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Toward an Innovative Poetics: Wang Changling on *Yi* 意 and Literary Creation

ZONG-QI CAI

Abstract This article reveals the coherent theory of literary creation hidden within the multivalence of the term *yi* in Wang Changling's (ca. 698–ca. 756) writings on poetry. A close and intertextual reading demonstrates how Wang deftly appropriates various Daoist and Daoist-inspired notions of *yi* 意 to illuminate different phases of literary creation. Comparisons with the term's adaptations by earlier literary and calligraphy critics further accentuate Wang's unique and innovative approach. Looking into a hitherto neglected Buddhist source, the author uncovers a Buddhicized *yi-xiang-yan* 意-象-言 (conception-image-word) paradigm, one that allows Wang to move beyond the theories of Lu Ji (261–303) and Liu Xie (ca. 465–ca. 522). Borrowing the Buddhist sense of *yi* and *yishi* 意識, Wang demonstrates the creative mind's receptivity to the richness and nuances of the world, followed by its dynamic transformation of what it has absorbed in quietude. The result is a much more detailed view of the different phases of the creative process—one that leads to a new appreciation of its poetic results.

Keywords Wang Changling, literary creation, Chinese literary theory, Chinese calligraphy criticism, Buddhist theory of consciousnesses

For a long time now, studies of Chinese theories of literary creation have been in need of discovering fresher perspectives. The immense prestige of Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) and Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–ca. 522) has meant that their views of literary creation, with an emphasis on creativity, have largely dominated the discussion. The formal expository style of their writings has been prized, especially by modern critics, over various unsystematic forms chosen by most later

critics, such as a cataloging of critical terms and categories or a random collection of impressionistic comments. The upshot is that profound theoretical insights expressed in such unsystematic forms have gone unappreciated, if not totally neglected. Wang Changling's 王昌齡 (ca. 698–ca. 756) writings on literary creation are a case in point. So far, crucial misreadings of his writings—especially a neglect of the influence exerted upon it by Tathāgatagarbha and Yogācāra Buddhism—have prevented us from seeing it for the radically innovative work that it is. But with the current interest in the cultural matrix out of which traditional Chinese literary thought emerged, it seems time to change all that. For this reason, I propose to closely examine Wang Changling's loosely organized writings and reconstruct his fresh perspective on poetic creation.

“Lun Wen Yi”: The Multivalence of *Yi* 意

This article focuses on examining Wang Changling's writings collected in “Lun wen yi” 論文意 (On the Roles of *Yi* in Refined Writing), along with a few important passages from his *Shige* 詩格 (The Norm of Poetry).¹ “Lun Wen Yi” occupies a prominent place in *Bunkyō hifuron* 文鏡秘府論 (The Literary Mirror and the Secret Repository of Literature), a collection of Tang texts on poetry assembled by the eminent Japanese monk Kūkai 空海 (774–835) during his stay in the Tang capital Chang'an (today's Xi'an) and published after his return to Japan. Specifically, “Lun Wen Yi” consists of writings by two leading Tang poet-critics, Wang Changling and Jiao Ran 皎然 (730?–799?). The first half of it—which also appears in Wang Changling's *Shige*—constitutes Wang Changling's theoretical discussion on poetry. The second half presents Jiao Ran's comments on various technical issues of composition, published also in his *Shiyi* 詩議 (Comments on Poetry). My discussion of “Lun Wen Yi” focuses exclusively on Wang Changling.²

The section title “Lun Wen Yi” is well chosen because it aptly underscores the ubiquity and importance of the term *yi* in Wang's writings in the section.³ The central importance of this term has been noted but not seriously studied by modern Chinese scholars.⁴ Instead of investigating Wang's exploitation of its multivalence, they focus their attention on his purported combination of *yi* 意 with *jing* 境 (inscape) to create *yijing* 意境,⁵ a *yi* compound that is to continually grow in importance in Chinese literary thought until it is enshrined by some modern scholars as the highest Chinese aesthetic principle.⁶

In my view, the importance of “Lun Wen Yi” should be assessed in light of Wang's own use of the term *yi*, not the future significance of *yijing* that never appears in “Lun wen yi.” Assuming his readers' familiarity with *yi*'s multivalence, Wang Changling freely moves from one meaning to another without explanation. He apparently believes that his readers would correctly contextualize his use of *yi* and follow him without difficulty. With a similar assumption of readerly

knowledge of *yi*'s import, neither traditional nor modern Chinese critics feel the need to probe and sort out the multivalence of *yi* in "Lun Wen Yi." But for anyone writing about "Lun wen yi" in English, the multivalence of *yi* presents a challenge from the very outset: how should the title be translated? *Wen yi* 文意 is a set compound made of two nouns—*wen* 文 (writing) and *yi* 意 (meaning), which literally means "the meaning of refined writing." But the translation "On the Meaning of Refined Writing" simply does not work. While he sometimes talks about *yi* with its nominal sense of "meaning," Wang far more frequently uses *yi* in a verbal sense, denoting the mind's different activities during the creative process. Given this, it seems best to leave *yi* untranslated and render the title "On the Roles of *Yi* in Refined Writing."

Confusing as it may be, *yi*'s multivalence actually provides a unique opportunity to discover the hidden coherent theory of literary creation in "Lun wen yi." To probe Wang Changling's exploitation of *yi*'s multivalence for this purpose, I pursue contextual reading of two kinds: textual and intertextual. First, I carefully contextualize all noteworthy occurrences of *yi* within "Lun Wen Yi" itself to determine which particular concept of *yi* is most likely to convey in each occurrence. Then I contextualize Wang's use of *yi* within the broader philosophical and aesthetic discourses. I hope to demonstrate how Wang deftly appropriates various Daoist or Daoist-inspired notions of *yi* to illuminate different phases of literary creation. Comparisons with earlier adaptations of the term by literary and calligraphy critics reveal Wang's unique and innovative use of the term. Finally, looking at a hitherto neglected Buddhist source for Wang, I uncover a partially Buddhicized *yi-xiang-yan* 意-象-言 paradigm for thinking about the creative process, one that allows Wang to give a more cogent account of the creative process than his predecessors Lu Ji and Liu Xie were able to do.⁷

Rethinking the Creative Process: The Paradigmatic Significance of *Yi* 意

"Lun Wen Yi" is the first work of literary criticism in which the term *yi* assumes full paradigmatic significance. Although Lu Ji and Liu Xie conceptualized the creative process through the *yi-xiang-yan* paradigm, they used *yi* very sparingly, often in its nominal sense of "intended meaning" rather than in explicit reference to the creative process. But with Wang Changling, *yi* practically becomes an all-purpose term, through which he conceptualizes and describes all phases of literary creation. This new paradigmatic significance of *yi* is made clear at the very beginning of "Lun Wen Yi":

§1 With regard to the nature of poetic composition, *yi* constitutes the norm and sound the prosody. If *yi* is lofty, so is the norm; when sound is well differentiated, prosody becomes pure. When the norm and prosody become complete, we can speak of tonality. 凡作詩之體，意是格，聲是律，意高則格高，聲辨則律清，格律全，然後始有調。⁸

Wang begins by identifying *yi* as the norm, or *ge*, of poetry. *Shige* 詩格, or the norm of poetry, is not only the title of Wang's work from which "Lun Wen Yi" is purportedly taken, but also appears in the titles of many other Tang writings on poetry.⁹ In stating that "Yi is the norm," Wang seems to be establishing *yi* (creative thinking) as the highest principle of poetry. *Yi* in this sentence cannot possibly be glossed as "meaning" because "Meaning is the norm" is a nonsensical statement. This conception of *yi* as "creative thinking" is confirmed by the next sentence, where Wang explains the decisive impact of *yongyi* 用意, namely, a poet's activation of his creative process. In establishing *yi* as the norm of poetry, Wang transcends his contemporaries' petty concerns with the technical rules of composition to make the creative process the center of his discussion.¹⁰

To elaborate on the impact of *yi*, he writes:

§2 If a poet transcends ancients in using *yi*, then the vision of heaven and earth may be keenly observed [in his works].

用意於古人之上，則天地之境，洞焉可觀。（*WJMFL*, 1299）

Here Wang focuses on the transition from transcendental contemplation to a resulting mediation of the outer world. "Transcending the ancients in using *yi*" primarily refers to a transcendence of time and space at the initial creative stage, a point that is more clearly shown in several instances below. With "the vision of heaven and earth may be keenly observed [in his works]," Wang speaks to the ensuing mediation of external realities by the creative mind. In the next sentence, Wang skips the remaining creative phases and describes instead perceiving the power of *yi* embedded in a finished work:

§3 Ancient writings adhere to a lofty norm. The workings of *yi* could be observed in one single line such as "Good like his own flesh and blood," in two lines such as "Guan, Guan, cry the ospreys / On the islet in the river," or in four lines such as "Green, green is the cypress on the hillside / Piles and piles of rocks in the valley; / Between heaven and earth lives man / Like a sojourner on a long journey."

古文格高，一句見意，則「股肱良哉」是也。其次兩句見意，則「關關雉鳴，在河之洲」是也。其次古詩，四句見意，則「青青陵上柏，磊磊澗中石，人生天地間，忽如遠行客」是也。（*WJMFL*, 1299）

Reflecting this shift of observational angle, he then talks about *jianyi* 見意 (perceiving *yi*) as opposed to *zuoyi* 作意 (activating *yi*; see §6). *Jianyi* literally means "perceiving the *yi*." As *yi* is more often than not used as "meaning," many would thoughtlessly take *jianyi* to mean "to see the meaning" of poetic lines. However, if we carefully contextualize *jianyi* in light of Wang's preceding

remarks, we realize that Wang is actually talking about the end result of the creative process: a crystallization of a poet's creative thinking in poetic lines. Thus we should read 見意 as synonymous with *xianyi* 現意 (making *yi* manifest).

To dispel any doubt about this reading of *jianyi* 見意, we have only to turn to the corroborating evidence supplied by Wang himself:

§4 When composing a piece of refined writing, one must look at how ancients and contemporary masters activated their creative thinking and discern if there is novel prosody to learn from.

凡作文，必須看古人及當時高手用意處，有新奇調學之。(WJMFL, 1365)

The expression “look at how . . . activated *yi*” (看 用意處) strikes us as very similar to if not identical with the expression “seeing *yi*” (見意). In the former, Wang tells how to perceive the ways ancient masters exercised their creative mind. In the latter it may be concluded that Wang does exactly the same. The similarity between these two expressions lends strong support to my interpretation of *jianyi* as an act of perceiving the crystallization of creative thinking in a finished work.

Transcendental Initiation of the Creative Process:

Zuoyi 作意 and *Liyi* 立意

Having adumbrated the pivotal roles of *yi*, Wang proceeds to illuminate these roles in the remainder of “Lun wen *yi*.” Now let us first consider how he elaborates on his notions of *zuoyi* 作意 and *liyi* 立意 as an initiation of transcendental contemplation:

§5 One's creative thinking (*yi*) must transcend the world of ten thousand people. One must look at the ancients placed under his own norm and must gather in heaven and sea within one's heart. This ought to be the way a poet uses his mind.

意須出萬人之境，望古人於格下，攢天海於方寸。詩人用心，當於此也。(WJMFL, 1315)

Wang stresses that a great poet must begin the creative process from a transcendental vantage point, from which he can gather in human worlds, past and present, heaven and sea, in his mind. Although he characterizes this initial transcendental contemplation as “a poet's use of the mind” 詩人用心, he simply calls it *zuoyi* (activating *yi*) in the following passage:

§6 Those who compose literary writings must activate *yi*. He should focus his mind beyond heaven and the seas and unfold his thought in the world before the rise of

primal energy. And then he should adroitly employ words and phrases while refining the essence of his creative thinking.

凡屬文之人，常須作意。凝心天海之外，用思元氣之前，巧運言詞，精練意魄。(WJMFL, 1327)

Liyi 立意 (enacting *yi*) is an alternative *yi* compound used by Wang to describe the transcendental initiation of literary creation. Wang stresses an unconscious, self-forgotten state of mind as the precondition for this enactment of *yi*:

§7 In composing a refined piece of writing, you should set store by the enactment of *yi*. Before you search through your mind and exert yourself to think, you must forget your own existence and free yourself from all constraints.

夫作文章，但多立意。令左穿右穴，苦心竭智，必須忘身，不可拘束。(WJMFL, 1309)

According to Wang, sound sleep is the best way to reach an optimal mental state for the enactment of *yi*:

§8 A poet should set a lamp by his bedside. If he lets himself sleep as long as he feels like, he will rise up immediately after waking and feel inspired to write, begetting *yi* in his mind. With his spirit pure and fresh, everything becomes crystal clear to him.

凡詩人，夜間床頭，明置一盞燈。若睡來任睡，睡覺即起，興發意生，精神清爽，了了明白。(WJMFL, 1329)

These passages all show that Wang uses *yi* and *yi* compounds such as *zuoyi* and *liyi* to denote a transcendental initiation to creative thinking.

This transcendental conception of *yi* is a major development in Chinese literary and art criticism. In the cognitive-cosmological paradigm of *yi-xiang-yan* established by Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), a master of abstruse learning (*xuanxue* 玄學), the term *yi* definitely has a transcendental dimension. However, in appropriating this paradigm for exploring the creative process, neither Lu Ji nor Liu Xie uses *yi* to depict the initial transcendental phase of literary creation. Instead, they conceptualize this creative phase as a daimonic flight of the mind and delineate it with a series of poetic images and hyperbolic statements.¹¹ Going one step further, Liu Xie also introduces the compound *shensi* 神思 (spirit thought) to name this daimonic flight.¹² In theorizing about the creative process, both Lu and Liu employ the term *yi*, but in a much less sublime sense. Whereas Lu Ji identifies *yi* with an author's general intent, Liu uses the compound *yixing* 意象 to describe the outcome of the daimonic flight: an inward image of a work to be. It is not until Wang Changling's time that the term *yi* begins to acquire a transcendental import in calligraphy criticism.

Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (fl. 713–741), for instance, gives this intriguing account of *yi*'s transcendental power:

§9 Then, [a calligrapher's] *yi* communes with the numinous being and his strokes move with mysterious force. The spirit folds and unfolds as it brings forth changes out of nowhere. The Dragon Uncle, for all his valor, cannot match its strength. The Divine Diagram and Talismanic Characters, even though they empower an emperor, cannot surpass its height. Subtle thought penetrates every interstice, the air of abandon overflows the universe, ghost and spirit come and go—no words and images, fish trap, and hare snare can capture the existence of all this!

及乎意與靈通，筆與冥運，神將化合，變出無方，雖龍伯挈鼈之勇，不能量其力；雄圖應籙之帝，不能抑其高。幽思入於毫間，逸氣瀾於宇內，鬼出神入，追虛捕微，則非言象筌蹄，所能存亡也。¹³

Wang Changling and Zhang Huaiguan are close contemporaries, and therefore it is impossible to tell who has influenced whom or to determine whether the two developed their transcendental notions of *yi* independently. This passage by Zhang is fraught with explicit Daoist references such as “the Divine Diagram,” “Talismanic Characters,” “fish trap,” and “hare snare.” By contrast, Wang Changling's use of *yi* is completely free of such Daoist references. So Wang Changling is most likely inspired by a transcendental notion of *yi* from a different source, notwithstanding his debt to earlier calligraphy critics' abiding emphasis on *yi*. Indeed, Wang Changling's passages betray the imprint of a heavy Buddhist influence—an issue to be further explored in the penultimate section of this article.

A Mirrorlike Mediation of the Outer World: From *Yi* 意 to *Jing* 境 (Inscape)

Like Lu Ji and Liu Xie, Wang Changling believes that an initial transcendental contemplation ushers in the second creative phase: a representation of the outer world in the mind. To Lu and Liu, the second creative phrase is as dynamic as the first. If transcendental contemplation consists in a daimonic flight of the mind, both Lu and Liu maintain that a representation of the outer world means a dynamic influx of nature's images, blended with emotions and words, in the mind.¹⁴ But to Wang Changling, both the first and second creative phases are tranquil by nature. He ceases to characterize the initial phase as a daimon's flight and envisions the second phase as a quiet mirroring of the outer world:

§10 If your thought does not arise, you must let your feelings subside and get relaxed so that an inscape may emerge in the mind. Looking at the mirror of this inscape, your

thought may come and then you can begin your composition. If the inscape-inspired thinking does not arise, you cannot begin to write.

思若不來，即須放情卻寬之，令境生。然後以境照之，思則便來，來即作文。如其境思不來，不可作也。(WJMFL, 1309–10)

The term *jing* 境 (inscape) is crucial to our understanding of this passage. Judging by the context, it refers to the outer world as perceived or mirrored in the mind. This notion of *jing* is definitely of Buddhist origin. While pre-Buddhist Chinese thinkers use *jing* as an objective descriptive word in the sense of “a realm,” physical or mental, Buddhist thinkers use it to denote the outer world as the object of the mind, a referent that is at once physical and mental.¹⁵ In fact, Buddhists use *jing* to label six categories of phenomena (*liujing* 六境) brought into existence by six corresponding senses (*liugen* 六根).¹⁶ By adding this *jing* label, Buddhists express a worldview different from those held by Confucians and Daoists. To Buddhists, all the so-called objective phenomena are mere mental presentations. Given this strong subjective connotation, “inscape” seems an ideal translation of *jing* as it resonates with the Buddhist worldview underlying the term. Moreover, it is the intended meaning of *jing* in this particular context: Wang Changling is actually talking about the mediation of the outer world during the second creative phase. The all-embracing denotation of “inscape” (in relation to “landscape”) nicely captures Wang’s idea of a total mirroring of the outer world. For him, what emerges from transcendental contemplation is not a stream of specific images (as conceived by Lu Ji and Liu Xie) but a vision or inscape of all things.

In the following passage, Wang Changling recounts how transcendental contemplation gives rise to such an inscape:

§11 To initiate creative thinking and write poetry, one must concentrate his mind and set his eyes on things. Next he penetrates things with his mind and reaches into the depth of the landscape. This is like climbing to the summit, looking at the ten thousand things down below as if they were just within his palm. Envisaging in such a way, one will have a crystal clear view of things in the mind and can immediately put it to use. 夫置意作詩，即須疑心，目擊其物，便以心擊之，深穿其境。如登高山絕頂，下臨萬象，如在掌中。以此見象，心中了見，當此即用。(WJMFL, 1312)

Judging by the context, *zhiyi* 置意 strikes us as synonymous with *zuoyi* 作意, both referring to an initiation of transcendental contemplation. To Wang, setting eyes on things is merely a way of inducing one’s mind to penetrate the objective world and have a clear inscape of the world in its totality—“like climbing to the summit, looking at the ten thousand things down below as if

they were just within his palm.” This mirrorlike mediation of the outer world thus becomes, according to Wang, available to the poet as he proceeds to the third creative phase.

Envisaging a Work to Be: *Si* 思 and *Yixiang* 意象

For Wang Changling, envisaging a work to be constitutes the third creative phase. If the first two creative phases are largely unconscious mental activities, this phase is a process of conscious thinking, which Wang consistently describes with the word *si* 思 (thinking). In “Lun Wen Yi,” the term *si* occurs fourteen times and denotes a conscious act of thinking in all cases. In his *Shige*, Wang Changling presents us with a list of “three *si*” (*sansi* 三思), or three modes of conscious thinking. Describing the first mode, he writes:

§12 The first is spontaneously inspired thinking. After a long exertion of meticulous thinking, one still could not form an envisagement (*yixiang*) [of a work]. Feeling physically worn out and mentally exhausted, one relaxes and calms one’s spirit and thought. Then, unexpectedly one catches a reflection of an inscape in his mind and thinking spontaneously arises.

生思一。久用精思，未契意象。力疲智竭，放安神思。心偶照境，率然而生。¹⁷

In this passage, Wang is making two crucial points about the third creative phase. The first is that *si*, a conscious mental effort, usually arises in response to an inscape in the mind. This point reaffirms his notion of “inscape-inspired thinking” (*jingsi* 境思) expressed in “Lun Wen Yi” (see §10). The second point is that this inscape-inspired thinking aims to bring forth *yixiang* 意象 (conception-image). So what is meant by *yixiang*? The compound itself gives us a good clue. Its second character *xiang* carries the straightforward meaning of “image” and here denotes the virtual image or “envisagement” based on artistic imagination rather than physical realities. But the first character *yi* is harder to decipher.

To figure out the importance of *yi* in this particular compound, we need to trace back to Liu Xie’s original coinage. In conceiving *yixiang*, Liu Xie sought to link a virtual “image” with two different referents of the term *yi*: visual imagination and refined feeling. Liu’s linkage of visual imagination (*yi*) with virtual image (*xiang*) may have been inspired by Han Fei’s 韩非 (ca. 280 BCE–ca. 233 BCE) account of how Laozi’s sages, by virtue of intuitive envisagement, perceived the Dao:

§13 People rarely see a living elephant. When they got the bones of a dead elephant, they used them as visual hints to imagine how it looked when alive. Therefore what those people conjured up was called an image (*xiang*). Now even though the Dao could

not be heard or seen, the sage dwelled on things accomplished by the Dao to envisage its shape. Therefore, [Laozi] says, “The shape without shape, the image without image.” 人希見生像也，而得死像之骨，案其圖以想其生也，故諸人之所以意想者皆謂之像。今道雖不可得聞見，聖人執其見功以處見其形，故曰：「無狀之狀，無物之像。」¹⁸

In explaining Laozi’s idea of “shape without shape and image without image,” Han Fei stresses the dynamic role of *yi* 意 or *yixiang* 意想,¹⁹ an act of conjuring up or imagining something absent—the shape of an elephant never seen. In a similar vein, Liu Xie credits “spirit thought” for the rise of a virtual envisagement of a work to be. The difference is that Liu not only talks about the relationship between *yi* (imaginative conception) and *xiang* (virtual image) but actually combines the two into a new compound, *yixiang*.

Liu’s coinage of *yixiang* also subtly denotes a fusion of feelings and images in a poet’s mind, thanks to *yi*’s newly acquired meaning as “processed” or “refined” feeling as opposed to crude emotions (see §16). There is no doubt this new meaning of *yi* looms large in Liu’s mind. Immediately after introducing his coinage of *yixiang*, Liu explicitly uses *yi* as a word synonymous with, if not identical to, feeling (*qing* 情) when he depicts the fusion of feelings and images in a poet’s mind: “When one ascends a mountain [in his envisioning],” Liu writes, “the whole mountain is filled with his feelings (*qing*); when one observes the seas, the seas will overflow with his expressive intent (*yi*)” 登山則情滿於山，觀海則意溢於海。²⁰ In these two strictly parallel sentences *yi* is paired with *qing*, both meaning “feelings.” For Liu Xie as for Wang Changling roughly two hundred years later, the compound *yixiang* epitomizes an optimal outcome of dynamic interaction between subject and object, between feelings and nature images in the third creative phase.

Wang Changling’s emphasis on the role of feelings in this phase is explicit in his next comment on the second mode of conscious thinking:

§14 The second is feeling-inspired thinking. As one ruminates the words of ancients, chants, and allegorizes in the ancient way, one feels moved to begin thinking. 感思二：寻味前言，吟讽古制，感而生思。²¹

Here, *gansi* 感思 (feeling-inspired thinking) seems congruent with *jingsi* 境思 (inscape-inspired thinking). In using this pair of compounds, Wang suggests there are two alternative ways of activating a poet’s conscious thinking to create an ideal *yixiang* (conception-image). Ruminating, chanting, and allegorizing ancients’ words may be just as powerful an inspiration for the conscious act of thinking. In describing this so-called feeling-inspired thinking, Wang employs the term *yi* as well:

§15 A poet must project his own self into poetic feelings (*yi*). If there is no self in poetry, how can we possibly have poetry? If not for the purpose of depicting one's own self and mind, what's the point of composing poetry? So poetry is the envoy of the heart and an outlet of anger and grievances of the time. When a poet feels the flow of his emotions being impeded or that what's in his heart couldn't be conveyed, he would resort to one of these acts—criticizing those above him, edifying those below him, giving expression to his own feelings, or giving an account of events. All these acts arise from displeasures and unhappiness of the heart and from the frustration of not being understood by others. If one speaks of poetry this way, one knows the foundation of the ancients. 皆須身在意中。若詩中無身，即詩從何有。若不書身心，何以為詩。是故詩者，書身心之行李，序當時之憤氣。氣來不適，心事不達，或以刺上，或以化下，或以申心，或以序事，皆為中心不決，眾不我知。由是言之，方識古人之本也。 (*WJMFL*, 1329)

Here the term *yi* can be taken to mean “conception-image,” connoting both “envisagement” and “refined feelings.” By Liu Xie's time, the term *yi* had already acquired the meaning of “refined feelings.”

Expounding this new notion of *yi*, Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) writes:

§16 It is often said that, in giving expression to emotion and intent, a writer ought to foreground his expressive tenor and use refined writing to convey it. If his expressive tenor is foregrounded, his intended meaning will be surely perceived. As he uses refined writing to convey his expressive tenor, his phrasing will not be flippant, and therefore, his works will exude fragrance and resound like instruments of metals and stone. 常謂情志所托，故當以意為主，以文傳意。以意為主，則其旨必見；以文傳意，則其詞不流。然後抽其芬芳，振其金石耳。²²

Here, to justify a self-projection into *yixiang*, or conception-image, Wang deftly reinvents the Confucian concept of poetry by establishing the individual self as its foundation.²³ Contrary to Wang's claim, the feelings of an individual poet are never foregrounded in such Confucian texts on literature as “Great Preface to the Mao Text of the *Book of Poetry*.”²⁴

In discussing the third mode of conscious thinking, Wang returns to the issue of selecting nature images:

§17 The third is thinking in quest of [images]. Searching in the world of images, one's mind penetrates an inscape and has a spiritual communion with things. All is acquired through the mind. 取思三。搜求於象，心入於境，神會於物，因心而得。²⁵

Consistent with his ideal of *yixiang* (conception-image), Wang stresses that the quest for poetic images is in effect a process of communion between mind and

landscape, between one's spirit and external things.²⁶ In the following passage Wang explicitly mentions the role of subjective feelings in this process:

§18 The vapor and hues of spring, summer, autumn, and winter may at any time arouse expressive intent (*yi*). Speaking of the use of this *yi*, you must calm your spirit and purify your thought when using them. Seeing things, you must let them enter your mind and let the mind commune with them. When things and the mind are in communion, you can begin to write.

春夏秋冬氣色，隨時生意。取用之意，用之時，必須安神淨慮。目觀其物，即入於心。心通其物，物通即言。(WJMFL, 1365)

Here we have yet another verbal *yi* compound: *shengyi* 生意 (evoking *yi*). While the *yi* in *zuoyi* 作意 and *zhiyi* 置意 suggests transcendental contemplation, here *shengying* seems to denote feelings to be fused with images or, in Wang's own words, "feelings for use" 取用之意. For Wang, to use these feelings means fusing them with natural images. To achieve the best effect of such fusion, Wang urges poets to strive for a true communion between the mind and things.

Dynamic Envisagement and Compositional Execution:

Bridging *Yi* 意 and *Yan* 言

For Wang Changling as well as for Lu Ji and Liu Xie, the final creative phase involves translating an artistic envisagement into a work of language. Liu Xie sees in this last phase the greatest challenge to the poet due to the huge gap between virtual envisagement and substantive language. He writes:

§19 At the moment a writer picks up his brush, before anything is written, he feels doubly invigorated. But when the piece is completed, he finds only half of what he first had in the mind is conveyed. What's construed (*yi*) is virtual and therefore can easily be extraordinary, but language is actual and therefore it's hard to be dexterous in using it. So conception is derived from thinking, and words from conception—they can be seamlessly blended or be apart from one another by a thousand miles.

方其搦翰，氣倍辭前；暨乎篇成，半折心始。何則？意翻空而易奇，言微實而難巧也。是以意授於思，言授於意，密則無際，疏則千里。²⁷

Though the main thrust of this passage underscores the author's difficulty in capturing the mind's creations (*yi*) in actual language (*yan*), Liu gives an abstract affirmation of the possibility of bridging the two. Apparently, it is just as challenging for a critic to explain how virtual envisagement is translated into actual language as it is for an author to complete such a translation.

Indeed, in Lu Ji's *Wen fu* 文賦 (An Exposition on Literature), we find two large, distinctly separate parts: an exposition on how a poet construes an artistic envisagement and a laborious discussion on all language matters crucial to compositional execution, without an earnest effort by Lu to address the *yi-yan* gap. In his "Shensi" 神思 chapter, Liu also fails to give a cogent description of how artistic envisagement is translated into a work of language. He says only, "Looking at the conception image, one wields the axe [of language to carve it]" 闕意象而運斤,²⁸ as if to suggest such a conception-image (*yixiang*) constitutes a static, finished product of artistic envisagement to be observed and recast through the axe of language. In other words, a conception-image is a self-contained entity, and language is extraneous to it. With Liu Xie, then, the issue of how virtual envisagement is translated into a poetic text remains unexplored.

To reveal how the virtual gets translated into an actual work of language, one must cease to consider envisagement as a completed process before compositional execution begins. Instead it has to be reconceptualized as a force that actually drives all stages of compositional execution. This is exactly what Wang Changling has done in "Lun Wen Yi":

§20 Poetry has its basis in the heart's intent. What lies in the heart is intent, and when intent is uttered it becomes poetry. Emotion stirs inside and finds form in words. A masterful poet can create momentum, bringing forth an envisagement (*yi*) in the first line. Next comes the one who brings forth an envisagement in the first two lines. Envisagement is like swirling smoke, rising from the ground higher and higher into the sky and leaving no traces of stages. An inferior poet writes progressively weaker lines, with no consideration of back-and-forth movement. His works do not espouse the principle of envisagement and are unbearable to read.

詩本志也，在心為志，發言為詩，情動於中，而形於言，然後書之於紙也。高手作勢，一句更別起意；其次兩句起意，意如湧煙，從地昇天，向後漸高漸高，不可階上也。下手下句弱於句，不看向背，不立意宗，皆不堪也。(WJMFL, 1304)

This passage is all about mind-to-language movement. First, Wang Changling articulates the traditional view of poetry as an expressive process from the heart's intent to spoken words. Next, skipping the first two creative phases (transcendental contemplation and the mediation of the outer word), he turns to probe the translation of envisagement into a poetic text. Here, unlike any critic before him, he conceptualizes *yi* as the dynamic force that propels and unifies the entire compositional process. In writing poetry, Wang contends that a fine poet creates great momentum by evoking artistic envisagement in the first or second line and letting it surge higher and higher. This upward thrust of *yi*, which Wang terms *qiyi* 起意, is at once that of the poet's cerebral activities and

his act of writing out poetic lines. To Wang, these two parallel movements are essentially inseparable, if not actually one and the same. In contrast to such a dynamic upward movement, Wang deplors an inferior poet's steady downward movement—a production of weaker and weaker lines. In failing to build momentum, Wang contends that these lines have forsaken the cardinal principle of “espousing *yi*,” and hence, he cannot bear to look at them.

By reconceptualizing envisagement (*yi*) as the dynamic force of compositional execution, Wang Changling has clearly surpassed Lu Ji and Liu in theorizing the final creative phase. However, his linking of envisagement (*yi*) with compositional execution is not entirely original when considered in the broader context of earlier and contemporary aesthetic discourse. In earlier calligraphy criticism, we can trace a similar notion of *yi* and compositional execution. Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), for instance, embraces *yi* as the highest principle of calligraphic execution:

§21 Calligraphy values quietude. The calligrapher's act of envisaging (*yi*) comes before moving one's writing brush. The writing of characters must come after the mind's effort. Before the act of writing, the calligrapher should complete his thought process. 凡書貴乎沉靜，令意在筆前，字居心後，未作之始，結思成矣。²⁹

This privileging of *yi* by Wang Xizhi most likely inspired Wang Changling's pronouncement that “*Yi* is the norm of poetry.” In these remarks by Wang Xizhi, *yi* cannot possibly be mistaken for the static “meaning” of a text. The great calligrapher-critic is instead describing a dynamic act of inward visualization or envisagement just before calligraphic execution. In the following passage, he explains how *yi* or an act of envisaging breathes life and energy into all aspects of calligraphy:

§22 To write in calligraphy, one must first grind the inkstick without water and focus his mind and engross himself in quiet thought. One must preconceive the varied shapes and sizes of characters, as well as their movements downward or upward, straight or fluctuating, so that they are joined as if by veins and sinews. This inward visualization or envisagement (*yi*) must occur before one sets brush to paper, and only then does one proceed to write out the characters. If the characters are all similar in their linear dimensions like beads of an abacus and are all uniformly aligned, top and bottom, front and back, that is merely dots and strokes, not calligraphy.

夫欲書者，先乾研墨，凝神靜思，預想字形大小、偃仰、平直、振動，令筋脈相連，意在筆前，然後作字。若平直相似，狀如算子，上下方整，前後齊平，便不是書，但得其點畫耳。³⁰

Although he talks about a dynamic movement of characters envisaged by a calligrapher, Wang Xizhi falls short of conceptualizing a calligrapher's envisagement itself as a dynamic process.

For a dynamic notion of calligraphic envisagement, we need to wait until shortly before Wang Changling's time. Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (646–691), a great calligraphy critic who passed away around the time of Wang Changling's birth, writes:

§23 Envisagement (*yi*) comes first and strokes follow. They fly gracefully and swiftly, a writing brush moves unimpeded, and spirit unfurls its flight. This is like the mind of Hongyang finding delight in the boundless realm and like the eye of the Butcher Ding not seeing the whole ox. I had some interested students seeking to study under me. I gave them a brief outline and then proceeded to teach them. They all had an awakening of the mind, followed by the execution of a masterful hand. They have all forgotten the word and attained *yi*. Even if they had not thoroughly observed various calligraphic methods, they were sure to achieve perfection in this art.

意先筆後，瀟灑流落，翰逸神飛。亦猶弘羊之心，豫乎無際；庖丁之目，不見全牛。嘗有好事，就吾求習，吾乃麤舉綱要，隨而授之，無不心悟手從，言忘意得；縱未窺於眾術，斷可極於所詣矣。³¹

Inspired by Zhuangzi's tale of the Butcher Ding, Sun Guoting compares the simultaneous movement of his envisagement and his writing brush to a miraculous flight. To him, such a synchronized movement of mind and hand is the key to ultimate success in calligraphy. In some ways, Wang Changling's conception of envisagement (*yi*) propelling the compositional process strikes us as a literary adaptation of Sun's notion of dynamic calligraphic envisagement. Indeed, Wang's comparison of poetic envisagement to rising smoke reminds us of Sun's hyperbolic figure of a miraculous flight.

The Birth of a Poetic Text:

Fusing *Yi* 意 (Expressive Tenor) and *Jingwu* 景物 (Scenes and Objects)

Having identified *yi* as the driving force of compositional execution, Wang Changling needs to demonstrate how it shapes different aspects of a composition. In tackling this task, Wang again seems to have found inspiration in Wang Xizhi's remarks on the impact of *yi* (envisagement) on *zi* (characters). For Wang Xizhi, calligraphic envisagement gives life to characters, turning them into symbols pregnant with energy and movement, and integrates them into an organic whole.

Probably influenced by Wang's animating notion of *yi*, Wang Changling stresses the primary role of dynamic poetic envisagement *yi* in activating and

intensifying subject-object interaction on all levels of poetic composition, from overall structure down to line formation. In configuring a poem, Wang advocates a balanced, orderly presentation of expressive tenor and scenes:

§24 One should see to it that both scenes seen by the eye and expressive tenor (*yi*) that yields delights are presented. If one exclusively presents the expressive tenor, a poem will not have anything marvelous and will be tasteless. Likewise, if a poem has too much scene depiction not tightly integrated with expressive tenor, it will also be tasteless even though it alludes to the principles of things. Scenes of morning and dusk and the atmospheres of the four seasons should all be arranged in accord with the expressive tenor. If scenes appear in such an orderly fashion and are depicted in tandem with expressive tenor, the effect will be miraculous.

然看當所見景物與意愜者相兼道。若一向言意，詩中不妙及無味。景語若多，與意相兼不緊，雖理道亦無味。昏旦景色，四時氣象，皆以意排之，令有次序，令兼意說之為妙。(WJMFL, 1365)

It is important to note that *yi* is used here as a noun meaning “expressive tenor.” As noted earlier, when appearing in conjunction with “scenes” or “images,” this nominal *yi* often denotes “refined feeling” namely, feelings that have been processed by the creative mind as opposed to crude, un contemplated emotions. Wang Changling’s notion of expressive tenor and nature images as two basic components of poetic composition might even be said to anticipate T. S. Eliot’s dichotomous conception of impersonal artistic feelings versus “objective correlatives.” Another noteworthy point is that by using *yi* instead of *qing* (emotions) to indicate subject-object interaction Wang achieves a subtle resonance with the sense of *yi* as dynamic envisagement.

The subject-object interaction also informs Wang Changling’s more specific discussion of poetic structure:

§25 A poem may begin by presenting its expressive tenor. If its expressive tenor is exhaustively conveyed, a poem will have a large bellylike body. Having a bellylike body, a poem can accommodate a lot, permitting a dazzling display of appearances and sensuous colors. But when it ends, it should revert back to the expressive tenor, and furthermore, there should be resonance of the tenor in each and every section of the poem.

夫詩，入頭即論其意，意盡則肚寬，肚寬則詩得容預，物色亂下，至尾則卻收前意，節節仍須有分付。(WJMFL, 1317)

Wang maintains that a poem’s beginning is particularly important, and it can be either an external scene or an emotive expression:

§26 As for the beginning of a poem, it could be a depiction of sensuous colors, the poet's experiential self, or self-expressive tenor. There are countless ways to begin a poem, but there is no fixed rule. Whatever arises spontaneously and runs smoothly can be the beginning of a poem.

凡詩頭，或以物色為頭，或以身為頭，或以身意為頭，百般無定，任意以興來安穩，即任為詩頭也。(WJMFL, 1335)

On the level of couplet construction, Wang also sets store by an interplay of nature images and expressive tenor:

§27 In a poem, [a couplet] may articulate expressive tenor in the first line and depict appearances of things in the second or, conversely, depict appearances of things in the first line and articulate expressive tenor in the second.

詩有上句言意，下句言狀；上句言狀，下句言意。(WJMFL, 1338)

Even when composing a single line, Wang holds that the poet should strive to blend scenes with expressive tenor:

§28 In a poem, it's best to have sensuous appearances of things along with expressive tenor. If a poem presents only sensuous appearances, uninspired by expressive tenor, it is not of much use even if dexterously composed. A line like "The sounds of bamboo are the first to know autumn's advent" can be said to have both.

凡詩，物色兼意下為好，若有物色，無意興，雖巧亦無處用之。如「竹聲先知秋」，此名兼也。(WJMFL, 1339)

Wang contends that the ideal blending of images and expressive tenor often leaves no trace of the latter: "Under a superior hand, external things and expressive content do not depend on each other" 凡高手，言物及意皆不相倚傍 (WJMFL, 1340). Among examples given of such traceless fusions, we discover Xie Lingyun's famous couplet, "Pond banks grow spring grass, / Garden willows change singing birds" 池塘生春草，園柳變鳴禽.³²

These and other passages reveal how Wang Changling envisioned a gestalt of subject-object interaction on all levels of composition, from the structure of a work down to the crafting of a single line.³³ By his own description, what activates and sustains the poet's process is just this dynamic envisagement that, like "swirling smoke, rising . . . higher and higher," propels the final compositional act toward the birth of a finished text (see §20). By envisioning this seamless fusion, Wang has managed to accomplish what eluded his predecessors: to provide a cogent account of the translation of virtual envisagement into poetic text.

Rethinking the Creative Process:

The Imprint of the Buddhist Concepts of *Yi* 意 and *Yishi* 意識

With Wang's radical reconceptualization of the creative process in mind, I now want to explore how the Buddhist notions of *yi* might have contributed to his thinking. By Wang's time, *yi* had been widely used in Chinese translations of the Buddhist sutras, especially those focused on the analysis of consciousnesses. Of course, this includes both *yi* and *yi* compounds. So it makes sense to consider what distinctively Buddhist concepts of the mind the term *yi* and its *yi* compounds convey in these texts. In this section, I show how Wang Changling might have been inspired by these Buddhist concepts to rethink the creative process.

The *yi*'s Buddhist connection is too conspicuous to ignore in "Lun Wen Yi." The string of *yi* compounds like *zuoyi* 作意, *jianyi* 見意, *zhiyi* 置意, and *qiyi* 起意 discussed above carry a strong Buddhist flavor. In indigenous Chinese philosophical texts, we seldom come across such *yi* compounds, never mind so many of them in so short a text. But *yi* compounds are a staple in Buddhist texts, especially those structured by a verb plus *yi*. It seems rather strange that, when probing the Buddhist influence on Wang Changling's literary thought, Chinese scholars have overlooked *yi* and *yi* compounds and focused on the less important terms of *jing*. In terms of their impact on Wang's literary thought, I consider *yi* and *yi* compounds to be far more important than the other terms because they introduce an entirely new way of looking at the workings of the mind and its virtual reproduction of the world. In some ways, terms like *jing* (inscape) often merely signify aspects of that reproduced world.

The Chinese term *yi* has a long and complex history of application to express different Buddhist concepts about the mind. In his translation of *Samyuktāgama* 雜阿含經, the eminent Indian monk Gunabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394–468) uses the term *yi*, together with *xin* and *shi*, to describe the changeable, insubstantial nature of mental activities:

§29 Those activities of the mind change in every moment, day and night. They neither have life nor decease. They are like monkeys bouncing among trees in a wood. They cling to tree branches every moment, releasing one branch only to catch another.

彼心、意、識日夜時刻，須臾轉變，異生、異滅。猶如獼猴遊林樹間，須臾處處，攀捉枝條，放一取一。³⁴

In translating this passage, Gunabhadra was probably using the terms *xin*, *yi*, and *shi* as rough equivalents of Buddhist terms *citta*, *manas*, and *vijñāna*, which, as Yoshito S. Hakeda notes, "are synonymous in the earliest phase of Buddhism, indicating 'mind' in the ordinary sense of the word."³⁵ But in later translations of the Tathāgatagarbha and Yogācāra sutras, these three terms become clearly

distinguished. For instance, in translating *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* 入楞伽經, Bodhiruci 菩提流支 (?–527) uses the term *yi* 意 and its derivative *yishi* 意識 to denote two of the eight consciousnesses:

§30 Again, Mahamati, the talk of good or bad methods of cultivation is about the eight consciousnesses. What are the eight consciousnesses? The first is *ālaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness), the second *manas-vijñāna* (ego-consciousness), the third *mano-vijñāna* (thinking consciousness), the fourth *caḥsur-vijñāna* (eye consciousness), the fifth *śrotra-vijñāna* (ear consciousness), the sixth the nose consciousness, the seventh the tongue consciousness, and the eighth the body consciousness.

復次，大慧！言善不善法者，所謂八識。何等為八？一者、阿梨耶識；二者、意；三者、意識；四者、眼識；五者、耳識；六者、鼻識；七者、舌識；八者、身識。³⁶

Eight consciousnesses also figure prominently in the Yogācāra sutras, although they are usually listed in reverse order with *ālaya-vijñāna* being the eighth rather than the first consciousness. In Chinese translations of the Yogācāra sutras, the terms *yi* and *yishi* are also respectively used to denote the *manas-vijñāna* and *mano-vijñāna*. Alternatively, *manas-vijñāna* is often transliterated as *mona* 末那 probably for the purpose of avoiding confusion between *yi* and *yishi*.

To determine whether any connection exists between this Buddhist reconceptualization of *yi* and Wang Changling's use of the term, we must first have a clear understanding of the nature and function of the two key consciousnesses called *yi* and *yishi* by various Buddhist schools. For this purpose, let us turn to the elucidation in *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 (Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith), a popular and influential Chinese Buddhist text in Wang's time that has no extant Sanskrit version but has been attributed, problematically according some scholars, to Aśvaghōṣa 馬鳴 (c. 80–c. 150):

§31 That a man is in samsara results from the transformation of his storehouse consciousness (*citta*), his mind (*manas*), and his consciousness (*vijñāna*). This means that the storehouse consciousness, thanks to the unconscious rise of a nonenlightenment aspect, perceives, reproduces, and possesses the world of objects [as real], and these [deluded] thoughts continue on. This is what we call mind (*manas*; *yi* 意).³⁷

生滅因緣者，所謂眾生依心、意、意識轉故。此義云何？以依阿梨耶識說有無明不覺而起，能見，能現，能取境界，起念相續，故說為意。³⁸

This passage offers a detailed description of *manas*. First it is defined in terms of its origin in and dependence on the storehouse consciousness. It comes into being as a result of an unconscious rise of the storehouse consciousness and

becomes capable of perceiving, reproducing, and possessing the world of objects. What follows is a discussion of the five names given to *manas*:

§32 This mind has five names. The first is called the “activating mind,” because the force of ignorance stirs up the mind unawares. The second is called the “evolving mind,” because it emerges as a result of the agitated mind and becomes capable of perceiving phenomena. The third is called the “reproducing mind,” because it reproduces the entire world of objects just as a bright mirror presents all material images. When confronted with the objects of five senses, it reproduces them at once. It arrives spontaneously at all times and exists forever [reproducing the world of objects] in front [of the subject]. The fourth is the “analytical mind,” for it differentiates what is defiled and what is undefiled. The fifth is the “continuing mind,” for it is united with [deluded] thoughts and continues uninterrupted. It retains the entire karma, good and bad, accumulated in the immeasurable lives of the past and does not permit any loss.³⁹

此意復有五種名：云何為五？一者、名為業識，謂無明力，不覺心動故。二者、名為轉識，依於動心能見相故。三者、名為現識，所謂能現一切境界，猶如明鏡現於色像；現識亦爾，隨其五塵對至即現，無有前後，以一切時，任運而起，常在前故。四者、名為智識，謂分別染淨法故。五者、名為相續識，以念相應不斷故；住持過去無量世等善惡之業，令不失故。⁴⁰

The first two names, “activating mind” and “evolving mind,” essentially repeat the preceding definition, reiterating its origin in the storehouse consciousness and its endowed capacities. The third and the fourth names, “reproducing mind” and “analytical mind,” throw light on its totalistic, mirrorlike reproduction of the world and its dichotomous differentiation of the defiled and undefiled. The last, “continuing mind,” elaborates on its karmic effects.

If we reread Wang’s remarks on transcendental contemplation and mediation of the outer world (see §5–§11) against the passages just examined, we notice three conspicuous parallels. First, both Aśvaghōṣa and Wang Changling emphasize the unconscious transcendental beginning of the mental processes they investigate. Whereas Aśvaghōṣa speaks of *manas* unconsciously arising from ignorance (*wuming* 無明), Wang repeatedly emphasizes the unconscious mental conditions under which transcendental contemplation begins. Second, in describing the phenomenal world subsequently emerging in the mind, they both emphasize its all-encompassing nature. Aśvaghōṣa talks about the *yi* 意 as capable of “reproducing the entire world of objects” 能現一切境界; Wang argues that an initiation of transcendental contemplation 用意 could bring forth “an inscape of heaven and earth” 天地之境 in a poem. When used alone, *jing* 境 (inscape) often denotes the entire phenomenal world as mediated in the poet’s mind, while *xing* 象, *wu* 物, and *jing* 景 are reserved for

specific parts of that world. Third, in foregrounding a total reproduction or mediation of the phenomenal world by the mind, they both use the Buddhist mirror metaphor. Whereas Āśvaghōṣa explicitly compares *yi* to “a bright mirror showing the image of the phenomenal world” 明鏡現於色像, Wang employs *zhaojing* 照境 (mirroring an inscape) that may be taken as a homonymic play on *zhaojing* 照鏡 (holding a mirror to). The discussion that follows of *mano-vijñāna* 意識 by Āśvaghōṣa invites similar comparisons with Wang’s use of *yi*:

§33 What is called “consciousness” (*vijñāna*; 意識) is the “continuing mind.” Because of their deep-rooted attachment, ordinary men imagine that I and mine are real and cling to them in their illusions. As soon as objects are presented, this consciousness rests on them and discriminates the objects of the five senses and of the mind. This is called *vijñāna* [i.e., the differentiating consciousness] or the “separating consciousness.” Or, again, it is called the “object-discriminating consciousness.”⁴¹

復次，言意識者，即此相續識。依諸凡夫取著轉深計我我所，種種妄執隨事攀緣，分別六塵名為意識，亦名分離識，又復說名分別事識。⁴²

Here, Āśvaghōṣa discusses *mano-vijñāna*, the sixth consciousness in the Yogācāra scheme of eight consciousness, and we see it in its standard Chinese translation *yishi* 意識. The addition of *shi* 識 to *yi* 意 is apparently intended to distinguish it from *manas-vijñāna* 意, the seventh consciousness. In Chinese, *shi* 識 means cognition or knowledge and aptly indicates the difference between *mano-vijñāna* 意識 from *manas-vijñāna* 意. Although Āśvaghōṣa called it “analytical mind,” *manas-vijñāna* is not all that analytical: its conception of self-ego and dichotomy of the defiled and undefiled indicates a differentiation only of the broadest kind. By contrast, *mano-vijñāna* 意識 is a true intellectual process that can arise either in tandem with or disassociated from the five sense consciousnesses to form differentiation and cognitive knowledge. Hence, its English translations also indicate its intellectual character: “thinking consciousness,” “conceptual consciousness,” and “intellectual consciousness,” among others. If *manas-vijñāna* 意 unconsciously reproduces the entire world of objects like a mirror, *mano-vijñāna* 意識, according to Āśvaghōṣa, represents a conscious, sustained process of “discriminat[ing] the objects of the five senses and of the mind” and “cling[ing] to them in their illusions.”

In Wang Changling’s “Lun wen yi,” we find a parallel progression from unconscious transcendental contemplation to the conscious process of *si* 思, or thinking. The modus operandi of *yishi* 意識 (*mano-vijñāna*) and *si* 思 are strikingly similar: both perceive and reproduce not the phenomenal world as a whole but its specific, differentiated objects. While *yishi* arises in tandem with objects of the five senses, Wang’s *si* enacts a search for images (*souxiang* 搜象) in

both nature and the human world. It is in this context that Wang speaks of *jingsi* 境思 (inscape-directed thinking; see §10) and *gansi* 感思 (emotion-directed thinking; see §14). Moreover, the operation of both *yishi* and *si* entails an active play of emotions. In Buddhism, *yishi*'s coarsing with the objects of the five senses and of the mind is illusory and volitional as much as it is conceptual. Likewise, Wang Changling's *si* is very much a dynamic process of blending volitions or emotions with images on all levels of poetic composition.

It is at this point, though, that we notice a crucial disparity between Aśvaghōṣa's philosophy of consciousnesses and Wang's theory of literary creation. Rejecting the ultimately negative Buddhist view of *yi* and *yishi* as agents of illusion, Wang prefers to cast *yi* and *si* as indisputably positive processes of literary creation.⁴³ The basis for this preference, I would argue, is his firm allegiance to the world out there and his desire to incorporate it into the realm of poetry. Where Buddhism incorporates *yi* and *yishi* as agents of the illusory world from which detachment is the logical answer, Wang parts company with the Buddhist perspective. What he does, then, in effect, is to *use* Buddhism for the initial stages of his thinking about the poetic process. It gave him a new way to think about poetic receptivity: the Buddhist emphasis on passivity as a mental pose enabled Wang to envision a radical receptiveness to the world out there that would allow it to penetrate the mind in ways previously unimagined. And that in turn would give him a new basis for thinking about how the mind could infuse the world with its own emotion. In other words, it becomes necessary to receive the world in all its fullness with a kind of loving apprehension in order to inflect that world with one's own emotion or subjectivity. So from Buddhist passivity, with its total receptivity to what is outside us, Wang arrived at a new form of poetic expressionism.

Conclusion:

The Emergence of a Yi-Centered Theory of Literary Creation

In "Lun Wen Yi," Wang Changling's use of *yi* may seem confusing at first glance. Historically, in fact, his quickly shifting parade of *yi* and *yi* compounds has baffled and confused readers even up to the present. Once sorted out, though, it becomes clear how Wang intended these complex terms to describe different phases of the creative process. In that respect, as in others, Wang broke new ground: seeing the creation of poetry as a mental process marked by distinct stages makes possible a new appreciation of the final result.

Although both Lu Ji and Liu Xie theorized literary creation based on the *yi-xiang-yan* philosophical paradigm, neither ventured much on the role of *yi* at any creative phase. By contrast, Wang Changling stresses the primacy of *yi* at every creative phase and introduces a rich array of *yi* compounds: *zuoyi* for

initiating transcendental contemplation, *yixiang* for the ideal outcome of envisaging, and *qiyi* for the dynamic mental process behind compositional execution, among others. The underlying theme of this stress on *yi* points to a heightened visuality in his poetics. In turn, we might see that as a sign of his desire to make poetry more responsive to the richness and nuances of the world out there. Perhaps the most important breakthrough made by Wang, however, is his use of a Buddhist perspective on the *yi-xiang-yan* paradigm and the ensuing consequences.

In examining the creative process, Wang follows in the footsteps of Lu Ji and Liu Xie, moving from initial transcendental contemplation (the *yi* phase) through artistic envisaging (the *xiang* phase) to compositional execution (the *yan* phase). Yet in the way he viewed the first two phases Wang differs fundamentally from Lu and Liu. Regarding the first phase, Wang dispenses with the Daoist trope of daimonic roaming of mind favored by Lu and Liu. Instead, he sees it as an absolutely tranquil and unconscious state of mind, in which the entire object-world is mirrored. The second phase he also characterizes in a radically different way. While Lu and Liu contend that artistic envisaging arises from a dynamic interplay of image, feeling, and word in the mind, Wang posits two distinct, successive processes: first, an unconscious reproduction of the entire phenomenal world and then a conscious effort to search and commune with specific objects and images. Virtually all of this bears a clear imprint of Tathāgatagarbha and Yogācāra Buddhist ideas on the workings of the *yi* and *yishi* consciousnesses. By importing Buddhism into his thinking about the initial stages of the poetic process, Wang clearly wanted to bring the external world more into the picture: if poetry is to capture aspects of the world as we know it, that process would have to begin with something like a complete immersion in its phenomenological richness, the plenitude of existing things. By his use of a Buddhist take on *yi*, Wang attests to the Tang dynasty openness to foreign cultural influences, as well as its ability to use these creatively.

Nonetheless, Wang does not remain there. Instead he reverts to the traditional Daoist stance when explaining the last creative phase—translation of envisaging (*xiang*) into language (*yan*). This return to the indigenous Chinese tradition yields an equally important result. Drawing on traditional, Daoist-inspired calligraphy criticism, Wang accomplishes what Lu Ji and Liu Xie failed to do—illuminating how *yi*, as a dynamic process of envisaging, propels the final compositional act and produces poetry marked by a fusion of feeling and image. This last phase, however, is made possible only by what preceded it, a complete absorption of the world. Only because the mind has absorbed the world, taken it into itself, can it then infuse the particular objects it wants to focus on with its own emotion. So Wang arrives finally at an expressionistic aesthetic, one for

which images and the objects represented become expressive of a particular turn of mind.

By exploiting the multivalence of *yi* in such an ingenious fashion, Wang Changling has innovatively rethought all creative phases and cultivated a new appreciation of the final result. Thus we see a coherent *yi*-centered theory of literary creation gradually emerge, one never known before, even though it has been reconstructed by us rather than fully articulated by Wang Changling himself. Rivaling Lu Ji's and Liu Xie's in many ways, Wang's *yi*-centered theory of literary creation provides later critics, especially those of Ming and Qing times, with a productive competing model for theorizing literary creation.



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Notes

1. Wang Changling's authorship of a book titled *Shige* is almost indisputable because the Japanese monk Kūkai, who stayed and befriended the Tang literati in the capital Chang'an, wrote about how he had come into possession of Wang's *Shige*: "Wang Changling's one-volume *Shige* was obtained by chance from the author when I was in China" 王昌齡《詩格》一卷，此是在唐之日，於作者邊偶得此書 ("Shu Liu Xiyi ji xuan na biao" 書劉希夷集獻納表, in Kūkai, *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai zenshū*, 6:741). However, the existing edition of Wang Changling's *Shige*, collected in the Song anthology *Yichuang zalu* 吟窗雜錄, is generally considered a mixture of authentic and spurious material. The part of this *Shige* preserved in "Lun wen yi" is considered by almost all scholars to be Wang's authentic work. For a study on the authenticity of Wang Changling's *Shige*, see Li and Fu, "Tan Wang Changling de *Shi ge*," 85–97.
2. I accept Japanese scholar Jin'ichi Konish's 小西甚一 view that the collection of Wang Changling's ends with this citation of Confucius's remarks: 故《论语》云。「学而时习之。」此谓也。若思而不学，则危殆也。又云：「思之者，德之深也」。See *WJMFL*, 3:1286.
3. Wang Changling uses the character *yi* 意 sixty times, either as an independent term or in combination with another character to form a *yi* compound.
4. The ubiquity of *yi* prompts Jin'ichi Konish to argue that "Lun Wen Yi" presents a literary theory revolving around *yi*. However, when listing four major theoretical contributions

- made by this text, he does not relate any of them to *yi*; see *WJMFL*, 3:1393. Wang Yunxi (“Wang Changling de shige lilun,” 24) takes note of two different meanings of *yi*, the author’s expressive intent and the creative process, but does not investigate any particular occurrences of *yi*.
5. On Wang Changling’s view of *yijing*, see Luo, *Sui Tang wudai wenxue sixiang shi*, 179–83. For a summary of noteworthy studies on this subject, see Bi, *Wang Changling shige yu shixue yanjiu*, 317–20.
 6. See Ye Lang, *Zhongguo meixueshi dagang*, 577–641; and Yuan, *Zhongguo shige yishu yanjiu*, 26–74.
 7. See Cai, “Early Philosophical Discourse,” 494–510.
 8. *WJMFL*, 1299. Unless indicated otherwise, the English translations of all passages cited here are mine. All subsequent references to this work are provided in the text.
 9. *Shige* appears in eleven of the twenty-nine titles collected in Zhang, *Quan Tang wudi shige huikao*.
 10. See Huang, *Yijing lun de xingcheng*, 137–38; and Li Limin, “Wang Changling *Shige*,” 94–96.
 11. See Cai, “Early Philosophical Discourse,” 501–4.
 12. See Ronald Egan’s and Shuen-fu Lin’s studies on Liu Xie’s views on imagination in Cai, *A Chinese Literary Mind*, 101–26, 127–60.
 13. See Zhang, *Fashu yaolu*, 184.
 14. See, for instance, these lines by Lu Ji:

And when it is attained: light gathers about moods (*qing*) and they grow in brightness;
 Things (*wu*) become luminous and draw one another forward;
 I quaff the word-hoard’s spray of droplets,
 And roll in my mouth the sweet moisture of the Classics; . . .
 Then, phrases from the depths emerge struggling as when the swimming fish, hooks in
 their mouths, emerge from the bottom of the deepest pool;
 And drifting intricacies of craft flutter down, as when the winging bird, caught by
 stringed arrow, plummets from the tiered clouds.
 (Zhang Shaokang, *Wen fu jishi*, 36; English translation in Owen, *Readings*, 98, 101)
 15. For a careful study of the historical evolution of the term, see Huang, *Yijing lun de xingcheng*, 1–134.
 16. The six categories of phenomena are *se* 色, *sheng* 聲, *xiang* 香, *wei* 味, *chu* 觸, and *fa* 法; the six corresponding senses are *yan* 眼, *er* 耳, *bi* 鼻, *she* 舌, *shen* 身, and *yi* 意. Wang Changling’s adaptation of the sixth sense *yi* or *yishi* 意識 for his theory of literary creation is discussed in detail in the penultimate section of this article.
 17. Wang Changling, *Shige*, in Zhang, *Quan Tang wudi shige huikao*, 173.
 18. Han, *Hanfeizi jijie*, 20.148.
 19. This verbal compound, written as 意想 and meaning “to imagine,” should not be confused with its homonym *yixiang* 意象, a nominal compound meaning “conception-image.” Except for this case, *yixiang* discussed in this article pertains to the latter (conception-image).
 20. *WXDL*, ch. 26, sent. 43–44.
 21. Wang Changling, *Shige*, in Zhang, *Quan Tang wudi shige huikao*, 173.
 22. Fan, “Letter to My Nephews Written in Prison” 獄中與諸甥侄書, appended to Fan, *Hou Han shu*, vol. 12.

23. On the theoretical significance of this introduction of an individual self, see Zhang Jing, “Yingjing yu shenti,” 69. On the complex relationship between an individual self and general subjectivity in Wang’s own poetry, see Varsano, “Whose Voice Is It Anyway?” 1–25.
24. For an analysis of this important text on the *Poetry*, see Cai, *Configurations of Comparative Poetics*, 44–49.
25. Wang Changling, *Shige*, in Zhang, *Quan Tang wudi shige huikao*, 173.
26. This point has been noted in Huang, *Yijing lun de xingcheng*, 147–72.
27. *WXDL*, ch. 26, sent. 48–54.
28. *Ibid.*, ch. 26, sent. 37.
29. See Zhang, *Shulun jiyao*, 15–16.
30. Wang Xizhi, “The Diagram of the Battle Array of the Brush” 題衛夫人筆陣圖後, collected in *Zhongguo meixueshi*, 1:173.
31. Sun, *Sun Guoting shupu jianzheng*, 91.
32. See my discussion of the much-praised appeal of this famous couplet, in Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry*, 385–86.
33. This gestalt not only guides Wang’s own composition of recent-style poetry but also lays the groundwork for Ming-Qing critics’ more sophisticated structural analysis of the recent-style poetry. See Wang, “Jintishi de chengshu”; and Wang Deming, “Wang Changling yu zhongguo gudai houqi shige qingjing lun de zhouxing.”
34. T2n99_012.
35. Ásvaghoṣa, *Awakening of Faith*, 47.
36. T16n671_16.
37. Ásvaghoṣa, *Awakening of Faith*, 47–48. I have added a Chinese character and made some modifications to Hakeda’s translation.
38. T32n.1666_001.
39. Ásvaghoṣa, *Awakening of Faith*, 47–48. I have added a Chinese character and made modifications in the first half of the translated passage.
40. T32n.1666_001.
41. Ásvaghoṣa, *Awakening of Faith*, 49.
42. T32n.1666_001.
43. We should note that the term *yi* is also frequently used in a positive sense as a description of a Bodhisattva’s transforming mind, as shown in the following remarks by Ásvaghoṣa:

The Bodhisattvas in their first stage of aspiration (*fayi* 發意) and the others, because of their deep faith in suchness, have a partial insight into [the nature of the influence of suchness]. They know that the things [of the bliss-body], such as its corporeal forms, major marks, adornments, and so on, do not come from without or go away, that they are free from limitations, and that they are envisioned by the mind alone and are not independent of suchness.

初發意菩薩等所見者，以深信真如法故，少分而見，知彼色相莊嚴等事，無來無去，離於分齊。唯依心現，不離真如。(T32n.1666_001; Ásvaghoṣa, *Awakening of Faith*, 71; I have added two Chinese characters to the translated passage.)

In the compound *fayi* 發意, translated as “aspiration” by Hakeda, the character *yi* obviously refers to a stage of the mind that affords insight to suchness, the Buddha nature. Such a laudatory use of *yi* encourages critics like Wang Changling to apply it when theorizing about literary creation.

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