

**Chinese Bamboo and the Construction of
Moral High Ground by Song Literati**

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the bamboo aesthetic in Chinese literature and its relations to the self-fashioning of moral high ground, with particular focus on literary works produced by Song literati. The study deconstructs the bamboo aesthetic into two parts, the literary bamboo and the literati self, and explores the internal dynamic relations between them.

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Introduction

Bamboo is one of the most important plants in ancient Chinese culture for its practical value and more importantly its significance in literature. Bamboo was abundant in most parts of China. Its characteristics of being long, hard, and having a straight stem made it one of the most practical materials for everyday convenience. Bamboo was used to build houses, made into chopsticks, baskets, furniture, and transporting devices, and many other usages. More importantly, bamboo was the media for art and literature. Before paper was invented in the Eastern Han dynasty, bamboo was shaped into slips to record texts. Most Chinese classics were originally written on these slips. Bamboo was also made into musical instruments, such as flutes and pipes. Music had very high cultural status since Confucius advocated music appreciation as a means to restore the virtue of Western Zhou ritual (11 century to 771 B.C.E.).¹ Therefore, bamboo was favoured by the cultural elites, so it was no surprise that bamboo became a significant subject matter in Chinese ancient literature and art. Scholars often planted bamboo in their courtyards, observed bamboo trees in the wild. Some included the Chinese character of bamboo *zhu* 竹 in their nicknames. They also gave bamboo names to their architecture, gardens, and books.²

The aesthetic of bamboo in classical literature can be traced back to *Shijing* (诗经), a collection of songs, odes and hymns from the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BCE). Since then, bamboo had been sporadically represented in literature and visual art. By the Tang dynasty (618-907), the fascination of bamboo became fully blown. Bamboo was very common in poetry and prose, very often creatively used as a persona of the author to express his virtue and morality. Song (960-1279) literati continued to contribute to the bamboo aesthetic by writing and painting about bamboo. They did so

¹ Xu Fuguan 徐复观. *Zhongguo yishu jingsheng* 中国艺术精神. ed. Li Weiwu 李维武. (Wuhan: Hubei People's Press, 2002), 11-16.

² For example, a Song poet Zhou Zizhi 周紫芝 names himself the "Resident of Bamboo Slope" 竹坡居士. See Sheng Yue 沈约, *The History of Song*. Vol. 28 (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1974.) Song scholar Zhao Dingcheng 赵鼎臣 had a book *The Collection of Bamboo Hermit* 竹隐居士集. See *Yongle dadian* 永乐大典 Vol.20. Another Song scholar Lin Jizhong 林季仲 had two books: *The Collection of Bamboo Creek* 竹溪集 and *The Note of Bamboo Cottage* 竹轩杂著. Both books were recorded in *the History of Song* 宋史 Vol.6 *Yiwen Zhi* 艺文志.

because they needed to cultivate their moral self. They were more likely to associate bamboo with morality than their predecessors, and their contribution nurtured a literati taste, which shaped the Chinese cultural landscape thereafter. In the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the painting of bamboo started to appear with great frequency. Since then, the bamboo motif in literature and visual art has never subsided until perhaps the arrival of modernity.

There has not yet been much English scholarship available to provide an in-depth analysis of bamboo in Chinese classical literature. Most scholarship is either in Chinese or Japanese. Within Chinese scholarship, it is not easy to find a book that is exclusively and systematically on bamboo in literature. All discussions of literary bamboo are subsumed in other larger topics. There are three types of Chinese academic publications where bamboo literature is found. First is anthologies of bamboo poetry. These books select poetry from different historical periods, providing the convenience to compare different poems on the same subject of bamboo. One drawback of these books is that the criteria of selection are usually not stated, and most of these books offer little analysis.³ Second are the books on bamboo culture. These books explain everything about bamboo, and there is usually a section on bamboo literature. I found these books more helpful in their anthropological view of bamboo, such as Lin Haiyin's (林海音) *Chinese Bamboo* (中国竹) and Guan Chuanyou's (关传友) *Chinese Bamboo Culture* (中国竹文化).⁴ However, the attention to bamboo literature is often diluted by the other non-literary aspects of bamboo. Hence, the depth of analysis seems compromised. The third kind of scholarship is publications on *yongwu* (咏物). As will be explained in more detail in this thesis, *yongwu* is a literary technique in which an author chants about an object to express his or her emotion. *Yongwu* is also understood by Chinese scholars as a genre of poetry, and bamboo is categorized as an important topic of *yongwu* poetry. Publications about *yongwu* poetry are often produced by Chinese literature specialists and they offer in-depth literary analysis. In their analysis,

³ One example is *Lidai yongzhu shicong* 历代咏竹诗丛. Cheng Naifan 成乃凡. (Xi'an: Shangxi People's Press, 2004).

⁴ Guan Chuanyou 关传友. *Chinese Bamboo Culture* 中华竹文化. (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Press 中国文联出版社, 2000).

while bamboo is studied as part of a cultural phenomenon including a wide range of chanted objects, bamboo is not the exclusive focus.⁵

Instead of a wider scope of focus, I am singling out literary bamboo as my exclusive focus of research, and I will concentrate on the Song dynasty as the main time frame for my study. The specific focus of the aesthetic of bamboo in literary works produced by Song scholar-officials may provide an interesting angle from which to understand Chinese intellectual history and Chinese aesthetics. Bamboo was very intimate to the scholar-writers, so the study of bamboo literature may allow us into the mind of the scholars. Bamboo is certainly not the only object in Chinese classical literature that warrants our attention. I am simply using bamboo as a case study to enhance our understanding of Chinese intellectual history and Chinese aesthetics. That said, the aesthetic of bamboo is a very complex subject of research. Chinese aesthetics, as we understand it today, is a heterogenous mixture of philosophy, astrology, literature, politics, and other fields. It needs to be unpacked and focussing on the bamboo aesthetic is one way to achieve that.

In studies of the bamboo aesthetic, most Chinese scholarship is concerned about the ideography of bamboo. In his book *Chinese Bamboo Culture*, Guan Chuanyou states: “Bamboo signifies the idealized moral integrity of Chinese scholars — *junzi* (君子). *Junzi* refers to those who pursued moral high grounds, who had a strong and uncompromising will to do so, and who in their pursuit demonstrated graceful and elegant demeanor.”⁶ This is the common symbolic meaning of bamboo in classical literature. In my research, I found almost all contemporary literature on classical bamboo makes similar comments.

This statement is certainly too general and abstract to understand the aesthetic of bamboo. In order to give more insights, Guan carries on his ideographic analysis into the very details of bamboo. For example, he studies a very specific kind of bamboo

⁵ For example: Lu Chengwen 路成文. *Songdai Yongwu Ci Shi Lun* 宋代咏物词史论. (Beijing: Commercial Press Ltd., 2005).

⁶ Guan, *Chinese Bamboo Culture*, 320. In Chinese: 竹是表示中国文人的理想人格——君子具有崇高的道德理想、坚韧不拔的意志以及具有举止清雅、英姿潇洒的外在仪态风范。

known as “Bamboo of Concubine Xiang” (湘妃竹).⁷ This bamboo is characterized by its spotted stems. According to Guan, this bamboo symbolized women’s fidelity, and Guan talks about a story behind this name: in the Bronze Age of China, the sage king Yao (尧) had two daughters. They were married to Yao’s successor Shun (舜) as concubines. Shun was another sage king in the region of the Xiang River. Therefore, Yao’s daughters were known as Madams of Xiang. One day Shun died accidentally when he was helping his people. Upon hearing about his death, the two women cried and cried. Their teardrops fell on the bamboo stems. Since then, the spotted stains on the bamboo stems were believed to be the marks of their tears. Hence, the bamboo was named after these women to commemorate their loyalty to their husband. To verify the story, Guan looks into the classical literature and traces the etymology of the term “bamboo of Concubine Xiang”.

Guan’s interesting study reveals the early sophistication of bamboo symbolism in literature. However, I would argue that seeing bamboo as a symbol does not suffice to understand the whole picture of a bamboo aesthetic. I propose an additional approach: to focus on the relations between bamboo and the authors who use it within the realm of the literary world. In other words, rather than seeing the representation of bamboo as embodying certain human qualities of a *junzi* (“gentleman”), I would like to see the correlations between literary bamboo and the constructed self of a *junzi*. While the study of representation presents a static image of a bamboo aesthetic, the study of correlations explores the dynamic meanings made possible by a bamboo aesthetic.

My analysis is based on both perspectives of representation and correlation. Chapter One is about the development of a bamboo aesthetic from early stages in *Shijing* to maturity in the Tang. I briefly explore the tradition of chanting objects in poetry, the process of attributing morality to bamboo, and the tradition of the retreating lifestyle that was a fertile ground for the growth of a bamboo aesthetic. In Chapter One, I trace the inter-linking of bamboo literature from different writers and time periods, and find out how new meanings were accrued to expand the bamboo aesthetic.

⁷ *Ibid.* 320.

Chapter Two explains the methodology of a correlation perspective versus a representation perspective. More often than not, scholar-officials saw bamboo as a living entity who possessed ideal human qualities. They did not have a modern linguistic concept of “representation” or “metaphor.” Therefore, it may be more helpful to see bamboo as a fully functioning friend to the author, and to acknowledge the agency of bamboo on the author. In this sense, the bamboo and the author become a correlating pair. The aesthetic of bamboo, I suggest, is not located in the process of representing; rather, it arises in the process of correlating between bamboo and the literati self. The bamboo aesthetic thus has two indispensable components: the literary bamboo and the literati self, who mutually intertwine through the aesthetic of bamboo.

In Chapter Three, I situate the bamboo aesthetic in the Song social fabric where an independent scholar-official identity arose, and investigate in detail the literary bamboo and its relation to the literati self. I focus on Song bamboo because Song was the time in Chinese history when art was most empowered. In his *This Culture of Ours*, Peter Bol states that “in no other civilization has art so intentionally been accorded as vital and central a role in culture and society as in China.”⁸ Song was arguably the pinnacle of this trend. Through the lens of Song bamboo, I propose to examine the dimensions of the literati self: its essence, its inclusions and exclusions. Chapter Three is therefore divided into three sections, and each section explains one dimension. In the first section, I deconstruct the Confucian self in order to analyze the internal logic of the aesthetic of bamboo. In the second section I explore how bamboo brings Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thinking into one singular moral aesthetic. The third section uses bamboo literature to explain who the cultural others were for the Song literati. My objective in this chapter is twofold. One is to mutually explain the relations between literary bamboo and its author; the other is to appreciate the beauty and the pleasure of reading bamboo prose and poetry.

⁸ Peter K. Bol, *“This Culture of Ours”: Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 34.

I have to note that fascination with a bamboo aesthetic was not confined to the scholar class. The imperial court was also part of the bamboo cultural phenomenon. There are historical records that indicate ruling families used bamboo to represent their virtues.⁹ For example, after the dismantling of Tang dynasty, there was a kingdom called Southern Qi (南齊). The king built a so-called “bamboo palace”, likely a palace decorated with real bamboo, in which he held banquets with his ministers.¹⁰ The Chinese peasants, although illiterate, were also part of the bamboo literature, as many folk songs and practices of story-telling were found to carry some poetic sense of bamboo similar to that found in the scholar class.¹¹

⁹ For example, in *The Book of Song* 宋书, there is an article titled *Furuaizhong* 符瑞中, in which was written: Just like bamboo is nurtured by dew, the kings respects the wise and loves the senior. 竹受甘露, 王者尊賢愛老. See Sheng Yue 沈约, *The Book of Song* 宋书. Vol. 28 Zhi 志 No.18.

¹⁰ For example, in *The Book of Song* 宋书, there is an article titled *Dearlly Brother Zhongyu* 伯玉弟仲玉, in which was written: In May, the king rode his chariots to the bamboo forest temple and set up banquet for his ministers. In this bamboo palace, they paid their tribute to son of heaven. 五月乙卯, 車駕幸竹林寺禪房宴群臣。天子自竹宮望拜. See *The Book of Song* 宋书. Vol 59.

¹¹ For example, in *The History of Eastern Han* 後漢書, there is a story titled *Night Man* 夜郎. It is about a baby who was born from inside bamboo stems became a sage king. See Fang Hua 范曄, *The History of Eastern Han* 後漢書, Vol.90, appendix *the Record of Han*, Vol.30, 九十卷附續漢志三十卷.

Chapter One: Development of a Bamboo Aesthetic (From Antiquity to Tang)

The development of a bamboo aesthetic can be traced through three threads. First is the formation of the literary technique of *yongwu* (咏物), or chanting about objects to express one's inner self. *Yongwu* is an important tradition of Chinese poetry. The objects are mostly plants and animals but not exclusively. Anything that stirred up the poet's emotion can be a topic for chanting, such as rocks, water, or household items. Throughout the entire history of Chinese literature, the most chanted objects are plum blossom, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, known as "The Four Gentlemen".¹² Chanting about objects was not only a way to give an aesthetic dimension to these objects, but more importantly was a means to express the poet's inner emotions or desires using the objects as vehicles. A poet was less likely to state directly what he wanted; rather, he used objects as a proxy to make the statement.

The second thread is the process of weaving morality into the meaning of bamboo. The moralizing of bamboo means giving a moral dimension to the aesthetic of bamboo often by emphasizing its physical traits.. As a plant bamboo is peculiar: its size when fully grown is comparable to trees, while its nature is close to grass. This in-betweenness allowed room for a range of interpretation. For example, the straightness of the bamboo stem was associated with honesty, which led to bamboo becoming synonymous with a *junzi*, or a morally superior man. Many ancient Chinese scholars, particularly Song scholars, used bamboo to construct their moral selves. By creating a moral aesthetic of bamboo, these writers were claiming a moral high ground for themselves and using bamboo as evidence of their virtuous attainments.

The third thread is the development of a retreating lifestyle, which I believe was a fertile ground for the growth of a bamboo aesthetic. A retreating lifestyle often involved living with bamboo on a daily basis. The practitioners of such a lifestyle focused on the

¹² "The Gentlemen of Four" in Chinese characters is *si-junzi* 四君子. These four plants were most popular among Chinese painting, and they were often written in literature.

emotional connection and spiritual dialogue between bamboo and themselves. The emotions that bamboo elicits are usually calmness, peace and other positive intimate feelings. These feelings carry an undertone of a social value that embraces the serene beauty of nature over the tumultuous ugliness of politics. Many writers since the collapse of Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) were somehow frustrated by politics and lived a simple life in the countryside. For them, the appreciation of the beauty of bamboo trees and their ambience helped them to cope with the transition from political life to peasantry. The development of this retreating lifestyle is certainly interrelated with the moralizing of bamboo. Most literary works employing a bamboo aesthetic make reference back to earlier texts. Paying attention to intertextuality is a helpful way to trace all these threads.

To map out these threads, I would like to study some literary examples and historical figures that were milestones in the development of a bamboo aesthetic, presenting them chronologically. Bamboo was first paired up with the image of well-respected people in *Shijing* or *Classic of Poetry*, which reached a stable form around 600 BCE. There are a few examples, but the poem most relevant to my inquiry is titled *Qi'ao* (淇奥).¹³

瞻彼淇奥，绿竹猗猗。
有匪君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。
瑟兮僩兮，赫兮咺兮，
有匪君子，终不可谖兮！

Looking over at the *Qi Water*, [we] see green bamboos long and graceful.¹⁴

Here are the *junzi*. Eloquently and elegantly, they are arguing and discussing with literary grace.

Their serious looks and self-respectful demeanor reveal their wealth and power.

¹³ The poem is taken from The Feng of Wei in *Shijing* 诗经·卫风. A more detail explanation can be found in Wang Fuhan 王扶汉, *shijing xin-lun* 诗经新论 (Tianjing: Tianjing Classical Books Publishing House 1992), 1.

¹⁴ Qi Water was a river in today's Henan Province in China.

Here are the talented gentlemen. How can [we] forget them!

According to *Maoshi* (毛诗), this poem was dedicated to Duke Wu of Wei (卫武公), minister to King Ping of Zhou (周平王). Wu was a mellow old man in his nineties. He was wise and his thought was deep. He wrote exemplary prose, and he was always open to admonishment. The people of Wei composed this poem to commemorate his virtue. In the poem, the *junzi* refers to Wu and the people around him.

In *Shijing*, the anonymous authors often use a rhetorical device called *xing* (兴), or “affective image”. The usual format of *xing* is to use it to start off the first verse, which is not logically relevant to the main content of the poem, to incite an emotional reaction. The first verse of this poem depicts a picture of charming bamboos. They are growing beside the riverbank, and their color is vibrantly green. This image created an impression that the bamboo is full of life, echoing the running water in the river. The feeling of liveliness is then projected onto the *junzi* in the next couplet. In this way, the aesthetic of both the bamboo and *junzi* is established. However, at the time *Shijing* was compiled, bamboo has not yet appeared as a significant literary subject. The subject of bamboo in *Shijing* was uncommon, and I do not find much consistency in meaning when it used as a metaphor.

The development of a bamboo aesthetic involved the process of personification of bamboo, and the earliest contributor to this process was Qu Yuan (340 - 278 BCE) of the Warring State period (475-221 BCE). He is the attributed author of the anthology *Chu Ci* (楚辞), or the *Songs of the South*, but the relationship between the text and the historical person is uncertain. *Chu Ci* was significant in the formation of an important literary tradition: the use plants to represent one’s inner qualities. Historical records indicate that Qu Yuan was a well educated man and served at the court of the King of Chu. After he was unjustly exiled from court, he toured around the country, mostly south of the Yangzi River. His nomadic life turned out to be fruitful in that reportedly collected shamanistic folk songs and enhanced them with his literary talent, which gave birth to *Chu Ci* which exercised great influence on the development of Chinese literature.

One of the salient characteristics of *Chu Ci* is an excessive use of flowers and herbs in its imagery. The “Nine Songs” are some of the most read pieces in *Chu Ci*. A great many flowers and herbs are mentioned in these short poems. These plants are not merely decorative for the sake of poetic beauty. They form a literary archetype known as the *xiancao-meiren* (香草美人), or ‘fragrant beauty’, in which an appealing image of the plant is depicted as a way to reflect the inner beauty of the human subject. For example:

秋蘭兮青青，綠葉兮紫莖。

滿堂兮美人，忽獨與余兮目成。

The autumn orchid bloom luxuriant,
With leaves of green and purple stems.

All the hall is filled with lovely women,
But his eyes swiftly sought me out from the rest.¹⁵

The autumn orchid and its green leaves convey a sense of beauty. The sensual feeling carries on to the women in the ritual hall. In this way these women are also as fragrant as the orchid. The image of the women is therefore enhanced. In another example from “Mountain Ghost” in “Nine Songs”, Qu Yuan writes: “The mountain spirit is as fragrant as the flower of *duruo* (杜若). / She drinks spring water among rocks and takes shelter under pine trees.” (山中人兮芳杜若，飲石泉兮蔭松柏)¹⁶ In here, instead of using *xing*, the rhetorical device is a metaphor. The mountain spirit (山中人) is compared to the flower based on the similar quality they both have: being nurtured by the spring water and pine trees. In *Chu Ci*, the human subject is often given a generic name of *mei'ren* (美人). According to many scholars, *mei'ren* refers to either kings, shaman, or mythical figures. Other scholars posited that the reference is to Qu Yuan himself.

¹⁵ These verses are taken from one of the nine songs and its title is “The Lesser Master of Fate” (少司命), translated by David Hawkes. See David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 111.

¹⁶ These verses are taken from *Mountain Ghost* 山鬼. IBid 70.

This archetype of “fragrant beauty” is highly influential in Chinese literature. *Chu Ci* lived on after the Qin emperor destroyed the texts associated with many schools of thought, and the archetype of the “fragrant beauty” later developed into the tradition of chanting about objects to express one’s feeling, that is, the *yongwu* style of poetry. While the term “fragrant beauty” includes numerous kinds of flowers and herbs, *yongwu* usually is more specific in its object or objects. Rather than attributing an indeterminate range of plants to human qualities, *yongwu* makes the attribution through careful logic, usually according to the physicality of the objects. For example, a pine tree grows in the cold winter, so it is used to express a feeling of toughness.

Bamboo in particular in *Chu Ci* is not romanticized at the same level as other flowers and herbs. In “Mountain Ghost” of “Nine Songs”, the putative voice of Qu Yuan states: “The darkness of a bamboo forest blocks the sky. / The path is dangerous and difficult, and that is why I am late” (余處幽篁兮終不見天，路險難兮獨後來). The bamboo forest appears to be intimidating, causing difficulty for the traveller in the mountain. This is very different from the slender, elegant bamboo in *Shijing*. This kind of discrepancy in connotations of bamboo imagery is not found in Tang and Song representations, at a time when the bamboo aesthetic reaches its maturity.

Another important group of figures in the development of a bamboo aesthetic are the so-called Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, a group of intellectuals who lived through the political turmoil and war of Third Century China. The Seven Sages were best known for their eccentric lifestyles and their wisdom and skill in walking the tightrope between state politics and private lives of retreat. They were all talented scholars, and their knowledge and conscience told them to stay away from post-Han politics, in which warlords were fighting for power and ignored the suffering of civilians. However, those in power, for their own interests, wanted to involve the Seven Sages in politics, so as to use their reputations and popularity among the people.¹⁷ The Seven Sages were therefore caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they did not want to be

¹⁷ The story of the Seven Sages can be found in *Zhulin qixian shiwen quanji yizhu* 竹林七贤诗文全集译注, written by Han Geping 韩格平. (Changchun: jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1997).

complicit with the warlords and government officials; on the other hand, for the sake of personal safety, they could not openly reject and provoke those brutal warlords. The strategy they used was to engage in eccentric social behaviour. For example, Ruanji (阮籍 210-263), who was the leading figure of the “seven sages,” was famously known to be always drunk and unconscious. Another sage, Liu Ling, was not only drunk but also dressed inappropriately in public. In this way, they warded off the government’s representative who came to persuade them to join the government without rudely rejecting the offer. In the story of the “seven sages,” we can see traces of the pragmatic side of Chinese intellectuals. Chinese intellectuals were less likely to involve themselves in direct confrontations with power.¹⁸ This tendency certainly explains in part the necessity of using an object as a proxy to express oneself.

The Seven Sages were said to be drinking and singing socially in a bamboo grove. Therefore, bamboo became associated with a lifestyle of retreating from politics. The naming of the group reinforced this association. The name “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” is consisted of two parts: the “seven sages” and the “bamboo grove.” These people were named sages because their behavior resembled those mythical Daoist immortals who were always drinking and acting carefree. The “bamboo grove” carries a connotation of beauty, much more so than “bamboo trees.” The “bamboo grove” helped strengthen the binding between the bamboo aesthetic and the sagely lifestyle. Therefore, the bamboo grove became a depoliticized space, which was a very influential legacy left by the Seven Sages for the many Chinese intellectuals who followed. When their political ambition was cut short, Chinese intellectuals always found meaning in their non-political lives that inspired their literature.

After the Seven Sages, Tao Qian (陶潜 365-427) was an important figure in the process of developing the *yongwu* tradition and a retreating lifestyle. Although he was not involved in bamboo writing, his influence played a part in poeticizing bamboo. He was born in an era of political turmoil in the Eastern Jin dynasty (265-420). He became

¹⁸ They were more direct in the Warring States period. After China’s unification, Chinese intellectuals were losing some of their power because of the political environment did not allow them to do so. See Fang Ming 方铭, *Zhangguo wen-xue shi-lun* 战国文学史论 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2008), 61.

disillusioned with politics and purposely quit his position in the government, and retreated to the countryside. Similar to the Seven Sages, he was a role model for the many generations of scholars-officials who struggled with the dilemma between fulfilling one's Confucian ambition in politics and maintaining his moral integrity when politics went awry. For Tao, his solution was simple: find peace in the countryside and enjoy its beauty. While the Seven Sages left a legacy of lifestyle through their behaviour, Tao influenced the literary world through his writing on retreating in life. The Seven Sages established a depoliticized space, which was in fact a buffer zone to ward off politics. They might come out of the bamboo grove had the political climate improved. In comparison, Tao carved out a private space that he truly enjoyed, a space where he found his true happiness and had no intention to go back to politics.

Following his retreat to the land and living among farmers, the subject of Tao's literary interest changed from the grand narrative of political ethics and concern of the state, to the enjoyable little details in life, such as picking flowers or contemplating a grand mountain.¹⁹ Tao became the first intellectual since the Han dynasty who brought poetry from the public domain to the private space. This paradigm shift was significant in the development of the *yongwu* tradition and the formation of an aesthetic of plants. Following his lead, Chinese writers felt legitimated to discover the beauty of everyday life and write about little things around them. Interestingly, Tao did not prominently use *yongwu* technique in his writing; it was his writing about his attitude of life that influenced Chinese literary history.

One of the earliest intellectuals to famously compare bamboo with the *junzi* was Tao's contemporary Wang Feizhi (王徽之 ?-388). He was most famous for his love of bamboo. Wang's lifestyle was somewhat similar to Tao and the Seven Sages. He served the court and then retreated from politics. After he resigned his position, he lived in his secluded home. His main interest in his hermetic life was to live with bamboo. He

¹⁹ In his poem *Drinking* 饮酒, Tao writes: Picking up chrysanthemum under the east fence, I am awarded the view of the Southern Mountain. 采菊东篱下，幽然见南山. Tao Qian 陶潜, *Tao Yuanming ji ciao zhu* 陶淵明集校注, ed. Sun Junxi 孙钧锡 (Zhongzhou Classical Books Press, 1986), 58.

planted lots of bamboo around his mansion.²⁰ He was famously quoted as saying: “this gentleman [bamboo] is high and virtuous, comparable to none; how am I going to live without him even for just a single day?” (此君高尚無比，何可一日無此君邪)

In the Tang dynasty, the fascination with bamboo fully blossomed and the aesthetic of bamboo became well established. Bamboo was widely used in Tang poetry to express the intimate feelings of Tang scholars. Among them, Liu Yanfu (刘岩夫) was very articulate in moralizing bamboo. The following is an excerpt from his essay “Liu’s Journal of Planting Bamboo”:

*A junzi, or a truly moral gentleman, has to compare his morality to the bamboo. The bamboo stem is firm and its joints are strong. It does not succumb to snow. This is masculine toughness. Bamboo leaves are green and stirred by the wind. This is its feminine delicacy. The bamboo stem is straight and hollow inside. It has nothing to hide. This is its loyalty. Bamboo does not stand high alone as one tree. It always grows in abundance and the plants rely on each other. This is righteousness. Although bamboo is full of vital force, it does not compete with other plants for splendidness. This is humbleness. Bamboo prospers for all four seasons and never fluctuates. This is its constancy... These good virtues are a good match for a gentleman. Therefore, I plant bamboo in my courtyard and exclude other plants. I want its singular beauty without distraction. I am afraid that some people may not understand me. Therefore, I wrote this book “Liu’s Journal of Planting Bamboo” as a tribute to its morality.*²¹

²⁰ See Liu Yiqing 刘义庆, *Shisuoxingyu* 世說新語, No.23 *rendan* 任誕, ed. Zhang Wangqi 张万起 (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1998), 95.

²¹ The original Chinese text is as follows: 君子比德于竹焉：原夫劲本坚节，不受霜雪，刚也；绿叶萋萋，翠筠浮浮，柔也；虚心而直，无所隐蔽，忠也；不孤根以挺耸，必相依以林秀，义也；虽春阳气旺，终不与众木斗荣，谦也；四时一贯，荣衰不殊，常也；……夫此数德，可以配君子，故岩夫列之于庭，不植他木，欲令独擅其美，且无以杂之乎。”窃惧来者之未谕，故书曰《刘氏植竹记》，尚德也。See Liu Xue Wen 刘学文 ed., *Gu jin yong zhu ji* 古今咏竹集 (Changsha: Hu nan ren ming chu ban she, 2002), 73.

Liu achieves two important things in this piece. First, *junzi* is identified with bamboo. Compared with Wang Huizhi, Liu's bamboo is regarded not as a plant onto which we project our morality; rather, bamboo has its own subjectivity. It has all these essential virtues a *junzi* must have, such as toughness, loyalty, humbleness, etc. Liu used his bamboo as a measurement for *junzi*. In other words, the virtues of bamboo are the criteria for a *junzi*. Second, Liu established a moral superiority for bamboo. By comparing bamboo with other plants, Liu belittles other plants which are contrasted with the moral greatness of his bamboo. This moral superiority is in fact what Tang scholars felt about themselves. As will be demonstrated in a later chapter, this sense of moral high ground is the upmost value that delved deeply in the psyche of the literati scholars.

Bo Juyi (772-846) was another important Tang poet to moralize on bamboo. In his prose piece "A Record of Growing Bamboo" (養竹記), Bo lists the moral qualities of bamboo, which were similar to Liu's list. Both of them treat bamboo as a reflection of moral values in their society. The difference is that while Bo emphasizes the inspiration bamboo had for scholars, he does not equate bamboo with the scholars directly. Instead, when he refers to bamboo, he uses the term *xian'ren* (賢人), or virtuous person; when he refers to the scholar, he uses the term *junzi*. Although *xian'ren* is close to *junzi* in meaning, Bo intentionally employs two names to differentiate bamboo from the scholar-poet. The following excerpt is the beginning of his essay:

Bamboo is like a virtuous man (*xian'ren*). Why? Bamboo is strong and being strong is the foundation of its virtue. When he sees bamboo roots, the *junzi* is inspired to become a person with strong will. Bamboo is straight, and being straight is imperative to establish its integrity. When he sees the straightness, the *junzi* is inspired to be honest. Bamboo stems are hollow, and being hollow is the key to experiencing the *dao*. When he sees the hollowness, the *junzi* is inspired to be humble. Bamboo joints are firm, and being firm is important to carry out a will. When he sees the joints, the *junzi* is inspired to persevere. When he

encounters difficulties, the *junzi* maintains his belief without betrayal. For this reason, the *junzi* plants bamboo in his courtyard.²²

Bo continued to write about his encounter with the bamboo trees in the courtyard previously owned by a respected minister and presently used by him. He was saddened to see the bamboo trees were not taken care of since the passing of the minister. Some of them were cut to make baskets and brooms, and those that survived were growing among weeds. He then took action to clear the weeds and restore the beauty of bamboo. At the ending of the prose piece, he makes this comment:

Alas! bamboo is a kind of plant. How does it relate to us? Because it looks like a gentleman, people love to plant it. A gentleman living among average people is like a bamboo tree living among weeds. Alas! Bamboo cannot distinguish itself from weeds on its own. It depends on human hands to clear the weeds to become distinguished. Similarly, the virtuous man cannot distinguish himself from the masses on his own. He can only be distinguished by those who empower him. For this reason, I write this “Record of Planting Bamboo” on the wall of this pavilion in order to acknowledge those future dwellers here. Another purpose of my writing is to make my voice heard by those who will empower the virtuous man.²³

Ending with such a commentary on composition is a typical technique of *yongwu* (咏物) prose. Bo talked about the virtuous features of bamboo, and recounted his bamboo story. In the end, he pieces them together by highlighting the parallels between the nurturing of bamboo and the nurturing of virtue. The bamboo versus weeds is akin to a virtuous man versus the ordinary populace. The effort of talking about bamboo is to

²² See *Bo Juyi ji* 白居易集 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chu-ban-she, 2002), 326. The original Chinese text is as follows: 竹似賢，何哉？竹本固，固以樹德，君子見其本，則思善建不拔者。竹性直，直以立身；君子見其性，則思中立不倚者。竹心空，空似體道；君子見其心，則思應用虛者。竹節貞，貞以立志；君子見其節，則思砥礪名行，夷險一致者。夫如是，故君子人多樹為庭實焉。

²³ The original Chinese text is as follows: 嗟乎！竹植物也，於人何有哉？以其有似於賢而人愛惜之，封植之，況其真賢者乎？然則竹之於草木，猶賢之於眾庶。嗚呼！竹不能自異，唯人異之。賢不能自異，唯用賢者異之。故作《養竹記》，書於亭之壁，以貽其後之居斯者，亦欲以聞於今之用賢者雲。

help the reader to understand the situation of the virtuous man (and Bo clearly counts himself as one). Then, he reveals his ultimate objective: he wants to be noticed by those who can empower him. He needs to be empowered because Bo at the time of his writing this was downgraded in the government hierarchy for political reasons. He certainly hoped to be recognized again, and his only chance was to get the attention of those who were in power. This was his will, and his will was articulated through the story of bamboo.

IBo's use of bamboo may seem a bit dry in this example of prose, but there were many fascinating *yongwu* poems written by other Tang poets. While Bo's essay accentuates the moral aesthetic of bamboo, other Tang writers were more subtle in this regard, chanting loudly on the poetic beauty of bamboo. This kind of poem dwells on bamboo's overall looks, smell, sound, roots, and many other features. Bamboo became a very specific poetic subject in Tang poetry. In this poetry, although the poet seldom mentions himself, the depiction of bamboo in such detail reveals the self-regarding gaze of the poet, and implies a dialogue between the poet and the bamboo. By acclaiming the beauty of bamboo, the poet affirms a typical literary lifestyle and hints at his own high morality. I would use a poem by Du Mu (杜牧 803-852) to illustrate this sort of poetic bamboo. The poem is titled "On Bamboo Newly Planted by Liu Xiucai" (题刘秀才新竹):²⁴

数径幽玉色，晓夕翠烟分。
声破寒窗梦，根穿绿藓纹。
渐笼当槛日，欲碍入帘云。
不是山阴客，何人爱此君。

The bamboo forest is dark green, the colour of jade,
In dusk and dawn, mist rises and circles around the greenness.
Their voices shatter dreams in chilly windows,

²⁴ A *xiu-cai* 秀才 is a person who passed the country level imperial examination. See Du Mu 杜牧 *Huangchuang shi jizhu* 樊川诗集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1978). Also see Wen Shizheng 闻世震, *Lidai mingjia zhu shi xin zhu* 历代名家竹诗新注 (Shenyang: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 2010), 95.

Their roots pierce the green patterned moss.
 They grow high above the balustrade to encircle the sun,
 They won't stop growing until they penetrate the curtains of
 clouds.
 Apart from Wang Huizhi,
 who else is falling in love with "this gentleman."

Compared with Bo Juyi's prose on bamboo, Du Mu's poem has more emotional appeal than moral appeal. To render a poetic image of bamboo, Du brings jade, dusk, dawn, dream, moss, windows, balustrades, sun, and clouds into the overall picture. The poeticizing of bamboo says something about who Du Mu was. Through the poem, he intimates that he is a bamboo lover, and has scholarly tastes. In the last couplet, Du Mu makes it clear by referring back to Wang Huizhi. As mentioned above, Wang was known as a bamboo fanatic in history. The self-comparison with Wang reinforces Du Mu's fascination with bamboo, and allies himself to the camp of scholars who lived a certain scholarly lifestyle.

From the example of Du Mu's mention of Wang Huizhi, it becomes clear that using historical references was a way to expand the aesthetic of bamboo. It is possible to trace the map of linear influence regarding bamboo aesthetic. Wang was perhaps the first recorded intellectual to relate bamboo to *junzi*. Following his lead, Liu Yanfu elaborates the relation by stating the moral quality of bamboo. Du Mu mentions bamboo-as-*junzi* at the end of his poem, therefore still maintaining the moral appeal even though he took bamboo in a very poetic direction.

Another example of historical citation can be found in the poetry of Du Fu (杜甫 712-770), considered by many to be the greatest Chinese poet of all time. In one of his poems, "To the Thatched Cottage", he refers to the Seven Sage of Bamboo Grove. In this poem, he recounted his life story of suffering caused by political turmoil.²⁵ In the

²⁵ The turmoil was caused by the so-called An Lushang rebellion. An Lushang 安祿山 was a military general who rose up against the Tang emperor and sacked the capital city of Changan, forcing the emperor to escape to the west. Although the rebellion was put down some years later, Tang had never recovered from the turmoil and had to face

first two couplets when he describes himself, he actually presents an image of Ruanji (阮籍), the leading figure of the Seven Sage in the Bamboo Grove turning Ruanji into his persona.

我生性放诞，雅欲逃自然。

嗜酒爱风竹，卜居必林泉

My personality is completely open and utterly carefree.

[I] always want to escape into nature.

I love to drink wine and I love bamboo in the wind.

The place I choose to live must have water and a bamboo grove.²⁶

In these two couplets, Du Fu claims to love to live with bamboo and to drink wine. However, Du Fu's personality was far from utterly carefree and he did not have a reputation of using alcohol to escape reality. The self-description seems exaggerated, if not out of character altogether. Although Du Fu does not mention the name of Ruanji, the reference to Ruanji was clearly recognized by his contemporaries because the Seven Sages had become a type known to all literati. These literati, with very few exceptions, all studied the same repertoire of classical texts. Therefore, it is an acceptable form of literary play for Du Fu to put on Ruanji's persona. By doing so, Du Fu conveys the message that the harshness of political turmoil he was experiencing was comparable to the notorious politics of Ruanji's time. This practice of appropriating historical figures to make a statement was similar to Du Mu's mentioning of Wang Huizhi to enhance his fascination with bamboo.

Apparently, historical reference is not only helpful to reinforce an old sentiment, but also to legitimate new meanings. Through the lineage with the commonly known literature of the past, the newly added information becomes more persuasive. In the example of Du Mu's poem, by foregrounding Wang Huizhi, Du Mu was saying: my new poetic treatment of bamboo is not a whimsical act; rather, it is rooted in the intellectual

its demise. See Zhan Zi-qing 詹子庆, *Zhong-guo gu-dai shi* 中国古代史 (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2011), 76-79.

²⁶ The Chinese title is 寄题江外草堂. See Qiu Zhanao 仇占鳌 ed., *Du fu quan-ji* 杜甫全集. (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1979).

tradition of a lifestyle of retreat. In Du Fu's example, bamboo and wine become a haven for temporary escape from suffering. By referencing the Seven Sages Du Fu builds support for his arguments through precedent. As a result of Du Fu's own account of his suffering, bamboo was associated with enduring suffering. Hence a new meaning was added to the aesthetic of bamboo.

Historical reference made it very convenient for Tang scholars to add new meanings to the bamboo aesthetic. This practice allowed the flexibility to introduce something new by referring to something old. Thus very personal experience could be added into the bamboo aesthetic by tying the experience to a literary lineage. For example, another popular Tang poet, Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡, 772-842) wrote in his poem "Courtyard Bamboo" (庭竹):²⁷

露滌鉛粉節，風搖青玉枝。

依依似君子，無地不相宜。

Dew is washing the white powdered bamboo joints.

Wind is stirring the bamboo branches of green jade.

The bamboo stems support each other, just like *junzi*.

There is nowhere they cannot fit in.

Comparing the green color of bamboo to jade echoes Du Mu's poem. Likening bamboo to *junzi* is already a cliché at this time. What's new in Liu Yuxi's poem is the last verse: there is nowhere the bamboo and the *junzi* cannot fit in. This was perhaps Liu Yuxi's own opinion from his personal experience. Liu was probably very concerned about his social and political life, and his personal experience probably taught him to value social adaptiveness. He then projected this value onto bamboo and voiced it in his poem. The poem has four lines. Three of them are old information referencing back to the common idea of bamboo. They help make sense of the last line, which is the most important one of all in that it carries Li Yuxi's sentiment. Thus a new and specific experience was added into the overall aesthetic of bamboo.

²⁷ Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡, *Liu Yuxi ji* 刘禹锡集 (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1990), 232.

There are numerous Tang writings that extend the moral vocabulary of bamboo and its appealing characteristics. I would therefore suggest that the bamboo motif did not correspond to a set of fixed qualities. As I mention in the introduction, the contemporary Chinese scholar Guan Chuanyou's (关传友) explores the ideography of bamboo and pinpoints the specific meanings of bamboo. This direction of study can never be completely comprehensive as it cannot map out all the meanings of bamboo. In fact, the connotations of bamboo include innumerable individual experiences even within the very broad framework of scholarly morality. By scholarly morality, I mean the positive spirit that educated individuals possessed in order to handle the challenges facing them within the Tang social and political fabric. In my opinion, a propensity to reduce bamboo motifs to a few discrete symbols pertaining to the morality of a *junzi* is limiting our imagination of a bamboo aesthetic.

It is true that many scholars up until Tang compared bamboo to *junzi*; however, the understanding of *junzi* varied significantly among different scholars. The concept of a *junzi* was much more complex than Liu Yanfu's list of qualities. Apart from symbolizing the idea of *junzi*, my research found numerous examples of bamboo poems that were not related to *junzi*. In many cases the connotations of bamboo have nothing to do with morality. For example, In Wang Wei's (692-761) "Bamboo Inn" (竹里馆), the theme of the poem conveys a sense of Buddhist tranquility. There is no trace of Confucian morality.

独坐幽篁里， 弹琴复长啸

深林人不知， 明月来相照

Sitting alone in the dark bamboo forest,

I am playing my zither and I am singing a long tune.

No one knows where I am in the depth of the forest.

Only the bright moon comes in to accompany me.²⁸

²⁸ Wang Wei 王維, *Wang wei ji xiao zhu* 王維集校注, ed. Chen Tieming 陳鐵民 (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1997), 424.

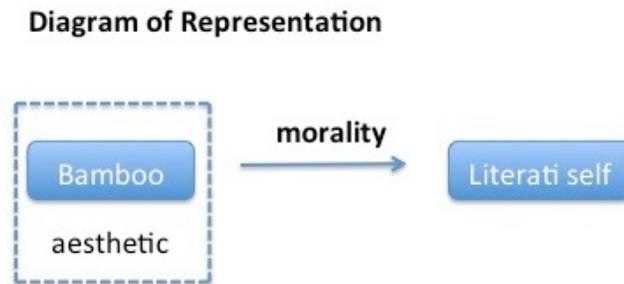
This chapter has attempted to show that there is a fairly linear development of a bamboo aesthetic from antiquity to the Tang dynasty, which then sees it take on a greater variety of connotations. When the aesthetic reaches its maturity in the Tang, the bamboo motif is used to represent a wide spectrum of scholarly life experiences. It is safe to say that the bamboo aesthetic was much broader in Tang dynasty than what is commonly understood beforehand, or even today. The common element of the many facets of the aesthetic of bamboo in the Tang, however, is the personification of bamboo, and bamboo's perceived parallel to the author's moral qualities, social values, or lifestyle. The aesthetic of bamboo was closely bundled with the practices of literary self-representation among Chinese scholars.

Chapter Two: Representation vs. Correlation

In comparison to their Tang predecessors, Song intellectuals were much more concerned with the *moral* aspect of the bamboo aesthetic. Bamboo does have a strong link with the concept of *junzi*. Therefore, I will focus on the parallel between literary bamboo and the moral self constructed by Song literati. That said, I have to emphasize the continuity of the bamboo aesthetic in general. The bamboo motif had been well defined by Tang scholars. Song intellectuals carried on the aesthetic and made adaptations according to the Song social and political contexts. What has been said about the development of a bamboo aesthetic before the Song remained true in Song, which then emphasized certain qualities over others. In Chapter One, I briefly traced the development of a bamboo aesthetic from antiquity to the Tang dynasty. In the chapter that follows this one, I will focus exclusively on the Song dynasty, not only exploring the connotations of bamboo within a linguistic context, but extending my inquiry to include the more complex relations between literary bamboo and the scholar's constructed selfhood. I will explore the Song intellectuals' innovation in using literary bamboo as a vehicle to advance their moral project, and conversely, the social agency literary bamboo granted Song intellectuals.. But in this chapter, I will pause to clarify my methodology.

As I mention in the introduction, I noticed that most Chinese scholarship approaches bamboo from the singular perspective of ideography. A singular perspective, sophisticated as it may be, could be limiting to see the bigger picture. A typical ideographical analysis is to list the characteristics of bamboo, and then equate them to the moral qualities of ancient Chinese scholars. For example, bamboo's height represents the moral high ground; bamboo's hollowness is equated to the humbleness of scholars. The overall image of bamboo is a generic representation of the morality of the educated class. The mode of representation produces a closed aesthetic of bamboo. (Diagram 1) This analysis is certainly useful to understand the very loaded meaning of literary bamboo. However, I found what this perspective provides us is a static picture of a bamboo aesthetic, and in fact it misses out the dynamic part of the relations between bamboo and human qualities.

(Diagram 1)



A simple question that is often not posed in most Chinese scholarship on bamboo is *why* the ancient scholars needed bamboo to represent themselves. Representation is a universal linguistic phenomenon. A representative is needed for a reason, either to elucidate a very abstract concept of what is represented, or for other linguistic factors. Assuming that bamboo was used to represent one's morality, then why not simply write about one's morality in a straightforward way? If the scholar discarded bamboo representations and wrote directly about their own moral traits, they could make themselves equally clear. One possible answer was that, in some cases, the politics was too unfriendly for the scholar-official to speak out the truth, so they had to find a proxy to make a statement. For example, Qu Yuan was exiled by King Huai of Chu. According to some contemporary Chinese scholarship, Qu Yuan could not speak out directly about his frustration with the king, therefore he invented the "fragrant beauty" to allude to his political situation. Tao Yuanming is another possible example of this technique. His writing created an aesthetic of a bucolic lifestyle, which could be understood as the antithesis of a political life, and hence his writing was an indirect critique of the politics from which he sought refuge. These examples are certainly true, but not enough to explain why writers still used bamboo as representative when the political climate became more friendly to scholars, as in the Song dynasty.

Regarding the bamboo aesthetic in Chinese literary works, I would argue that rather than seeing bamboo as a representation of the scholar's self, it would be more helpful to see it as a correlation with the scholar's self. A correlation between

bamboo and the scholarly self assumes that both parties are substantive entities. Liu Yanfu, as I mention in Chapter One, says: “A *junzi* has to compare his morality to that of bamboo.” Bamboo was considered an entity that was independent of the scholar, and that bamboo had its own innate quality of morality. I would like to give another example, a poem titled “Planting Bamboo” (栽竹) by the Song poet Huang Shu (黄庶 1019-1058):

小檻栽培得此君，绿阴疏韵似相亲。

从来风月为三友。吟社新添客一人。

I grew it from the small gardening patch and got this gentleman.

Its green shade is simple and elegant, as though full of intimacy.

Normally, the gentle breeze, bright moonlight, and I make a group of three friends.

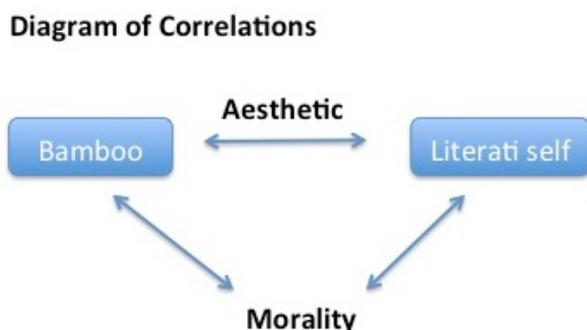
But now our poetry society has a newly added guest.²⁹

In this poem, it was very clear that bamboo was considered an individual in the poet’s social group. You may argue that the bamboo tree was a metaphorical being and hence a representation. However, it would be more meaningful to focus on the relation between the bamboo tree and the poet. In the eyes of the poet, the bamboo tree was an equally fully grown person. Its *junzi*-ness was not a mirror image of the scholar’s morality; rather, the bamboo plant possesses a moral quality of its own; bamboo was *another junzi*. If we go back to seeing bamboo as merely representative, the bamboo would be void of meaning in this case and the human *junzi* who would have to stand on his own moral strengths. In a correlation relationship such as this, however, both the bamboo and scholar-self are correlated and therefore indispensable. Without one party, the other party could not make sense. (This is suggested in the second line with the phrase “as though full of intimacy” which uses the Chinese adverb *xiang*, meaning “mutually”.) The bamboo in this poem is certainly indispensable because it is what the poem is all about; without it, the meaning of the story would be incomplete. From the viewpoint implied in this poem, bamboo is seen as a real entity with intrinsic human-like qualities and an acknowledged agency. Thus rather than the aesthetic qualities of the

²⁹ Yang Qincun 杨庆存, *Huang tinjian yu song-dai wen-hua* 黄庭坚与宋代文化 (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2002), 27. Also see Huang Su 黄庶. *Fa tan ji* 伐檀集 (Jiling: Jiling Publishing House Ltd., 1988

bamboo *standing in* for the moral qualities of the literati self (as is the case with the representative mode), in the correlative mode the aesthetic and moral qualities are shared *between* the bamboo and the literati self.

(Diagram 2)



The correlative mode in part answers the question why ancient scholars constantly use bamboo in their writing to construct their selves: because both bamboo and the literati self were imperative to the overall picture of morally charged aesthetics. The aesthetic of bamboo, I suggest, is not located in the process of representing; rather, it arises in the process of correlating between bamboo and the literati self. (See Diagram 2) In other words, the moral aesthetic included two indispensable components: the bamboo and the literati self. If one is left out, the picture will be incomplete. In the representation mode, the sense of beauty comes from the visualization of bamboo and the reification of the moral self; in the correlative mode, the aesthetic beauty comes from the fertile yet intangible synergic space of literature where bamboo and the literati self are placed to interact with each other. I will use Zhu Xi's (朱熹) poem "New Bamboo" (新竹) as another example to illustrate my suggestion.

春雷殷岩际，幽草刘发生。

我种南窗竹，戢戢已抽萌。

坐获幽林赏，端居无俗情。

The spring thunder is rambling at the edge of the cliffs.

Lush grasses sprout and grow together.

I have planted the Bamboo of South Window.
 [Now] they are waking up and putting forth their sprouts.
 I sit down to appreciate the lushness of the bamboo trees.
 My sense of living is righteous without vulgar feelings.³⁰

The first couplet renders a lively spring atmosphere in a landscape that includes cliffs and lush grass, which provides a very good backdrop for a typical bamboo painting. The second couplet mentions the poet. It is the poet who planted the bamboo some time ago, thus making his own small contribution to the beautiful landscape. The bamboo trees are now reproducing themselves in a very sensual way: they are thawing between the last chill of winter and the first arrival of spring thunder, and they have already put forth sprouts. The third couplet returns to the poet again. He is now reaping the reward of planting the bamboo: the nice view of bamboo trees. Because the poet is accompanied by the prosperous bamboo trees, he concludes that he senses morality in his residence with a feeling of transcendence.

Zhu Xi was the most prominent figure in Neo-Confucianism. He held the literary view that the beauty of language was to serve the purpose of morality. Although the poem uses very few characters to refer to morality, his objective to create a moral aesthetic must not be underestimated. There is only one character in the poem that highlights morality: *duan* (端). This character is actually the eye of the poem (诗眼). It is mentioned in the last line, and it immediately enlightens everything that has been mentioned previously with an aura of morality. The beauty of the nature in early spring and the poet's activity are conclusively transformed into a kind of moral aesthetic code.

Upon closer look, I would suggest that the aesthetic image of *duan* comes from the synergy of the bamboo and the poet. *Duan* is used as an adverb in this poem, and literarily it describes an upright posture.³¹ In the context of this poem, *duan* is the manifestation of morality. The bamboo trees are certainly *duan* because of the straightness of their stems, and the poet is certainly *duan* because of his lifestyle. As the

³⁰ Liu Xue Wen 刘学文. *Gu jin yong zhu ji* 古今咏竹集 (Changsha : Hu nan ren ming chu ban she, 2002), 222.

³¹ *Han dian* 汉典, accessed August 12, 2013. <http://www.zdic.net/z/20/js/7AEF.htm>.

poet is gradually unfolding the picture for us, we see a distinct poet and distinct bamboo trees. They interact with each other. Their relations are clearly not that of representing and represented. Towards the end of the poem, they suddenly merge into the single character *duan*. *Duan* really stands out because it is the only character in the poem that carries the meaning of morality--and yet at the same time it perfectly describes the upright bamboo stalks. The succinctness of *duan* carries more weight when placed towards the end of the poem. *Duan* therefore becomes the most powerful character in the whole poem, a carrying power imparted to it by the first five lines of the poem and the way that it carries both the aesthetic of bamboo and the poet's moral self.

There is another phrase in the poem that supports my argument that the best part of the aesthetic arises in the correlations of two parties, rather than a one-way relationship of representation. This phrase is *nan'chuang-zhu* (南窗竹). I translate it as "the Bamboo of South Window." Note that I do not translate it as "the bamboo besides the southern window." For anyone who has an ear for Chinese poetry, the former translation is apparently much more poetic or aesthetic than the latter. The capitalization of "South Window" is to indicate that it is a specific term. The window is not a generic window; it is a terminology constructed by the poet. South Window therefore carries the imprint of the poet. When the bamboo is named *nan'chuang-zhu*, the nature of bamboo is combined with the poet's scholarly trace into one single phrase, and therefore the term *nan'chuang-zhu* contains a better sense of aesthetic than when the character *nan'chuang* (南窗) or *zhu* (竹) is used alone.

Visually speaking, if you see a window facing the south, you may think it is banal even though you know the window was the poet's favourite, and it allows more sunlight into the house in winter than windows facing other directions. If you see a bunch of bamboo out of nowhere, you are not very impressed neither. When you place the bamboo besides the window, which then lends the poem a poetic name, then you see the beauty. This visual example illustrates that beauty is located in the mutual compliment between the bamboo and the poet. Both of them are equally important in the aesthetic, and both of them are interdependent in meaning. If you see the bamboo only as a ghostly shadow representing the poet, you might miss out the vitality of the

bamboo aesthetic. Here the bamboo is given linguistic and spatial specificity, which allows it to correlate with the specific man writing the poem.

By proposing a correlation perspective, I do not mean that seeing bamboo as a symbol is aberrant. In many cases, seeing bamboo as a symbol is helpful to understand the aesthetic of bamboo. The correlative perspective for me is to compensate for the limitations of the representative mode, which tends to overlook the complexity of the relational dynamic. I propose to use correlative mode as an additional methodology to supplement the representative one. A semiotic analysis would clarify when a representative mode can be applied and when the correlative mode is more helpful.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, a symbol is “something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else, not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation.”³² A symbol is especially “a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality, or condition; a representative or typical figure, sign, or token.” A typical example of a symbol, in ancient Europe for example, is a rose symbolizing romantic love; or an olive branch symbolizing peace; or a icon of Jesus symbolizing Christian belief. In the same token, we may understand bamboo as a symbol because it points to a certain kind of lifestyle or moral trait. In this regard, we are talking about the symbolic meaning in the linguistic sense.

That being said, there may be a problem in using a generalized symbolic meaning of bamboo for meaningful discussion of particular poems by particular poets. It is true that bamboo as a symbol can refer to certain traits of scholars. However, upon closer examination, what bamboo can possibly symbolize is too big in scope for a manageable symbolic relation in specific circumstances. As mentioned in Chapter One, the symbolism of literary bamboo was not fixed, and its meaning varied greatly according to the individual scholar’s personal experience. Scholars could add as many new meanings as they wished into the symbolism. In this circumstance, bamboo can only be treated as a symbol within the specific context of an given literary work; it is

³² OED “symbol” definition 2a. accessed August 01, 2013. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196197?>

impossible to generalize the meaning of bamboo across all literature. It is more meaningful to explore the relation between literary bamboo and the author in particular cases, and dig out the fundamental *applied* meanings of the bamboo aesthetic.

There are other factors that further complicate the symbolism of bamboo. Sometimes the literary bamboo as a symbol took up various forms, making it more difficult to generalize the symbolic meaning of bamboo. For example, bamboo sometimes was further divided by scholars into different sub-types. The sub-types may include green bamboo(绿竹), jadeite bamboo (翠竹), tall bamboo(修竹), silk bamboo(丝竹), bitter bamboo(苦竹), wind bamboo (风竹), cold bamboo (冷竹), and many others. These bamboos were different in species, and were attributed to very different human qualities based on their shapes. For example, bitter bamboo was so called because of its smaller size and its survival in extreme cold weather.³³ Tall bamboo, however, was remembered for its elegance. In “The Pavilion of Laolao” (劳劳亭), Tang poet Li Bo (李白 701-762) wrote: “The cicada’s voice on bitter bamboo shakes the autumn moon; / Living alone inside the empty curtain, my dream goes on and on in the night”(苦竹寒声动秋月，独宿空帘归梦长). In comparison, Su Shi (苏轼 1037-1101) wrote: “In this world, there is bamboo as high as a thousand xun; / The setting moon casts long shadows in the empty courtyard.”³⁴ (世间亦有千寻竹，月落庭空影许长) Both poems express the similar sentiment of loneliness; however, the symbolic meaning of bamboo is different. If bamboo has to represent a person, Li Bo’s bitter bamboo seemed like a broken scholar who maintained his moral integrity despite his poverty, while Su Shi’s tall bamboo seemed like a gentleman who was full of poise and greatness.

Therefore, the method of symbolism does not always suffice to explain the aesthetic of bamboo and the cultural psyche of bamboo across all literary uses of it. The representative mode has its merits, but the examination of the correlations between bamboo and the scholar-self allows access into the minds of the scholars through the

³³ Its average height is only between three to five meters, and the stem was only two centimeter in diameter. Baidu, accessed August 02, 2013. <http://baike.baidu.com/view/439785.htm>.

³⁴ The Chinese title of the article is: 文与可画筼筻谷偃竹记. See Bai Chunping 白春平 *Tang Song ba da jia wen jian* 唐宋八大家文鉴 (Beijing: Hua xia chu ban she, 2013), 373.

bamboo, to see what they were seeing and to feel what they are feeling. The representative mode presents a two-dimensional image of the bamboo aesthetic; the correlative mode can give us a three-dimensional image, revealing more dynamic meanings of the bamboo aesthetic. In the next chapter, I will use the combination of both methods to analyze the aesthetic of bamboo within the literary world of Song literati.