

Article

Political Competition, Literary Contest, and Reception of the Palace Style: Xu Ling's Criticism of Wei Shou's Poetry

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Abstract

This study re-examines the literary rivalry between Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–583) of Liang and Wei Shou 魏收 (507–572) of Northern Qi through a political lens. Analyzing Wei's "A Beautiful Woman" (*Meinü pian* 美女篇) poems alongside southern counterparts, it argues that Wei deliberately embraced classical allegorism and didacticism to construct Northern cultural legitimacy, contrasting with Xu Ling's ornate palace-style aesthetics. While Xu's dismissal of Wei's anthology reflected southern literary supremacy, Wei's works embodied a strategic northern archaism that prioritized political utility over aesthetic refinement. The paper further contextualizes this conflict within broader North–South diplomatic tensions, musical traditions, and Tang historiography's moral judgment of Wei Shou. Ultimately, it reveals how the northern political agenda, literary culture, and the contemporary reflection of the southern poetic style influenced Wei Shou's study of the southern palace-style poetry.

Keywords: Xu Ling; Wei Shou; North–South literary rivalry; political legitimacy; *Yuefu* poetry

1. Introduction

Liu Su 劉劭 (?–?, active around 740s), the son of the eminent Tang historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), recorded an anecdote in his *Fine Tales of Sui and Tang* (*Sui Tang jiahua* 隋唐嘉話), which narrates probably one of the most dramatic confrontations between the northern and southern poets in medieval China.

梁常侍徐陵 (507–583) 聘於齊, 時魏收 (507–572) 文學北朝之秀, 收錄其文集以遺陵, 令傳之江左。陵還, 濟江而沉之, 從者以問, 陵曰: 「吾為魏公藏拙。」 [1], p. 55.

Attendant-in-ordinary of the Liang, Xu Ling, went to the [Northern] Qi on a diplomatic mission. At that time, Wei Shou was the flower of the Northern Dynasty's literature. He collected his works and gave them to Xu Ling, asking him to pass them along to the South. Upon Xu Ling's return, he crossed the river and sank it. His followers questioned him, and Xu Ling replied: "I am hiding his clumsiness for him."

Wei Shou 魏收 of the Northern Qi court was renowned for his literary and historiographical achievements. He compiled the *Book of Wei* (*Weishu* 魏書), the official history of the Northern Wei dynasty; he was also regarded as one of the three most distinguished writers, particularly of prose, in the North, along with Xing Shao 邢劭 (496–569) and Wen Zisheng 溫子昇 (496–547). It is today's general assessment that in Wei's time, the southerners took pride in their literary superiority over the northerners. In order to give a more nuanced evaluation of the literary relationship between the North and the South, instead



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of simply seeing the North as a follower of the southern style and seeing the southern style as a stable and fixed aesthetic product, in this paper, I will first examine the political situation of Wei Shou's time that can contextualize the poetic competition between Xu Ling and him, and more broadly between the North and the South; this examination also helps us to understand how historiography has presented a narrative that made poetry writing a key contributor to the political construction of legitimacy and power. Then, the paper will proceed to a close reading and comparison of poems by northern and southern writers with the same title to demonstrate how Wei Shou differed from the southern approach to poetic innovation. Finally, I will contextualize the anecdote quoted above by situating it within the evaluation of northern and southern literary and musical styles to shed light on the reception of palace-style poetry in its own time on both sides of the Yangzi River.

There have been many discussions about the cultural constructions of the North and the South that emerged in the late sixth century and solidified in the Sui and early Tang. When thinking about the northern and the southern literary styles in comparative ways, it is inevitable that we are influenced by the early Tang's assessment that the southern style was more delicate and ornate, as represented by the palace style (*gongti* 宮體), while the northern style was more conventional and archaic. (See the quotation from *Suishu* in the Coda section.) Scholars, such as Tian Xiaofei, have already clarified that the southern palace style should not be applied as a general term to describe the Liang's writings. There were various styles associated with various groups of writers. However, it is used as a somewhat general term in this paper to describe the southern literary style when compared with the North, aligning with early Tang discourse. Only in the fifth section, where I examine the southerners' self-reflection, is "palace style" treated as one style among the diverse southern writings. It is done so for the sake of comparison.

When the Tang people and the modern scholars compared the North and the South before the Sui, and when the northerners and southerners compared each other, the key set of criteria can be summarized as *wen* 文 and *zhi* 質. *Suishu* also utilized these two terms to summarize the major difference between the South and the North. The Tang authors aimed to combine the advantages of both sides and achieve a balance between *wen* and *zhi* (各去所短, 合其兩長, 則文質斌斌, 盡善盡美矣。) [2], p. 1942. The former refers to the more ornate, delicate, and flowery, and the latter to the more plain, simple, and substantial. (See Lee, 2017 [3], for a survey of *wen-zhi* in literary thoughts). The application of *wen-zhi* to literature became a useful means of linking stylistic quality to political superiority. Yan Buke has made a shrewd observation that *wen-zhi* has become a basic framework for discussing politics and culture during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. The pair of terms was actively utilized to justify political strategies within the broader context of North–South, non-Chinese–Chinese power struggle [4], pp. 292–320.

The paper intends to build upon Yan Buke's survey of the application of *wen-zhi* in political discourses in early medieval China and to exemplify how literary writing has interacted with politics at the micro level of individual texts. My current case study is less interested in making a generalized argument about how literature contributed to the northern intellectuals' construction of legitimacy and power, even though, at times, Wei Shou's practice aligned well with the Northern Qi political agenda. Besides that, my paper is not a comprehensive study of Wei Shou's literary and political career; Tian Xiaofei's reminder that our perception is inevitably restricted by the literary texts we have been left with is another reason for this approach. She argued that in Wei Shou's time, readers read only selected parts of the author's literary works; only part of one's oeuvre was preserved; and incomplete and biased literary evaluations shaped medieval readers' assessments of early medieval literature [5], pp. 144–172. More specifically to this paper, she reminds us that for Xiao Gang, who was often criticized for his quasi-erotic (*yanqing* 艷情) poetry,

his poetic reputation resulted from the combined effects of archival fallacy and political construction. His contemporaries read only part of his writings, mostly from *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠), and anthologizers, who stood opposite to him politically, attributed more erotic poems to him [5], p. 166. Therefore, we can only deal with the historical, political, and cultural context of each piece of writing case by case, and be careful about over-generalization.

More or less building upon Yan and Tian's papers, I hope that my case study of Wei Shou, dealing with limited poems left behind, can demonstrate two points. On the one hand, literary writing was entangled in a complex web of mutual influence among literature, music, and political administration between the South and the North (and within the North). On the other hand, when Wei Shou's poems are (probably consciously) contributing to the northerners' discourse of political legitimacy, he, as a writer, had to digest the southern poetic culture at the first place, and then used these southern "heritage" to deal with his local political situation in the Northern Qi, namely fighting for his and his peer Han-Chinese intellectual's position in the non-Han-ruling court. When we adopt this practical, cynical political stance, it also reminds us of the discrepancy between one's writing and one's political activities, even when the two seem to interact closely. Therefore, I hope this paper offers a more nuanced reading of Wei Shou, who used poetry as a political tool for himself and his court, during a period of division when *wen-zhi* was often politicized, before the Sui and Tang attempted to generalize and unify the North and the South.

2. Xu Ling and Wei Shou in Northern and Southern Propaganda and Literary Exchange

Despite the political hostility between the two sides, we found abundant examples in literary and historical sources that northern and southern elites entertained mutual respect in private and public settings. Xu Ling was detained in the North from 548 to 555 and frequently interacted with northerners. He remained in epistolary communication with several northern writers after returning to the South, and in his letters, he sincerely praised the writings of northerners. For example, upon receiving four poems from Li Chang 李昶 (515–565) brought to him by Yin Buhai 殷不害 (509–589), Xu Ling wrote in response to Li:

山澤晦靄，松竹參差，若見三峻之峰，依然四皓之廟。甘泉鹵簿，盡在清文；扶風輦路，悉陳華簡。 [6], p. 830.

The mountain and waters are darkened with haze, and the pine trees and bamboo are uneven and scattered. It is like seeing the mountain of three peaks and showing clearly the temple of the four White-Headed. The Ganquan grand chariots are all present in your clean texts, and the Fufeng imperial pathways are all displayed in your ornate letter.

In particular, Xu Ling was able to identify and appreciate Li's poems portraying the northern ruler's power and magnificence. Does it mean that Xu Ling's depreciation of Wei Shou is justified because Xu Ling, after all, was able to make positive comments about northerners' literary achievements? Probably not. Even if we table the doubt about the credibility of the anecdotal record in the *Fine Tales of Sui and Tang*, there are at least two other factors: (1) the political attitude of the author of the historical sources with regard to Wei Shou; (2) the context of literary exchange in which the story was narrated.

Wei Shou was a highly controversial figure in the medieval period, primarily because of his low moral standards in composing the official history of the Northern Wei. In the official histories compiled from either northern or southern perspectives, namely, the *Beishi* (北史, "History of the North") and *Nanshi* (南史, "History of the South"), Wei Shou received moral criticism. According to the *Beishi*, in 539, when he was 32 years old, Wei visited Xiao Yan's 蕭衍 (464–549) court as a diplomat and received favorable comments from the southern elites in terms of his literary talent but was harshly scorned for his obscene behavior.

收兼通直散騎常侍,副王昕(?–559)聘梁,昕風流文辯,收辭藻富逸,梁主及其羣臣咸加敬異。……收在館,遂買吳婢入館,其部下有買婢者,收亦喚取,遍行奸穢,梁朝館司皆為之獲罪。人稱其才而鄙其行。 [7], p. 2027.

Wei Shou held a concurrent post as Attendant-in-ordinary of the Senior Recorder for Comprehensive Duty and went to the Liang as the Deputy Envoy of Wang Xin. Wang Xin's literature and eloquence were distinguished; Wei Shou's writings and diction were rich. The Emperor of the Liang and his courtiers all respected them. ... When Wei was in the diplomatic guesthouse, he paid for southern courtesans to visit. When his subordinates did the same, Wei Shou even brought them into his chamber, and they all engaged in lascivious activities. Liang officials in the guesthouse were all punished. People admired his talent but despised his behavior.

The criticism of Wei Shou's morality was pervasive in medieval sources. As for his talent as an eloquent writer-minister, there have been some nuanced, different opinions in the official histories of the North and the South. *Beishi* and *Nanshi* were both compiled by the Tang courtier Li Yanshou 李延壽 (?–687?), promoting the Tang court's self-identity as the unified empire. However, the two nevertheless represented the perspectives of the two rivaling sides, as each drew from the northern and southern historiographical sources.

From the northern perspective, Wei was always acknowledged as a literary icon for his achievements in administrative genres from a young age.

節閔帝(498–532)立,妙簡近侍,詔試收為《封禪書》,收下筆便就,不立稿草,文將千言,所改無幾。時黃門郎賈思同(?–540)侍立,深奇之,白帝曰:「雖七步之才,無以過此。」遷散騎侍郎,尋勅典起居注,並修國史,兼中書侍郎,時年二十六。 [8], pp. 483–484.

Emperor Jiemin [of Northern Wei] was installed, and he carefully selected his close attendants. He ordered Wei Shou to compose the *Script for Fengshan Sacrifices*. Wei Shou picked up the brush and immediately finished it without making a draft first. He wrote almost one thousand words and hardly needed to change anything. At that time, the Gentleman Attendant at the Palace Gate, Jia Sitong, was attending the court, and he was deeply impressed. He said to the emperor, “Even the talented seven-step poet (Cao Zhi) was not better than this.” Wei was promoted to Gentleman Cavalier Attendant and soon ordered to draft the emperor's Diaries of Activities and Repose and the national history. He was also Vice Director in the Secretariat at the age of twenty-six.

Wei Shou was entrusted with compiling important court documents due to his swiftness and eloquence in writing. For this, he was compared to Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232). Another northern poet, equally iconic in the North as Wei, was Wen Zisheng, who received similar praise from the southern emperor in the *Weishu*, compiled by Wei Shou.

蕭衍使張皋寫子昇文筆,傳於江外。衍稱之曰:「曹植、陸機(261–303)復生於北土。恨我辭人,數窮百六。」 [9], p. 1876.

Xiao Yan's diplomat, Zhang Gao, copied back [Wen] Zisheng's prose and verse. They were well-received in the South. Xiao Yan praised him by saying, “Cao Zhi and Lu Ji are revived in the North. It is pitiful that our writers experience the time of decline and exhaustion.”

Xiao Yan's remark put the cultural competition between the North and the South right at the forefront. During Xu Ling and Wei Shou's time, literary competition, in the form of poetry writing or witty public debates, often took place on inter-state occasions. Xu and Wei had a direct conflict when Xu first arrived in the North in 548. It is in *Nanshi*'s telling of this incident that we found the failure of Wei Shou's literary talent when challenged by the southern elite.

太清二年, 兼通直散騎常侍使魏, 魏人授館宴賓。是日甚熱, 其主客魏收譙陵曰: “今日之熱, 當由徐常侍來。” 陵即答曰: “昔王肅 (464–501) 至此, 爲魏始制禮儀; 今我來聘, 使卿復知寒暑。” 收大慚。齊文襄 (521–549) 爲相, 以收失言, 囚之累日。 [10], p. 1523.

In the second year of the Taiqing Era, [Xu Ling] held a concurrent post as Attendant-in-ordinary of the Senior Recorder for Comprehensive Duty and went to Wei on diplomatic duty. The [Eastern] Wei people entertained the guests with a banquet in their courier station. It was a hot day. The host, Wei Shou, mocked Xu Ling and said, “The heat of this day must be brought here by Attendant-in-ordinary Xu.” Xu replied immediately: “In the past, Wang Su came here, and he first installed the ritual propriety in the [Northern] Wei; now, I come, and make you understand cold and hot.” Wei Shou was very embarrassed. [Emperor] Wenxiang of the [Northern] Qi (Gao Cheng 高澄) was then the Prime Minister. He accused Wei Shou of his indiscreet remark and imprisoned him for several days.

Xu Ling discriminated against Wei Shou and the northerners in a diplomatic setting so that he could defend the political and cultural supremacy of the South. It is widely accepted by pre-modern and contemporary scholars that southerners were more skilled and accomplished in culture, while northerners were their active learners. In terms of prosodic innovation and ornate style, the southerners were, in fact, examples that northerners followed. Northern writers even copied the southerners word by word in some cases. For example, Xing Shao and Wei Shou (both from the north) accused each other of plagiarizing southern poets.

收每議陋邢文。邵又云: “江南任昉 (460–508), 文體本疏, 魏收非直模擬, 亦大偷竊。” 收聞乃曰: “伊常於沈約 (441–513) 集中作賊, 何意道我偷任。” [7], p. 2034.

Once, Wei Shou criticized and despised Xing Shao's writings. Xing Shao said: “As for Ren Fang of the South, his writing is already loose; yet Wei Shou does not simply imitate but even copy and steal from him in numbers.” Upon hearing this, Wei Shou said: “He himself is often a thief in Shen Yue's anthology; how dare he accuse me of stealing from Ren Fang!”

Skillful imitation of iconic writers and ingenious borrowing of poetic diction were certainly not prohibited in the medieval literary world. Qing Ziwen also argues that the criticisms between Xing and Wei did not target their poetry but official writings, after comparing their works, such as memorials and edicts, with those of Ren Fang and Shen Yue [11]. In whatever event, the above quotation should be understood within the context of the North–South literary competition. In the following section, I will closely read a set of poems under the same title written by Wei Shou and southern poets to demonstrate Wei's learning of the southern poetry and the deviation from the southern style.

3. Wei Shou's Poetic Rendition of Classical Literary History

There remain two pieces of “A Beautiful Woman” (*Meinü pian* 美女篇) in Wei Shou's anthology. “A Beautiful Woman” was a *yuefu* Music Bureau poetic theme first introduced by Cao Zhi. It is included in the *Selection of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選). (Cao Zhi's poem in English can be found in Robert Cutter's complete translation of Cao Zhi's poetry [12], pp. 240–243). Cao described the beautiful woman's glamorous physical appearance and refined costumes, and then pointed out her noble pursuit of a worthy husband and her boudoir lament after such hope failed. When Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (1041–1099) collected Cao Zhi and Wei Shou's poems of “A Beautiful Woman” in the *Poetry Collection of the Music Bureau* (*Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集), he added his commentary on the title and pointed out the political allegory of this series:

美女者, 以喻君子。言君子有美行, 願得明君而事之。若不遇時, 雖見徵求, 終不屈也。 [13], p. 912.

A beautiful woman is a metaphor for a worthy man. A worthy man has fine acts and longs for a virtuous ruler to serve. If not meeting his time, even if recruited, he would not submit himself.

It is the poetic technique of creating a political allegory that defines the difference between Wei Shou and Cao Zhi (and other southern writers) when writing under the same title. This series serves as a good example to illustrate how northerners and southerners actively chose to develop the two different poetic possibilities demonstrated by earlier poets, such as Cao Zhi: elaborate linguistic mimesis (presenting an object) and political allegorism (metaphorizing an object). In other words, when the pursuit of perfecting tonal patterns and enriching poetic vocabulary had already become the trademark of southern palace-style poetry (*gongti shi*, 宮體詩), a style Xu Ling and other Liang poets developed based on southern Qi poets' (e.g., Shen Yue) experiences, the northerners' failure, or belatedness, to achieve comparable success in that aspect was not merely a result of their literary incompetence; rather, the northerners opted for a more archaic, classical and political poetics.

美女篇其一

魏收

楚襄遊夢去,

陳思朝洛歸。

參差結旌旆,

掩靄頓驂騑。

變化看臺曲,

駭散屬川沂。

仍令賦神女,

俄聞要處妃。

照梁何足豔,

昇霞反奮飛。

可言不可見,

言是復言非。 [13], p. 914.

A Beautiful Woman: No. 1

by Wei Shou

King Xiang of Chu wandered off in dream,

King Chensi returned from Luoyang visit.

Long and short—pennons and banners join;

Misty and cloudy—horses and colts pause.

Transforming: looking from the spiral terrace;

Dispersed: gazing from the river side.

Yet asked to rhapsodize the goddess;

Soon hearing about inviting Fufei.

Shining on the beam: what's so brilliant?

Mounting clouds: in turn flying high.

Can be said, cannot be seen/revealed,

Saying what is there and what is not.

Wei Shou's two "A Beautiful Woman" poems are ambitious in terms of repossessing classical poetics as he tried to invoke the *Chuci* (楚辭, "Songs of the South") and the *Shijing* (詩經, "Classic of Poetry"), respectively. The first poem is much more a conscious reflection on the textual tradition of writing about imperial encounters with beautiful goddesses as seen in Song Yu 宋玉 (ca. 298 BC–ca. 222 BC) and Cao Zhi's works (who contributed to and benefited from the *Chuci* tradition) than a poetic articulation of the actual female beauty based on real-life observation. The first couplet retells that the king of Chu encountered a goddess in his dream after visiting the Gaotang Terrace, as rhapsodized in Song Yu's "Gaotang" (*Gaotang fu* 高唐賦) and "The Goddess" (*Shennü fu* 神女賦); the second line states that Cao Zhi met the goddess of the Luo River, Fufei 宓妃, rhapsodized in Cao's "The Goddess of the Luo" (*Luoshen fu* 洛神賦). In the rhapsody he wrote in 223 on his way back to his fief from Luoyang, he described her extreme beauty and recounted the anecdote about King Xiang of Chu's encounter with the same goddess. Cao Zhi responded to Song Yu, and Wei Shou now responds to both of them.

Song Yu and Cao Zhi's textual influences persist throughout the poem. The second couplet echoes the following one in Song Yu's "Gaotang": "They are headlong as a four-horse team,/with feathered-pennons raised." [14], p. 190. The fifth couplet alludes to the following two lines: (1) Song Yu, "The Goddess": "When she first was coming—/there was a glow, like the sun just appearing/and shining on roofs and beams." [14], p. 191. (2) Cao Zhi, "The Goddess of the Luo": "When I gazed on her from afar,/she shone like the sun through morning clouds mounting." [14], p. 194.

More importantly, Wei's poem is not a collection of canonical lines, but a careful weaving together into a poetic narrative that questions the very poetics of talking about beautiful women. Laying down the narrative framework of the entire poem in the opening couplet based on textual tradition, Wei Shou emphasized the king's majestic dignity in the second couplet, instead of proceeding with descriptions of the woman's beauty, which is typical and ubiquitous in southern palace-style poetry. His chariot, led by numerous banners and pulled by multiple horses, came to a halt. The beautiful goddess is not directly displayed in front of the king's procession or the readers, but merely suggested by the king's reaction of stopping and gazing. As the following third couplet tells us, her visual qualities were by no means revealed clearly. Standing on the riverbank, they could only look at a transforming and dispersing blurry image of the goddess. She was beautiful, not because the emperor, Wei Shou, and other courtiers had found that out in great detail, but precisely because of her transcendence over materiality and physicality, her imperceptibility and inconstant shape—beauty beyond capture. (What I mean by the goddess's transcendence here does not entail religious omniscience or removal from the worldly realm. Quite contrary, her transcendental beauty was presented in close connectedness with the nature that anchors human existence.) This poetics of visually unmanifest beauty was responding and posing challenges to the dominant southern poetics based on concentrated observation and articulation of details. (Tian Xiaofei and Meow Hui Goh discussed the southern Liang and Qi courts' poetics in relationship with visual culture and way of seeing in detail and in depth [15,16].) So far, Wei Shou has failed to describe the goddess's beauty and has depended solely on the literary precedents to narrate her presence. Meanwhile, we should notice that contrary to Cao Zhi's poem and other southern examples, the presence of kingly power is dominant from the very beginning.

The second half of the first poem is interesting, or bad, by the standards of southern palace-style poetry, as the poet persona in the *yuefu* poem was prompted to verbalize this encounter, but Wei Shou did not allow the persona to do so. In response to the king's order, he went on and discussed the linguistic incompetence of capturing the phenomenological world. In the fourth couplet, the poet persona/Wei Shou either received an imperial com-

mand or, subordinating to literary convention, decided to describe the distant goddess and extend a verbal invitation (which may be this very poem) to approach her. Wei Shou was honest in the fifth couplet—he restricted his description to overall visual effects but not minute details. The goddess’s luminous ambiance was all he could talk about. Her glamor was brighter than the morning sunshine and loftier than the ascending clouds. The poet was enthralled with the limitations of verbal utterance. In the ungraspable, ever-changing appearance of the goddess lies her true beauty, like the dazzling rays of the sun. Similarly, (poetic) language’s failure to exhaust all connotations grants language the capability to transcend its immediate experience and point to a more general ideal. Language seems powerful as it can describe what is present and absent, but it is also limited. It cannot describe everything and, at times, only intimates.

Wei Shou talked about describing things in the poem—its possibility and its difficulty—instead of actually describing the thing. He departed from the southern *yongwu* (詠物, “singing-of-objects”) methodology. This is not something that Xu Ling would endorse. To Xu, visual enchantment was sublime, and skillful and extensive linguistic capturing of moments was admired. Ornateness, often associated with female sensuousness, was a key literary merit that Xu Ling promoted. Xu Ling compiled *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*. In this anthology, he paid special attention to ornate palace-style poems describing female beauty and boudoir emotions, some of which were written by female authors. In the preface, Xu compared the exquisiteness of writers’ literary craftsmanship to that of delicate objects:

加以天時開朗，逸思雕華，妙解文章，尤工詩賦。瑠璃硯匣，終日隨身；翡翠筆牀，無時離手。清文滿篋，非惟芍藥之花；新製連篇，寧止蒲萄之樹。 [17], p. 12.

Divine is their brilliance,/Exquisite their mind./They superbly appreciate literature,/Are skilled in the craft of poetry./Their colored glass inkstone-case/Is beside them all day long./Their kingfisher jade pen-case/Never for one moment leaves their hands./The fine literary pieces cramming their cabinets/Are not just about peony blooms!/Their new compositions, verse after verse,/Are a marked advance on The grapevine ode! [18], pp. 340–341.

Xu Ling used “beautiful woman” to refer to poetry writers, and he praised the “new” verses which “advance” toward the new contemporary style; Wei Shou employed the *yuefu* poem of a beautiful woman to express his poetic archaism and allegorism (further discussed in the second poem of Wei’s). Their literary viewpoints were in sharp contrast and represented two different deliberate choices of poetic style in the North and the South. No wonder Xu Ling would discard Wei Shou’s anthology, one collection including poems like the above-discussed, which questions the limits of palace-style new verse.

Xiao Gang’s 蕭綱 (503–551) “A Beautiful Woman” would be an epitome of the palace style poetry that Xu Ling approves of.

美女篇
蕭綱
佳麗盡關情，
風流最有名。
約黃能效月，
裁金巧作星。
粉光勝玉靚，
衫薄擬蟬輕。
密態隨流臉，
嬌歌逐軟聲。

朱顏半已醉，
微笑隱香屏。 [13], p. 913.

A Beautiful Woman

by Xiao Gang

This lovely girl, so passionate by nature,
Well-known for her manner and mien,
Trimmed yellow-silk imitates the moon,
Snipped cloth-of-gold cunningly resembles stars. (with modification in this couplet)
Sheen of her make-up far surpassing jade,
Her dress as filmy as cicadas' wings.
Her careless postures mobile as her face,
Her haunting voice murmuring soft melodies.
And then, cheeks flushed with wine, half-drunk,
She smiles and hides behind a scented screen [19], p. 167.

Xiao Gang's beautiful woman was a dancing girl at the court banquet. Her gown was flimsy, and her posture changed constantly. However, Xiao Gang spent considerable effort to observe and describe the flimsiness and inconstancy. He compared her sheen cheeks to jade and her thin dress to cicadas' wings. They were semi-translucent and required extra concentration to see clearly. The fourth couplet highlights her constant movement, in terms of posture, facial expression, and vocal utterance. Xiao Gang's ingenuity lies in the final couplet: he poetically distilled liminal stages to successfully verbalize ephemeral instants. The woman was half-drunk, and her smile, still visible, was fading into the screen's blockage. This poem is just like the moon-colored textile and star-shaped patterns the beautiful woman wore in the second couplet. Poetry was able to imitate the natural beauty, capturing its most subtle and inconstant features. What Wei Shou deemed beyond linguistic depiction was where Xiao Gang showcased his poetic creativity.

4. Wei Shou's Didactic Archaism and Modification of the Southern Style

Were we Xu Ling and to evaluate Wei Shou's two poems of "A Beautiful Woman," the first one was mediocre at the least. The second poem was probably worse than that, despite its attempt to follow *Shijing's* 詩經 exegetical tradition of *Maoshi* 毛詩. The first one is a decent poem with a narrative in both senses of literary history and the political leader's power. Wei Shou's knowledge of the canonical works of the Han and Wei dynasties, as well as the contemporary poetic epitome of the South, enabled him to write a poem of counter-poetics while fully understanding the conventions. He developed the political side in contrast to his southern peers. But he took it too far in the second one, which is more or less a mere assemblage of moral mottoes.

美女篇其二
魏收
□□□□，
我帝更朝衣。
擅寵無論賤，
入愛不嫌微。
智瓊非俗物，
羅敷本自稀。

居然陋西子，
 定可比南威。
 新吳何爲誤，
 舊鄭果難依。
 甘言誠易污，
 得失定因機。
 無憎藥英妬，
 心賞易侵違。 [13], p. 914.

A Beautiful Woman: No. 2

by Wei Shou

(First line missing)

Our emperor changed out of his court robe.
 Monopolizing the favor—no matter how worthless;
 Enjoying affection—not excluding the humble.
 Zhiqiong is not a tawdry figure;
 Luofu is in fact quite rare.
 Unexpected, Xishi is disdained;
 Surely, she must be comparable to Nanwei.
 The new Wu state: what hindered it?
 The past Zheng state: indeed cannot be counted.
 Pleasing remarks in fact are corroding;
 Achieving or losing surely depends on chance.
 No resentment: it cures jealousy;
 Appreciation from heart: it easily leads to impingement.

The speaker of the poem is a court lady who describes her beauty through historical allusions and ends the poem in fear of slander. Several allusions concern women who destroyed a state, giving the poem a tone of moral instruction. At the very beginning, the emperor was enticed by the beautiful consort, and probably attended the court less regularly because of her. The consort who monopolized the emperor's favor seemed to be of low origin. In the third and fourth couplets, Wei Shou introduced four female historical figures. Zhiqiong 智瓊 was a beautiful goddess who married a commoner man in the Wei Dynasty, according to legend. Luofu 羅敷 was a beautiful woman famous for her refusal to a man's flirting. Xishi 西施 was the beauty sent to the Wu state by the vengeful Yue king, and she eventually seduced King Fuchai 夫差 to disregard his court duties. Nanwei 南威 was the beauty presented to King Wen of Jin 晉文王, and the king did not attend his court for three days after her arrival. With the sharp comparison between the two groups of female figures, Wei Shou managed to bring out his main argument: unvirtuous consorts ruin the state. Zhiqiong and Luofu were virtuous, but they were difficult to come across. The consort should be compared only to Xishi and Nanwei, who bewitched the rulers and were said to destabilize a state. Excessive pleasure leads to political failure, as examples of Fuchai's obsession with Xishi and the Zheng kings' indulgence in immoral music had proved. Wei Shou concluded the poem with two couplets of didactic proverbs, admonishing the emperor not to indulge in sexual pleasure and the consort not to monopolize and be jealous.

The critical history of *Shijing* played an important role in the poem when Wei Shou links indulgence in female sensuality with corrupted ritual music and political failure. The fifth couplet refers to the allusion to Xishi, in which the Wu state was defeated because of its king's sexual indulgence with Xishi. The Zheng state's music was condemned by orthodox Confucians as seductive and corruptive, which would lead the state to destruction. Wei Shou apparently had little interest in writing a poem in the immoral Zheng style, but wanted to take the chance of composing this piece about beauty as a political exhortation.

The moral lesson is very clear, but its poetic aesthetics are underdeveloped. Compared to Xiao Zixian's 蕭子顯 (487–537) poem under the same title, Wei Shou was not able to balance moral teaching and lively depiction of the poetic object at all.

美女篇

蕭子顯

章丹斲輟舞,

巴姬請罷弦。

佳人淇水出,

豔趙復傾燕。

繁穠既爲李,

照水亦成蓮。

朝酤成都酒,

暝數河間錢。

餘光幸未借,

蘭膏空自煎。 [13], p. 913.

A Beautiful Woman

by Xiao Zixian

Zhangdan ceased dancing for now,

Ba dancers asked to quit plucking the strings.

A beautiful woman from Qi and Wei

Dazzled Zhao and overwhelmed Yan.

Ornate and luxuriant, just as plums;

Reflected on water, also like lotus.

In the morning, she sells Chengdu wine;

In the evening, she counts Hejian coins.

"Luckily, I did not borrow the lingering twilight;

Orchid oil is burning in vain."

In his poem, Xiao Zixian also referred to a number of historical allusions, but this is clearly not a political poem. The author compares his court lady's sensual beauty to famous female figures. Various classical sources, *Shijing* and *Houhan shu* 後漢書, for example, are cited only to add to the erudite poetic style. Contrary to Wei Shou, who criticized the Zheng style, Xiao Zixian used Zheng and Wei in a neutral tone. In the second couplet, he depicts the court ladies as from River Qi in the state of Wei and River Wei in the state of Zheng. They dazzled the states of Yan and Zhao. He merrily assigns the beauty as a peer of the Zheng/Wei ones, even if they would derail a state. Classical texts come to Xiao Zixian without their didactic burdens. In the third and fourth couplets, Xiao employs them like flowery phrases that are known to learned readers, so that people can readily grasp how charming the beauty is. He quotes from the *Shaonian* section of *Shijing*: "These flowers

their clusters large and gay/As of the peach or plum display” (何彼穠矣, 華如桃李) [20], p. 74. The bright faces of court ladies are compared to plums. Selling wines and counting coins, the ladies enjoy luxury. Allusions from the Eastern Han dynasty are used to describe wine and coins. According to *Shenxian zhuan*, Luan Ba 樂巴 (?–168) spat wine towards the southwest and explained that he was using wine to put out the fire in Chengdu, which was later verified by people there [21], p. 195. Xiao alludes to this to praise the richness of the wine shared with the beauties. *Houhan shu* quoted the *Xuhan zhi* 續漢志: “The beautiful woman from Hejian is good at counting money—she used coins to build chambers and gold to build halls.” [22], p. 327. This criticizes Empress Dong’s greediness, who was the mother of Emperor Ling of Han. When Xiao Zixian used it to describe the fortune court beauties enjoyed, he did not allude to the anecdote’s moral message at all.

In the closing couplet, he expressed the moral lesson in an extremely subtle and indirect manner—so indirect that it is better read apolitically. Like Cao Zhi’s example, Xiao Zixian ended the poem with the lonely lady’s boudoir lament. He wrote a female monolog in which, after daylight has ended, a candle burns in vain. The beautiful consort was alone in her chamber, and obviously, the emperor did not visit her. One could draw a Confucian moral reading: the ruler should not be obsessed with beautiful consorts, and should visit her only when proper; the consort should hold her lament to herself and not be jealous. But it is much more natural for the readers to read it simply as the beauty’s hopeless lament when the gentlemen abandon her. A political reading would be more of the reader’s interpretation.

Compared to Xiao Zixian and other southern poets, Wei Shou’s second was indeed much clumsier in terms of forging ornate diction, presenting sensuous beauty, and conducting astute observation, all the qualities that Xu Ling esteemed. But as I have shown in the previous poem, this might be his active poetic choice. Wei desired to inherit the Han and Wei orthodox opinion of poetry, which can be readily summarized by Cao Pi’s 曹丕 (187–226) famous statement: “Literary works are the supreme achievement in the business of state, a splendor that does not decay” (文章經國之大業, 不朽之盛事) [23], p. 68.

5. The Self-Criticism of Southern Palace-Style Poetry

Previous scholarship usually sees the northerners as clumsy, passive learners of whatever poetic style the southerners were practicing [24], pp. 288–289. Jin Xi has pointed out that the northerners were skillful and careful when studying the southern examples [25]. In the above discussion, I examined Wei Shou’s poems in comparison with the southern Liang examples. I demonstrate that Wei Shou had his own political and literary agenda. However, it might be misleading to believe that his poetic innovation was not at all informed by the Southerners’ self-reflection. As a matter of fact, southern poets and theorists have begun to criticize the overly ornate and morally disinterested palace style of poetry. The southerners did not finish the task of correcting the palace style poetry of unbalanced artistic pursuit and political didactics, and it is the northerners (and southern poets detained in the north) who completed that unification.

The literary competition between the two styles, canonical–orthodox (*yazheng* 雅正) and contemporary–innovative (*xinbian* 新變), was vigorous in the Liang court. The key to differentiating the two styles lies in whether the literary text overlooks the content (*zhi* 質) and focuses excessively on the formal aspects (*wen* 文), such as rhyme, rhythm, parallelism, ornate metaphors, etc. This paper does not intend to conduct a comprehensive study of the southern poets’ self-reflection, but will only point out some related materials to demonstrate how Wei Shou and northerners made a poetic choice according to their northern agenda when choosing which southern style to imitate and why that choice was informed by the southern literati’s examination of their own tradition.

When discussing Xu Ling's discrimination against Wei Shou, Li Dingguang 李定廣 and Yan Weizhe 嚴維哲 pointed out that the two sides have different literary standards, and provided an overall explanation: the northern politically driven literary culture [26]. To a certain degree, my paper so far gives a close reading of how northern skillful manipulation of literary history fulfills that task. In the following, I will discuss how the southern awareness had informed the northerners.

At the end of Section 2, I quote Xing Shao and Wei Shou's mutual attack from the official history of the Northern Dynasties. Xing Shao thought that Wei Shou was imitating Ren Fang, while Wei thought that Xing was copying Shen Yue. When Ren and Shen, close in active years (Ren was younger but lived shorter), were compared side by side, they represented contrasting literary styles within the southern literary culture. Comparatively speaking, Shen stood for the contemporary–innovative and Ren the canonical–orthodox.

Shen Yue's theory of tonal patterns greatly improved the southern elite's understanding of prosody and the linguistic musicality of literature and was probably the defining element of the Qi-Liang palace-style poetry. Though celebrated and followed, he received some criticism in his time. In particular, people were not satisfied when his style was applied to lyrics prepared for state rituals. Xiao Ziyun 蕭子雲 (487–549), who was about 40 years younger than Shen, had discussions with Xiao Yan, Emperor Wu of the Liang, and reached a negative judgment of Shen's literature for statecraft and court rituals.

At the beginning, Xiao Ziyun recommended that Xiao Yan replace Shen Yue's ritual texts because the older verses included lines about animal sacrifice, and they were no longer appropriate as Xiao Yan banned that practice (in 514). But the emperor's verdict went beyond that.

敕曰：「郊廟歌辭，應須典誥大語，不得雜用子史文章淺言；而沈約所撰，亦多舛謬。」 [27], p. 514.

The edict said: “Lyrics for temple songs should be written in the magnificent language of canonical announcements, and they should not be mingled with the shallow words of masters and historians' writings. However, what Shen Yue composed is abundant in such mistakes.”

Xiao Yan clearly pointed out the defect of Shen's style of writing for the sacrificial rituals. The emperor preferred a more classical and elegant style. Xiao Ziyun followed Xiao Yan's instructions. In his reply, he expressed his dissatisfaction with Shen Yue's works and gave the reasons.

子雲答敕曰：「殷薦朝饗，樂以雅名，理應正採《五經》，聖人成教。而漢來此製，不全用經典；約之所撰，彌復淺雜。……謹依成旨，悉改約制。惟用《五經》為本，其次《爾雅》、《周易》、《尚書》、《大戴禮》，即是經誥之流，愚意亦取兼用。……」敕並施用。 [27], pp. 514–515.

Ziyun responded to the edict: “Since the Yin dynasty's sacrificial rituals, music was in the canonical-elegant style. We should adopt the style of *the Five Classics*, which the sages used to teach the people. But the system, since the Han dynasty, no longer conformed to the classics. What Shen Yue composed was even more shallow and heterogeneous. ... I respectfully follow your edict and exchange all the compositions of Shen Yue. I only use *the Five Classics* as the foundation. As for *Erya*, *Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *the Elder Dai's Book of Rituals*, they are all sects of classical announcements. I humbly suggest including them. ...” The Emperor's edict ordered the acceptance of the suggestions.

The quotation does not speak directly about Shen Yue's poetic style, but it shows Xiao Yan's dissent from his contemporary–innovative style of increasing attention to tonal patterns. Xiao Yan was never too fond of the new literary styles, unlike his sons, Xiao Gang

and Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–555). Shen Yue's official biography introduced Xiao Yan's disinterest right after listing Shen's literary compositions.

又撰《四聲譜》，以為在昔詞人，累千載而不寤，而獨得胸衿，窮其妙旨，自謂入神之作，高祖雅不好焉。帝問周捨 (469–524) 曰：「何謂四聲？」捨曰：「『天子聖哲』是也。」然帝竟不遵用。 [27], p. 243.

In addition, [Shen Yue] wrote *the Catalog of Four Tones*. He thought that men who wrote in the past did not understand that in a thousand years, while he alone understood that in his heart and exhausted the secrets. He thought his works captured the spirits, but Emperor Gaozu (Xiao Yan) was elegant and did not like that. The Emperor asked Zhou She, "What are the four tones?" She answered, "the son (rising tone) of heaven (level tone) is sage (departing tone) and wise (entering tone)—that it is." However, the Emperor did not adopt that principle.

Xiao Ziyun and Xiao Yan's exchange of opinions about Shen Yue has clearly shown that shortly after Shen's death, some Liang courtiers already began to question his style, even though the ornate palace style of poetry continued to flourish in the last years of the Liang dynasty under Xiao Yi's political and literary leadership. This difference is reflected in the poetic styles of the Liang emperors. Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) said that "Zhaoming (Xiao Tong 蕭統) (501–531) was quaint and simple; Jianwen (Xiao Gang) was ornate and exquisite; Emperor Yuan (Xiao Yi) was in between." (昭明尤拙，簡文尤巧，元帝介巧拙之間) [28], p. 776. Zhou Xunchu 周勛初 also categorized the Liang writers into three schools: canonical–orthodox (*shoujiu* 守舊), contemporary–innovative (*qixin* 趨新), and eclectic (*zhezong* 折衷). He put Xiao Gang, Xiao Yi, and Yu Xin in the contemporary school, and Xiao Tong and Xiao Yan in the eclectic school [29], pp. 230–253.

Contrary to Shen Yue, Ren Fang was known for a canonical–orthodox style. According to Tong Tsz-ben's research, "Ren's prose conforms to the Confucian ideology and the Han and Wei style of strength. Compared to much of the Qi-Liang literature that overlooked the content and meaning of writings, his works were substantial in content and reflected the author's talent and Confucian education." [30], pp. 381–399; [31], esp. p. 24. In Xiao Tong's *Selection of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選), Ren Fang has 17 pieces of prose and two poems, while Shen Yue has four pieces of prose and 14 poems. This testifies to their equal literary status while suggesting their different genre of expertise and, thus, different stylistic characteristics.

In light of this, when Wei Shou chose Ren Fang, instead of Shen Yue, as the major southern poet to model after, he showed his attitude against the ornate palace style. He found the more archaic and orthodox one more suitable for the northern court's cultural policy and political context. It was out of such northern concern and understanding of the southern tradition that he actively reflected on the literary and musical canons in the two poems of "A Beautiful Woman." How southerners thought of themselves informed the northerners on how to aid politics with literature, regarding style in particular.

6. Wei Shou's Poetic Reflection on the Musical Tradition

The two poems demonstrate Wei's attempts to establish the political didactics in poetry by different means, by building upon the classical literary resources, and by returning to the literary didactics. In the context of North–South political competition, Wei Shou's choice to return to the classics exemplified the Northern Qi's narrative of legitimacy. Writing poems in an orthodox, classical manner, Wei Shou connected the Northern Qi with the Han-Chinese and political orthodoxy. Meanwhile, "A Beautiful Woman" is a title for poetry of the music bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) after all. Musical background deserves consideration. Thus, in this section, I attempt to make a tentative argument that Wei Shou's intentional deviation from the ornate southern palace style in his music bureau poetry, as exempli-

fied by the two pieces of “A Beautiful Woman,” might as well reflect his nuanced, if not contradictory, view of the musical system in the North. His “twisted” attitude toward the Northern Qi musical fashion reveals that the poetic construction of political discourse at least encompasses two levels: one collective, ideological level of legitimacy narrative, and one individual (or representing one’s group), practical level of fighting for power in the court.

Before proceeding, I have to admit that this point is not much more than an educated guess because of the lack of evidence; we cannot be certain about whether Wei’s two poems were ever performed to music; if so, we are not sure whether he wrote them to specific musical tunes or based purely on literary tradition and left the issue of music entirely to the musicians.

Although there were three different regimes on both sides of the Yangtze River in Wei Shou’s time, they shared a similar trend of increasing inclusion of “foreign” (non-Han-Chinese) tunes in their music. In the southern Liang, Northern Wei tunes, many of which were originally with foreign lyrics, were introduced to the court and made up the majority (even almost all, in Sun Kaidi’s opinion) of the Liang songs accompanied by fifes (*hengchui qu* 橫吹曲) [32], pp. 328–332. In the Northern Zhou, when Yuwen Tai was still serving the Western Wei, Gaochang surrendered, and their entertainers (*ji* 伎) participated in performances at court banquets. The Empress of Yuwen Yong, Ashina, who was the daughter of Muqan Qaghan, widely included non-Han music in court performances [2], p. 370. In the Northern Qi, as Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) recorded in the *Book of Sui* (*Suishu* 隋書), foreign music was extremely popular. It even foretold the collapse of the Northern Qi, as the familiar fate of the music of Zheng and Wei.

雜樂有西涼鞞舞、清樂、龜茲等。然吹笛、彈琵琶、五弦及歌舞之伎，自文襄以來，皆所愛好。至河清以後，傳習尤盛。後主唯賞胡戎樂，耽愛無已。於是繁手淫聲，爭新哀怨。……後主亦自能度曲，親執樂器，悅玩無倦，倚弦而歌。別采新聲，為《無愁曲》，音韻窈窕，極於哀思，使胡兒闖官之輩，齊唱和之，曲終樂闋，莫不殞涕。雖行幸道路，或時馬上奏之，樂往哀來，竟以亡國。 [2], pp. 359–360.

In the category of miscellaneous music, there are drum dances from the Western Liang, pure music, Kucha music, and so on. Entertainers playing flutes, *pipa*, and five-stringed instruments, and singing and dancing were always favored since the Wenxiang Emperor [Gao Cheng]. Since the Heqing reign, foreign music has been transmitted and practiced tremendously. The last [Northern Qi] emperor (Gao Wei) only enjoyed non-Chinese military music and was so indulged. As a result, musicians all played vulgar tunes and fought to compose new songs of aggrievement. ... The last emperor could also conduct tunes and play instruments by himself. He indulged in performing restlessly and always sang to the plucked strings. He picked a new tune and composed the “Rid of Sorrows,” which is seductive in tune and exhaustive in expressing grief. He ordered the non-Chinese entertainers and eunuchs to sing it together. When the tune ended and the music ceased, they all shed tears. Even on the way in royal excursions, they sometimes played music on horseback. The music was gone, and the sorrow came—the regime ended.

Wei Zheng’s criticism was embedded in his narrative, which deploys allusions to Zheng and Wei music. Criticism of the music of the Zheng and Wei style did not have to wait until the early Tang to emerge. Classical music (as inherited from the Han and Wei dynasties) and foreign new music coexisted competitively throughout the Northern and Southern Dynasties in various ritual settings, such as state sacrifices and court banquets. As foreign music spread in the North and South, appeals to restore the classical style were often raised and put into practice [33].

Given that the non-Chinese music was extremely popular in the Northern Qi, [13], pp. 884–885; [34], p. 123; [35], it is quite striking to see that Wei Shou expressed his warning against the Zheng-Wei style music in his poems that were most likely set to be sung with non-Chinese new musical tunes which were not orthodox and traditional. In “A Beautiful Woman: No. 2,” Wei Shou offered his admonition about the danger of indulging in female beauty, often associated with excessive enjoyment of music for pleasure. He even blatantly criticized the Zheng state (10th line). What would have triggered his criticism of the Northern Qi’s new music? Why would he write such a poem to make the point? These are the questions this section wishes to answer. As I said earlier, I can only suggest some possibilities.

First of all, the Northern Qi literati did not necessarily perceive their music as mainly erosive. There was still a large part of the Northern Qi music, especially those for state sacrificial rituals, that were based on orthodox Han-Wei tradition. It is only retrospectively that the Sui and Tang people became aware that the Northern Qi music was significantly unorthodox and “barbarian” when they compared the music they inherited from the three regimes. It is so described in the “Treatise of Music” (*yinyue zhi* 音樂志) of the *Book of Sui*:

煬帝矜奢，頗翫淫曲，御史大夫裴蘊，揣知帝情，奏括周、齊、梁、陳樂工子弟，及人間善聲調者，凡三百餘人，並付太樂。倡優獫狁，咸來萃止。其哀管新聲，淫弦巧奏，皆出鄴城之下，高齊之舊曲云。 [2], p. 313.

Emperor Yang [of Sui] was extravagant and dissipated. He enjoyed playing licentious music. The Censor-in-Chief Pei Yun guessed the emperor’s intention and petitioned to gather [Northern] Zhou, [Northern] Qi, Liang, and Chen court musicians and those who were good at playing tunes among commoners. It numbered more than 300 people, and they were all dispatched to join the Imperial Music Service. Musicians and entertainers of all kinds came to join. The flutes of sadness, songs of the latest fashion, excessive strings, and elaborate tunes were all from the city of Ye, and they used to be Gao Qi music.

The Northern Qi elites did not view the issue quite the same way as the Tang historians, who, by all means, were also biased by their own political heritage. As demonstrated in the quotation below from Zu Ting’s 祖珽 memorial to the Northern Qi emperor, they believed that they were incorporating non-Chinese music in fashion at that time into the canonical Chinese tradition, and saw the heavy import of non-Chinese music as a long-lasting tradition in their dynastic lineage, which dated back to the Northern Wei.

魏氏來自雲、朔，肇有諸華，樂操土風，未移其俗。至道武帝皇始元年，破慕容寶於中山，獲晉樂器，不知採用，皆委棄之。天興初，吏部郎鄧彥海奏上廟樂，創制宮懸，而鐘管不備。樂章既闕，雜以《簸邏回歌》。初用八佾，作《皇始》之舞。至太武帝平河西，得沮渠蒙遜之伎，賓嘉大禮，皆雜用焉。此聲所興，蓋苻堅之末，呂光出平西域，得胡戎之樂，因又改變，雜以秦聲，所謂秦漢樂也。至永熙中，錄尚書長孫承業，共臣先人太堂卿瑩等，斟酌繕修，戎華兼采，至於鐘律，煥然大備。自古相襲，損益可知，今之創制，請以為准。 [2], pp. 341–342.

The Northern Wei were from the Yunzhou and Shuozhou area. When they first occupied the Chinese territory, their music remained their indigenous style, and their custom did not change. Not until the first year of the Daowu Emperor’s Huangshi era (396) did they defeat Murong Bao in Zhongshan and confiscate the musical instruments of the Jin. But they did not bother to adopt their music and thus disposed of them. At the beginning of the Tianxing era, Gentleman Attendant at the Ministry of Personnel Deng Yanhai presented to the emperor the court music and created the Palace Hanging Instruments (*gongxuan*, the top level of hanging musical instruments denoting the arrangement of suspended instruments in all four cardinal directions). But they did not have the bell pipes. The music missed chapters and was mixed with Boluohui songs. For the first time, they employed the

row of eight dancers and performed the Huangshi dance. When the Taiwu Emperor conquered the Hexi area, he captured Juqu Mengxun's court entertainers. They were mixed in court rituals, including hosting rites and congratulatory rites. The popularization of such music was the continuation of Fu Jian's [time]. Lü Guang conquered the western regions and got the music of the [non-Chinese] Hu and Rong people. Thus, the music [of Northern Wei] was altered. The [Northern Wei] music was mixed with [Former] Qin tunes and was the so-called Qin-Han music. In the middle of the Yongxi era, Zhangsun Chenye, the Overseer of the Department of State Affairs, my ancestor, Zu Ying, the Chamberlain for Ceremonials, and others thoroughly considered [the tradition] and edited the music. It incorporated both non-Chinese and Chinese songs, and the bell temperament became complete and brilliant. It is passed down from the past, and its deduction and addition are known. When we make our music now, I humbly ask that you follow this standard.

The Northern Qi musicologists were aware of the large part of non-Chinese tunes in their musical system. That is a lineage they proudly identified with. On the other hand, according to Zu Ting's evaluation, the Northern Qi rearrangement of the musical system incorporated the non-Chinese songs into an orthodox Chinese ritual system. They managed to find a balance between the two elements. Therefore, when Wei Shou was criticizing the Zheng-Wei music, he was offering only a mild reminder to the court and believed that the Northern Qi musical syncretism was the right choice for the court. Like Zu Ting, Wei Shou thought that the Northern Qi was bringing non-Chinese music into a harmonious collaboration with Chinese tradition, unlike the harsh criticism of the Sui and Tang people. Even though, after Zu Ting's reform, the Northern Qi court music was "still mixed with Xiliang songs 仍雜西涼之曲" [2], p. 342, the hymns for court sacrifices, e.g., to heaven and earth, were not so different from Northern Zhou and Qi-Liang counterparts. The corpus [2], pp. 342–358, shows clear resemblance to the line structure of the Liu Song hymns and obvious borrowing of diction from classical texts [36], esp. p. 75.

Wei Shou's critical attitude toward Zheng-Wei music, which refers to the non-Chinese music popular in his time, aligns with Wei's literary archaism. It also aligns with Northern Qi's construction of political legitimacy in music, which blends non-Chinese tunes into Chinese orthodoxy. What Wei said in "A Beautiful Woman, No. 2" was informed by the Northern Qi musical reformation.

Secondly, in terms of the political implications, preference for different music not only concerns ideology but also realistic incentives of fighting for the emperor's favor. While Wei Shou conformed to the convention of criticizing the Zheng-Wei music in writing, it did not stop him from playing non-Chinese music to advance his career in the court.

The Northern Qi emperors' favor for non-Chinese music allowed many non-Chinese to enter the court and helped the emperor to maintain the advantage of Xianbei elites. Those who were good at non-Chinese music used it to gain the emperor's favor and took control of the Northern Qi politics [37]. Wei Shou was one of those who gained the emperor's favor due to his talent in non-Chinese music. It was noted in his official biography.

收既輕疾，好聲樂，善胡舞。文宣末，數於東山與諸優為獼猴與狗鬪，帝寵狎之。
[8], p. 495.

Wei Shou was frivolous and impetuous. He was fond of music and good at Hu dances. At the end of the Wenxuan Emperor's reign, several times, he dressed like monkeys and fought dogs in the East Mountain, along with other entertainers. The emperor favored him.

Thirdly, writing a *yuefu* poem to criticize the unorthodox contemporary music and to be played with the reconstructed archaic orthodox musical system might not be Wei Shou's invention. He may have been responding to the musical reforms of the Northern Zhou. When the Northern Zhou were undergoing a reformation in their ritual and mu-

sis system, led by former southern Liang poet Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581), to construct their political legitimacy, the Northern Qi found it necessary to do the same. It was not only a competition for power, but also a competition in the literature. I do not have evidence from historical documents or musical notations. This tentative conclusion depends solely on textual similarity.

Yu Xin was one of the most iconic poets of the southern Liang court. He went to the North as a diplomat in 554, and after the Western Wei launched their fatal attack on Jiangling and defeated Liang, he was detained in the North until his death. The Northern Zhou court took advantage of his literary talent. He eventually oversaw the Northern Zhou's effort to rebuild their state and court ritual system. The "Northern Zhou Songs of Five Tunes" (*Zhou wushengdiao qu* 周五聲調曲) are a set of poems to be performed at court banquets to praise the magnificence of the Northern Zhou regime, as the preface of the poems indicates [38], p. 474. The texts are arranged under five different tunes, each featuring one of the five basic musical notes, *Gong* 宮, *Shang* 商, *Jue* 角, *Zhi* 徵, and *Yu* 羽. Despite the fact that Yu Xin grew up a poet of the southern poetic style and the southern court poets wrote several versions of "Songs of Five Tunes," Yu Xin's composition is clearly different from the southern examples. The most significant difference is that Yu Xin's "Songs of *Shang* Tune" are compilations of mottos of political ideals between the ruler and the ministers. (For a more detailed study of Yu Xin's contribution to the Northern Zhou court ritualistic texts, see He Jing 何靖, "Nanbei wenfeng jiaorong yu Beizhou jiaomiao yanshe gequ xinbian" (Blending of Northern and Southern literary styles and innovations in Northern Zhou's state ritual songs 南北文風交融與北周郊廟燕射歌曲新變) [39], esp. pp. 102–106). Yu Xin's rather dramatic shift in poetic style was influenced by the Northern Zhou promotion of archaism and, at the same time, defined the new Northern Zhou court style.

No clear textual evidence survives to establish a mutual influence between Wei Shou and Yu Xin; however, according to later anecdotes as recorded in the *Youyang Zazu* 酉陽雜俎, at least Yu Xin was aware of Wei's works and held a favorable opinion. Also, it is unlikely that any educated man in Wei Shou's time would miss reading Yu Xin. Moreover, the unprecedented method of writing court poems by weaving together historical examples and moral instructions in one piece, "coincidentally," appeared in Yu and Wei's two sets of poems. There are more similarities to suggest a possible mutual impact. Like the first poem of Wei's "A Beautiful Woman," Yu Xin's opening pieces in the set, the "Songs of *Gong* Tune" (*gongdiao qu* 宮調曲) and the "Songs of *Gong*-variant Tune" (*biangong diao* 變宮調), which are dedicated to praising the merits of the emperors, narrate the imperial achievements. Naturally, emperors undertake various activities in these texts. When Yu Xin switched to the "Songs of *Shang* Tune," as I mentioned above, he introduced a new composition that collects political mottoes. Similarly to Wei Shou, Yu Xin has criticized the music style of Zheng in his "Songs of *Jue* Tune" (*juediao qu* 角調曲).

涇渭同流, 清濁異能; 琴瑟並御, 雅鄭殊聲。 [38], p. 488.

Jing and Wei flow in the same river, but their clearness and muddiness are different in efficacy. The zither and harp play together, but the canonical and Zheng styles differ in sound.

Therefore, it is not completely insane to suggest the following tentative conclusion. There is a good possibility that Wei Shou might have imitated Yu Xin's examples; moreover, the Northern Qi might have imitated the "Northern Zhou Songs of Five Tunes," which represented the Northern Zhou's attempt to combine the latest popular music of the South and North with the archaic orthodoxy. In other words, Wei Shou's two poems of "A Beautiful Woman" were possibly played to the Northern Qi version of court tunes of five notes (*wushengdiao qu* 五聲調曲) if the Northern Qi response to the Northern Zhou cultural construction of legitimacy went beyond textual imitation.

According to the preface to Yu Xin's "Northern Zhou Songs of Five Tunes," the poems were intended for musical performances at the New Year Ritual and recounted the accomplishments of the Northern Zhou emperors.

元正饗會大禮，賓至食舉，稱觴薦玉，六律既從，八風斯暢，以歌大業，以舞成功。
[38], p. 474.

At the grand New Year Ritual of Banquet, guests arrive, and food is served. Cups are lifted, and sacrifices are offered with jade. Six pitches are accompanied, and thus the eight winds are smooth. They are used to sing about the great accomplishments and to dance the successful achievements.

The Northern Zhou court carried out a musical and ritualistic reformation for the New Year Ritual during Yuwen Yong's (宇文邕 r. 560–578) and Yuwen Yun's (宇文贇 r. 578–579) reigns.

武帝以梁鼓吹熊羆十二案，每元正大會，列於懸間，與正樂合奏。宣帝時，革前代鼓吹，制為十五曲。 [2], p. 370.

Emperor Wu [of Northern Zhou] utilized the Liang's twelve Bear-Decorated Stages for Drum-and-Pipe Songs. Once the New Year Banquet took place, they were placed among Palace Hanging Instruments and played with the main music. During Emperor Xuan's reign, he reformed the Drum-and-Pipe Songs of previous dynasties and made fifteen songs.

Yuwen Yong used the Liang musical instruments at the New Year Banquets. What was preserved in Yu Xin's anthology were likely lyrics for these performances. As the Liang literary icon, Yu Xin was more suitable than anyone else in the North to compose new lyrics for the Northern Zhou to be played on Liang instruments. Those songs would not be finished before 554 when Western Wei conquered Liang, and most likely were written towards the end of the 560s. (Yu Xin actively got involved in the Northern Zhou ritualist reformation at the beginning of the 570s. Yuwen Yong's rulership started in 560.) It is likely that Wei Shou, who died in 572, learned of Yu's poems towards the end of his life. Therefore, Wei Shou's two poems of "A Beautiful Woman" might represent his updated opinion about Zheng-Wei and orthodox styles towards the end of his life, which differed from his known interest in non-Chinese music. Yu Xin's potential impact on Wei Shou also shows the intermingled, complex mutual influence between the northern and southern literati in terms of musical culture. Northern music had an influence on the South and vice versa. It is better to see that the North and South chose sometimes different and sometimes similar literary and musical styles to fulfill their political pursuits at various levels than to rigidly think that each side stuck to a consistent style.

At last, I have to admit that there is another possibility. Wei Shou's poem did not care about music at all. There was a discrepancy between poetry and music. When Wei was writing, he disapproved of the Zheng-Wei style because it had been a literary convention. When he performed non-Chinese corruptive music, he did not care about its moral implications and solely enjoyed its melodies.

Whether or not poetry is performed to music and, when so, which comes first, has attracted many scholarly discussions. Shi Yidui gave a concise periodization based on the relationship between poetry and music. "From ancient times to the Han dynasties, music was composed to accompany poems; from Han to the Six Dynasties, selective poems accompanied music; since the Sui and Tang, lyrics were written according to melodies." [40], pp. 131–132. Most recently, Casey Schoenberger's *Music, Mind, and Language in Chinese Poetry and Performance: The Voice Extended* offers a comprehensive overview of the interwoven histories of traditional Chinese poetry and performing arts. Even though Schoenberger does not focus on the stylistic coherence (or incoherence) between poetry and music, in his sketch of the relationship between lyric and music in the medieval period, he offers

us a glimpse of a disjunction between the two in the later Northern and Southern Dynasties. “Middle Chinese languages were tonal, a fact of which Chinese scholars likely grew more aware through study of foreign languages, like Sanskrit. Literacy grew much more common, as did poetry composition as a social activity, leading also to increased demands for ‘poetry that writes its own music.’” [41], p. 27. Compared to poetry before and after, Qi-Liang palace-style poetry, which developed into the Tang recent-style regulated verse, was relatively independent of music. “Though still associated with music, medieval poetry composition grew in recognition as an independent artistic pursuit.” [41], p. 97. It depended on the alternation of level and oblique tones, the most important linguistic feature of Middle Chinese. Shen Yue and fellow Qi-Liang poets’ invention of tonal regulations did not aim to “force poetry to conform to external pitch standards by rigid prescription of tonal patterns, but rather to establish guidelines for writing poetry that sounded good read aloud without the need for a special musical arrangement.” [41], p. 99.

Being Music Bureau poems, Wei Shou’s two examples of “A Beautiful Woman” were more likely to be performed to music than an average Qi-Liang palace-style poem. But it is not uncommon that poets imitate extant Music Bureau titles based on the transmitted texts. Examining the tonal pattern of the two poems by Wei Shou, we can notice their semi-conformity to the prosodic rule of alternating level and oblique tones. Below are their tonal patterns.

No. 1	No. 2
— —	□ □ □ □ □
— — — —	— — —
— — —	—
— —	— —
—	— —
— —	— — —
— —	— — —
— — — —	— —
— —	— — — —
— — —	— —
—	— — — —
— — —	— —
	— — —
	— — —

Apparently, they were not anywhere close to the tonal pattern of later well-developed recent-style poetry (*jinti shi* 近體詩). But Wei Shou was probably intently following Shen Yue’s tonal theory and wrote in the latest Qi-Liang tonal style. In almost all couplets, with only one or two exceptions, the first line ends on an oblique sound and the second line on a level. Wei Shou also tried to alternate between the two tonal categories. Not very successfully, but he also showed some attempt to contrast the level with the oblique between two lines of the same couplet.

Wei Shou’s poems demonstrated incoherence in their music, language, and content. They were probably performed to non-Chinese Hu music; they followed the Qi-Liang court-style poetry’s tonal innovation; they expressed ideological archaism and classicism, which criticized the Zheng-Wei non-orthodox ornateness. It reflects the complicated political dimensions of Wei Shou’s poems, as discussed above, and the interaction between northern and southern poetic styles. In content, Wei wanted to establish an image of orthodox Northern Qi; in language, he wanted to show northerners’ competence in prosody equal to that of southerners; in music, he chose to meet the ruler’s favor for popular Hu tunes.

To briefly sum up, Wei Shou's two poems reflected not only the literary tradition of canonical didactic poetry but also the musical tradition of proper ritualistic and court sovereignty. By writing in the same title but a different style (and possibly music as well) than the southern counterparts, Wei Shou actively sought to construct the Eastern Wei court's legitimacy and political authority by following the archaic and canonical style. But his choices were nonetheless influenced by the southerners' self-correction. It will be oversimplified to treat the North and South as a clear-cut unity on their own, and misleading to see the North as naïve followers of the South's literary fashion.

7. Coda

Wei Shou's poetry, from a southern perspective of literary ornateness, is not good enough. However, I hope I have at least demonstrated that the first poem was a successful and intriguing engagement with the southern poetics. Even though Xu Ling accused him of being clumsy (*zhuo* 拙), Wei Shou's stylistic choice implies that *zhuo*, in Chinese thought, can also signify virtues such as plainness, naturalness, and resistance to artifice. The resistance to artifice, in particular, pertains to the idea of *zhi* as discussed in the literary and political context in this paper. It will take another paper to examine the nuanced aesthetic history of *zhuo*, but I hope my close reading of the two poems has at least shown that Wei Shou was intentionally cultivating a *zhuo* style, "unpolished" by southern criteria yet esteemed according to a different evaluative framework. The pair of poems, evoking both *Shijing* and *Chuci* traditions, represents northerners' deliberate efforts to repossess the classical tradition in order to distinguish themselves, in some respects, from the southerners.

Wei Shou's archaism and allegorism had been in fashion at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, and Xu Ling's palace style was under criticism. Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), who was in fact also from the Wei family, compared the northern and southern literary styles in the bibliographical treatise, *Jingji zhi* 經籍志, of *Suishu* 隋書:

梁簡文之在東宮，亦好篇什，清辭巧製，止乎衽席之間，彫琢蔓藻，思極閨闈之內。後生好事，遞相放習，朝野紛紛，號為宮體。流宕不已，訖于喪亡。……後魏文帝，頗效屬辭，未能變俗，例皆淳古。齊宅漳濱，辭人間起，高言累句，紛紜絡繹，清辭雅致，是所未聞。
[2], p. 1237.

When [Emperor] Jianwen of the Liang was still in his prince's palace, he also enjoyed writing. Pure diction and delicate structure—they stopped between sheets and mats; carved, polished, rich and complicated—thoughts reach limits within boudoir chambers. Later generations appreciated that, and numerous writers in and outside the court competed to imitate that style. It was called the palace style. It passed down without end, until the fall of the dynasty. ... Emperor Wen of the Later Wei (Northern Wei) practiced writing a lot, but he could not alter the tradition, and all his examples were archaic. The [Northern] Qi settled on the side of the Zhang River, where men of literature emerged continuously; lofty words piled up in sentences—abundant and diverse; pure diction and elegant intentions—one had never heard before.

Wei Zheng implicitly linked the fall of the Liang with their superfluous ornate literary style. It seems that Wei Shou's warning about the political damage of beauties in his poems was proven in the South. The Sui and the early Tang imperial court, which first rose to power in the North, approved of the northern archaic, politically righteous style. Therefore, when the anecdote of Xu Ling sinking Wei Shou's anthology gained popularity at Liu Su's time during the Tianbao Reign 天寶 (742–756), it means that the literary fashion, poetic taste, and court culture were undergoing a transition. It was probably not Xu Ling who deemed Wei Shou a bad poet, but the Tang readers' shifting preference and poetic pursuit that cast this bad name onto Wei Shou's poetry. As I have shown in this paper, the changing political incentives have influenced how poets receive and modify the

literary conventions and contemporary stylistic developments. When the political culture shifted in Wei Shou's time between the South and the North, and from Wei Shou's time to the early Tang, the standards for evaluation and the context for making sense of Wei's poetry changed accordingly. That demands a more nuanced and sympathetic approach from contemporary readers to those pieces.

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