Wang An Shi and the Balance of Form and Function

by

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Abstract

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The reform-minded aspect of Wang's writing is frequently emphasized while its rhetorical component is overlooked. Similarly, in texts which appear poetic in nature the underlying subject matter of reform fails to be recognized. Both rhetoric and its antithesis function in tandem in all of Wang's texts, the one serving to balance the other; stylistic writing serves to soften political discourse. When Wang writes poetically, the problem of reform is served through allusion. In contrast, when direct terminology is employed, this is balanced by rhetorical analogy (often citing the past to prove the present, jie gu yu jin). Because his subject matter is predominantly political, Wang's memorials and prose texts are well known, while his poetry has remained in relative obscurity. Nevertheless, even the memorials rely on the balance of rhetoric and aesthetics, which he describes in his best known text "Shang Ren Zong Huang Di Yan Shi Shu". It is rhetoric which lends Wang's writing its effectiveness and which initially gained him prominence as a writer; which in turn gained him access to the court and the emperor.
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Chapter I - Memorials and Prose
The written works of Wang An Shi contain several references to what has been generally translated as “utility”. Utility is not the solitary aim of Wang An Shi’s writing; rather, assertions about the necessity of utility are only one aspect of Wang’s style. In some of the texts in question Wang An Shi asserts the importance of service to society, but does not provide specific examples. In these cases it is often understood that Wang is referring to utility in writing. That is to say, writing that is useful in some way to society. However, this understanding is merely implicit. The comment of Wang’s most often cited in relation to utility indicates simply that writers should benefit society: “For those who are called writers, the task is simply to benefit society” 所謂文者，務為有補於世而已矣《上人書》. It is important to keep in mind that during this age in China, officials were literati by necessity. Therefore, in referring to writers, Wang was actually referring to court officials. Thus, by extension Wang may have been implying a necessity for officials to be benevolent (ie - in the implementation of policies). In other texts Wang specifically refers to the task of writing. However, there are problematic elements here as well. At times Wang asserts the necessity to avoid stylistic writing. Nevertheless, in these very texts Wang exhibits some of his most artistic writing. In fact, the texts in which Wang makes such protestations are often memorials in which rhetoric is an integral component. The very nature of communications with the throne is that Wang must write in a convincing and unique manner in order to attain and maintain the attention of the emperor. Professor Wang Shuizhao 王水照 of Fu Dan University has described Wang’s “Shang Ren Shu” in the following manner: “This text exhibits quite unique writing. The writer has used analogies to figuratively describe the relationship between refined language and writing. The text also displays Wang’s prowess at using
function words such as ‘zhe’, ‘ye’, ‘yun er’, ‘er yi’ and so on; creating the chanting of emotions that is characteristic of this composition.”

Shang Ren Shu is a memorial to the throne, which implies an inherent level of functionality. Wang generally used these memorials as opportunities to propound the necessity of political reform. In observance of this functional aspect Wang wrote in a succinct manner, clearly expressing his intention. When Wang was first summoned to the court the trend in contemporary China was a continuation of that under the Tang: writing was heavily ornamental and drew strongly from the classics. Wang also did not have the strong connections in Kai Feng 開封 that some of his contemporaries had (his family was from Fu Jian 福建 and his father was only a minor official). Thus, Wang had to strike a delicate balance between style and function in his writing, particularly in the case of the memorials. In this way, Wang’s arguments against stylistic writing and a focus on utility are more of an aspect of his writing style, rather than a true description of his writing. A closer look at Shang Ren Shu《上人書》will provide more clarity:

“I have claimed before that ‘cultured writing’ is about rites and government; that writing records various policies and transmits them to people largely falls under this rubric. The expression, ‘words which are not decorative will not travel very far’ is merely the disciples saying that rhetoric is indispensable; [however,] it does not imply that rhetoric was the main intention of

the sages in creating cultured writings. Since the death of Confucius, Han Yu has appeared and continued the tradition of the sages from ages ago; this is truly great. Only Liu Zongyuan and Han Yu share this honor [and] Liu Zongyuan [generally] cannot compare with Han Yu; however, in the end his writing did compare favorably with those of Han Yu and were passed on, which is also outstanding and awe-inspiring. Han Yu has also told others how to write compositions, saying that things should be done in this way and that way; Liu Zong Yuan has also said things should be done in this way and that way. I speculate that all of what these two said, was simply telling others about the issue of rhetoric and polished language. As for the original intention in writing, it is not as simple as this.

Mencius has said, ‘A gentleman should attain knowledge on his own through advanced study. Those who have attained knowledge on their own through advanced study will be able to grasp reliably [what they learn]; through reliably grasping one may accumulate a deeper and deeper foundation of basic skills everyday; with a deep foundation one can draw upon them in various situations and encounter their origins.’ These words from Mencius are not just applicable in the process of writing compositions, but may also be borrowed for the explanation of the original intention [of the sages] in writing compositions.

Furthermore, what I believe about writing is that they must be of benefit to society. As for polished rhetoric, it is easily comparable to a vessel which is painted and engraved. If a vessel is exquisite and magnificent, it will not necessarily be suitable for use; Also, if a vessel is suitable for use, it will not necessarily be exquisite and magnificent. The essence is to make usefulness the foundation [and] take its carvings and patterns as its appearance only. If it is unsuitable for use, then it is not a tool. But if you do not decorate its exterior, is this still the case? No. Thus, external appearance cannot be completely disposed with; it is just that you cannot make it paramount.
I have been learning about writing for a long time now and have made this viewpoint the main direction of my research all along. I have thought about putting these ideas into an composition to pass onto others. As for the result of putting this idea to practice, wait and see. What of the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of these compositions? I cannot be certain. You, an honest person, will not simply flatter someone [and tell them] what they like. I have composed ten essays for you here in the hopes that you will give your advice and evaluate the 'rights', 'wrongs', and settle them for me.”

At the start Wang clearly defines the purpose of writing: “‘cultured writing’ is about rites and government” 當謂文者，禮教政事云爾. The ‘wen’ in this phrase is understood to mean “cultured writing” 文章. In the next phrase wen is used differently, “words which are not decorative will not travel far” 言之不文，行之不遠. Here the wen is a modifier for yan, which can be understood as “words” or “speech”. The modifier wen in this case means “decorative” or “ornamental” (from 康熙字典): 易乾卦文言疏 文謂文飾. The idea that writing must include elements of both style and utility is directly discussed near the end of this text. Wang appears at first to be setting up the argument that style is entirely useless: comparing rhetoric to a decorated vessel Wang argues, “If a vessel is exquisite and magnificent, it will not necessarily be suitable for use... in sum, suitability is the base, paintings and engravings are merely the decorative exterior” 誠使巧且華，不必適... 要之以適用為本，以刻鏤繪畫為之容而已. The term bu2 bi4 不必 should be read according to its adverbial form, not its verbal form. The phrase “誠使巧且華，不必適用” could equally be translated as either “In reality, if a vessel is artfully made and magnificent, there is no need for it to be useful” or as “In reality, a vessel which is artfully made and magnificent will not necessarily be useful”. The latter translation fits more logically into the rest of the dialogue: Wang continues with, “if it is not useful, it is not what is thought to be a vessel” 不適用，非所以為器也. Wang then concretizes the idea of both utility and stylistic elements as important: “Style is also indispensable. As long as it is not made most important, it is acceptable” 然容亦未可已也，勿先之，其可也. Wang
actually presents two seemingly irreconcilable ideas in this phrase: the term “未可已” suggests that style is indispensable, while the use of “其可也” seems to denote that style is merely acceptable (as long as it is not made the primary focus of writing). The phrase becomes less problematic if we reinterpret the definite composition ‘qi2’. If ‘qi2’ is understood as referring to “the written composition”, rather than “the use of style”, then the phrase becomes: “Style is also indispensable. As long as it is not made most important, [then an composition containing] it will be acceptable (of acceptable quality)”. Or, “Style cannot be dispensed with completely, but one should not emphasize it in order for it to be acceptable”.

Different terms are used throughout this text to describe stylistic writing. In using the analogy of a decorated vessel, Wang refers to rhetoric as ci2: “That which is called rhetoric is like the engraving and painting on a vessel” 所謂辭者，猶器之有刻鏤繪畫也. Also, in his assertion that, “style is also indispensable” 然容亦未可已也, the term rong2 容 is used in a similar context. This suggests that wen2, ci2 and rong2 may be used interchangeably in describing stylistic writing. Wang’s assertion that both content and style are necessary is demonstrated within his text. The use of analogy, which is typical of Wang’s style, is used to both make the composition more convincing and to make it more interesting. Wang thus is able to soften his arguments by positing them in a rhetorical fashion, pausing for confirmation from the reader: “If it is not decorated, is it not the same?” 不為之容，其亦若是乎. Rong2 may be variously interpreted as: “to hold” (容納), “to tolerate” (宽容), “appearance” (容貌), “correct manners and
discipline” (儀容), “decorated facial or outer appearance” (修飾面容，打扮), “free and unrestrained” (逍遙自在) and “changing and unstable” (變化不定). From the line, “take its carvings and patterns as its appearance only” 以刻鏤繪畫為之容而已, it can be surmised that Wang is referring to the “decorated facial or outer appearance” of the vessels. ‘Wen2’ is also used to refer to ‘decorative’ or ‘ornamental’ writing, as described above, and appears once in this context: “words which are not decorative will not travel far” 言之不文，行之不遠. The final term used in the context of style and rhetoric is ci2 詞. Ci2 can be variously interpreted as: “oral confession” 話供, “words” 言辭, “to reject” 推辭 or “to part” 告別. Only “words” is an appropriate translation for the use of ci2 in this context, but does not fully encapsulate the meaning implied in its usage here: “the disciples saying that rhetoric is indispensable…” 徒謂辭之不可以也. A better translation is ci2 zhang1 詞章, which can be derived from yan2 ci2 言辭. Ci2 zhang1 refers to prose writing, particularly that which rhymes. Thus, ci2, wen2 and rong2 are taken collectively to mean rhetorical, stylistic or decorative writing, forming the antithesis of ‘useful’ writing. In reference to useful writing Wang employs the terms bu3 補 and shi4 適. Shi4, written as the compound shi4 yong4 適用, must be understood as “suitable”. Herein, Wang is referring to writing which is suitable for transmitting

Confucian values and politics and for teaching others 禮教治政云爾，其書諸策而傳之人，大體歸然而已．

Another aspect of the rhetoric employed in this text is the repetition of terms: “It’s like a vessel which is carved and painted. In reality, if it is artfully made and magnificent, it is not necessarily useful. In reality, if it is useful, it is also not necessarily artfully made and magnificent. The essence is to make usefulness the foundation [and] have it carved and painted for appearance only.” 猶器之有刻鏤繪畫也。誠使巧且華，不必適用；誠使適用，亦不必巧且華。要之以適用為本，以刻鏤繪畫為之容而已．The closed circle organization and repetition of the terms makes the argument complete: “carved and painted... artfully made and magnificent... useful... useful... artfully made and magnificent... carved and painted”. In quoting Meng Zi Wang reiterates this style of repetition: “Mencius has said, ‘A gentleman should attain knowledge on his own through advanced study. Those who have attained knowledge on their own through advanced study will be able to grasp reliably [what they learn]; through reliably grasping one may accumulate a deeper and deeper foundation of basic skills everyday; with a deep foundation one can apply skills effectively and thus will succeed one way or another’” 孟子之云爾，君子欲其自得之也。自得之，則居之安；居之安，則資之深；資之深，則取諸左右逢其原．In quoting this text Wang asserts that while the sayings of Meng Zi herein are not directly applicable to the process of writing, one can extrapolate from them in defining the root purpose of writing 孟子之云爾，非直施於文而已，然亦可托以為作文之本意．
In the quotation of his that is used in this text, Meng Zi makes no mention of writing. Rather, what is described is how one can achieve success through deep and consistent study. Wang posits that through this quotation one may also understand the intention of the sages in writing compositions. This implies that the sages either wrote compositions as an aspect of advanced study, or that through advanced study one may learn to write well (and thus succeed). However, neither interpretation supports Wang’s discourse regarding the primacy of suitability or usefulness in writing. Neither does it support the argument that stylistic writing is valuable, but must be made secondary to utility. However, two other texts in Meng Zi’s Li Lou Zhang Ju Xia《離婁章句下》discuss the issue of writing directly: “It is unfortunate when words have no basis in fact. What is really unfortunate [about this] is the veiling of one’s talent” 言無實不祥。不祥之實，蔽賢者當之6. Zhu Xi 朱熹 has reinterpreted this as, “The reason that fictitious speech is unfortunate is the fact that masking one’s talent is unfortunate” 言而無實者不祥，故蔽賢為不祥之實《孟子集注》. This implies that writing must be factual, but says nothing of the need for writing to benefit society. A piece of writing may be well researched and fully accurate, but have no application (except for aesthetic appreciation). Furthermore, this does not imply that writing cannot place a strong emphasis on rhetoric, rhyme or other stylistic elements. Also of relevance to writing Meng Zi asserts, “In regards to great men, it is not important that their words are reliable or that their actions bring results; it is only important that they possess a sense of duty” 大人者，言不必信，行不必果，惟義所在. This mode of thinking implies that one should act according to their

station and not beyond that. From this emphasis on ritual it can be surmised that Meng Zi would have discouraged efforts of any form that would pose a challenge to established rank. Some of Wang’s reform efforts sought to bring farmers out of their dependancy on feudal lords. Since Wang’s writing was primarily the vehicle for the implementation of his reforms, it is likely that Meng Zi would have disagreed with Wang’s purpose in writing.

Wang describes that, “looking back to the sages, in these countless years since the death of Confucius, Han Yu [alone] is outstanding” 自孔子之死久，韓子作，望聖人於百千年中，卓然也. This implies that Han Yu’s style and purpose of writing is consistent with Wang’s ideas. This is not the case. Han Yu has been described by contemporaries such as Zhang Ji 張籍 and Pei Du 裴度 as, “writing for the purpose of entertainment” 以文為戲《寄李翱書》7. In a letter to Han Yu, Pei Du criticized his writing as being “mostly disparate and impractical, causing people to display it before themselves as a form of entertainment style” 多尚駭雜無實之說，使人陳之於前以為戲《上韓愈書》. Specifically, Han Yu’s contemporaries have compared Mao Ying Zhuan《毛穎傳》to the works of the Six Dynasties period poet Yuan Shu 袁淑. This suggests that Han Yu would not agree with Wang that “cultured writing’ is about rites and government” 嘗謂文者，禮教治政云爾，其書諸策而傳之人. Furthermore, it shows that a tradition of “writing for the purpose of entertainment” 以文為戲 existed even in the

Six Dynasties period. Mao Ying Zhuan is often considered to be representative of Han Yu’s style:

“There was a man from Zhong Shan named Mao Ying. His ancestor was a rabbit who helped the great leader Yu (of the Xia dynasty) govern the East. Because he governed all things well, he was given land by the court and after he died became one of twelve gods. He was once quoted as saying, “My descendants will be those of gods, they cannot be the same as other living things. When born they will be expectorated from the mouths of their parents.” In the end things happened in this way. When then eighth generation of descendants of the rabbit were born, there was the fall of a dynasty in the realm of men. At this time the descendant was living in Zhong Shan where he learned the magic of the fairy gods. This magic granted him the power to become invisible, as well as to control affairs and material things. He then stole the love of Chang E (the moon fairy) and travelled into the moonlight on the back of a toad. The descendants after him went into hiding and did not become court officials. One descendant by the name of Cun lived in the Eastern quarter of the city. He was very sly and enjoyed running. He entered into a race with Han Lu who could not compare with him. Han Lu became frustrated and collaborated with a magpie to murder Cun. They then killed his entire family and ground up the meat of their bodies.

In the time of the first Emperor Qin the general Meng Tian destroyed the Chu kingdom in the south. While passing through Zhong Shan, Meng Tian initiated a large-scale hunt to intimidate the people of Chu. Officials and officers from all around convened together. They used Lian Shan divination to seek information about their campaign through omens. The diviner congratulated them and advised, ‘The one you must catch this time is the one who has no dull corner teeth. He is the animal wearing short clothing. He has no lips and has a long neck. He has eight orifices and sits as if meditating. You only need to collect the hair of this one and use it
to make a tool for writing. Everyone under heaven will then write the same words. Will Emperor Qin not then be able to annex the lands of the feudal lords?’ The battle then began and the family of Mao Ying was captured and all of their hair removed. The best hair was packed into a cart and taken back. Arriving at the Zhang Tai palace they handed the captives over to the emperor. The Mao Ying family was gathered together and restrained while brushes were made. The emperor then graciously allowed general Meng Tian to bath in the bathhouse pool and gave him a tract of official land with the title ‘Guan Cheng’. He then bestowed upon him the title of ‘Guan Cheng Zi’ (Sir of Guan Cheng). From then on he gradually received the favor of the emperor and continued to manage affairs in his land.

For a man, Mao Ying had an incredibly strong and agile memory. He was also very keen and recorded everything from the year of tying branch tips to record events to the affairs of the Qin Kingdom. Yin Yang, the Eight Diagrams, divination techniques, medical techniques, nationalities and surnames, records of mountains and rivers, land features, letters and calligraphy, paintings, different teachings and ideologies, all the schools of thought and all the books under heaven, even Buddhism, Laozi and the teachings and sayings of foreign countries were all recorded in great detail. He also thoroughly understood the various affairs of his time. The official letters of the administration as well as the financial accounts and inventory records of the marketplace were all handled by him for the emperor. From the emperor Qin, to the princes Fu Su and Hu Hai, to Zhao Gao of the rank Zhong Che Fu Ling, all the way down to the common people, there was no one who did not love him. He could also understand people well and follow their thinking. Whether they were honest, evil, tactful, ingenious or clumsy and plain, he could understand them. Even at times when he was not put to use, he would keep silent throughout and would not be discouraged. He only showed a little displeasure at assuming the role of warrior, but if requested he often went along anyway.
For a long time he was assigned to the position of ‘Zhong Shu Ling’ and became even closer to the emperor. The emperor once referred to him as ‘Sir Zhong Shu’. The emperor personally handled official matters. Everyday he poured over official reports, deciding on the weight of rules in order to set limits for himself. Even those within the palace could not stand by the emperor’s side. Only Mao Ying and the servants who carry candles could stand by the emperor’s side until he slept. Mao Ying along with Chen Xuan from Jiang County, Tao Nong of Hong Nong county and Mr. Chu of Hui Ji county were all good friends and held each other in high esteem. Wherever they appeared they were together. Whenever the emperor called on Mao Ying they all would go together, but the emperor did not find offense in this.

On one occasion when Mao Ying was summoned to the court, the emperor appointed him to a special task with heavy responsibility. Mao Ying removed his hat and expressed his deep gratitude. At this point the emperor saw that his head was shaved and this did not accord with his expectations. He scoffed at this: ‘Sir Zhong Shu is old and bald; he cannot handle this position well. I have called you Zhong Shu (one who writes); you do not write now?’. Mao Ying replied, ‘I try (write) with all my heart’. Mao Ying was never summoned to the court again. He returned to his own land at Guan Cheng where he grew old. His descendants were many and spread throughout China and abroad. Though all of them claimed to be people of Guan Cheng, only those who lived in Zhong Shan could carry on the enterprise of their ancestors.

Tai Shi Gong said: ‘The Mao family has two clans; one has the surname Ji. This clan is from the son of the King Zhou Wen and had the title of ‘Mao’. This is the same Mao as in ‘Lu, Wei, Mao and Dan’. During the time of the warring states there was an officer Mao, Mao Sui. There is only the Mao clan of Zhong Shan. I do not know about their ancestors, but their descendants are very prosperous. At the time that Confucius wrote the Spring and Autumn Annals, he caught sight of a lin (Chinese unicorn) and put down his pen. This was no fault of Mao Ying. When general Meng pulled the hairs from Zhong Shan and was granted land by the
Qin emperor, this was well known to the world. Yet the Mao clan of the Ji lineage has remained in obscurity. Mao Ying appeared as a slave at the outset, but in the end came to be given great responsibility. When emperor Qin destroyed the feudal lords, Mao Ying definitely contributed greatly to the effort. For this he received no reward. He was even estranged from the emperor because of his old age. Emperor Qin was really lacking in grace!

毛穎者，中山人也。其先明視，佐禹治東方土，養萬物有功，因封於卯地，死為十二神。嘗曰：

「吾子孫神明之後，不可與物同，當吐而生。」已而果然。明視八世孫(需兔)，世傳當殷時居中山，得神仙之術，能匿光使物，竊姮娥、騎蟾蜍入月，其後代遂隱不仕云。居東郭者曰(鶼兔)，狡而善走，與韓盧爭能，盧不及，盧怒，與宋鶼謀而殺之，醢其家。秦始皇時，蒙將軍恬南伐楚，次中山，將大獵以懸楚。召左右庶長與軍尉，以《連山》筮之，得天與人文之兆。筮者賀曰：「今日之獲，不角不牙，衣褐之徒，缺口而長鬚，八竅而跌居，獨取其髪，簡幷是資，天下其同書，秦其遂兼諸侯乎！」遂獵，圍毛氏之族，拔其豪，載穎而歸，獻俘於章台宮，聚其族而加束縛焉。秦皇帝使恬賜之湯沐，而封諸管城，號曰管城子，日見親寵任事。穎為人，強記而便敏，自結繩之代以及秦事，無不纂錄。陰陽、卜筮、占相、醫方、族氏、山經、地志、字書、圖畫、九流、百家、天人之書，及至浮圖、老子、外國之說，皆所詳悉。又通於當代之務，官府簿書、市井貸錢注記，惟上所使。自秦皇帝及太子扶蘇、胡亥、丞相斯、中車府令高，下及國人，無不愛重。又善隨人意，正直、邪曲、巧拙，一隨其人。雖見廢棄，終默不泄。惟不喜武士，然見請，亦時往。累拜中書令，與上益狎，上嘗呼為中書君。上親決事，以衡石自程，雖官人不得立左右，獨穎與執書者常侍，上休方罷。穎與絳人陳玄、弘農陶泓，及會稽褚先生友善，相推致，其出處必偕。上召穎，三人者不待詔，輒俱往，上未嘗怪焉。後因進見，上將有任使，拂試
The beginning of this narrative (which is a comical allegory about a writing brush; mao 毛 is a reference to mao bi 毛筆, brush) is focused on later events, describing the eventual fate of the Mao Ying lineage. This is done to satisfy the reader’s curiosities about the lack of any present traces of this family. The family eventually fell into hiding because of the eighth ancestor’s love affair with Chang E 窺姮娥、騏蟾蜍入月. After this there is mention of another descendant named Cun of the eastern quarter of the city (presumably Zhong Shan). He and his family were viciously murdered by his competitors after a race 與宋鶠謀而殺之，醜其家. The end of the story then ties back into this inconspicuousness of the family: “When general Meng pulled the hairs from Zhong Shan and was granted land by the Qin emperor, this was well known to the world. Yet the Mao clan of the Ji lineage has remained in obscurity” 及蒙將軍拔中山之豪，始皇封諸管城，世遂有名，而姬姓之毛無聞. The primary emphasis of the story is

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the greatness of Mao Ying: his ancestor was a god, he had a strong and agile memory, aside from the personal servants only he could be always at the emperor’s side, and because of his greatness everyone loved him. Also, the very brush used by Qin Shi Huang in writing the words that would unite China, was made of the hairs of Mao Ying’s family (since Mao himself was a brush). However, all of this is described with a secondary purpose in mind: the ridiculing of the emperor. The culmination of the narrative comes in the final four lines: “When emperor Qin destroyed the feudal lords, Mao Ying definitely contributed greatly to the effort. For this he received no reward. He was even estranged from the emperor because of his old age (ie - when the emperor burnt books written by brush). Emperor Qin was really lacking in grace!” The history of Mao Ying, including descriptions of his greatness and his noble heritage are all used to facilitate the final statement. Here Han Yu is criticizing the underuse of talented officials and the lack of benevolence of the emperor. In common fashion he veils his rhetoric through an historical narrative. This is a technique that is frequently employed by Wang An Shi (Consider Ben Chao Bai Nian Wu Shi Zha Zi《本朝百年無事札子》, Shang Zhong Yong《傷仲永》and Tai Gu《太古》). The difference with Wang’s historical narratives lies in Wang’s citing of realistic events. This lends itself to the coerciveness of Wang’s rhetoric. The story of Fang Zhong Yong displays this quality: “At the age of five Zhong Yong wrote a four line poem that made his name... He was born a genius and so had
talent; [however,] he did not receive proper education and became a normal person” 仲永生五年，即書詩四句，並自為其名... 彼其受之天也，如此其賢也；不受之人，且為眾人《傷仲永》9. In this text Wang employs the story of a prodigy for much the same purpose as Han Yu’s discussion of Mao Ying: to criticize court policy 10. Han Yu’s frivolity stands in contrast to Wang’s solemnity. Though Han Yu’s text is also purposeful, there is too much build up and too little focus on the main argument. The text is also very long and is primarily an allegorical work. This has brought criticism from those who describe Han Yu as “using writing for entertainment” 以文為戲. Han Yu also fails to balance his criticisms with praise, a technique that Wang uses proficiently 11. This suggests that Han Yu is not attempting to formulate a convincing argument. Rather he is focused on writing in the satirical mode. This manifests itself in a candid statement about the emperor: “The Qin emperor really was lacking in grace!” 秦真少恩哉. Presumably Han Yu was indirectly referring to the emperor of his own time, Xian Zong 憲宗. Nevertheless, the candidness of this last statement is strongly evident. It is informative to discussion of utility in writing to compare this text with Wang’s “A Letter to Transport Minister Ma”《與馬運判書》:

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10 This is a continuance of Wang’s argument for the primacy of education reforms, as a precursor to hiring useful officials. Qin Ke. Wang An Shi Quan Ji. Shanghai: Shanghai Gu Ji Chu Ban She, 1999.

11 See Shang Ren Zong Huang Di Yan Shi Shu《上仁宗皇帝言事書》. This text is too long to quote in its entirety here, but an example is such statements of praise for the emperor as, “I have personally observed that your majesty is thrifty and courteous, is intelligent and talented” 臣竊觀陛下有恭儉之德，有聰明睿智之才 combined with calls for alarm such as, “the financial resources of the kingdom are being drained daily and the customs of the people are daily being lost” 天下之財力日以困窮，而風俗日以衰壞
“Your Excellency Si Ma Guang: Recently I wrote you a letter. I appreciate your quick reply, which has brought me both gratitude and shame. I must trouble you again. I have a question about a situation that has come to my attention; it seems that you are very considerate toward your subordinates! I have always believed that the country’s destitution and deficiencies are not only due to inefficient disbursement and controls on spending; but also due to insufficient sources of income. A family’s capital comes from the country, a country’s capital comes from the people; if you want all the people under heaven to have an abundance of wealth it should come from the land and from nature. A family man will not draw his financial wealth from his son. Under the strict teaching and supervision of his father, a son will learn to produce great wealth. In that situation, what needs cannot be met? Consider a man who closes his door, does trade with his son and does not allow the wealth outside to enter his home. Even if he attains all of his son’s assets he cannot become rich. Although the political discussions of recent generations have not been bad, they have all primarily been demands by the emperor for methods to draw wealth from the people. Really this is just the same as a father closing the door and doing trade with his son. This is exactly the reason for the country’s destitution. With such great wisdom Your Excellency must have known this early on, it is simply that you did not have the means to do something about it. If you do not have the means, what need is there to have faith in my words?

This year there was serious famine due to drought everywhere in the southeast; even the water of Kai Feng dried up. The logistics of managing these problems are mentally exhausting. I personally estimate that the rations of the military stationed in the eastern capital will meet depletion. There will also certainly be an increase in the cost of firewood, grain products and other foodstuffs. I believe we should investigate the old and incapacitated soldiers in the capital. They should be separated and moved to various counties and townships. This will ease the
difficulty of their care. In this way we can also slow the depletion of rations. When people of
ancient times discussed the standing army, they thought of it as being similar to the circulatory
system of the people; if it cannot flow freely the body will dry up and die; if it collects in one
place it will coagulate. Spreading the army throughout the land and consequently solving the
problem of their care, this is just like allowing the circulatory system to flow. This type of
suggestion, perhaps it can be reported to the emperor and put into implementation?"
income. A family’s capital comes from the country, a country’s capital comes from the people; if you want all the people under heaven to have an abundance of wealth it should come from the land and from nature” 富其家者資之國，富其國者資之天下，欲富天下，則資之天地. This rhetoric is strategically wrapped between statements of deference to the reader. In addressing Si Ma Guang as “Your Excellency” 閣下 and referring specifically to his title, “Yun Pan” 運判, Wang is both humbling himself and simultaneously raising up Si Ma Guang. Similarly, Wang asks for confirmation from Si Ma Guang for his assertions: “This type of suggestion, perhaps it can be reported to the emperor and put into implementation?” 倘可上聞行之否. Just as described in Shang Ren Shu above, Wang uses this method of rhetorical questioning both to soften his assertions and also to create a sense of interaction with the reader. The convincing quality of Wang’s writing is most strongly rooted in this rhetorical questioning. This lends Wang’s texts a sense of balance. For example, in his memorials he pairs his critique of the emperor with praise. Here Wang achieves a similar result by telling Si Ma Guang, “With such great wisdom Your Excellency must have known this early on, it is simply that you did not have the means to do something about it” 在閣下之明，宜已盡知，當患不得為耳. Essentially Wang is giving Si Ma Guang a second chance to reconcile his views with Wang’s. By offering, “you did not have the means to do something about it (the country’s destitution)”, Wang is effectively allowing Si Ma Guang to change his stance and support Wang’s reforms 變法, without losing face or appearing to contradict himself.
Although Wang creates the fictional situation of a father doing trade with his son, the majority of this text is real observation. The second half focuses on the drought faced by the southeast and the capital. The text then proceeds with suggestions for dealing with this situation: “I believe we should investigate the old and incapacitated soldiers in the capital. They should be separated and moved to various counties and townships” 認宜料蠶兵之駭怯者就食諸郡. Si Ma Guang was the biggest opponent of Wang’s New Policies. The fact that Wang is including Si Ma in his preliminary ideas regarding troop placement shows the aim of this text: to gain widespread support for the implementation of his policies. This is very much in contrast to the aim of Han Yu in his writing of Mao Ying Zhuan, which was intended as allegory. In this letter of response Wang is hoping to win Si Ma’s support through logical reasoning. Wang ends his analogy with a conclusive statement about the country’s destitution: “Although the political discussions of recent generations have not been bad, they have all primarily been demands by the emperor for methods to draw wealth from the people. Really this is just the same as a father closing the door and doing trade with his son. This is exactly the reason for the country’s destitution” 蓋近世之言利雖善矣，皆有國者資天下之術耳，直相市於門之內而已，此其所以困與. In the second half of the text Wang uses another analogy: “When people of ancient times discussed the standing army, they thought of it as being similar to the circulatory system of the people; if it cannot flow freely the body will dry up and die; if it collects in one place it will coagulate” 古人論天下之兵，以為猶人之血脈，不及則枯，聚則瘀. In a similar fashion as above Wang ends this analogy with a logical conclusion: “Spreading the army throughout the land and consequently solving
the problem of their care, this is just like allowing the circulatory system to flow” 分使就食，亦血脈流通之勢也.

What makes Wang’s use of rhetorical analogy particularly effective is that it is used sparingly. Unlike Han Yu’s text which is fully comprised of his fictional analogy (Mao Ying as the writing brush), Wang employs only an occasional comparison in strengthening his argument: the army like the circulatory system, the drawing of funds from the people like doing trade with one’s son, decorative writing like a vessel with markings and so on. Wang also explains the analogies he uses. This he does by employing such terms as you2 猶 (similar to) and xiang4 像 (likeness). For example: “they thought of it as being the circulatory system of the people” 以為猶人之血脈. In the case of Mao Ying Zhuan it is up to the reader to make the connection between fiction and reality. Finally, Wang uses repetition in this text to strengthen his argument: “Consider a man who closes his door, does trade with his son and does not allow the wealth outside to enter his home” 今闔門而與其子市 and then “Really this is just the same as a father closing the door and doing trade with his son” 直相市於門之內而已; also, “the circulatory system of the people... cannot flow” 以為猶人之血脈，不及則枯 and then “this is just like allowing the circulatory system to flow” 亦血脈流通之勢也. In the latter example Wang pairs the word ‘ku1’ 枯 (to dry up) with its opposite, liu2 流 (to flow), lending a poetic quality to this analogy.

Wang has a tendency to cite others in a manner that supports his own arguments, even when there is no apparent congruency between the two texts. This is the case in
his description of Han Yu as “continuing the tradition of the sages from ages ago” 望聖人於百千年中 and stating that even “Liu Zong Yuan cannot compare with Han Yu” 子厚非韓比也. Since Wang comments in the same composition that, “what I believe about written compositions is that they must be of benefit to society” 且所謂文者，務為有補於世而已矣, it is implied that Wang believes Han Yu to have written to benefit others.

Conversely, Han Yu’s contemporaries claim that he “wrote for entertainment” 以文為戲. Similarly, Wang has cited Meng Zi who, as described above, believed that “In regards to great men, it is not important that their words are honest or that their actions bring results; it is only important that they have a sense of duty” 大人者，言不必信，行不必果，惟義所在. This suggests that the “positioning of suitability (or usability) as the primary aspect [of writing]” 以適用為本 is a unique quality of Wang’s writing. Rhetoric is used by Wang only as a tool for increasing the readability and thus, effectiveness of his texts. Wang is aware that “writing which is not stylistic will not travel far” 言之不文，行之不遠 and uses rhetoric to ensure the longevity of his texts. Our enjoyment of these texts today is evidence of Wang’s success in this matter. Wang seemingly drew influence for his rhetorical style from Han Yu and for his understanding of duty from Meng Zi. The former is evident in Wang’s consistent use of analogies, while the latter is visible in his affable response to his adversary Si Ma Guang. Of course the statement, “A family man will not draw his financial wealth from his son” 蓋為家者，不為其子生財, contains an element of mockery; however, Wang skillfully masks this mockery below layers of deference.
Wang’s views on the writing process are further explained in “A Letter to Zu Ze”《與祖擇之書》:

“The policies and laws of an enlightened government are what the sages were referring to when they talked of writing. What was written in books and the result of what was implemented among the people were consistent. On the issue of morality and justice, the sages attained what they wished. The laws and policies of civilized government that were implemented were decided by; prioritizing the essential, measuring [the needs] of different situations, establishing duties and concretizing standards. That which was written in books was simply meant to explain these laws and policies. But for those who were superficial it was not like this. Whether permitted to or not, sometimes they would do as they wished; at other times they would rigidly follow orders. Sometimes they would do things in excess and at other times they would not give enough. There were even those who would abandon the roots and go in search of the branch tips. What should be in front, they placed at the rear; there was not one thing they did not do in violation of standards. In regards to morality and justice: if what they wrote was not what was in their hearts, how could they not encounter problems in the proposals they wrote?

So if the content of what was written was good, there could not be the situation where the written word was followed and implemented among the people, yet the result was bad. Two emperors and three kings implemented civilized laws in their administration over the people and received good results. Confucius and Mencius wrote the civilized laws into books and caused them to be put to good use. These are all sages; no matter what angle you see it from it is the same. When I was twelve years old I began my study, which lasted for fourteen years. Therefore, I also have ideas about what the sages called ‘writing’; however, I have yet to write these ideas into a book. Sometimes when there are issues that weigh on my heart I write them out in words; this is just to put myself at ease. Even supposing I allow my friends to read these
words, they are just crude ideas and narrow thinking; I do not dare to call them written compositions. At present you seek to instruct me and want to receive a sample of my writing. Although I understand my own level of ability, how can I dare [in the face of your request] to hide my imperfections? Here I have copied out certain pieces from the books, prefaces, official decrees of pardon and speeches that I have written. I will borrow this opportunity to write out my knowledge and hopes and send all of this along to you; I hope you will take a look.”

In Shang Ren Shu the terms *rong* 容, *wen* 文 and *ci* 辭 were used interchangeably. *Wen* was used in the cited maxim, “words which are not decorative will not travel far” 言之不文，行之不远, where it referred to stylistic or rhetorical writing.

Conversely, in “A Letter to Zu Ze” 與祖澤之書, Wang uses *wen* to mean the explicit

opposite of 『ci』: “Sometimes when there are issues that weigh on my heart I write them out in words; this is just to put myself at ease. Even supposing I allow my friends to read these words, they are just crude ideas and narrow thinking; I do not dare to call them compositions.” 间或然动於事而出於词，以警戒其躬，若施於友朋，褊迫陋庳，非敢谓之文也. This is consistent with the opening statement: “The policies and laws of an enlightened government are what the sages were referring to when they talked of compositions” 治教政令，聖人之所谓文也. In other texts Wang has mentioned the need for writing to make “suitability (for the transmission of Confucian values and policies) its base” 以适用为本. He has also asserted that “for those who are called writers, the task is simply to benefit society” 所谓文者,务为有补於世而已矣. This suggests that Wang’s reluctance to describe his own texts as wen implies that he sees them as unsuitable for the transmission of laws and Confucian values. Also, he is implying that his texts will not benefit the world. On the other hand this can be understood as a display of humility. Wang has cited Mencius and Confucius in this text, as well as others, which suggests that they were a primary influence on Wang’s thinking. From Meng Zi he learned the importance of duty, evident in his deference to Si Ma Guang and evident in this text in his show of humility. Duty was paramount in the eyes of Meng Zi as evident in the statement, “In regards to great men, it is not important that their words are honest or that their actions bring results; it is only important that they follow duty” 大人者,言不必信,行不必果,惟义所在. ‘Wen’, which can also be interpreted as ‘civility’, is in fact being demonstrated by Wang here through his show of humbleness. This is characteristic of Wang’s writing: when he is denouncing rhetoric, he is effectively
employing rhetoric; when he is denying his understanding of civility, he is actually
demonstrating his mastery of it.

Ci in this text has retained the meaning of stylistic or aesthetic writing and now
serves as the antithesis to the civility or instructive writing implied in wen. Although
rhetoric is described in pejorative terms, Wang artfully employs rhetoric throughout this
text. One example is the analogy, "there were even those who would abandon the roots
and go in search of the branch tips" 棄其本求之末. The roots refer to the teaching of the
sages, while the branch tips refers to problems or problematic teachings. The tree is a
perfect analogy since the root is the source or origin of the tree, while the branch tips is
the point of protuberance or least developed part of the tree. Rhetorical questioning is
also employed by Wang here: "If what they wrote was not what was in their hearts, how
could they not encounter problems in the proposals they wrote?" 彼其於道也，非心得之
也，其書之策也，獨能不悖耶？Here Wang is effectively stating, “Those who write
should do so from the heart”. The use of rhetoric is an attempt to seek confirmation from
the reader and strengthen Wang’s assertions about writing as a useful exercise. Wang’s
use of rhetoric and his emphasis on instructive writing in this text are conducive to his
assertions for the equal importance of both elements.
Chapter II - Poetry
Wang Anshi employs poetry for much the same reason as he employs prose: to assert the expediency of his reforms. As such, Wang’s poems display elements of both rhetoric and purposefulness. Depictions of strong emotions are often present as well, but Wang uses this as an element of rhetoric. Wang does not use poetry to specifically discuss the process of writing, but his views are evident through his choice of subject matter and his manner of citation. These qualities are evident in the text “Where Does Wine Fail to Be Forgotten? Two Poems” 何處難忘酒二首:

When is it hard to forget about wine?
When a hero has lost his purpose and will!
In the past the court has produced such immoral people as Wang Mang and Dong Zhuo, while talented men like Yi Yin and Zhou Gong Dan died of old age in the mountains. In the central plains excessive taxation and confiscation of wealth caused great difficulty among the populace.
People throughout the kingdom became anxious and took up arms.
Without a cup of wine at a time like this, how could one express their great aspirations and intentions?14

何處難忘酒? 英雄失志秋！
廟堂生莽，卓，巖，谷死伊，周。
賦敘中原因，干戈四海愁。
此時無一盞，難遣壯圖休！

This text is in the ‘Five Word Regulated Poem’ 五言律詩 form and its rhyming structure is revealed when read in certain dialects such as Cantonese (In Jyutping: cau 秋, zau 周, sau 愁, jau 休) 15. The rhetorical question at the opening of this text was borrowed from Bai Juyi’s poems of the same name. Wang has appropriated this text and taken it out of its original context: “When is it hard to forget about wine? / When living within the walls of a wealthy home admiring one’s children... / in the small courtyard relaxing on a swinging chair, / enjoying the music of piped and stringed instruments coming from the deep inner chambers” 16. 何處難忘酒，朱門羨少年... 小院迴羅綺，深房理管弦. While Bai Juyi’s text was a satire against the frivolity of the rich, Wang uses it here to propound the urgency of efficient recruitment. Wang Mang from the Western Han period, Zhou Gongdan from the Western Zhou and others are borrowed to illustrate the argument about suitable officials. The calamity described is a warning about the consequences if proper officials are not chosen. Finally, the assertion that wine is for “when a hero has lost his purpose and will” 英雄失志秋 is an attack on frivolity. Wang is asserting that those with “great aspirations and intentions” 壯圖 will find it difficult to forget wine when “people throughout the kingdom are filled with anxiety” 四海愁. In other words, problems of the country are the concern of those who are righteous. In contrast, ‘little people’ like Wang Mang are more concerned with personal


attainment. Wang Anshi is also propounding the necessity of financial reform here by stating that “In the central plains excessive taxation and confiscation of wealth caused great difficulty among the populace” 賦斂中原因. This method of “turning an essay into a poem” 以文為詩 is also evident in Wang’s “Seeing Off Wang Zhanshu, Transport Minister for the Roads of Li Zhou” 《送王詹叔利州運判》:

Young master Wang you have read five cartloads of books; you have held the official seal of the prefect at Shan Yang (Chu county).

You have not yet been promoted yet you are leaving the capital. You must travel to Li Zhou, take on the post of ‘Official in Charge of Transport’ and assist with the implementation of the ‘Distributed Transport Law’.

Since ancient times, talented individuals have been hard to find. One such as yourself who is the talk of the times can hardly be left unused for long! Go now and before long you will be on your way back to the capital to give your report. Do not lament over the rugged path ahead.

王孫舊讀五車書，手把山陽太守符。
未駕朱轕辭轅轅，卻分金節佐均輸。
人才自古常難得，時論如君豈久孤。
去去便看歸奏計，莫嗟行路有嶙峋。

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17 Wang Mang gained the trust of the Han emperor and then usurped the throne.
18 “wu che shu” 五車書 means ‘many books’ and is taken from “Confucius, All under heaven” 《莊子, 天下》
19 “Zhu Fan” 朱轕 is actually referring to the curtain which veils the rider of a palanquin; by extension Wang is referring to riding in such a palanquin (thus, having a high position)
This purpose of this text is to idealize one who is associated with the reforms. Wang Anshi’s descriptions of Wang Zhan Shu are intended to equate a reformer with the qualities of being well-read and accomplished. In stating that Zhan Shu has “not yet been promoted” 未駕朱轓 Wang is expressing his confidence in the success of the reforms. This is further expressed in the use of the informal “go go” 去去, intended to emphasize the brevity of Zhan Shu’s impending post (as consolation). Rhetoric in this text takes the familiar form of analogies and metaphors. Firstly, Wang uses the image of the bamboo tally 符節 in reference to high office, which in turn is a reference to Zhan Shu’s quality of character. Wang builds on this image with his reference to the metal envoy tally 金節. Next, Wang refers to the curtains of a palanquin 朱轓 to build on the image of a high officer. Finally, in his reference to the capital Wang uses the analogy of a cartwheel hub 輪轅; the idea here being that the capital is the hub all official activity in the kingdom. Like his prose texts 散文, Wang’s poetry contains a strong element of rhetoric. While rhetoric is generally important to the aesthetic value of poetry, in Wang’s poems it exists to facilitate the functional aspect of the text (advocating reform). Primarily this is done through analogy, as described above. Wang often “borrows material things to express his purpose and will” 託物言志. This is evident in “Solitary Tree” 《孤桐》:

“The parasol tree is naturally verdant and lush;
   it alone stands so immeasurably tall.
It reaches into the clouds and does not bend itself.

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20 Zhou, 1983. p113
It firmly grips the land yet at its roots is an empty heart.

With age it simply becomes stronger and more extensive.

Even the force of the blazing sun just causes the leaves to become darker.

In a period of political brilliance it agrees to be cut down and made into a five-stringed zither, in order to help the people dispel their grievances”

天質自森森，孤高幾百尋。

凌霄不屈己，得地本虛心。

歲老根彌壯，陽驕葉更陰。

明時思解愠，願斷五弦琴。

Wang’s choice of a tree, which stands upright and does not bend, is evidently an analogy for an upright officer. This is one whose “roots firmly grip the land yet [whose] heart is open” 得地本虛心. Wang believed in addressing the suffering of the common people and this is what he is referring to in, “roots firmly grip the land” 得地21. Open heart means both humbleness and open-mindedness. The former quality is displayed throughout Wang’s memorials, while the latter is contrary to Wang’s practice. Wang has frequently been criticized for his tenacity in pushing for reform, even to the extent of sacrificing friendships22. This perseverance is portrayed vividly in this poem: Wang asserts that with age the influence of upright officials “becomes stronger and more

21 ibid. p40. In the text, “Cu Zhi” 促織 Wang attacks those who seek personal attainment while ignoring the suffering of the common people.

This is a direct challenge to those who would hope for him to slow down in his later years. The same is evident in the assertion that the “blazing hot sun” causes such officials to become stronger (just as the sun causes “leaves to become darker”). Finally, Wang describes that he is willing to give himself fully to the effort of reform, just like a tree which is “cut down and made into a five-stringed instrument.” The period of political brilliance referred to here is a hypothetical situation in which Wang’s reforms are widely implemented. Thus, Wang is emphasizing a single-minded sense of mission toward the people, which would continue even after the successful establishment of his reforms. This is reminiscent of Wang’s professed commitment to “take on the world as one’s own personal mission.”

The final couplet of this text is drawn from Kong Zi Jia Yu Bian Le: “The legendary king Shun of antiquity played the five-stringed zither and created the southern style of poetry. It is said in his poems: ‘The pleasant warmth of southern style poetry; / it can dispel the grievances of my people. / In the period of southern style poetry; / the wealth of the people can increase.’” This text suggests a correlation between financial stability in the country and common enjoyment of poetry. Similarly, Wang’s description of a zither from the parasol tree ties music together with political prosperity.
In the text Ling Chuan Wang Wen Gong Ji Xu《臨川王文公集序》 it is described that Wang’s “conduct was outstanding, he was persistent in his aspirations and he excelled beyond riches and rank; never dwelling on a desire for even the slightest benefit. He was just as magnificent in old age as in youth. This is the type of person he was” 其行卓，其志堅，超超富貴之外，無一毫利慾之泊，少壯至老死如一，其為人如此

23. This description effectively clarifies the analogies made in Wang’s text. Wang’s strength in old age is like that of the parasol tree’s, while abstaining from personal desires is likened to a tree which will not become crooked. Thus, the function of the text is evidently to reflect Wang’s character (as an ideal) and to advocate reform. The latter is strongly evident in the text Shang Yang《商鞅》:

Since ancient times the people have been moved by trust;
one word has been more weighty than one hundred pieces of gold.
Today, people cannot casually deny the importance of Shang Yang.
Shang Yang could have every single law firmly executed

自古驅民在信誠，一言為重百金輕，
今人未可非商鞅，商鞅能令政必行。

Here Wang is attempting to argue for a correlation between trust of state (by the common people) and effectiveness of law. In doing such, Wang draws from the past in order to make assertions about the present 引古證今. In particular, Wang draws on the

23 Zhou, 1983, p114
reputation of Shang Yang who he argues “could have every single law firmly executed”

Shang Yang was a politician during the Warring States period (390-338 BCE), who was particularly influential during his nineteen years of service to the Qin kingdom. It is overtly ideal for Wang to compare himself to Shang Yang, which is in contrast to the humbleness that is advocated in “Solitary Tree” (through the term “xu xin” 虚心); however, the analogy is obvious since Shang Yang, like Wang Anshi, was best known for his reforms 商鞅變法. These reforms placed particular emphasis on military development and on the reduction of noble influence, both of which were aims of Wang Anshi’s reforms: The “General and Soldier Law” 將兵法 was designed for the selection of the most experienced officers, while similar laws like the “Protective Armor” policy 保甲 aimed at improving the defensive ‘readiness’ of the country. The Green Sprouts Law, while not its main aim, worked to significantly reduce the influence of the land-owning nobility. Wang also fought corruption in the court, which was a mainstay of the eunuchs in their dealings with merchants. Thus, in saying that people today should not casually ignore the importance of Shang Yang, Wang is warning against denial of his own reforms. Wang often criticized what he viewed as “drifting along” 苟且 and believed that people were in danger of trusting in a false sense of security.24

The functional aspect of the text is balanced by the hyperbole in the first line, which paints the trusted words of government as “more weighty than one hundred

24 In Bai Nian Wu Shi Zha Zi《百年無事札子》Wang implores the emperor to act upon the imminent threat of attack by the Liao to the north. The text criticizes the emperor’s solution of annual payments to the Liao. The emperor believes this will avert conflict, but Wang advocates the strengthening of the military in preparation for a northern campaign.
The use of such vivid imagery is evidence of the importance of reform to Wang. Wang believed that simply having strict laws was not enough, people must see those laws enacted in order to have confidence in them.

Wang’s later poems shed the satirical element that was so pervasive in his earlier poetic works. In these later texts Wang focused increasingly on descriptive content which expressed his state of mind, often borrowing objects in his environment to facilitate this expression. The text Qi《棋》(chess) effectively describes his mindset at this later stage in his life:

“Do not allow your feelings to be affected by the game; it’s just a matter of luck to say, ‘I win’. After the competition is over and the black and white pieces are put away, where on the board is there any indication of a win or a loss?”

莫將戲事擾真情，且可隨緣使我贏。
戰罷兩鬬收黑白，一枰何處有虧成。25

The first thing of note is that Wang’s unrelenting drive for reform, portrayed almost universally in his earlier texts, has been replaced here by a more moderate attitude. Talking about chess, this text emphasizes acceptance of one’s successes and failures. When the game is over there is no lingering success or defeat. Therefore, one should not become too emotionally entangled in the game. Therefore, Wang makes moves

25 Zhou, 1975. p171
very quickly, seeing little consequence in a ‘wrong’ move. In his text “Dun Qi Xian Lan” 範正敏 describes that during a game of chess Wang “did not think long, his motions were quick and when it appeared that he would lose, he turned it around” 未嘗致思，隨手疾應，覺其勢將敗，便斂之. He further describes that the nature of chess “originally was suited to forgetting one’s worries, but now it has become a bout of tiresome concentration” 本圖適性忘慮，反苦思勞神. Because Wang is able to enjoy the game without investing in it emotionally he is a successful player.

Speaking on the issue of success and failure, Zhuang Zi Qi Wu Lun《莊子齊物論》 says “If you have not committed to success, then you will not have the disappointment of ruining your moral obligations” 無立言之“成”，亦無毀“道”之“虧”也. Put another way, this text explains that, “That which diminishes the moral way is that which completes coveting. Can the way be both success and failure? Can the way be neither success nor failure?” 道之所以虧，愛之所以成。果且有成與虧乎哉？果且無成與虧乎哉. Relating this back to Wang’s text, one can see that Wang could not ‘fail’ at chess because he was not ‘committed to success’. Rather, Wang responded to a win with a simple statement “I’ve won”. Similarly, a loss warrants nothing more than acknowledgement. His ‘love’ of chess allowed him to dispel his worries through the game, as it was meant to be played.

Though the advocacy of reform is not the aim of this text, functionality is still an integral component. Speaking on the issue of chess, Wang effectively implores the reader to separate competition from personal emotion. There is also the obvious
connotation of the loss in chess symbolizing the failure of the reform process. This text is written after Wang’s retirement from office, after which the process of reversing his reforms began. In an effort of self-appeasement, Wang emphasizes the irrelevance of success or loss in political endeavors. Wang uses the poem’s abundant imagery to facilitate this discussion: war 戰 as a synonym for competition, a wooden case 堆 where pieces are neatly packed away (and thus forgotten), the colors black and white 黑白 to denote both sides of the competition and the chessboard 棋 as the political arena or even the country itself, all serve to draw the reader in. As mentioned above, many of Wang’s later poetic works rely heavily on such imagery, steering away from satirical rhetoric. This is the case with Vine Leaf《藕葉》:

The reed thrives in clear, shallow water.
The apricot blossoms in the warm wind of spring.
In a land so remote as this, why does the reed still turn so green?
I am so old, dear apricot, for whom are you so red?

蒲葉清淺水，杏花和暖風。
地偏緣底綠？人老為誰紅？

In this text Wang is describing the vastness of the country and the persistence of life in remote places. Even far from the capital the reeds are green and the apricots red. Wang’s questioning of these vibrant plants suggests a sense of self-doubt. In asking,

26 Zhou, 1983. p201
“for whom are you so red?” 為誰紅 Wang is suggesting that good acts will go unnoticed in such a remote place. The color red is often used to denote beauty and can be found in several of Wang’s texts: “many thanks to the punica flower, for blossoming and showing its red pistil to all” 多謝安石榴，向人紅蕊拆《老景》; “red sunflowers and purple amaranths fill my eyes over and over” 紅葵紫苋復滿眼《光宅寺》, “red and green fills / my eyes when suddenly a sweet fragrance fills the air” 紅綠紛在眼，流芳與時競《獨臥有懷》，etc. In Vine Leaf the vibrant red and green described are analogous to the qualities of a virtuous official, which Wang believes are wasted in the type of remote place described. Compare the tone of this poem with “Solitary Tree” in which Wang had asserted that “even the force of the blazing sun just causes the leaves to become darker” 陽驕葉更陰. In that poem Wang displayed great confidence in the face of adversity. Conversely in “Vine Leaf”, Wang is shown to be overcome by old age and his accompanying withdrawal from politics. Yet, this poem is also functional on the superficial level. In describing that there is life found everywhere, Wang is imploring the emperor to be benevolent and consider all of his subjects in his policies. Many of Wang’s reforms directly affected citizens in remote areas, such as: the Bao Jia 保甲 system with its militarization of the family unit; the Green Sprouts Law 青苗法, which promoted government subsidized loans for farmers at the peripheries; the Market Ease law 市易法 which regulated market prices for commodities and so on. Wang hoped

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that the reversal of these reforms would not cause great hardship for these people.

Wang’s concern with the people of the peripheries is evident in “Retainers” 《兼並》:

During the three dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou, all people were taken to be the children of the emperor.

There was no distinction between private and public property.

The emperor arrogated power to himself, like Polaris which brings those around it into its orbit. The finances of the nation were all under the control of the emperor, while the retainers were considered deceitful.

The punishment for this deceit was decapitation, so this behavior could not manifest. After the Qin and Han dynasties the situation began to reverse;

The people thus became hard to control. Qin Shi Huang did not understand this situation and built a podium in honor of the widow Huai Qing. The rites of and morals of the three dynasties have become more and more diluted by the day; the classics of the sages have been buried in the soil. Although the laws used to suppress the retainers in ancient times are still kept in the records, if they were advocated today they would be ridiculed. The common official does not understand how to govern the nation;

if they are good at plundering they are already considered to be talented. The common Confucianist does not understand reform;

they believe the retainers need not be sanctioned. The avenues for attaining wealth are innumerable
and lowly men are opportunistic. As corrupt officials and merchants compete for personal attainment, the people grow ever more pitiful.

三代子百姓，公私無異財。
人主擅操柄，如天持鬥魁。
賦予皆自我，兼並乃奸回。
奸回法有誅，勢亦無自來。
後世始倒持，黔首遂難裁。
秦王不知此，更築懷清台。
禮義日已偷，聖經久堙埃。
法尚有存者，欲言時所吿。
俗吏不知方，掊克乃為材；
俗儒不知變，兼並可無摧。
利孔至百出，小人私闢開。
有司與之爭，民愈可憐哉！

As the title makes obvious, this text is a discourse on the Green Sprouts Law through which Wang sought to suppress the retainers 兼並. The first phrase draws from historical example to effectively summarize Wang’s vision: “During the three dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou, all people were taken to be the children of the emperor. There

28 Guang, 1975. p208
was no distinction between private and public property.” 王氏子百姓，公私無異財. Wang believed that freeing the people from subsistence living would encourage them to be more productive. This would benefit both commoners and the court. In contrast, Sima Guang and others believed that there should be a strict separation between court and commoner. Wang is specifically attacking this mindset by describing the commoners as “the children of the emperor”. Yet, Wang also reiterates the primacy of the emperor by describing that he “arrogates all power to himself” 人主擅操柄. This is intended directly as an attack on the retainers, which is clarified below: “the retainers were considered deceitful. The punishment for this deceit was decapitation, so this behavior could not manifest.” 兼並乃奸回。奸回法有誅，勢亦無自來. Wang is suggesting here that retainers must be dealt with strictly, proving this through historical reference. The consequence of not doing so, Wang warns, is that “the people thus become hard to control” 黔首遂難裁. Wang’s description of a divergence from tradition is intended to propound the need for reform: “The rites of and morals of the three dynasties have become more and more diluted by the day; the classics of the sages have been buried in the soil” 禮義日已偷，聖經久堙埃.

Wang further suggests that this loss of ritual has manifested in the corruption of officials: “The common official does not understand how to govern the nation; if they are good at plundering they are already considered to be talented.” 俗吏不知方，掊克乃為材. This is also evident in the line, “the avenues for attaining wealth are innumerable and lowly men are opportunistic. As corrupt officials and merchants compete for personal attainment, the people grow ever more pitiful.” 利孔至百出，小人私闢開。
Here Wang seeks to advance the urgency of reform, suggesting an immediate threat from corrupt individuals. Reference to the three dynasties of Shang, Xia and Zhou, as well as the use of analogous imagery are combined in this text to increase the effectiveness of Wang’s promotion of the Green Sprouts Law. This is evident in Wang’s reference to the masses as “those with black hair” 黑首, his comparison of the emperor’s hold on power with the orbit of Polaris 如天持 and his use of the Huai Qing podium as symbolic of Qin Shi Huang’s support for the retainers. Wang used this imagery to advance the rhetorical aspect of this text, creating an element of prose writing within this poem. This focus on reform extended beyond just politics to a concern over the mentality of the people in general. Wang believed the country’s failures were due to a false sense of security and a failure of the people to recognize the need for reform. “For Conferment Upon Gentleman Chen Jingchu” 《贈陳景初》, Wang discusses the need to have individuals as talented as the physician Chen Jingchu 陳景初 who can lead the country out of its situation:

I have experienced great surprise at the skill of Hua Tuo,

he really knows how to make skillful incisions.

with great effectiveness he applies his plaster,

and in an instant the fallen patient is cured.

Before I had only heard rumors but now I believe it to be true;

there really is this type of medical prowess in this world.

The solemn Chen Jingchu from Ying Chuan,

can find the source of even the most obscure illness.
Using a precious pill he can restore the health of his patient,
expelling the parasitic worm from the body through excretion and vomiting.

Those paralyzed for four or five years,
can be made to walk after his employment of acupuncture.

If one has nothing in common with him,
even large gifts of gold cannot move his heart.

He also can write poetry;
he often writes exquisite pieces.

Hi brush moves quickly across the paper;
he seems to have received the tutelage of a god.

His name is known even in the capital,
yet he prefers to remain amongst the masses in obscurity.

Whenever he meets with others he gives a long hoot;
whenever he meets with wine his mouth is covered.

Why be the only one who does not partake of wine?
In this way is it not difficult to find others to get along with you?

It seems he is not one who intentionally avoids the world;
perhaps he is like Sun Bo: one who has had profound tutelage.

How can we obtain this man’s skill
and put it to work in handling the country?

吾嘗奇華佗，腸胃真割剖。
神膏既敷之，頃刻活殘朽。
昔聞今則信，絕技世常有。
In this text Wang holds up the doctor Chen Jingchu as an ideal to which officials should aspire, even comparing him to the legendary doctor Hua Tuo from San Guo Zhi.

The hyperbolical descriptions of Chen are intended to assist the analogy between good doctor and good official. This is evident in the statements: “His name is known even in the capital, yet he prefers to remain amongst the masses in obscurity” 名聲動京洛，蹤跡晦長莠，在 which he is propounding humility; “those paralyzed for four or five years, can be made to walk again by him through acupuncture” 攀足四五，下針使之走, which emphasizes the importance of talent; and “he seems to have received the

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29 Guang, 1975. p223
tutelage of a god" in which he is advocating profound scholarship. The last statement is reiterated in the conjecture, “perhaps he is like Sun Bo: one who has had profound tutelage.” This is also consistent with Wang’s education reforms that sought to replace rote memorization with insightful contemplation. With the same purpose in mind, Chen is also described as one who does not consume wine and one who is not concerned with material wealth. Wang dispels any confusion about the purpose of this text in the final line: “How can we obtain this man’s skill and put it to use in handling the country?” The primary aim of this text is thus to promote the hiring of talented officials, a concern Wang describes explicitly in his texts Ren Cai and Wan Yan Shu. Wang recognizes the challenges of reform in the rhetorical questions, “Why be the only one who does not partake of wine? In this way is it not difficult to find others to get along with you?” Wang is emphasizing that Chen does what is righteous, even in the face of adversity. This is reminiscent of the statement, “Do not lament over the rugged path ahead” found in the poem Song Wang Zhan Shu Li Zhou Lu Yun Pan. Essentially Wang is imploring the reader not to be discouraged by the challenges which are an inevitable part of reform.

Just as in Wang’s other poems, expressive imagery forms an important part of the rhetoric in this text. Wang refers to the masses as “herbs and weeds” essentially painting them as wild, numerous and without cultivation. Similarly, the image of plaster
allows the reader to envision Hua Tuo’s treatment of patients. Similarly Wang refers to material wealth as “immeasurable amounts of gold” 萬金. The most vivid imagery in this text however, is the description of “excretion and vomiting” 泄嘔 of the “parasitic worm” 蠕蟲 from the body of a patient. Wang has borrowed this image from San Guo Zhi Hua Tuo Zhuan《三國志華佗傳》 in which Hua Tuo cured a prefect magistrate: “He spit out a worm of approximately three liters. It’s whole body including head was moving; half of its body was filled with raw minced fish” 吐出三升許蟲，亦頭皆動，半身是生魚蠕也30. Wang is using the parasite here as an analogy for corruption. Corrupt officials, eunuchs and retainers are like parasites in Wang’s view. Wang hopes that reform-minded individuals will be like a “precious pill” that can expel the corrupt from their positions.

Primarily “To Be Conferred Upon the Gentleman Chen Jingchu” is intended to be a portrayal of an ideal to which officials should aspire. Wang often draws upon contemporary or historical figures in this manner to assist the effectiveness of his rhetoric. While at times this is intended to evoke the image of an ideal as described above, at other times it is for the purpose of describing the relentless sacrifice and suffering of the people. Wang’s “The Cautious County Road Repairman” 《慎縣修路者》 employs the image of a road worker for both purposes:

After three years of industrious effort,

the workers have finally created a prosperous village.

What is the purpose of the workers’ spirit?

To help solve the problem [of the road], which worries the village official.

The industriousness of the workers is not without contribution.

Yet, do they not have any needs in their hearts?

These ten years I have thought of nothing but food [and salary];

now seeing you workers today I feel ashamed.

翟築今三歲，康莊始一修。

何言野人意，能助令君憂。

戮力非無補，論心豈有求。

十年空志食，因汝起予羞。31

The road worker in this text exemplifies the model citizen from a Confucian perspective. The workers labor away to “solve the problem of… the village official” 能助令君憂 and do so without any requirements. The concern of the workers is entirely selfless, aimed at the village’s prosperity. Wang uses the term ‘savage people’ 野人 in this text to ridicule Meng Ke who has described commoners in this way; however, this does not describe Wang’s own perspective. On the contrary, Wang’s impression of these workers is so profound that he describes being ‘ashamed’ 羞 in their presence because he personally has not been so selfless. In the past ten years, he explains, he

has “thought of nothing but food [and salary]” 十年空志食. In this last description Wang is actually referring to those officials who are concerned only with personal gain, contrasting them with the road workers. This text plays heavily on the idiom “healthy village, large avenue” 康庄大道, which is generally understood to mean “a large road leading to prosperity”. The road in this text is thus figurative, referring to collective, selfless effort, which will lead to common prosperity.

Throughout Wang’s collection of poetic works Wang consistently incorporates both an aesthetic element and a functional element. Seemingly disconnected imagery such as apricot blossoms, chess pieces and Polaris can all be shown to have relevance to Wang’s discourse on politics. Though the functional aspect of writing is not explicitly referred to in these texts, it is implicit through the use of rhetoric. The aesthetic element on the other hand is inseparable from the poetic form. In his text Shang Ren Shu 《上人書》Wang describes both the ‘exterior’ 容 and the ‘foundation’ 本 as equally important to the writing process. In that text Wang was discussing the act of writing compositions 文章, though it is evident that Wang follows the same logic in writing poetry. This is especially clear in texts such as Shang Yang 《商鞅》and “To Be Conferred Upon the Gentleman Chen Jingchu”《贈陳君景初》, which read more or less like handbooks for officials; telling them what type of behavior they should seek to emulate. Wang’s later poems appear to lack much of the drive evident in his earlier works; Vine Leaf 《蒲葉》and Qi 《棋》for example describe a recognition of one’s losses and old age. Yet even in this context there is an element of functionality present in the text: Vine Leaf
implores the reader to consider remote citizens when making policies, while Qi advocates emotional detachment from competition. Wang’s writing in the poetic form is thus consistent with his prose: containing a decorative ‘exterior’ that facilitates transmission of a functional ‘foundation’.
Chapter III - Letters and Articles
Wang often complained that the necessity of reforms and the immediacy of the threat to the court went unnoticed. An enquiry from the emperor gave Wang the opportunity to speak at length about this problem, which became the theme of “A Letter on the One Hundred Uneventful Years of this Dynasty” Ben Chao Bai Nian Wu Shi Zha Zi 《本朝百年無事劄子》. In effect Wang is arguing that the apathy generated by a quiet history has in itself become a threat. He fears that the court is woefully unprepared for the inevitability of dynastic decline. This text follows a previous conversation between Wang An Shi and emperor Shen Zong in the fourth month of the first year of Xi Ning 熙寧元年四月 (1068). As Wang An Shi was acting as personal servant to the emperor he was asked to explain the reason for such an uneventful one hundred years. This text is his reply to that enquiry. The full text is below:

Last time I had the good favor of being asked by your majesty why, in the hundred years since the establishment of this court, the kingdom has had peace and nothing of consequence has happened. My knowledge is superficial and I [regret that] I have disappointed your majesty by not answering your question. At that time the day was running short and I did not dare stay too long. Without giving you a detailed explanation I departed. I felt that the people of this kingdom are fortunate that your majesty has asked this question, yet I have not made even one word of a contribution. This is not consistent with the proper method of the emperor’s personal servant. So for this reason I dare to take the liberty of writing a letter to roughly explain my view.

I personally feel that Tai Zu had great wisdom and unique understanding. Also, he understood what is true and false about the affairs of men. Therefore, when directing people he could use them to their greatest potential. When implementing measures he could apply actions
which were most suitable to the needs of the time. For this reason he could command generals and train soldiers. He resisted invasion of foreign intruders from the outside and brought separatist influences to rest on the inside. He also cancelled exorbitant taxes and prohibited cruel punishments. He prevented local generals from running amuck and dealt with cruel and corrupt officials. Furthermore, he led a frugal life and acted as a standard for the people to follow. In making orders he followed what was stable and what would benefit the people as a standard. Tai Zong used great wisdom to continue the enterprise of Tai Zu. Zhen Zong after him was very benevolent and succeeded in defending his territory. All the way to Ren Zong and Ying Zong there were no great losses. This is the reason that in this one hundred years the people of this kingdom have lived in peace and nothing of great consequence has happened.

Ren Zong held his reign for the longest [of those emperors]; during that time I was his personal servant. I fully witnessed the implementation [of his policies] from start to end. I will attempt to explain the details to your majesty, so that your majesty can carefully choose what to implement in the present. I personally believe that as an emperor Ren Zong showed deference toward both heaven and the people. He was very benevolent and frugal, which came to him completely naturally. He was also very loyal and sincere; the same from start to end. He never initiated any absurd projects and didn’t arbitrarily kill men. In meting punishment he spared the lives of criminals as much as possible and used the harshest measures against corrupt and cruel officials. He preferred to accept personal grievance and send money to the Xi Xia and Liao, rather than sending troops. His punishments were fair and reasonable; his awards to inferiors were generous and trust in him was great. He employed imperial censors and took advice from all sides; he paid no heed to one sided or slanderous talk. Furthermore, he trusted the advice of the common people and employed talented officials from far off places. When dealing with recommended officials, he used the same measures against those who recommended them. Basically, from the level of the supervisory board all the way to the
common county official, no one dared to be tyrannical or to benefit themselves at the expense of the people. After the Xi Xia swore allegiance there was no big change from any of the other minorities. Thus, the people of the periphery were spared the horrors of war and the people of the hinterland were able to rest and build up strength; this is how it has been until the present. This has been the result of Ren Zong never initiating any absurd projects, never arbitrarily killing men; in meting punishment, sparing the lives of criminals as much as possible and using the harshest measures against corrupt and cruel officials; preferring to accept personal grievance and sending money to the Xi Xia and Liao, rather than sending troops. High officials were trustworthy; nobody dared to be tyrannical or violate the law. All were cautious in their actions and practiced self-discipline. There were some who even surpassed the common people [in their behavior]. This is the result of fair and unreasonable laws. The valorous, brutal and treacherous men of the kingdom were recruited to be soldiers, totaling near one million in all. There was no great general to lead them, yet those who were conspiring to commit treason were always defeated. All of the wealth of the nation was collected and though there was an account book, which was given to a small officer to manage, there was no one delegated to appraise the records. Yet those who engaged in corruption or thievery were always exposed. During years of famine refugees filled the streets and corpses were piled up on the roadside. Yet those who committed murder and robbery were always caught. This is the result that generous awards and trust brings. High officials [thus] were trustworthy; nobody dared to act without restraint or abuse their power; or to widely accept bribes. As soon as treacherous behavior occurred, there was immediately someone who would report it. As for crafty individuals with insatiable greed, although they would sometimes find themselves employed it would never be for long. This is the result of employing the advice of imperial censors, listening to the opinions of all sides and not heeding slanderous or deceitful comments. From county magistrates and capital officials to high level supervisory officers, all were given assignments.
Though not all were competent in their posts, within a short amount of time there were very talented men who wear buried away and not put to use. This is the result of trusting the people, using talented officials from far off, and dealing with recommended officials and those who recommend them in the same way. On the day Ren Zong passed away the whole country wept bitterly, as if losing their own parents. This is the result of his affable benevolence, his courteousness and his frugality, which all came naturally to him; as well as his loyal and sincere essence, which remained unchanged from start to end.

However, in past courts the bad customs of the previous generation have been followed; and friends and relatives have not criticized the officials. The people who the emperor spent time with have been nothing more than women and officials. When the emperor came out to handle affairs it was always small issues of relevant departments; not like the responsible emperors of ancient times who talked about the politics of early kings and how to implement them at present. Everything followed the natural course of things; self motivated effort was inadequate and there were no investigations to ensure conformity between titles and results. It is not that past emperors were not respected, but villainous men could find their way into his company. It is not that correct advice was not used, but sometimes vicious speech and confuting theories would be heeded. Poetry and memorization were used to select all the officials of the kingdom; yet there was no school established to train men in laws and government. The state examinations and the records of qualifications and service were used to separate officials by rank, yet there was no method of appraising their office. The Supervisory Board did not have an investigator and the garrison commander did not go through a selection officer. The reassignment of officers was so frequent that it was hard to investigate their performance. Thus, those who liked to exaggerate could do nothing and remain undetected. Of those who privately formed factions to get prestige, most gained prestigious government positions and did not rely on others. Conversely, those who were utterly loyal faced opposition
and restraint. Therefore, officials of all levels were indolent and preferred only to discuss promotion. Although there were capable officials employed, they were also no different from the masses. Farmers were bitterly engaged in all types of forced labor, yet they did not receive economic relief from the government; there also was no specific department setup for the construction of irrigation and water conservation [systems]. The ranks of soldiers were diluted with the old and sick; yet there was no reorganization or training. There was also no powerful general chosen for their leadership, to allow them to hold long-term military power. The capital guards collected vagabonds and wretches and did not change the bad habits they relied on for five generations. There was a lack of proper methods of educating, training and selecting people of the Imperial clan. As for the management of the nation’s finances, for the most part there were no laws; therefore, although the emperor was very frugal the people were also not wealthy. Though the people were always worried and exerted great effort, the country did not become strong and prosperous. Fortunately this was not a time when foreign enemies were strong and prosperous; or the time of Yao or Tang when there were floods and droughts. Therefore, the kingdom has been peaceful for over one hundred years. Though this is through the effort of people, it is also the result of the blessing of the heavens. The former emperors of this court, one after another, have all: respected the heavens above, respected the people below, been generous and benevolent, been courteous and frugal and been loyal and sincere. This is the reason they have received the blessing of the heavens.

I believe your majesty is naturally endowed with intelligence and has thus continued the endless imperial line. Your majesty knows that the blessing of the heavens cannot be relied upon for a long time, knows that the affairs of men cannot be carelessly delayed forever. Thus, now is your time for action. I do not dare to give up my responsibilities as an official, in order to escape the punishment for violating regulations. I respectfully request that your majesty absolve
me of my affront and carefully consider my advice. That would be the great fortune of the
common people.  [In regards to my advice] make a ruling after you have listened

臣前蒙陛下問及本朝所以享國百年、天下無事之故。臣以淺陋，誤承聖問，迫於日暮，不敢久留，語不及悉，遂辭而退。竊惟念聖問及此，天下之福，而臣遂無一言之獻，非近臣所以事君之義，故敢昧冒而直有所陳。

伏惟太祖躬上智獨見之明，而周知人物之情偽，指揮付託必盡其材，變置施設必當其務。故能駕馭將帥，訓齊士卒，外以扞夷狄，內以平中國。於是除苛賦，止虐刑，廢強橫之藩鎮，誅貪殘之官吏，躬以簡儉為天下先。其於出政發令之間，一以安利元元為事。太宗承之以聽武，真宗守之以謙仁，以至仁宗、英宗，無有逸德。此所以享國百年而天下無事也。

仁宗在位，歷年最久。臣於時賓備從官，施為本末，臣所親見。嘗試為陛下陳其一二，而陛下詳擇其可，亦足以申鑒於方今。伏惟仁宗之為君也，仰畏天，俯畏人，寬仁恭儉，出於自然。而忠恕誠懇，終始如一，未嘗妄興一役，未嘗妄殺一人，斷獄務在生之，而特惡吏之殘虐。寧屈己棄財於夷狄，而終不忍加兵。刑平而公，賞重而信。納用諫官御史，公聽並觀，而不蔽於偏至之讎。因任眾人耳目，拔舉疏遠，而隨之以相坐之法。蓋監司之吏以至州縣，無敢暴虐殘酷，擅有調發，以傷百姓。自夏人順服，蠻夷遂無大變，邊人父子夫婦，得免於兵死，而中國之人，安逸蕃息，以至今日者，未嘗妄興一役，未嘗妄殺一人，斷獄務在生之，而特惡吏之殘虐，寧屈已棄財於夷狄而不忍加兵之效也。大臣貴戚、左右近習，莫敢強橫犯法，其自重慎或甚於閨巷之人。此刑平而公之效也。蓋天下騁雄橫猾以為兵，幾至百萬，非有良將以御之，而謀變者輾敗。聚天下財物，雖有文籍，委之府史，非有能吏以甄考，而斷盜者輾發。凶年飢荒，流者填道，死者相枕，而寇攘者輾得。此賞重而信之效也。大臣貴戚、左右近習，莫能大攘威福，廣私
貨赂，一有奸慝，隨輒上聞。貪邪橫猾，雖間或見用，未嘗得久。此納用諫官、御史，公聽並觀，而不蔽於偏至之讒之效也。自縣令京官以至監司台閥，升擢之任，雖不皆得人，然一時之所謂才士，亦罕蔽塞而不見收舉者。此因任眾人之耳目，拔舉疏遠而隨之以相坐之法之效也。升遐之日，天下號慟，如喪考妣，此寛仁恭儉出於自然，忠恕誠懇，終始如一之效也。

然本朝累世因循末俗之弊，而無親友群臣之議。人君朝夕與處，不過宦官女子，出而視事，又不過有司之細故，未曾如古大有為之君，與學士大夫討論先王之法以措之天下也。一切因任自然之理勢，而精神之運有所不加，名實之間有所不察。君子非不見貴，然小人亦得厕其間。正論非不見容，然邪說亦有時而用。以詩賦記誦求天下之士，而無學校養成之法。以科名資歷敘朝廷之位，而無官司課試之方。監司無檢察之人，守將非選擇之吏。轉徙之亟既難於考績，而游談之眾因得以亂真。交私養望者多得顯官，獨立營職者或見排沮。故上下偷惰取容而已。雖有能者在職，亦無以異於庸人。農民頓於繇役，而未嘗特見救恤，又不為之設官，以修其水土之利。兵士傷於疲老，而未嘗申敕訓練，又不為之擇將，而久其疆場之權。宿衛則聚卒伍無賴之人，而未有以變五代姑息豢養之俗。宗室則無教訓選舉之實，而未有以合先王親疏隆殺之宜。其於理財，大抵無法，故雖儉約而民不富，雖憂勤而國不強。賴非夷狄番蠻之時，又無煬、湯水旱之變，故天下無事，過於百年。雖曰人事，亦天助也。蓋累聖相繼，仰畏天，俯畏人，寛仁恭儉，忠恕誠懇，此所以獲天助也。

伏惟陛下躬上聖之質，承無窮之緒，知天助之不可常恃，知人事之不可怠終，則大有為之時，正在今日。臣不敢貳廢“將明”之義，而苟逃諱忌之誅。伏惟陛下幸赦而留神，則天下之福也。取進止。
In this letter, Wang An Shi intended to convince the emperor to adopt reforms, borrowing from the emperor’s enquiry to facilitate his arguments. In discussing the emperor Ren Zong, Wang states that, “I fully witnessed the implementation [of his policies] from start to end. I will attempt to explain the details to your majesty, so that your majesty can carefully choose what to implement in the present” 施為本末，臣所親見。嘗試為陛下陳其一二，而陛下詳擇其可，亦足以申鑒於方今. Wang reiterates this intention in the final line of the text: “[In regards to my advice] make a ruling after you have listened” 取進止. Wang balances his candidness here with several statements of humility. To begin with, at the beginning of the text Wang humbles himself saying, “my knowledge is superficial and I have disappointed your majesty by not answering your question” 臣以淺陋，誤承聖問. Similarly, Wang concludes by saying, “I do not dare to give up my responsibilities as an official, in order to escape the punishment for violating regulations. I respectfully request that your majesty absolve me of my affront and carefully consider my advice. That would be the great fortune of the common people.” 臣不敢輟廢“將明”之義，而苟逃諱忌之誅。伏惟陛下幸赦而留神，則天下之福也. Wang’s wording here is an attempt to assert his reform ideas without being overly aggressive, which would be a violation of duty. At the same time, Wang feels that not telling the emperor would also be a violation of his responsibilities as an official. In Ye Meng De’s 葉夢得 Shi Lin Yan Yu《石林燕語》it says that “scholars, are the private [servants] of the emperor” 學士，天子私人也. The scholars referred to here are specifically those of the Imperial Hanlin academy. Scholars at this institution were the best in the country and served the court directly. Primarily, Hanlin scholars were responsible for the
interpretation of texts and performing secretarial tasks for the emperor. Specifically because “Hanlin scholars had the identity of being the emperor’s confidential secretaries, they were viewed by the emperor as his ‘own men’. Therefore, during the late Tang period when the influence of officials grew, the emperor often relied on them to deal with the officials.” 翰林学士具有皇帝机要秘书的身份，被天子视为“私人”，因此，在唐后期宦官势力膨胀的情况下，皇帝时常依靠他们来对付宦官32. As Wang himself was a Hanlin scholar, he would have felt a great sense of responsibility to the emperor. Since Wang so strongly believed in the necessity of reform, he sincerely felt a responsibility to implore the emperor to adopt his ideas.

It is very typical for Wang to ‘draw from the past to prove [arguments about] the present’ 借古喻今33. In Ben Chao Bai Nian Wu Shi Zha Zi this forms the majority of the discourse. Drawing from historical examples is really necessary in this text since Wang is discussing the history of the current regime; nevertheless, Wang uses this historical narrative in a rhetorical way to serve his arguments about reform. This is evident almost from the start of the letter, as Wang goes directly into a description of Tai Zu (the first emperor of the current dynasty), whom Shen Zong is expected to take as an example. The descriptions of Tai Zu’s policies match almost perfectly with many of Wang’s reform laws: Wang’s argument that “when directing people he could use them to their greatest potential” 指揮付託必盡其材 is really an extension of Wang’s education system reforms 改革教育制度. It was Wang’s intention to revise the state examination system;

thereupon he hoped to place successful graduates into long-term posts that most closely matched their ability. When Wang describes that “he could command generals and train soldiers. He resisted invasion of foreign intruders from the outside and brought separatist influences to rest on the inside” 故能駕馭將帥，訓齊士卒，外以扞夷狄，內以平中國, he is really describing the need for his military based reforms. Wang’s Generals and Soldiers law 將兵法 and his Protective Armor law 保甲法 had the respective aims of strengthening the ranks of the military and having an internal security network. Finally, Wang’s mention that, “he cancelled exorbitant taxes and prohibited cruel punishments” was intended to propound the necessity of his Regional Field Fair Tax law 方田均稅法. This law sought to suppress corrupt officials and collect taxes based on the productivity of the land.

Although Wang’s intentions in praising Tai Zu were very specific, he did not arbitrarily assign qualities to the emperor and rather based them on historical facts. In the History of Song 宋史 it describes that Tai Zu, “served the interests of farmers and allowed education to thrive. He was cautious in meting punishment, showing slight restraint. He was at peace with the world” 務農興學，慎罰薄斂，與世休息. This suggests that Tai Zu aimed his policies at the benefit of the people and that he was a popular ruler as a result. The History of Song also explains that, “since the time of the five dynasties (907-960), there were frequent audits of the land by which land taxes had been set. Because officials were villainous, taxes were unfair. As a result, the common people lost their livelihoods. Fields were filled with uncultivated vegetation. The emperor was filled with grief over this and decreed that it be ended; he allowed the people to
develop the land. Amongst all the provinces and counties, there were none that were
required to be examined. Thereby the practice of setting taxes based on audits of land
tenants was ended”

This account further emphasizes the attention of the emperor toward the people.
Furthermore, Tai Zu's tax reforms are specifically described here, suggesting a shift
from the traditional feudalist model, which ultimately relied on the labor of the vassals, to
a more egalitarian system described above whereby the productivity of the land was
considered.

Wang describes emperor Ren Zong in a similar way to Tai Zu. His statement that
“Ren Zong held his reign for the longest [of those emperors]” suggests that Ren Zong
was the most successful of the Song emperors (and thus can serve as the best
example). Wang’s assertion that “Ren Zong showed deference toward both the heavens
and the people” 仰畏天，俯畏人 portrays Wang’s influence by the writings of Mencius
孟子. Mencius believed in the importance of the people to the state, even allowing for
regicide if a ruler was despotic34. Wang’s involvement with the “moral life study” clique
and his promotion of the works of Mencius are evident in his Shi Yi 《詩義》, Shu Yi 《書
義》 and Zhou Li Yi 《周禮義》; collectively known as San Jing Xin Yi 《三經新義》 or
Jing Gong Xin Xue 荊公新學. Wang’s description of Ren Zong’s deference toward the
heavens and the people is thus intended to portray him as a moral and benevolent ruler.

Wang’s knowledge of Ren Zong is described as first-hand (“during that time I was his personal servant” 臣於時實備從官); however, his claims are mirrored by statements in Lun Yu Ji Shi《論語－季氏》: “The emperor had three fears; he feared the command of the heavens, he feared those of older generations and he feared the words of wise men” 君子有三畏；畏天命，畏大人，畏聖人之言. Wang’s hope was for Shen Zong to similarly show deference to the common people, which would foster support for those reforms which would specifically empower the people. Wang’s Green Sprouts law for example would raise the level of land tenants at the expense of the retainers. Similarly, caps on commodity prices would reduce the pressure on peasants at the expense of powerful merchants.

Other qualities that Wang attributes to Ren Zong are similarly intended to describe him as a benevolent ruler (and thus, one to be emulated). Wang’s description of Ren Zong as ‘frugal’ 儉 is mirrored in the History of Song, which states that, “Ren Zong was reverent and frugal, benevolent and merciful; this came from his natural character” 仁宗恭儉仁恕，出於天性《宋史－仁宗本紀贊》. Furthermore, Wang’s claim that Ren Zong, “never initiated a single absurd project” 未嘗妄興一役 is confirmed in Dong Du Shi Lue Ben Ji Liu 《東都事略－本紀六》: Ren Zong “locked himself up in the imperial garden, without starting any projects. The foreign trade department requested to decorate the garden with jade and have it be used exclusively by the king. The king responded, ‘the former emperors before me used this garden and it seems

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spacious enough, why have it [decorated] as a private garden?”

Finally, it is described in the History of Song that in the first year of Jing You (景佑元年, 1043) Ren Zong decreed that “all provincial and county officials must not sentence criminals to death and must memorialize their judgements and have them heard” 州縣官非理科決罪人至死者，並奏聽裁. Invariably Wang’s reforms all went back to the issue of human resources. His works such as Zhi Ren Nan 知人難 and Ren Cai 人才 point to the need for proper training and selection, as well as fostering trust amongst officials. In describing Ren Zong as a benevolent leader, Wang comes to the conclusion that a great level of trust existed amongst officials in Ren Zong’s time.

The issue of trust in the state is the culmination of Wang’s arguments about Ren Zong and he proceeds to discuss this in great depth. The several examples Wang provides appear to be fictitious, but the same examples are found in several histories of the Song. For example, the History of Song states that, “in the middle years of Qing Li the there were one million two hundred and fifty thousand troops in the imperial guard. Since the beginning of the dynasty that was the highest number” 慶歷中外禁廬軍總一百二十五萬，視國初為最多《宋史－兵志一》. Wang’s argument is that although the troops that filled these ranks were “people who were of a fierce nature and with a wild heart... tyrannical and deceitful people”勇猛而有野心的人物... 強橫奸詐的人 and though "there was no great general to lead them, yet those who were conspiring to commit
treason were always defeated” 非有良將以御之，而謀變者輒敗. Similarly, Wang’s claims about the restraint of thieves during famine are evidenced in Shu 書, where it states that “none dared to rob or snatch” 無敢寇攘《書－費誓》. Furthermore, the association of robbing with ‘snatching’ comes from Shi 《詩》 where it is written that, “to rob is to get by looting. If one is dead then it is called snatching” 寇，劫取也。因其失亡日攘《詩－大雅－蕩》38. The image of ‘mounting corpses’ 死者相枕 thus is an extrapolation, drawing from the idea that nobody ‘snatched’ (though there was apparently a situation where they could have). The image Wang invokes of corpses resulting from famine is similar to the flood he describes occurring during the time of Yao 堯. Here Wang is describing a fictional account, though one that is well known in Chinese folklore. Shang Shu《尚書》records that, “huge amounts of water surrounded the mountains of Xiang Ling; the great mass of water brought monstrous waves” 蕩蕩懷山襄陵，浩浩滔天《尚書－(Collision)－堯典》39. Wang pairs his description of flooding with that of equally disastrous drought during the time of Tang 湯. According to Yin Shu《殷書》, “during the time of Tang there were five years of drought”.

Wang’s use of this graphic imagery is intended to evoke a sense of threat to the stability of the court. This is evident in Wang’s statement about the lack of laws and wealth in the earlier years of the Song: "fortunately this was not a time when foreign enemies were strong and prosperous; or the time of Yao or Tang when there were

floods and droughts" 燕非夷狄昌熾之時，又無壊，湯水旱之變. Essentially Wang is asserting that, should the enemy become strong or there suddenly be floods, drought or some other disaster, the Song would be brought to an end. In Wang’s mind, the root of the problem lies in the court’s improper training and use of officials. This is emphasized in Wang’s claim that in past courts, "poetry and memorization were used to select all the officials of the kingdom; yet there was no school established to train men in laws" 以詩賦記誦求天下之士，而無學校養成之法 (this argument is developed in much greater depth in Shang Ren Zong Huang Di Yan Shi Shu 《上仁宗皇帝言事書》). Wang also discusses the consequences of not reforming, describing that "the reassignment of officers was so frequent that it was hard to investigate their performance. Thus, those who liked to exaggerate could do nothing and remain undetected. Of those who privately formed factions to get prestige, most gained prestigious government positions and did not rely on others. Conversely, those who were utterly loyal faced opposition and restraint. Therefore, officials of all levels were indolent and preferred only to discuss promotion" 轉徙之亟既難於考績，而游談之眾因得以亂真。交私養望者多得顯官，獨立營職者或見排沮。故上下偷惰取容而已. Wang then concludes by stating that the former emperors have all, "respected the heavens above, respected the people below, been generous and benevolent, been courteous and frugal and been loyal and sincere. This is the reason they have received the blessing of the heavens" 仰畏天，俯畏人，寛仁恭儉，忠恕誠懇，此其所以獲天助也. However, Wang also acknowledges that man’s efforts are important and says of the emperor, "your majesty knows that the blessing of
the heavens cannot be relied upon for a long time, knows that the affairs of men cannot
be carelessly delayed forever." 知天助之不可常恃，知人事之不可怠終。Wang is
essentially imploring the emperor to be benevolent as a basic element of successful rule
and advocating reform on the other hand to ensure the long-term stability of the court.
Wang hopes to convince the emperor of this through semi-threatening language. At the
same time Wang recognizes the danger in using such threatening and candid speech
and so balances this with humility and praise for the emperor: "I believe your majesty is
naturally endowed with intelligence and has thus continued the endless imperial line" 伏
惟陛下躬上聖之質，承無窮之緒。

This text is a prototypical example of Wang’s writing style, which balances both
function and rhetoric. As a Hanlin scholar Wang had direct access to the emperor and
used this advantage for productive discourse. Thus, Wang attempted to write in a
convincing manner, rather than in a purely satirical manner in the way that Han Yu did
(one of Wang’s influences before him). The rhetorical aspect of this text is manifest in
the use of graphic imagery (corpses, floods, brutal and treacherous soldiers), historical
narrative (which forms the majority of the text) and repetition. Repetition is often used
after the lengthy descriptions of each emperor. Each time Wang lists off innumerable,
positive qualities of an emperor, follows this with examples of how that emperor’s reign
was good (usually describing the trustworthiness of the officials) and then concludes
with a reiteration of that emperor’s positive qualities: "this has been the result of Ren
Zong never initiating any absurd projects, never arbitrarily killing men; In meting
punishment, sparing the lives of criminals as much as possible and using the harshest
measures against corrupt and cruel officials; preferring to accept personal grievance
and sending money to the Xi Xia and Liao, rather than sending troops. This imagery and repetition then serve to increase the effectiveness of Wang’s argument for reform (the functional aspect of the text).

In propounding ideas about reform Wang often encountered opposition from other officials. One dominant idea in the court at the time was that of “governing without action.” Wang was opposed to this mindset, seeing it as a misunderstanding of Daoist ideas and believing it to be an excuse for indolence. Wang’s redefinition of those related Daoist concepts form the basis of his text, Lao Zi 《老子》:

In `The Way` there is the basic way and the specific way. The basic way comes from the birth of all things; the specific way comes from the creation of all things. The basic way comes from nature and so does not rely on the effort of men to be born. The specific way is related to specific things and so relies on the effort of men for the birth of all things. The sages of course cannot discuss and cannot act on `the way` which relies on the effort of men for the creation of all things. Therefore, in ancient times those who held high positions used four methods for the governing of all things; these are: ritual, music, punishment and politics. The sages were dedicated to governing all things and did not discuss the root of things. Because the birth of all things is controlled by nature, it is not for man to intervene.

Laozi did not think in this way. He felt that specific things related to human society were not worth discussing, not worth doing. Therefore, he rejected ritual, music, punishments and politics and only talked of one `Way`. This is his mistake [caused by] blindly seeking profound [understanding] and his inability to see things clearly. The basic way is from nature; what need is
there to intervene in it? It is simply because the specific way is related to specific things in
human society that it relies on men to discuss it, to `do` it. The text Laozi says, `thirty spokes
collect on the hub of a wheel. In the middle there is a hole for the axle. Only with these things
can the vehicle be useful`. Because of the hub and the spokes the car may be made useful. The
reason undoubtedly is due to the empty axle hole in the middle of the hub. However, when the
artisan was creating the wheel he did not exert any effort on the axle hole, because the axle
hole takes shape naturally; the artisan need not be concerned with it. Even today when artisans
construct vehicles, they will only construct the hub and the spokes and will not put any wasted
energy into the empty space of the axle hole. However, the assembly of the vehicle relies on the
hub and the spokes being already prepared; in this way the axle hole will naturally have use. If
one only knows the use of the axle hole and does not build the hub and spokes, this method of
constructing a car is too odd.

Today it is only known that the axle hole is useful to the car, only known that inaction is
useful to society; however it is not known why these things are useful. In fact, the empty space
of the axle hole is only useful because of the hub and spokes; Inaction is only useful to society
because there is ritual, music, punishment and politics. If one constructs a car and gets rid of
the hub and spokes, or governs the nation and gets rid of ritual, music, punishment and politics,
 vainly seeking the usefulness of inaction; this is really near to stupidity.

道有本有末。本者，萬物之所以生也；末者，萬物之所以成也。本者，出之自然而，故不假
乎人之力而萬物以生也；末者，涉乎形器，故待人力而後萬物以成也。夫其不假人之力而萬物以
生，則是聖人可以無言也，無為也；至乎有待於人力而萬物以成，則是聖人之所以不能無言也，
無為也。故昔聖人之在上而以萬物為己任者必制四術焉。四術者，禮，樂，刑，政是也，所以成
Wang’s description of ‘The Way’ (Dao, 道) is centered around the image of the wheel with its hub, spokes and axle hole. This comes from chapter eleven of the text The Classic of the Way and Virtue《道德經》, also known simply as Lao Zi《老子》. Wang ties this text’s description of the usefulness of the axle hole’s empty space to the concept of ‘governing through inaction’ 無為而治. The original reference in Lao Zi uses even more examples to propound the concept of ‘usefulness in emptiness’:

Thirty spokes will converge
In the hub of a wheel;
But the use of the cart  
Will depend on the part  
Of the hub that is void.

With a wall all around  
A clay bowl is molded;  
But the use of the bowl  
Will depend on the part  
Of the bowl that is void.

Cut out windows and doors  
In the house as you build;  
But the use of the house  
Will depend on the space  
In the walls that is void.

So advantage is had  
From whatever is there;  
But usefulness rises  
From whatever is not.

三十辐，共一毂，當其無，有車之用。
埏埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。
鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。
Wang’s argument is that while usefulness exists in the ‘void’ of inaction, this ‘inaction’ cannot be useful without the other aspects of governing (ritual, music, punishment and politics). This is Wang’s own extrapolation from the meaning of Laozi’s text, since there is no mention of the reliance of windows and doors on the house, or the reliance of the axle hole on the hub. Nevertheless, Wang posits that, “the empty space of the axle hole is only useful because of the hub and spokes” 故無之所以為車用者，以有轂幅也. Wang’s acknowledges the natural origin of the axle hole by describing that, “when artisans construct vehicles, they will only construct the hub and the spokes and will not put any wasted energy into the empty space of the axle hole” 然工之琢削未嘗及於無者，蓋無出於自然之力. This is an extension of Wang’s description of the ‘basic way’: "the basic way comes from nature and so does not rely on the effort of men to be born" 本者，出之自然，故不假乎人之力而萬物以生也. Other texts describe ‘The Way’ similarly. In the Zhuang Zi《莊子》it is written that, "without life there can be no death, without death there can be no life. Is there an end to life and death? All things are of the same body. Were there things before the heavens and the Earth? All things are not things. If things appeared, there could be no earlier things. It appears there are things, it appears there are things; this is endless" 不以生生死，不以死死生。死生有待耶？皆有所一體。有‘先天地生’者物耶？物物者非物。物出，不得先物也。猶其有物也，猶其有物

In this understanding, void space and material things are both inseparable parts of the same whole. All things exist only as impermanent concepts, so there is no need to make a distinction between the space (such as the axle hole) and what surrounds the space (such as the hub and spokes). This is the basis for Wang's understanding of the usefulness of void space. Also, in Wang Bi's 王弼 Lao Zi Zhu 《老子注》 it is written that "The Way is nature, all things are born of it" 道者天也，萬物之所自生. This is the same as Wang's explanation of the 'basic way', which does not rely on the effort of men for the creation of things. Wang emphasizes this in the question, "the basic way is from nature; what need is there to intervene in it?" 夫道之自然者，又何預乎.

However, Wang makes an important distinction between the 'basic way' 本者 and the 'specific way' 末者. The latter, he argues, "is related to specific things and so relies on the effort of men for the birth of all things" 涉乎形器，故待人力而後萬物以成也. This distinction is important to Wang's argument for the necessity of reform, which requires the effort of men (as opposed the contemporary trend of 'governing through inaction' 無為而治). Wang even goes as far as to criticize Laozi for failing to recognize such a distinction: "Laozi did not think in this way. He felt that specific things related to human society were not worth discussing, not worth doing. Therefore, he rejected ritual, music, punishments and politics and only talked of one 'Way'. This is his mistake [caused by] blindly seeking profound [understanding] and his inability to see things clearly" 老子者獨不然，以為涉乎形器者皆不足言也，不足為也，故抵去禮，樂，刑，政而唯道之稱焉。是
In this way, Wang seeks to appropriate Laozi’s discussions on ‘The Way’ for use in his own argument. Wang’s use of rhetoric in this text is primarily centered around the imagery of the wheel (with its ‘void’ axle hole) and some rhetorical statements. For example in asking, “the basic way is from nature; what need is there to intervene in it?” 夫道之自然者，又何預乎, Wang’s intention is to prove his discussion of two ‘Ways’; one in which men interfere and one in which they don’t. By proving two ‘Ways’ (or two aspects of one Way) Wang infers that men should act at certain times and refrain from acting at other times. He argues that this is the reason for ritual, music, punishment and politics as essential aspects of governing. He then reiterates this argument by candidly stating that, “if one constructs a car and gets rid of the hub and spokes, or governs the nation and gets rid of ritual, music, punishment and politics, vainly seeking the usefulness of inaction; this is really near to stupidity” 如其廢轆軸於車，廢禮，樂，刑，政於天下，而坐求其無之為用也，則亦近於愚矣. Both the image of the wheel (with its association to inaction) and the argument that inaction alone is ‘stupid’, serve to support Wang’s argument for action (reform) and simultaneously to make his text more appealing.

Just as Lao Zi is a critique of ‘governing through inaction’, Wang’s Tai Gu《太古》is a protest against the thinking of his political opponents 新法反對派. This composition, written in the third year of Xi Ning (熙寧三年, 1070), is one of the more well known of Wang’s short compositions:
The people of far off ancient times were not very different from animals. The sages despised this situation. Thereupon they created ritual and music to distinguish people from animals. Afterward in later generations, people were quick to adopt luxurious clothing, the palace was made grand and majestic, men full-heartedly chased sensual pleasures. This caused disturbance in society to the point that between emperor and official, father and son, older and younger brother and husband and wife, there was a loss of the respect that should exist in these relationships. Justice and humanity had no influence on their personalities. Ritual and music could not imprison their desires; punishment could not restrain their evil conduct. There was no order left to society; people once again became like animals. The sages did not emerge and the benighted people did not know of any method to enlighten the populace; conversely, they dragged society back to ancient times. If the methods of ancient times could be applied forever, why did the sages invent ritual and music? It was simply because the methods of ancient times could not be used that ritual and music were created. If there was no desire to drag society back to ancient times, then how is separating men` s society from that of animals and then returning it to a place among animals, helpful in educating the populace? I thought that when those whose job it is to govern speak, it should be for the purpose of enlightening [the people]. As for that type of discourse that would have society return to the state of ancient times, if it is not stupidity then it is lies.
Wang’s comparison of those who pursue extravagance and personal desire with animals effectively describes his opposition to self-serving behavior. Though Wang does not specifically use the word ‘officials’ in this text, it is implied through the statement, “I thought that when those whose job it is to govern speak, it should be for the purpose of enlightening [the people]” that Wang is specifically referring to the behavior of officials. Also, Wang specifically states that, “the palace was made grand and majestic”, which serves to clarify that he is specifically referring to officials at the capital. Wang’s description of ritual and music as components of civilized government are reminiscent of a similar argument in Lao Zi: "in ancient times those who held high positions used four methods for the governing of all things; these are: ritual, music, punishment and politics". Just as in that composition Wang describes that one who “governs the nation and gets rid of ritual, music, punishment and politics, vainly seeking the usefulness of inaction... is really near to stupidity” in Tai Gu Wang also describes that if one “would have society return to the state of ancient times, if it is not stupidity then it is lies”. In both cases Wang is equating music and ritual with civilization. Since Wang associates the selfish pursuit of desires with a decline in
civilization, this suggests that in a civilized society officials will focus only on ritual and not pursue their own interests. However, Wang also asserts of officials that after the decline of civilization began, “ritual and music could not imprison their desires; punishment could not restrain their evil conduct” 禮樂不足錶其情，刑政不足繞其惡. Wang believes that people must be trained to adopt ritual practices, which is evident in his comment, “The sages did not emerge and the benighted people did not know of any method to enlighten the populace” 聖人不作，昧者不識所以化之之術. Wang’s assertions about education suggests that the function of this text is to promote his education and testing reforms. His argument is made effective by the imagery of animals, extravagant clothing and a grand and majestic palace, as well as his assertion that the persistence of ancient practice is equivalent to stupidity.
Chapter IV - Epitaphs
Epitaphs 墓誌銘, funeral orations 祭文 and other related texts, which are inherently specific in purpose, are nevertheless used by Wang An Shi for the same purpose as other types of writing: to support his reform ideas. To this end, Wang employs rhetorical and stylistic writing throughout these texts. In most cases, Wang emphasizes qualities about the deceased that support his reform agenda. Furthermore, Wang writes epitaphs specifically for those who support his reforms and thus, have built a strong relationship with him. In this way, epitaphs perform two important functions for Wang: on the one hand they allow him to commemorate individuals who he feels were of a high quality of character or with whom he was otherwise very close; and on the other hand they provide him with another avenue for promoting reform and righteous behavior. The text Bao Wen Ge Dai Zhi Chang Gong Mu Biao《寶文閣待制常公墓表》“embodies the special commentary-like quality of Wang An Shi’s epitaphs” 體現了王安石墓誌銘長於議論的特色⁴¹. Written in the tenth year of Xi Ning (熙寧十年, 1077), this text was written for Chang Zhi 常秩, a close friend of Wang An Shi and a supporter of his political policies:

For the senior official Chang of the position of Imperial Censor, stationed at the Chamber of Imperial Texts; who passed away in the second month of the tenth year of Xi Ning, and who will be buried in the fifth month of this year; Wang An Shi of Lin Chuan has written: ‘In study and government, Official Chang did not aim to receive high praise. His only aim was to be upright in his handling of affairs. When he conducted himself in society he did not aim to be famous, he

only sought to conform to his conceptions of morality and justice. He did not take anything and
could make a greedy person restrain themselves; nor was this excessive embellishment for the
purpose of appearing honest. Anything he did not do, could cause a weak man to depend on
himself; nor was this being rigid on the pretext of appearing brave. When given a position he did
not take it; when invited to the capital he did not go. There were people who said: "he is
definitely a person who lives in seclusion, he’s just been like this whole life". Then, upon
receiving a courteous invitation from the current emperor he accepted. Thereupon, the emperor
was happy about his arrival, humbly requesting his consultation. He was allowed to take the
position of Imperial Censor, so that the emperor could see how he would enlighten him. He was
allowed to supervise imperial studies, to see how he would train scholars. What Official Chang
said to the emperor was not circulated; however, people knew that what he said was sincere
and not mere flattery. The grace he bestowed upon his subordinates did not help anyone;
however, people viewed him as being upright and not just drifting along. In Poems《詩》it says,
"why not keep [him] forever?". Unfortunately, he got sick and upon returning home he died.
From the time the ritual of the Zhou dynasty was buried, what scholars have sought has always
been what they like at the current moment. Violating the customs of the time and satisfying
one’s own desires, doing things on their own and being different from the rest. Ah! How wise
and able was Official Chang! The recorded facts of Official Chang must be kept forever, they
cannot compare with stone inscriptions. A stone can be eroded away; it can also become
cracked. To say that Official Chang will also decay away and be extinguished, this is an
impossible thing'.
The title, which specifically mentions Chang’s position, is intended to emphasize his professional character. According to the Records of Officials in the History of Song 《宋史．職官志》, when Ying Zong took the throne (1063) he had Ren Zong’s texts collected and stored in a chamber. Four years later, when Shen Zong came to power he added Ying Zong’s works to the Chamber of Imperial Texts, had officials appointed to the position of Attendant 待制 and had them stationed in the Chamber. Attendants were below the position of Scholar 學士, but still quite important, given their responsibility as consultants for the imperial collection. The History of Song describes that their position was comparable to the attendants of the Dragon Pictures Chamber, where paintings and other valuable artifacts from the imperial collection were stored. Although as Wang describes, “In study and government, [Official Chang] did not aim to receive high praise” 公學不期言也, nevertheless his position was one of significance, as the History of Song makes evident. By writing Chang’s position into the title of this text, he is emphasizing the degree of his achievement. This is further emphasized by
Chang’s acceptance of “a courteous invitation from the current emperor” 今天子所禮 and the assertion that “the emperor was happy about his arrival, humbly requesting his consultation” 天子悅其至，虛己而問焉.

Wang’s description of Chang refusing offers of positions is reflected in scroll two hundred five of Chang Bian, which states that, “in the sixth month of the second year of Zhi Ping (治平二年, 1065), Chang Zhi who had tested for the position of Jiang Zuo Guan Zhu Bo 將作監主簿, was recommended by the administrator of the ‘Loyal and Fierce Army’ 忠武軍節度 for the position of county magistrate... the order was sent but Chang gave up the position and did not go” 治平二年（1065年）六月，試將作監主簿常秩為忠武軍節度使推官，知長社縣... 命下，秩辭不赴《長編》. In this way Wang portrays Chang Zhi as a righteous individual, one who does not seek personal benefit (though he is proven as able to attain it). His high quality of character is proven by the emperor summoning him to the capital. This is even further emphasized by the emperor’s show of humility toward Chang, as well as his happiness at Chang’s arrival. In the History of Song it is written, “in the tenth month (during winter) of the fourth year of Zhi Ping (治平四年, 1067), a summons was sent to the county level to Chang Zhi of the position ‘Jiang Zuo Jian Zhu Bo’” 治平四年，冬十月，詔將作監主簿常秩赴闕《宋史－神宗本紀》. Elsewhere this text elaborates: “After Shen Zong came to the throne, three attempts at employment [of Chang] were refused. In the third year of Xi Ning (熙寧三年, 1070), a very courteous request was sent to the county level, to which Chang Zhi’s refusal was not heard. The next year he arrived at the court” 神宗即位, 三使往聘辭。熙寧三年, 託
The emperor’s persistence in drawing Chang Zhi to the court is evidence of his value to the emperor, which Wang has shown in his argument by emphasizing the politeness of the emperor’s request. In particular, the emperor gave Chang Zhi the high responsibility of teaching the court scholars, as emphasized in Chang Bian: “In the fourth month (during Summer) of the fourth year of Xi Ning (熙寧四年, 1071), Chang Zhi of the position Jiang Zuo Jian 將作監 took the position of You Zheng Yan 右正言. Those of talent were collected into the school and he became the administrator of the Imperial College”.

As described, Wang’s epitaphs have two functional aims: commemorating the deceased and promoting reform. Toward both aims, Wang provides various evidence of Chang Zhi’s high character. This is particularly facilitated by the image of a stone and its erosion: “The recorded facts of Official Chang must be kept forever, they cannot compare with stone inscriptions. A stone can be eroded away; it can also become cracked. To say that Official Chang will also decay away and be extinguished, this is an impossible thing” 傳載公久，莫如以石。石可磨也，亦可泐也，謂公且朽，不可得也. Wang is attempting here to describe Chang as an example that should be followed throughout time, thus emphasizing that the aim of this epitaph goes beyond its commemorative aspect. The use of such a metaphor also serves to improve the readability of this text and displays the ‘commentary-like’ quality of Wang’s writings in this form. Similarly, Wang’s descriptions of “weak men coming to depend on themselves” 所不為也，可使弱者立焉 and the “burial of Zhou dynasty rituals” 自周道闕 also add the rhetorical imagery of this text and thus, serve to improve its effectiveness.
Wang’s text Gei Shi Zhong Zeng Shang Shu Gong Bu Shi Lang Kong Gong Mu Zhi Ming 《給事中贈尚書工部侍郎孔公墓誌銘》provides another example of using an epitaph to elevate an individual as an example to emulate. Written in the seventh year of Jia You (嘉祐七年, 1062), this is Wang’s first epitaph and shows that his ‘commentary-like’ style existed from this beginning stage. The subject of this epitaph is the official Kong Dao Fu 孔道輔, who was exiled for his candidness in discussing political matters. Wang extols Kong on account of this candidness:

A high official who was hired by the court has deceased. Among his responsibilities were; magistracy of Yun county as well responsibility for military affairs of the county and rights over the banks of inner rivers. He had advised that farming and herding be combined under the same office. After the emperor gained an army and after the country was established by [the assistance of] Lu county, there were one thousand, six hundred homes under control of the court, two hundred units directly accessible to the court. The emperor bestowed a violet and gold fish pouch upon Official Kong; who is the son of Kong Xu, the vice minister of the Ministry of Public Works mentioned in Shang Shu 《尚書》; grandson of Kong Ren Yu, county magistrate in Qu Fu county, Yan Zhou; and great grandson of Kong Guang Si, civil official in Si Shui county, Yan Zhou. Also, Official Kong is a forty fifth generation grandson of Confucius.

He was an official under the reign of Emperor Ren Zong during the years of Bao Yuan, and through his qualities of strong persistence and natural honesty became well known throughout the country. He was once employed in the Office of Censorship, where he wrote a letter requesting the Queen Mother Ming Su to give control of the government back to the emperor. He also exposed the crimes of high official Cao Li Yong (of the rank Shu Mi Shi 柯密
and official Luo Chong Xun (who was in charge of the emperor’s medicine). At the time, Luo
had a great deal of influence and often did business with the literati. Cao was tyrannical,
completely unreasonable and was feared inside and outside the court. Kong once held the
position of Assistant to Imperial Officers 御史中丞. Empress Guo was expelled, after which Kong
led the imperial officials in protest. They hid away in the cabinet arguing this and requested an
audience with the emperor, though it was not granted. Yet, he persisted in arguing this matter,
until at the very end he offended the emperor. These are basically the facts of Kong`s servitude
to the emperor. This is the reason that he became well known throughout the country, the
reason so many officials were finished before ever reaching high positions. It is why the whole
country feels such pity [over his death].

Official Kong`s name is Dao Fu, his style is Yuan Lu. At the beginning he passed the civil
service exams, attaining the rank of Jin Shi, and so gained the command of military affairs in
Ning Zhou. Although he was very young, in his ability to judge cases and discuss matters he
shocked those much older than him. Thereupon he rose to the rank of Assistant Criminal Law
Officer 大理寺丞, stationed in Xian Yuan county of Yan Zhou; he once again gained a reputation
as a capable official. After this, he held the positions of Direct Officer 直吏館, attendant of the
Dragon Picture Chamber 待制龍圖閣, judge of the financial departments for cases lacking
evidence 判三司理欠憑由司, the court of hearing investigations 登聞檢院, the department of
selecting internal officials 吏部流內銓, investigation of punishments and imprisonment in the
capital 給察在京刑獄 and he was stationed in the five states of Xu, Xu, Yan, Yun and Tai before
staying in Nanjing. Also, his posts in Yan Zhou, Yun Zhou and the position of Assistant to
Imperial Officers he all took again. During his time in office, because he was persistent in
fulfilling the needs of his post and did not resort to flattery, at times he was demoted and at other
times promoted. He persisted in his moral integrity until his death, never once did he submit.

While he was in Yan Zhou, there was an intimate minister of the emperor`s who submitted
one hundred poems to the throne. The acting officials requested that the emperor give him a
post as a scholar in the Chamber of Dragon Pictures. The emperor replied, `Although these
poems are so numerous, yet they cannot compare to even one statement of Kong`s`; he then
chose Kong as a scholar in the Chamber of Dragon Pictures. Thereupon there were people who
guessed that he missed the emperor and would not remain posted outside for long. Then,
before long had passed he really was called back and he was posted as Assistant to Officers.
The prime minister sent people to advise him to slightly change his rigid moral integrity in
preparation for promotion; he did not send any reply. Thereupon there were people who
guessed that he could not remain in a central position for long and in the end he really did leave
the court. In the beginning, when the Kai Feng official Feng Shi Yuan entered prison he wrote
texts implicating many high level officials. Therefore, his case got moved to the desk of the
imperial officials. They judged his only crime as being an accomplice and requested many times
that he be pardoned. Kong then went to see the emperor. The emperor was under the
impression that Feng had tried to use his status as a small officer to conspire with high officials
and tarnish the court; thus, these were the crimes he should punished for. He believed Kong
was being too lenient and sent him to a post in Yun Zhou.

In the second year of Bao Yuan (1040), Kong travelled to Yun Zhou and got sick on the
way. In the twelfth month of that year he died in the relay station outside of Hua Zhou; he was
fifty four years old at the time of death. After this, the emperor requested that Empress Guo
have her title returned to her. Among the emperor`s intimate ministers there were those who
talked to the emperor about the affairs of Kong during the time of Queen Mother Ming Su. The
emperor also remembered the details of Kong`s life, so he specially conferred the [posthumous]
title of Vice Minister of Public Works upon him. His wife was from Jin Cheng county and had the surname Shang; she was the daughter of Shang Bin of the position Assistant Imperial Consultant in the department of Shang Shu. She had two sons; one named Tao, who was of the position Assistant Imperial Consultant in the Office of Farmland Reclamation in the Shang Shu department, and one named Zong Han, who held the rank of Court Academician in Charge of Land and Grain God Rituals. Both were well achieved officers, able to continue the family enterprise. Many times Kong was bestowed with the titles Senior Officer in Charge of Administering the Salaries of Honored Officials and Vice Minister of Military Affairs in the department of Shang Shu, also, his burial was arranged for the tenth month of the seventh year of Jia You, with the coffin to be buried one hundred steps to the southeast of Confucius` tomb.

Kong was not greedy for material things, rather he was happy to bestow relief [upon others]. When he met the son of his old friend he was especially sincere and graceful. Also, he did not believe superstitiously in ghosts and spirits; did not pray for blessings and fortune, this type of thing. When he was in Ning Zhou there were Daoists repairing the statues of the seven gods of the northern sky. A snake passed in front of the statues. It appeared many times and came close to the people; the people believed it was a spirit of the gods. A state official went to check and confirm [that this was true], so that he could prepare a report for the emperor. He led some subordinates and made a visit and the snake appeared. From hereon Kong started to become well known in the world. Kong took the court scepter at once and attacked the snake, killing it. From the state official down to the lowest official, all were shocked and became pale; however, I saw Kong discuss important affairs in the court several times. Regarding fortune and misfortune he never added personal choice; his bravery and wisdom went beyond other people.
What is there about the defeat of one bewitched snake that is worth bringing up? [However,] the people of this world always commend Kong for this, so I cannot leave it out.

On the tombstone it reads: Indeed, Official Kong considered and pursued only the ideal. His path had both pitfalls and smooth stretches, yet he did not change his direction. The rich and powerful were jealous of him and hated him. Those who [rely on] false flattery were hostile toward him. He died naturally as a person of high position and high salary. The emperor liked his honesty and uprightness, so he bestowed rank and nobility upon him. The order and details of his conduct have been laid out in his epitaph for the records in the nether world.

宋故朝請大夫，給事中，知鄭州軍州事，兼管內河堤勤農同群牧使，上護軍，魯郡開國候，食邑一千六百戶，賜紫金魚袋孔公者，尚書工部侍郎，贈尚書吏部侍郎諱曷之子，兗州曲阜縣令，襲封文宣公，贈兵部尚書諱仁玉之孫，兗州泗水縣主薄諱光嗣之曾孫而孔子之四十五世孫也。

其仕當今天子天聖，寶元之間，以剛毅諌直名聞天下。曾知諫院矣，上書請明肅太后歸政天子，而廷奏樞密使曹利用，上御藥羅崇勳罪狀。當是時，崇勳操權利，與士大夫為市；而利用恆強不遜，內外憤之。嘗為御史中丞矣，皇后敦氏廢，引諫官，御史伏閣以爭，又求見上，皆不許，而固爭之，得罪然後已。蓋公事君之大節如此。此其所以名聞天下，而士大夫多以公不終於大位，為天下惜者也。

公諱道輔，字原魯。初以進士釋褐，補寧州軍事推官。年少耳，然斷獄議事，已能使老吏憚驚。遂遷大理寺丞，知兗州仙源縣事，又有能名。其後嘗知縣事，待制龍圖閣，判三司理欠倉由司，登聞檢院，吏部流內銓，糾察在京刑獄，知許，徐，兗，郓，泰五州，留守南京。而竟，
郫，御史中丞皆再至。所至官治，數以爭職不阿，或謁或遷，而公持一節以終身，蓋未嘗自詰也。

其在兗州也，近臣有獻詩百篇者，執政請除龍圖閣直學士。上曰：“是詩雖多，不如孔某一言”。乃以公為龍圖閣直學士。於是人度公為上所思，且不久於外矣。未幾果復召，以為中丞。而宰相使人說公稍折節以待遷，公乃告以不能。於是又度公且不得久居中，而公果出。初，開封府吏馮士元坐獄，語連大臣數人，故移其獄御史。御史劾士元罪止於杖，又多更赦。公見上，上固怪士元以小吏與大臣交私，時朝廷，而所坐如此，而執政又以謂公為大臣遴地，故出知郫州。

公以寶元二年如郫，道得疾，以十二月壬申，卒於滑州之韋城驛，享年五十四。其後詔追復郫皇后位號，而近臣有為上言公明肅太后時事者。上亦記公平生所為，故特贈公尚書工部侍郎。公夫人金城郡君尚氏，尚書都官員外郎諱賓之女。生二男子，曰淘，今為尚書屯田員外郎，曰宗翰，今為太常博士，皆有行治，世其家。累贈公金紫光祿大夫，尚書兵部侍郎，而以嘉祐七年十月壬寅，葬公孔子墓之西南百步。

公廉於財，樂振施，遇故人子，恩厚尤篤，而尤不好鬼神禨祥事。在寧州，道士治真武像，有蛇穿其前，數出近人，人傳以為神。州將欲視驗以聞，故率其屬往拜之，而蛇果出。公即舉笏擊蛇殺之，自州將以下皆大驚，已而又皆大服。公由此始知名。然余觀公數處朝廷大議，視禍福無所擇，其智勇有過人者，勝一蛇之妖，何足道哉？世多以此稱公者，故余亦不得而略也。

銘曰：展也孔公，維志之求。行有險夷，不改其軌。權彊所忌，紛詔所翼。考終厥位，寵祿優優。維皇好直，是錫公休。序行納銘，為識諸幽。42

42 Wang An Gong Wen Ji. Shanghai: Shanghai Ren Min Chu Ban She, 1974. p932.
In arguing for the quality of Kong’s character, Wang employs numerous examples of the emperor’s benevolence toward him. The most vivid image among these examples is that of the ‘violet and gold fish pouch’ 紫金魚袋. Fish pouches were used during the Tang and Song period as a sign of the emperor’s trust in an official. Aside from this, any gift from the emperor was taken as representative of the emperor himself. Thus, the value of such a gift was in its symbolic meaning; wherever Kong wore this bag he would be sure to command great respect. Beyond this, the color of the pouch itself held significance. In the History of Song it is described that, “Song followed the system of the Tang dynasty: officials of class three or higher wore violet garments, those of class five or higher wore red, those of class seven or higher wore green and those of class nine or higher wore blue” 宋因唐制，三品以上服紫，五品以上服朱，七品以上服緑，九品以上服青《宋史－服制》. Thus, a pouch of violet and gold from the emperor would identify Kong as an official of the highest level. Elsewhere in the same text it reiterates, “The ‘fish pouch’ system started in the Tang. Clothes that were violet used gold for decoration; clothes that were red used silver for decoration. When the court bestowed violet clothing, they would paint the gold with silver; scarlet clothes were also especially given [this treatment]” 魚袋，其制自唐始，凡服紫者飾以金，服緋者飾以銀，建賜紫則給金塗銀者，服緋亦有特給者. This suggests that the gold on Kong’s pouch was in fact silver, since his high office was bestowed upon him directly by the emperor. This is further clarified in Shi Lin Yan Yu《石林燕語》: “for all of those with colored clothing it is said that their position was bestowed upon them; it is said that when an official’s level does not match their clothing it means their position was specially bestowed upon them.
Because officials wore purple clothing, even when imperial attendants and higher officials did not act in their assigned levels, they were still all recognized as having received bestowal. Thus, although Kong did not receive his highest posts until they were assigned posthumously, he still would have been recognized as a high level officer because of the gift of the fish pouch.

Another way in which Kong would have been very highly regarded is through his ancestry. Wang’s text describes clearly that he was a direct descendent of Confucius and his burial near Confucius indicates that this was recognized by his contemporaries. In the History of Song it describes that, “in the second year of Jing You, it was ordered that Confucius’ forty sixth generation descendent Zong Yuan (son of Kong Dao Fu) be given the title Wen Xuan Gong. At the start of Zhi He (1054–1056), a court academician in charge of ritual and music had no appropriate title to use to indicate a position inherited from ancestors; following the emperor’s order, there was a department which set the position of Zong Yuan Yan Sheng Gong” 景祐二年，詔以孔子四十六世孫宗願襲封文宣公。至和初，太常博士祖無擇言不可以祖諡而加後嗣，遂詔有司定封宗願衍聖公. Zong Yuan’s position of Yan Sheng Gong was bestowed upon descendants of Confucius and though the title of the position was changed in different periods of China’s history, the lineage was always recognized. The above text suggests that after the beginning of the Zhi He period of Song, the title Wen Xuan Gong 文宣公 was fixed for the recognition of this lineage thereafter. In an epitaph this ancestry would have

been very vital information that Wang could not have failed to mention; on the other hand, Wang also would have recognized the value of this ancestry to a description of Kong’s character.

Wang also aimed to prove Kong as sincere and dedicated to his purpose, even in the face of adversity. This is described plainly in the final paragraph: “Official Kong considered and pursued only the ideal. His path had both pitfalls and smooth stretches, yet he did not change his direction. The rich and powerful were jealous of him and hated him. Those who [rely on] false flattery were hostile toward him” 展也孔公，維志之求。行有險夷，不改其軈。權彊所忌，繆詐所警. Toward this aim, Wang also provides the example of Kong’s persistence in pleading for the reinstatement of Empress Guo:

“Empress Guo was expelled, after which Kong led the imperial officials in protest... he persisted in arguing this matter, until at the very end he offended the emperor” 皇后敟氏廢，引諫官... 面固爭之，得罪然後已. Further details are found in the History of Song:

“Empress Guo was expelled [whereupon] Kong Dao Fu led the imperial censors Sun Zu De, Fan Zhong Yan, Song Jiao and Liu Huan as well as the imperial attendants Jiang Tang, Guo Quan, Yang Xie, Ma Jiang and Duan Shao Lian; a total of ten people. They arrived at the Chui Gong palace, prostrated themselves and reported to the emperor, ‘The empress is the mother of the people, she should not so easily be expelled’, thereupon Kong Dao Fu was demoted to a magistracy in Tai Zhou” 郭皇后廢，道輔率諫官孫祖德，範仲淹，宋郊，劉淪，御史蔣堂，郭勸，楊偕，馬継，段少連十人，詣垂拱殿伏奏：‘皇后天下之母，不當輕議絀廢’，於是出道輔知泰州《宋史－孔道輔傳》. The list of officials above that were led by Kong includes Fan Zhong Yan, whose own reform
efforts inspired Wang An Shi. Thus, aside from portraying Kong’s persistence in pursuing his ideals, the example above also shows that Kong was influenced by the same reform-minded clique as Wang. Thus, Wang’s inclusion of this event in Kong’s epitaph, though it shows him being demoted, allows Wang to emphasize the dedication of this group while overlooking their failure.

In contrast to Kong’s demotion described above, Wang also describes many examples of the emperor’s show of grace toward Kong. Aside from the bestowal of the fish pouch discussed above, the emperor also bestowed several titles on Kong, both posthumously and during his lifetime. In the History of Song it describes that, “in the third year of Huang You (1051), on the basis of Wang Su’s words about Kong Dao Fu, Ren Zong believed Kong to be loyal; [Thereupon] he bestowed the title of Vice Minister of Public Works upon him.” Wang also describes that, “Many times Kong was bestowed with the titles of ‘Senior Official of Gold and Violet Light and Prosperity’ and Vice Minister of Military Affairs in the department of Shang Shu.” Aside from these titles Kong was also awarded the high salaries that accompany such high positions. Wang describes that, “he died naturally as a person of high position and high salary. The emperor liked his honesty and uprightness, so he bestowed rank and nobility upon him.” Wang has borrowed this wording from Shi《詩》 where it is written: “maintain superior [handling of] politics, all riches are endless.”

Taken together, these examples suggest that Wang was most impressed by Kong’s
persistence in the face of adversity. Wang himself faced adversity in his reform efforts and was known for encouraging his supporters to persist when encountering inevitable challenges. For example, in his text Song Wang Zhan Shu Li Zhou Lu Yun Pan《送王叔利州路運判》Wang encouraged his contemporary Wang Zhan Shu to “not lament over the rugged path ahead” 莫嗟行路有崎嶇. Wang has also taken care to show that Kong’s persistence was not fruitless, as he received abundant acknowledgement from the emperor for his efforts.

Another text which both expresses high acclaim for Wang’s contemporary and supporter, as well as displays Wang’s tendency toward reform-minded commentary, is his text Bing Bu Assistant Imperial Consultant Ma Jun Mu Zhi Ming《兵部員外郎馬君墓誌銘》:

“Mr. Ma, whose name was Qiu and whose style was Zhong Tu, lived for a generation in Le Ping of Rao Zhou (modern day Jiangxi province). He took the test for Jin Shi (successful completion of the highest level of imperial examinations), testing all the way from the Ministry of Rites up to the final imperial exam. When the list of successful candidates was published he was always ranked highest. He was assigned to the positions of: Inspector of Imperial Texts, Magistrate of Hong Zhou in Feng Xin county and County Magistrate of Kang county. Around this time, the emperor changed the high level officials, hoping to do something noteworthy. He invited talented people to check the conditions on every road. Furthermore, while Mr. Ma was an assistant in the department of punishment enforcement, he was judge in the department of roads and transportation in Fu Jian, under the jurisdiction of the crown prince. However, because of the loss of his parents Mr. Ma did not go to take that position. After the funeral, he
went on as magistrate of Kai Feng county and also acted as judge of transportation for the two waterways of Jiang Huai and Jing Hu. At this time Mr. Ma was acting as a high officer in charge of rituals. The court began to extend honor and favor to Mr. Ma, allowing him to display his usefulness. He was given charge of investigating imperial officials. Thereupon he was assigned as assistant to the officer of transportation. Before long he returned to the stage of imperial officers and became officer of communicating affairs. When he was at this position for only a short time he was involved in impeaching the prime minister for criminal activity, whereupon the prime minister was relieved of his duties. Mr. Ma was then sent off to a position as county magistrate of Xuan county. After he was in Xuan county only a day he was sent to take charge of transportation in the eastern part of the capital; then he returned to the court to be an imperial censor. He also took a position as a supernumerary attendant in the ministry of rites and a position as officer of miscellaneous matters, selecting officers for internal positions. On many occasions his discussion of matters was accepted by the emperor.

In the beginning when Mr. Ma was studying, he became known all over through his convincing and beautifully worded texts. After he became an official, it was said that every place he was sent to was administered well. His discussions were clear and to the point. When others attempted to debate his points, they could not bring failure to his argument. Normally his administration was so consistent with policy it seemed that he could not get along harmoniously with others. Even when a situation seemed to be unfolding clearly, he would persist with his own personal integrity. Kai Feng was a place that was often difficult to administer because of all of the rich and powerful individuals seeking immunity. When a guest arrived in the capital with a request, Mr. Ma would always take care of them well and would never deny them. After the guest left he would follow the law to seek resolution. Gradually people recognized him as a person who could not be bought; Kai Feng became a peaceful place with nothing of consequence happening. When he came to the position of imperial censor he was again able to
perform in this way. Thereupon the literati said out of admiration: ‘How brilliant is Mr. Ma! He is able to use soft or hard methods appropriately to match the needs of the occasion. Ah!’

In the second year of Jia You, because Mr. Ma became ill, he requested to leave his post and wrote to the emperor five or six times. Thereupon the emperor allowed him the choice between a post as supernumerary official court attendant or officer in the Dragon Pictures Chamber, but would not allow him to leave the court. On a certain day of a certain month Mr. Ma died at the age of forty seven. The emperor gave a certain official position to his son and gave a specific official position to his nephew Ma Chi Guo. His wife, who was from a certain county and had the surname Zheng, arranged a certain day of a certain month of a certain year for his burial in Xin Zhou of Ye Yang county after which she returned to her hometown in the wild fields of Li Sha.

Mr. Ma formerly was friendly toward me and I often enjoyed his wise strategies; I feel the literati today cannot compare with him. I am saddened that he was not used to his full potential; also I am saddened that he left this world so early and was not able to enjoy riches and honor in the end. However, the court is trying to advocate talent and use good strategy, while at the same time following old laws and trying to make everyone of the same mind. In that case, even if one enjoys longevity and attains wealth and honor in the end, how can his talent be put to use. How pitiful!

After the funeral Mr. Ma’s wife and her family discussed things and had Ma Chi Guo come to say, "I hope there is a record, allowing Mr. Ma to die and not decay". Thereupon he wrote these closing words:

He was given talent, and opportunity.

He ran off to a far away place, allowing him to run wild.

Before him there is nobody to obstruct him ah, behind there are people pushing him forward.
Suddenly he stopped and did not continue, why is this?
The saddened widow, who is there to comfort her sadness?
In front of his tomb there is a stone ah, there I shall put my words of lament. ’

馬君諱遴，字仲塗，世家饒州之樂平。舉進士，自禮部至於廷，書其等皆第一。守祕書省校書郎，知洪州之舉新縣，移知康州。當是時，天子更值大臣，欲有所為，求才能之士，以察諸路。而君自大理寺丞除太子中允，福建路轉運判官。於是君為太常博士，朝廷方尊寵其使事，以監六路，乃以君為監察御史，又以為殿中侍御史，遂為副使。已而還之臺，以為言事御史。至則彈宰相之為不法者，宰相用此罷，而君亦以此出知宣州。至宣州一日，移京東路轉運使，又還臺為右司諫，知諫院。又為尚書禮部員外郎，兼侍御史知雜事，同判流內銓。數言時政，多聽用。

始君讀書，即以文辭辯麗稱天下。及出仕，所至號為辯治。議論恢廓，人反復之而不能窮。平居務然，若與人無所譜。及遇事有所建，則必得其所守。開封常以權豪請託不可治。客至有所請，君輒善遇之無所拒。客退，視其事一斷以法。居久之，人知君之不可以私屬也，縣遂無事。及為諫官御史，又能如此。於是士大夫歎曰：馬君之智，蓋能時其柔剛以有為也。

嘉祐二年，君以疾，求罷職以出，至五六。乃以為尚書吏部員外郎，直龍圖閣，猶不許其出。某月某甲子君卒，年四十七。天子以其子某官某為其官，又官其兄子持國某官。夫人某縣君鄭氏，以某年某月某甲子葬君信州之弋陽縣歸仁鄉裡沙之原。

君故與予善，予常愛其智略，以為今士大夫多不能知。惜其不得盡用，亦其不幸早世，不終於富貴也。然世方慾尚賢任智之弊，而操成法以一天下之士，則君雖壽考，且終於貴富，其所蓄亦豈能盡用哉。嗚呼。可悲也已。
From the start of this text it is evident that Wang is discussing the issue of human resources. Wang often touched upon what he thought to be ineffective use of talented officials, hoping to address this through his reforms. Wang believed that, because many officials were frequently shuffled around between different posts, there was no way to effectively evaluate an official’s performance and no way for an official to become very proficient at any given task. Wang discussed this issue in Cai Lun’s 杜ières where he states, “those who are not troubled do not wish to act, the troubled emperor does not make them act” 不患士之不欲為，患上之人不使其為也. Thus, Wang identified the source of the human resource problem as being both policy and the lack of a fostering environment. In the above epitaph, Wang describes this problem not directly, but rather through example, repeatedly describing various posts that Ma found himself engaged in. Wang’s argument is made particularly evident through the example of Ma’s post in Xuan county: “Mr. Ma was then sent off to a position as county magistrate of Xuan county. After he was in Xuan county only a day he was sent to take charge of transportation in the eastern part of the capital” 君亦以此出知宣州。至宣州一日，移京東路轉運使. On the other hand, the emperor evidently valued Ma and thus wished to

make as much use of him as possible. Wang emphasizes this in the example of the emperor’s denial of Ma’s request for retirement: “In the second year of Jia You, because Mr. Ma became ill he requested to leave his post and wrote to the emperor five or six times. Thereupon the emperor allowed him the choice between a post as supernumerary official court attendant or officer in the Dragon Pictures Chamber, but would not allow him to leave the court.” 嘉祐二年，君以疾，求罷職以出，至五六。乃以為尚書吏部員外郎，直龍圖閣，猶不許其出。

Wang leaves no room for doubt about the intention of this text when he states, “the court is trying to advocate talent and use good strategy, while at the same time following old laws and trying to make everyone of the same mind. In that case, even if one enjoys longevity and attains wealth and honor in the end, how can his talent be put to use. How pitiful!” 然世方懲尚賢任智之弊，而操成法以一天下之士，則君雖壽考，且終於貴富，其所畜亦豈能盡用哉。嗚呼。可悲也已. The functional aspect of this text is balanced by the image of the tombstone at the end and Ma Chi Guo’s poetic oration. Chi Guo’s narrative effectively describes not only the incessant advancement of Ma (with people behind him pushing him ever forward), but also describes his benevolent character as he turns back out of concern for his widowed wife.
Conclusion
Throughout Wang’s body of writing there is a universal attempt to balance function and form. Though Wang at times refutes the importance of stylistic writing, he evidently employs it to his advantage. Rhetoric in Wang’s texts almost always takes the form of analogy as he often ‘borrows from things to express feelings’ or ‘cites from the past to compare with the present’. Yet, this rhetoric is all used to facilitate the aim of the text, which is to describe Wang’s reform ambitions. At times Wang is very candid, using statements like, “in the present, scholars are of a low level. They have turned soaking (idling) into a habit; in their indifference they equate obedience with virtue” 今之時，士之在下者，浸漬成俗，苟以順從為得《上運使孫司諫書》. At other times his ideas are more discreetly expressed; veiled by the text’s powerful imagery: “the remnant snow recedes; what is left hanging on the mountain conceals something precious. / A new sun is obscure and distant in the haze; the grass is filled with mist” 殘雪離披山臅玉，新陽杳霧草含穿《同長安君鍾山望》. Here Wang is using mist and obscurity as an analogy for the misdirection of current court politics. Underneath this obscurity is the potential of the court, which can bring peace and prosperity to the kingdom. The character ai 霧, used here to describe the haziness of the sky, may also be translated as either “the appearance of flourishing grass and trees” 草木茂盛的樣子, thus referring to prosperity, or “the appearance of friendliness or gentleness” 和氣的樣子 and by extension peacefulness or contentedness. The character xue 雪 (snow) can also refer to the wiping away of something (such as shame

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or contempt): “Get revenge and wash away one’s hate. Wash away shame on behalf of one’s country. Redress and exonerate.” 報仇雪恨。為國雪恥。平反昭雪⁴⁶. Wang was greatly concerned about the sending of annual payments to the Liao in the north and considered this shameful to the country. He aimed to overcome this through the training and strengthening of the military. The ‘new sun’ Wang refers to here is a reference to his reforms or ‘New Laws’ 新法. Just as the sun will melt the snow and clear away the mist, Wang aims for his reforms to dispel the shame and problems of the country. Thus, Wang is able to incorporate his political argument into this text without compromising its aesthetic value.

Although Wang did make functionality an important component of all of his texts, it is inaccurate to use terms such as ‘utility’ 實用性 or ‘utilitarian’ 功利主義 to describe his works. Utilitarianism in particular is a concept which did not exist in the time Wang An Shi, so using it to describe Wang’s motivations would be an anachronism. Wang did not often use the word shi yong 實用 or any of its synonyms such as shi yong 適用 or you li 有利 in his texts. However, one exception is Shang Ren Shu《上人書》in which Wang describes that writing, “must use suitability as its foundation” 要之以適用為本. Though Wang did not often specifically refer to usefulness or functionality as part of the writing process, the importance of this quality to his texts can generally be inferred from the subject material he employs. As described above, even the descriptions of scenery in Wang’s poetic texts are inherently rhetorical. Furthermore, comparing Wang’s texts with those of contemporaries such as the Xi Kun group 西崑派 and Su Dong Po 蘇東坡

reveals that Wang’s balance of form and function were a unique quality. While Su and the Xi Kun group focused on form and personal expression, others such as Lu You 阮游 wrote candid observations. Only Wang used the writing process exclusively as a tool of his political endeavors. From start to end, Wang’s aim was for his texts to “be useful to the world” 有補於世. Wang found rhetoric to be useful in achieving his political ends.
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