at all indicate that this category is the most frequent type of variation found in any given pair of manuscripts. In some pairs it is, accounting for 38.6% of the variants in the pair P3381 and P2700 and for about 31% of the variants when P2700 is paired with S5476 and P3381.⁷⁷ At the same time, in about one-third of the comparisons, this type of variant either is not the most frequently encountered or is essentially tied for that position with another category.

An objection might be raised that such variants are insignificant, just as we would give little meaning to the variant spellings of the word “color.” However, in a manuscript culture the potential for new variation is considerable, and variant characters that might be considered interchangeable in one set of forms can grow farther apart through subsequent transmissions. In a phenomenon I will call “variant drift,”⁷⁸ variant forms with the same meaning can easily give rise to later variations that end up with very different meanings. The character 壹 is much more likely to be mistakenly read and written as 荳, meaning “beans” or “peas,” than would the form 一. This would be an especially large possibility in a context like line 128, which addresses agricultural products. Another example can be found in the variant forms of the character 關, meaning “gate” or “close,” which appears in many forms in the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts. In the fourth character position of line 26 alone we find the following forms: 関, 闌, 関, and 關. The last of these forms is especially problematic due to its close graphic similarity to the character 開, meaning “open.” With the meanings related and the forms so similar, a reader could easily mistake one for the other. The final stage of this particular example of variant drift does not appear in the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts themselves, though it is well attested to elsewhere.⁷⁹ Variants, even those that indicate the same meanings, still constitute differences between texts. Moreover, they can and do lead to further variation that gradually increases these differences as a work is repeatedly copied.

⁷⁷ Note that as these pairs also have some of the lowest overall variant rates to begin with, the dominance of this variant further emphasizes their similarity.

⁷⁸ See the more detailed discussion under category eleven, below.

⁷⁹ See Cherniack, number 1.1.7.1, “Book Culture,” p. 110, for examples from other texts.

Similar sound and form

Variants in which both the phonology and the graphic form of the characters are quite similar make up my second category of variants. In many cases, these small differences in phonology and orthography result in much larger differences in meaning. Common forms of this variation involve the use of different radicals or the omission of a radical. An example of the latter is found in the fourth character position of line 153, in which manuscripts S5476 and P3780 both have the character 城 (*ʃhiaŋ*),⁸⁰ while the rest of the texts use 成 (*ʃhiaŋ*). In most texts this line reads 大道俱(成/城)棘子林 (“The main roads had become groves of thorn bushes”) and thus 成, meaning “to become,” makes more sense in context.⁸¹ Examples with different radicals abound as well. Because the characters 河 and 何 are both pronounced “*xfia*” and their respective radicals can be almost identical in many calligraphic styles, they are frequent candidates for confusion. In the first character position of line 224, P3381, P3780, and S5477 use 河 while P2700 and S692 use 何. As the character is part of the compound with 津, meaning “ford,” context makes it clear that 河 (“river”) is probably correct.

In both these cases one variant is clearly preferable to another, and we can attribute the variation to scribal errors at some point in the transmission process. There are many other instances in which the choice is much less obvious or even impossible. In the sixth character position of line 26, four manuscripts use the character 警 (*kiəŋ*) and two use 驚 (*kiəŋ*). Both appear with the character 急 in compounds that have attested Tang uses. In this case the likely meanings, “a dire situation” or “imminent danger” are quite close, though 驚急 has additional psychological implications not contained in 警急. In the line in question, 擬向潼關爲(警/驚)急 (“They readied to head to Tong Pass to deal with the crisis”),⁸² both compounds make sense, and there is no clear basis for favoring one over the other.

Characters with similar sounds and appearances are obviously strong candidates for scribal confusion (or choice) and it should come as no surprise that this type of variant appears frequently in the “Qinfuyin” texts. Overall they make up 17.4% of the variants in the pairs com-

⁸⁰ All transcripts of Tang period pronunciations are from Edwin G. Pulleyblank’s reconstructions of Late Middle Chinese found in his *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991). I will use the reconstructed Tang pronunciations only when it is important for the argument being made, not for every character cited.

⁸¹ Note that S5477 has 且 rather than 俱 in this line.

⁸² There are variants in a number of these positions, but this seems to be the most likely reading of the line.

parisons and are thus the second most frequently encountered category. But again we see a wide range within the various pairings. In the pairs P3953 with P2700 and P3780, this category makes up as much as 31% of the variants. With most other pairs we find numbers closer to 15% to 20%. Even though these numbers are lower than those for the first category, unlike the variants in that category, these often substantially change the meaning of the character in question and can thus have a greater effect on possible interpretations of the poem.

Graphically similar

Characters that are orthographically similar but phonetically quite distinct, rank third in frequency and account for 13.1% of the variation in these texts.⁸³ Unlike the first two categories, this one appears with a fair degree of consistency across the different pairs. Save for pairs with P3953, whose statistics can sometimes be skewed by the small size of the sample, this category typically makes up between 11% and 15% of the variants in each pair.

These variants almost always result in significant differences in meaning. In some cases one can easily identify a particular variant as a copying error. The seventh character position of line 24, in which manuscript P3910 has the character 設 (*śiat*) while all the other versions use 誤 (*ḡuś*), is a good example. The compound 疑誤 has attested Tang usages meaning either “to be confused” or “to misunderstand,” both of which make sense in this context referring to an alarm indicating that the rebels are about to attack. The character 設, on the other hand, does not appear in compounds with 疑 and with a primary meaning of “to establish,” would make little sense here.⁸⁴

Other examples of this category bring into question whether one particular variant should be privileged over another. In the fourth character position of line 93, P2700 has the character 里 (*li*) as part of the compound 千里, while the other manuscripts all have the character 重 (*trḡywnj*). With the latter variant the full line reads: 夜卧千重剑戟围 (“At night I slept surrounded by a thousand layers of swords”).⁸⁵ This reading makes perfect sense in context and the fact that it appears in all the other manuscripts that contain this line could be taken as an argument for taking it as the standard version. At the same time, the

⁸³ These are found in Cherniack’s type 1.1, “Confusions of similar graphic forms,” “Book Culture,” p. 109.

⁸⁴ The full line reads: 朝士归来 (上/半/尙) 疑 (誤/設); discussed further, below.

⁸⁵ There are variant characters in the sixth position but they are of the first category, variant forms, and do not affect the meaning of the line.

compound 千里, meaning “a thousand *li*,” is far more common in general and would also read smoothly here.⁸⁶

We find more complicated scenarios in other instances from this category. In the seventh character position of line 53, manuscripts P3780, P3910, S692, and S5477 use the character 盡 (*tsfin*), meaning “to complete.” P3381, P2700, and S5476 instead use the character 畫 (*xñwajk*), meaning “to paint.” The full line reads: 東隣有女眉新(畫/盡) (“My neighbors to the east had a daughter, her eyebrows newly painted/complete”). In this case there is little reason to privilege one variant over the other. Both make sense in the context of the poem (though 盡 would require a more forced reading) and both are attested to by multiple manuscripts.

An example in line 85 represents an even more complicated case in which a confluence of different variants makes it exceedingly difficult to determine the “correct” reading of the line. In the fifth character position of this line, the manuscripts P3910 and S5477 both have the character 金 (*kim*), meaning metal, while the four other texts with this line use the orthographically similar character 全 (*tsñyan*) meaning “complete” or “to keep whole, keep safe, preserve.” The context for these variants varies by manuscript because of the variants that appear in other positions in the line. In P3381, S692, and S5476 the line reads: 妾身幸得全刀鋸 (“I was fortunate to be able to keep myself safe from their weapons of torture”).⁸⁷ In the version contained in P3910 and S5477 the third character position has the character 行 (*xñjia:jñ*), meaning “to walk, to go” or “conduct, action,” rather than 幸 (*xñjia:jñ*), meaning “fortunate.”⁸⁸ My tentative reading of the line in this form is “If I were to have gone, I would have met with their metal weapons of torture 妾身行得金刀鋸.”⁸⁹ Had the character 金 appeared in the fourth character position of P3381, S692, or S5476, it would have been simple to write it off as an error, as it would make little sense for the line to read, “I was fortunate to have met with their metal weapons of torture.” When 行 rather than 幸 is used in the third character position, however, the presence of 金 is more plausible. At the same time, a reasonable argument could be made that 全 still makes more sense than 金 even in P3910 and S5477. The line would then read, “I myself

⁸⁶ A similar situation is found in the seventh character position of line 190, in which P3780 has the character 公 (*kəwŋ*) while the other manuscripts use 翁 (*ʔəwŋ*). Both make sense in context.

⁸⁷ Literally, “knives and saws.” The compound is a reference to tools of punishment and torture. Yates translates this line as “But, as luck would have it, I managed to keep myself safe from sword slashes”; Yates, *Washing Silk*, p. 113.

⁸⁸ This type of variant falls into category four; discussed below.

⁸⁹ This is an unnatural reading, as the translation is intended to reflect.

went out and was able to keep safe from their weapons of torture” 妾身行得全刀鋸。A few lines later in the poem we learn that the woman in whose voice this line is written did indeed leave and go with the rebel forces, giving additional support for this reading. Complicating matters further, the full line in P2700 reads: 妾身行德全刀鋸 (“I conducted myself virtuously and kept safe from their weapons of torture”). In this context, 行 works better than 幸 but 全 is also clearly superior to 金. Again we find that it is difficult to choose one variant or set of variants over another. Moreover, any given variant can have an effect that goes beyond the character position in which it appears, changing our reading of other characters and lines as well. We have moved beyond a simple notion of scribal errors in such cases and must acknowledge that copyists may be consciously reshaping the poem in the course of transmission.

Phonetically similar

My fourth category of variants is the reverse of category three: characters that are phonetically similar but orthographically distinct (such as 行 and 幸 noted above).⁹⁰ Like the third category, these variants typically display widely divergent meanings. In the sixth character position of line 4, for example, two manuscripts have the character 塵 (*trhiŋ*), while another uses the homophone 陳 (*trhiŋ*). In the context in which they appear, 塵 is a better fit as part of a common compound, 香塵. With a basic meaning of “fragrant dust,” this is both a metaphor for the walk of a beautiful woman and a Buddhist term for one of the one of the “six dusts” of worldly entanglement. Meaning “to array,” 陳 would make little sense here. Another example in which it is relatively easy to determine the best reading is P2700’s use of the character 同 (*thəwŋ*) rather than 潼 (*thəwŋ*) in the third character position of line 26. As the line is making a clear reference to the famed Tong Pass 潼關, we can confidently consider this an error.⁹¹

For many variants in this category one alternative appears to fit much better with the sense of the line than another. Yet there does remain a number of cases in which it is much more difficult to make such a determination. In the fourth character position of line 45, manuscripts P3381, P3780, and S5476 have the character 氣 (*kʰi*), here meaning “vapor” or “mist,” while P3910, P2700, and S5477 use the homophone

⁹⁰ See Cherniack’s type 1.3, “confusions due to similarities in sound,” “Book Culture,” p. 110.

⁹¹ For the sake of contrast I note variants with characters that are graphically similar but phonetically quite distinct. These are often cited as evidence of written transmission and in some cases the context makes it clear that a given variant is indeed probably a copying error.

起 (*kʰi*), meaning “to rise up.” In this context, 氣 would serve as part of a compound noun with the character 暈 (*yn*) indicating the ring of mist around the moon. As 暈 itself has this meaning of “mist,” the character 氣 as part of a compound with it does not affect the sense of the line. The character 起, however, operates as a verb for which 暈 would be the subject. Alternate readings would be something to the effect of “Dark clouds, the moon’s ring of vapor, like surrounding layers” 陰雲暈氣若重圍;⁹² or, using the variant 起, “The moon’s ring of dark clouds rises up like surrounding layers” 陰雲暈起若重圍.⁹³ Neither 暈氣 nor 暈起 is a common Tang compound and neither is used more frequently in the extant manuscripts. Thus while these two nearly homophonic characters have fundamentally different meanings and graphs, there is little if any ground to privilege one over the other.

Such variants, making up 10.1% of the total variants, are less prominent overall than the category of orthographically similar characters with different sounds. However, it is much more frequent in some pairings than others, accounting for 18% of the variants between P3780 and P2700, but only about 2% of those between the pair S692 and S5476 and the pair P3910 and S5477. Both this wide range and the differences between this category and the previous one have implications for determining how these texts may have been transmitted and will be addressed in more detail below.

Similar meaning

The fifth category consists of characters with similar meanings but completely different graphs and phonology.⁹⁴ These variants are relatively rare, accounting for only 4.5% of the variants overall but are arguably the best examples of change in the course of transmission due to scribal choice rather than simple error.⁹⁵ In the third character position of line 163, manuscript P2700 uses the character 賊 (*tsʰəǎk*), meaning “bandit” or often, “rebel,” while the rest of the manuscripts use 寇 (*kʰəw*), which has approximately the same meaning, though is also used to specifically refer to “raiders” from another land. In the sixth character position of line 4, P3780 uses the character 烟 (*?jian*), meaning “smoke” or “mist.” Manuscripts P3381 and P2700, as noted previously, use the

⁹² *Wei* 圍 need not have military implications, though the context makes it clear that they are intended here. This is especially true of the reading with the variant 起.

⁹³ For the sake of simplicity, I am ignoring other variants in some of these lines (e.g., 圍 for 圍, in S5476).

⁹⁴ This category is not included in Cherniack’s list.

⁹⁵ The only pair in which they are substantially more common is P3780 and P3381, where they make up 8.4% of the total variants between the two texts.

character 塵, meaning “dust.”⁹⁶ The meaning of these two characters is not identical, but it is unquestionably close. When this character position was discussed earlier, the compound “fragrant dust” 香塵 helped to identify the variant 陳 as a probable mistake. In this case, however, such a determination is much more difficult. To begin with, because of physical damage to manuscript P3780, the character immediately preceding 烟 is missing. Assuming for the sake of argument that it is the character 香, as it is in the other manuscripts, we are still left with no definitive answer. The compound 香烟, like 香塵, has many well-attested Tang uses and would fit quite well in this line. In both of these cases context is no help in determining the better reading and there is thus nothing to favor one reading over the other.

Interestingly, this type of variant is also found in one of the only two lines of “Qin fu yin” that had been known for hundreds of years prior to the discoveries at Dunhuang. In the fourth character position of line 145, manuscripts P3381, P3780, P3953, S692, P2700, and S5476 all have the character 爲 (*yj*), here meaning “to become” or “to be.” Manuscripts P3910 and S5477 use the character 成 (*shiaijj*), which here would mean “to change into” or “to become.” Again, the characters bear no graphic or phonological similarity, but are rather near synonyms. With either character the line could be translated as, “The Inner Treasury was burned into the ashes of brocade and embroidery.”

A subset of this type is the graphically and phonologically distinct characters whose meanings are different but of the same general category. Variants of this sort do change the meanings of the lines in which they appear. Yet they do not typically force grammatical changes in the lines and rarely provide clear evidence that one variant or another is more likely to be correct. In the third character position of line 52, manuscripts P3910 and S5477 both have the character 子 (*tszʹ*), here meaning “son,” while the rest of the manuscripts use 女 (*nriǝʹ*), “daughter.”⁹⁷ The meanings, appearance, and sound of the characters are all different, yet the shared general category of the meanings probably explains the variation. We find a similar situation in the fifth character position of line 214, in which S5477 uses 數 (*swa:wk*), “many,” with the other manuscripts all reading 千 (*tsʰian*), “a thousand,” as a modifier for 万, meaning “ten thousand.” Again, the resulting meaning of the line is

⁹⁶ As discussed previously, this character position has a third variant, 陳, as well.

⁹⁷ Note that this is one of the many instances in which S5477 and P3910 share a variant that does not appear in the other manuscripts. As noted above, at least a portion of S5477 appears to have been copied by the same copyist responsible for P3910. However, the strong probability that S5477 was written by multiple hands complicates matters. My conjecture is

slightly changed, but the sense and grammar remain the same. The fact that variants of this type result in only small changes in meaning might give the impression that they are unimportant. However, as I will argue below, this category of variant may be the most revealing in terms of how these texts were transmitted over time as they provide at least partial evidence of both intentional scribal change and memorial transmission.

Reversed characters

Category six, reversed characters, is straightforward: in a pair of texts, two adjacent characters appear in inverted positions. These variants account for 9.3% of the variants overall but are significantly more frequent in pairs involving P3953 or S692.⁹⁸ Cherniack argues that in many cases of textual transmission, characters are reversed intentionally to “improve the sense.”⁹⁹ This does not often prove to be the case in the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts. In fact, these variants provide a rare opportunity to be confident in assessing whether a variant is simply another version of the text or difference that would be considered an error by the copyist himself or a later reader. In over a third of these instances, caret-like marks appear next to characters that have been reversed from the order found in the other manuscripts.¹⁰⁰ In the second and third character positions of line 36, for example, manuscript S5477 has the characters 向走, while the other four manuscripts in which this line survives all read 走向. Next to these characters in S5477 a caret mark is written. It is unclear, however, whether the mark was put in by the copyist himself or by someone else. In either case, as noted previously, this is strong evidence that these texts were read over after being copied.

In almost every case, even when not corrected, these reversals do not seriously alter the meaning of the lines in which they appear. In the second of the lines of the poem to survive through preservation in *Beimeng suoyan*, line 146, the reversal of the characters 盡踏 in the third and fourth character positions in S5477 and P3910 makes little difference in the meaning of the line, “On the Street of Heaven everything we stepped upon was the bones of public officials.” And although these reversals sometime change the meanings of lines if one holds to strictly

that even though S5477 is the work of a number of copyists, they were probably working from the same source. This may be true of P3910 as well.

⁹⁸ Though these two texts do not share the same set of reversals in most cases.

⁹⁹ Cherniack has this as her type 4.2; “Book Culture,” p. 119.

¹⁰⁰ Note that I still included these “corrected” examples in the 9.3% figure, above.

grammatical readings, in many cases the result is a change in emphasis rather than larger meaning. Line 61 of manuscript S692 reads 西隣女有真仙子, while the same line in all the other manuscripts reads 西隣有女真仙子. The difference between “The neighbors to the west have a daughter, a true goddess” and “Among the daughters of the neighbor to the west, there is a true goddess,” is not great.

Extra and missing characters

The seventh and eighth categories of variants in these manuscripts, the inclusion of extra characters and the absence of characters, respectively, are probably more prevalent in a long narrative poem such as “Qinfu yin” than they would be in shorter poems in which extra or missing characters would more obviously stand out as line-length violations. Here extra characters account for 8.6% of the variants overall, while missing characters make up 11.3%.¹⁰¹ In some instances, extra characters are simply rewritten versions of a mistaken character that the copyist did not bother to cross out. In line 59 of manuscript S5477, the character 郎 (*lan*) appears as an extra character directly before the graphically and phonetically similar character 良 (*lian*). The copyist probably realized his error and simply wrote the correct character in without crossing out the incorrect one.¹⁰² Many missing characters are also easily attributable to simple copying errors at some point in the transmission process. Other additions and omissions appear to be due to line skips by the scribe. At the beginning of line 66 in S5477 the copyist has begun the line with the characters 出朱^門 (the last of which is an aborted attempt at the full character 門), which appear out of place here. These same three characters are found at the end of the next line, line 67, indicating that the copyist skipped ahead but realized his error in mid-character. Line 132 of manuscript P3910 is a good example of a scribe omitting characters for a similar reason. In the other seven manuscripts this line reads 溝壑漸平人漸少 (“Ditches and gullies gradually filled [with bodies] while the people grew fewer”), P3910 reads, 溝壑漸少 (“Ditches and gullies grew few”). By consulting multiple texts we can clearly see that the copyist must have skipped from one 漸 to the other in the same line. To a reader who had only this one text (and it makes sense to assume that most readers *would* only have one text), the line would be confusing indeed.

¹⁰¹ Note that the category of missing characters does not include characters missing due to textual damage and also does not include the last third of the poem that seems to have been intentionally omitted from P3910.

¹⁰² See line 78 of manuscript S5476 for two examples of this type of extra character variant in a single line.

Other additions, however, are not clearly errors and can have a significant impact on the meaning of a line. In both line 143 of S5477 and line 172 of P2700 extra negative particles (不) clearly give the lines new readings. An interesting example of additional characters that appear to have been inserted intentionally is found in line 196. Here all the manuscripts but one end the line with the phrase 仰天哭 (“he looked up to the Heavens and wept”). Manuscript P3780, on the other hand, lengthens this phrase to the more detailed and emotive 仰天掩面哭一聲 (“he looked up to the Heavens, hid his face in his hands, and gave a single cry”). Though this violates the seven-character line in which the rest of the poem is written, it would be wrong to characterize it as a mistake rather than an embellishment. By the Tang there was already a longstanding poetic tradition of expanding and contracting lines to fit into different meters, often by adding or subtracting particles or other words less crucial for the meaning of the line. In this case, however, the added words are not filler but are likely intended to give further emotional weight to the scene the line describes.¹⁰³

Commentarial characters

My ninth category concerns commentarial characters that become part of the text proper, a relatively frequent occurrence in printed editions of philosophical and historical texts.¹⁰⁴ In this set of poetic manuscripts, however, it appears only once. In manuscripts P3780 and P2700, the characters 眇音 (*mjiaw'zim*) are written horizontally in small script after the character 舜 (*phiaw'*), apparently as an explanation of the latter's correct pronunciation. In P3910, however, the character 舜 itself is omitted while the characters 眇音 appear as vertically written, regularly sized parts of the text proper. They make no sense in context and can rightly be deemed an error. The nature of this particular work of literature and the context of its reproduction – a popular poem being copied on a distant frontier no longer part of the Tang empire – make it unsurprising that there was little commentary or annotation, beyond this one instance, that might be accidentally incorporated into the main text.

Split characters

Commentarial characters working their way into the text proper is surely a result of written, rather than oral transmission, as is my tenth

¹⁰³ The power of this emotion was not lost on at least one translator of the poem. Though P3780 is the only manuscript with these extra characters, Dore Levy's translation apparently uses this version in her rendering “...hiding his face in his hands and wept aloud to Heaven”; Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁴ See Cherniack's type 5.2, “Book Culture,” p. 120.

category, in which a scribe has at some point mistakenly written the radical and the phonetic components of a single character as two separate characters.¹⁰⁵ This type of variant is also quite rare, making up less than 1% of the total variants. Not surprisingly given the overall quality of its copying, most instances of this type of variation are in the manuscript S5477, though it appears in P3780 as well. In line 187, what appears as the character 携 in other texts is clearly written as 推乃 in S5477. Likewise, in line 193, S5477 has two characters 公羽 where P3381, S692, and P2700 have the single character 翁.¹⁰⁶ In both these cases the characters resulting from the split make little sense in context.

Variant drift

My eleventh and final category of variants in the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts is perhaps the most difficult to explain. These are variants that seem have little or no clear connection with each other in terms of graphic form, phonology, or meaning.¹⁰⁷ They are not easily explainable by line skips, character reversals, or any of the other categories explored above. For example, in the fourth character position of line 107, manuscript S5477 and P3910 have the character 事 (*shì*) while the other manuscripts all use 對 (*tuaj*). Both variants make sense in context but there is little to connect them. Another example is found in the third character position of line 114. This section of the poem describes a rumor that the imperial forces have retaken the city of Chishui 赤水, about thirty miles from the capital. In most manuscripts the line reads: 朝若来兮暮應至 (“If they set out for here at dawn, they will arrive by dusk!”). P2700, on the other hand has the phonetically and orthographically unrelated character 見 (*kjian*) in the place of 来 (*laj*). Other than both being verbs, there is little to connect them. Moreover, 来 would have as its subject the troops themselves, which would have to be taken as the object of 見. Again, both work in context but there is no clear reason for the variation.

In many instances of this type of variation, it may simply be the case that the characters did indeed sound more alike to the Tang ear (or Dunhuang ear) than we now realize through our reconstructed pronunciation. However, another explanation for some of these con-

¹⁰⁵ See Cherniack’s type 1.7, “Book Culture,” p. 112.

¹⁰⁶ Manuscript P3780 uses the character 公 in the second character position. As it does not follow this with 羽, I have put this variant in the present category. Determining that 翁 has been broken up at this point in S5477 is, of course, a judgment call. Based on the spacing between characters and comparisons with other instances of 翁 in this same text, I am confident that a reader (and later copyist) would likely read this 公 and 羽 as separate characters in this case.

¹⁰⁷ My count of these variants is twenty-three, though this is a very tentative total.

fusing variants is what I call variant drift. This is a phenomenon, well attested to in manuscript cultures, of a single word changing in different directions through multiple reproductions. In other words, some transmission lines might vary according to sound value while others will change along orthographic lines.¹⁰⁸ The comparison pair P3780 and P3910 offers two interesting examples of this phenomenon. In the sixth character position of line 4 (a position rich in variants, as we have seen above), P3780 has the character 烟 and P3910 has 陳. These characters bear no relation to each other phonologically, orthographically, or in terms of meaning. If one had only these two manuscripts it would be difficult to find any connection between the two. However, we do have one additional text that is intact at this character position: P3381. The latter's use of 塵 in this position provides a link between 烟 and 陳. It is connected to the first through meaning ("dust" vs. "smoke" or "mist") and to the second through pronunciation (*trfin* in both cases). The third character position of line 34 has a similar example with two seemingly unrelated characters. In P3780: 綠 (*lywk*) meaning "green") and in P3910: 蘭 (*yan*) meaning "garden." The four other manuscripts with this portion of text provide a possible missing link with the character 緣 (*jyan*), here meaning "to climb," which shows an orthographic link to 綠 and a phonological link to 蘭.

These cases are fairly straightforward and understandable because we have additional texts with different variants beyond the pair in question. One could, however, easily see how variant drift, when continued across many generations of textual reproduction and transmission, could produce variants whose paths and origins are much less obvious. It is also important here to be clear that in tracing these connections I am not implying a direct link between any of these texts. I would not claim, for example, that the scribes for P3381 and P3910 worked from the same source text and erred or altered in different directions. Rather, the idea of variant drift provides a useful and in some cases convincing description of a process that probably took part at various stages in the transmission of these texts, the length and number of textual generations of which we cannot know.

¹⁰⁸ This type of variation has been found in some of the earliest manuscripts from China. See Edward Shaughnessy's discussion of the variants 東, 東, and 簡 in bamboo strips from Mawangdui and other sites; Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany: State U. New York P., 2006), pp. 18–19.

CONCLUSIONS

If we are only interested in approaching “Qinfu yin” as a disembodied literary work free from any material context, the usefulness of these statistics may seem obscure. But “Qinfu yin” was never free from specific material contexts to those who encountered it in the Tang and Five Dynasties. Every “Qinfu yin,” whether recited or read, was unique in ways that literary works would not be in the age of print. And thanks to the Dunhuang finds, in this particular case modern scholars can get a taste of what the earlier experience of this poem might have been like, if we set aside the various critical editions that have appeared in the last seventy years and return to the manuscripts themselves. The variants I have detailed above may not bring us any closer to understanding the poem as it originally existed in Wei Zhuang’s own mind or on his lips or paper, but they do go a long way towards helping us understand how the poem was experienced by readers and copyists (two categories that heavily overlap in late-medieval China) close to its period of greatest popularity. In this final section I discuss just what conclusions we can and cannot draw from both the extent and the different types of variation found in these texts.

The overall rates of variation between different pairs of texts make it clear that there were many different versions of “Qinfu yin” in the half century or so after it first appeared. This raises the question of whether or not these different “versions” should, in fact, be considered to be the same poem. In the course of his discussion of different versions of works created by the same author (for example, original manuscript, corrected galley proofs, first edition), Thorpe concludes that: “The basic proposition which I submit about works created by authorial revision is that each version is either potentially or actually, another work of art.”¹⁰⁹ The situation we find with the “Qinfu yin” manuscripts is quite different from Thorpe’s focus on authorial revision in that we have no way of knowing if any of the variation in “Qinfu yin” texts is due to different versions all created by or approved of by Wei Zhuang himself. Thorpe’s focus on the author as the only legitimate creator is out of place when we are dealing with texts produced and transmitted in the very different circumstances of the Tang and Five Dynasties. If the author is only one part of a collaborative effort in creating literary works in medieval China, then the variations introduced by scribes should be afforded the same respect Thorpe gives

¹⁰⁹ Thorpe, *Principles of Textual Criticism*, p. 37.

to changing authorial intentions. We would then be talking about not one “Qinfu yin” but many.

But by what measure could we declare that these texts meaningfully represent distinct works of art? Falling back on numbers to make the determination, one inevitably encounters the Sorites paradox. What precise amount of variation results in a new literary work? In the final analysis I am not sure such a determination would tell us more than do the bare numbers that underlie it. What is clear is that someone reading the poem found in manuscripts S₅₄₇₇ or P₃₉₁₀ is going to have a very different experience from someone reading that written out by the copyist of P₃₇₈₀. They will encounter numerous lines that differ not only in the form of the words but in their meaning as well. Given the tendency in traditional Chinese literary criticism to focus very closely on single words and compounds as examples of literary achievement, these differences might well add up to different judgments on the merit of the poem. And this does not even take into account the fact that P₃₉₁₀ omits about a third of the poem found in other texts without noting as much, which would surely lead to even greater discrepancies in reader and critical responses to these different texts.

Whether or not we should consider these texts as distinct literary works, there still remains the question of how their differences came about. That is, what were the means of transmission through which the differences in these texts, whether by accident or intent, appeared? The two general categories of transmission for texts in a manuscript culture are memorial and written. In the former, works are memorized and transmitted orally until they are eventually, if ever, written down. Pure written transmission would entail a series of scribes working with physically present source texts from which they would copy new manuscripts. It should be noted that there are many plausible situations that would be a combination of these two categories, such as one scribe reading aloud from a written text while another copies down his spoken words. Not long after their discovery, scholars tagged the “Qinfu yin” texts from Dunhuang as evidence of memorial transmission. Both Giles and Robin Yates have speculated that, to quote Yates, “many of the errors in these manuscripts...were the result of these novices’ memorizing the text without learning the correct form of the graphs.”¹¹⁰ Close examination of the patterns of variants in these texts, however, reveals that though there is good reason to believe that some memorial transmis-

¹¹⁰ Yates, *Washing Silk*, p. 254.

sion may have occurred, the concrete evidence from the texts primarily indicates scribes working from written sources.

Before addressing the specific question of memorial versus written transmission, it is worth noting the simple fact that most of the variation between these texts is comprehensible. That is, we can usually find reasonable connections between variants, whether they be through sound, shape, or meaning. Even with category eleven, some of the seemingly unrelated variants can be attributed to variant drift. If we had a fuller set of manuscripts, I have no doubt that more connections like this would become clear. One obvious trend found in these texts is that the more variants have in common, for example sharing similar sounds *and* shapes *and* meanings, the more likely they are to appear. As we have seen, the most common variant category overall is variant forms of the same character. These variants have the same meaning and sound, and often very similar graphic forms (though there are exceptions to this, such as the variant form 壹 and 一). The next most common category is characters that share both the same sound and very similar graphic forms. It should not be at all surprising that a scribe, whether working from his memory or another text, might write the character 何 when he meant to write 河, or 城 when he intended to copy 成. These examples provide specific evidence of neither written nor memorial transmission, but they do remind us that even if scribes sometimes changed texts intentionally, they often simply made mistakes as well.

Looking at the types of variants found in the Dunhuang “Qinfu yin” manuscripts one does find hints of memorial transmission; conclusive proof, however, remains elusive. Homophones that are graphically dissimilar, my fourth category discussed above, are often cited as evidence of memorial transmission in Chinese texts beginning with the *Shijing* 詩經 and seem to be what Yates has in mind when he speaks of copyists’ “memorizing the text without learning the correct form of the graphs.”¹¹¹ Indeed, we could easily imagine how such variants would be common in texts written out based on memorized sounds. However, there is no reason to believe that these changes would not also occur in texts copied directly from another written text. In a culture in which most reading was done aloud, including the reading involved in transcribing a text, there was rarely writing without an oral component. The typical process of copying from a written text, even in modern reading

¹¹¹ Note that Yates is thus using the term “text” in a broader sense than I do. He seems to be referring to the poem in the abstract, while I use “text” to refer to specific written instantiations of the poem. With my terminology it would thus not make sense for someone to memorize the text but not the graphs. The graphs (and the paper on which they are written) *are* the text.

cultures in which oral reading has largely disappeared, still introduces a word's sound into the process. The copyist looks at the written base text and "vocalizes" the part he is about to copy, if only in his head, and then turns to a separate blank sheet to write it out anew. There is ample evidence from both Europe and China that vocalization while copying results in the same sorts of variants as would copying purely from memory or from hearing another read or recite aloud. Graphically distinct homophonic variants thus may be the result of memorial transmission, but there are other explanations for them as well.

Another category of variants that might appear to provide more convincing evidence for memorial transmission is category five, graphically and phonetically distinct synonyms. It is less likely (though not impossible) that someone working directly from a text, whether speaking aloud, working silently, or having someone else dictate, would confuse 塵 and 烟. Had people memorized all or parts of the poem, however, it would not be surprising for them to remember the basic sense of a line, especially in a narrative poem with a distinct plot like "Qinfu yin," while occasionally switching words for near synonyms. This type of variation is quite common in the received versions of Tang poems that have come down to us through later print culture and in this case we imagine the print culture is simply reproducing the variation found in the manuscript culture upon which it was ultimately based.

At the same time, there are valid explanations for this type of variation other than memorial transmission. People copying texts in both medieval Europe and Tang China, whether professional copyists or simply avid readers, would change words in an attempt to "improve" the work they were copying. These changes were especially likely with such non-canonical works as contemporary poetry. When copyists think of themselves as potential collaborators or critics rather than simply agents of mechanical reproduction, we cannot simply write off changes in the course of transmission as errors. We can explain some variants this way, but clearly not all of them. Thus synonymous variants of this sort neither indicate copying "errors" *per se* nor serve as definitive proof of any particular mode of circulation.

Perhaps more significantly, "Qinfu yin" lacks the one pattern of variation that does point directly to memorial transmission. In his work on the role of memorization in the transmission of the Middle English romances, Murray McGillivray writes that memorization at some stage can be definitively proven only by "memorial transfer," defined as, "the movement of material from one part of a text to another part

which is physically remote, but which is liable to confusion with it because of similarities of situation, content, or language.”¹¹² “Qinfu yin” as a lengthy poem with a number of similarly worded sections, would seem to be prime ground for just such a phenomenon, yet it does not appear in any of the extant manuscripts.

The evidence for written transmission of “Qinfu yin” is much stronger and can be broken down into two types: evidence of copying from written texts at some point in the transmission process and evidence that the scribes copying these particular texts were working from physically present written models. It is always important to keep in mind that any given manuscript will probably contain changes introduced when it was copied and also changes that were introduced at any earlier point in the transmission process, and it is most often impossible to distinguish between the two.¹¹³ Two pieces of evidence for written transmission of these texts that I have noted above are good examples. As we have seen, some of these texts contain marginalia indicating how a particular character is pronounced and in another text it appears that this same marginalia have mistakenly been integrated into the text proper rather than appearing as smaller horizontally written characters. The presence of commentary indicating how a character should be pronounced strongly suggests that these texts had been circulating in written form, as such annotations would be out of place in the transcription of a text that had theretofore only circulated orally. The same holds for these commentarial characters’ accidentally making their way into the text proper. A single character being split into two characters made up of its two graphic elements is another example of the kind of variation that could only occur through written transmission at some point. In both these cases, there is no way to determine when the variation might have first happened. Servant Yin may have had sloppy handwriting, but it is very possible that he was reproducing rather than introducing this particular variant.

Line skips, also called “eye skips,” in which it appears a copyist has jumped from one point in a text to a later point, thereby missing the characters in between, are both strong evidence of written transmission and sometimes evidence of variants that occurred with the copying of

¹¹² Murray McGillivray, *Memorization in the Transmission of the Middle English Romances* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), p. 5.

¹¹³ Thus even the numerous “errors” noted by Giles and Yates do not prove that our novice Dunhuang monks were poor copyists. By the time the extant Dunhuang versions of “Qinfu yin” were copied, the poem had surely been transmitted countless times by others. As far as we know from the evidence at hand, these monks may well have made perfect reproductions of variant-filled texts.

the text in question. Line 132 of manuscript P3910 is a good example. As noted above, while the other seven manuscripts have the line reading 溝壑漸平人漸少 (“Ditches and gullies gradually filled [with bodies] while the people grew fewer”), P3910 reads, 溝壑漸少 (“Ditches and gullies grew few”). By consulting multiple texts we can clearly see that the copyist must have skipped from one 漸 to the other in the same line. Similarly, line 198 of manuscript P3780 contains the extra characters 戶叁阡, which appear in no other text. However, as they do appear two lines later we can be confident that a copyist’s eyes skipped ahead somewhere in the transmission process.¹¹⁴

These eye skips could have occurred at any point in the transmission process, with later copyists simply faithfully reproducing the texts they had. There is one example, however, that seems to have occurred during the copying of the text we have today. We have seen that at the beginning of line 66 in S5477 our old friend servant Yin has prematurely written the characters 出朱^門, and that these same three characters (with the full version of 門) are found at the end of the next line, line 67. I suggested above that this indicates that Yin skipped ahead but realized his error in mid-character. These two-and-a-half characters also appear to be written in lighter ink than the surrounding characters. I would speculate this copyist may have been taking a break after completing line 65. When he returned to his copying, he mistakenly began farther down in the text than he should have. Realizing his mistake, he also reinked his brush before beginning again.¹¹⁵ This is indeed more evidence that Yin was not the most fastidious copyist. Yet it also shows that he was almost definitely working from a written model and not from his memory.¹¹⁶

This last example highlights the importance of manuscripts as windows onto the world of Tang and Five Dynasties literary culture. However cloudy that window may be, it provides insights that simply cannot be found in either texts received through hundreds of years of printing or from modern critical editions. In most cases the latter is all we have. When exceptional cases such as the Dunhuang finds present

¹¹⁴ For another example, see lines 212–13 in which the phrase 一身苦 is found both at the end of 212 and the beginning of 213 as an intentionally repetition (i.e., it conforms to the seven-character line length). Two of the manuscripts, however, simply skip over the second repetition and thus merge the two lines.

¹¹⁵ In personal correspondence about this variant, Sarah M. Allen has raised the possibility that the text was covered up with a light pigment as a form of “white-out” that has since partially faded. Without closer examination of the manuscript, it is impossible to tell for sure.

¹¹⁶ It should also be noted that the presence of corrections in so many of these texts also implies that they were read over and compared to another written text.

themselves, however, we must take advantage of them. Manuscripts can show us not only the end product, but the process that produced it. They also remind us that the world in which this literature was produced was very different from the world in which we read it today. All these texts were copied in the same place and in roughly the same time by people who probably spoke the same dialect and had similar levels of education, yet the resulting texts are often substantially different. There can be little doubt that if we had Tang and Five Dynasties copies of “Qinfu yin” from other regions of China, we would see even more variation. By focusing on these differences and the materiality of the “Qinfu yin” texts I have attempted give an account of what the reading experience must have been like for people living in the time this poem was composed and first circulated, that is, an experience quite different from that which printed texts afford. Such a limited sample in and of itself should not fundamentally change the way that we analyze and discuss Tang poetry today, but it should at least give us pause about the surety of our judgments and remind us that the process by which these poems went from their authors to their audience (to say nothing of getting to us) is one about which we still have much to learn.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Manuscripts *Manuscrits de Dunhuang et d'Asie Centrale Conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale de France*