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

by

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

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

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

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2 For example, a Song poet Zhou Zizhi 周紫芝 names himself the “Resident of Bamboo Slope” 竹坡居士. See Sheng Yue 沈约, *The History of Song*. Vol. 28 (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1974.) Song scholar Zhao Dingcheng 赵鼎臣 had a book *The Collection of Bamboo Hermit* 竹隐畸士集. See Yongle dadian 永乐大典 Vol.20. Another Song scholar Lin Jizhong 林季仲 had two books: *The Collection of Bamboo Creek* 竹溪集 and *The Note of Bamboo Cottage* 竹轩杂著. Both books were recorded in *the History of Song* 宋史 Vol.6 Yiwen Zhi 艺文志.
because they needed to cultivate their moral self. They were more likely to associate bamboo with morality than their predecessors, and their contribution nurtured a literati taste, which shaped the Chinese cultural landscape thereafter. In the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the painting of bamboo started to appear with great frequency. Since then, the bamboo motif in literature and visual art has never subsided until perhaps the arrival of modernity.

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

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3 One example is Lidai yongzhu shicong 历代咏竹诗丛. Cheng Naifan 成乃凡. (Xi’an: Shangxi People’s Press, 2004).
while bamboo is studied as part of a cultural phenomenon including a wide range of chanted objects, bamboo is not the exclusive focus.\(^5\)

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

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

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


\(^6\) Guan, *Chinese Bamboo Culture*, 320. In Chinese: 竹是表示中国文人的理想人格——君子具有崇高的道德理想、坚韧不拔的意志以及具有举止清雅、英姿潇洒的外在仪态风范。
known as “Bamboo of Concubine Xiang” (湘妃竹). This bamboo is characterized by its spotted stems. According to Guan, this bamboo symbolized women’s fidelity, and Guan talks about a story behind this name: in the Bronze Age of China, the sage king Yao (尧) had two daughters. They were married to Yao’s successor Shun (舜) as concubines. Shun was another sage king in the region of the Xiang River. Therefore, Yao’s daughters were known as Madams of Xiang. One day Shun died accidentally when he was helping his people. Upon hearing about his death, the two women cried and cried. Their teardrops fell on the bamboo stems. Since then, the spotted stains on the bamboo stems were believed to be the marks of their tears. Hence, the bamboo was named after these women to commemorate their loyalty to their husband. To verify the story, Guan looks into the classical literature and traces the etymology of the term “bamboo of Concubine Xiang”.

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

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

IBid. 320.
Chapter Two explains the methodology of a correlation perspective versus a representation perspective. More often than not, scholar-officials saw bamboo as a living entity who possessed ideal human qualities. They did not have a modern linguistic concept of “representation” or “metaphor.” Therefore, it may be more helpful to see bamboo as a fully functioning friend to the author, and to acknowledge the agency of bamboo on the author. In this sense, the bamboo and the author become a correlating pair. The aesthetic of bamboo, I suggest, is not located in the process of representing; rather, it arises in the process of correlating between bamboo and the literati self. The bamboo aesthetic thus has two indispensable components: the literary bamboo and the literati self, who mutually intertwine through the aesthetic of bamboo.

In Chapter Three, I situate the bamboo aesthetic in the Song social fabric where an independent scholar-official identity arose, and investigate in detail the literary bamboo and its relation to the literati self. I focus on Song bamboo because Song was the time in Chinese history when art was most empowered. In his *This Culture of Ours*, Peter Bol states that “in no other civilization has art so intentionally been accorded as vital and central a role in culture and society as in China.”¹⁸ Song was arguably the pinnacle of this trend. Through the lens of Song bamboo, I propose to examine the dimensions of the literati self: its essence, its inclusions and exclusions. Chapter Three is therefore divided into three sections, and each section explains one dimension. In the first section, I deconstruct the Confucian self in order to analyze the internal logic of the aesthetic of bamboo. In the second section I explore how bamboo brings Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist thinking into one singular moral aesthetic. The third section uses bamboo literature to explain who the cultural others were for the Song literati. My objective in this chapter is twofold. One is to mutually explain the relations between literary bamboo and its author; the other is to appreciate the beauty and the pleasure of reading bamboo prose and poetry.

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

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

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

11 For example, in The History of Eastern Han 後漢書, there is a story titled Night Man 夜郎. It is about a baby who was born from inside bamboo stems became a sage king. See Fang Hua 范晔, The History of Eastern Han 後漢書, Vol.90, appendix the Record of Han, Vol.30, 九十卷附錄漢志三十卷.
Chapter One: Development of a Bamboo Aesthetic
(From Antiquity to Tang)

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

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

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

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12 “The Gentlemen of Four” in Chinese characters is si-junzi 四君子. These four plants were most popular among Chinese painting, and they were often written in literature.
emotional connection and spiritual dialogue between bamboo and themselves. The
emotions that bamboo elicits are usually calmness, peace and other positive intimate
feelings. These feelings carry an undertone of a social value that embraces the serene
beauty of nature over the tumultuous ugliness of politics. Many writers since the
collapse of Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) were somehow frustrated by politics and
lived a simple life in the countryside. For them, the appreciation of the beauty of bamboo
trees and their ambience helped them to cope with the transition from political life to
peasantry. The development of this retreating lifestyle is certainly interrelated with the
moralizing of bamboo. Most literary works employing a bamboo aesthetic make
reference back to earlier texts. Paying attention to intertextuality is a helpful way to trace
all these threads.

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

瞻彼淇奧，綠竹猗猗。
有匪君子，如切如磋，如琢如磨。
瑟兮僴兮，赫兮咺兮，
有匪君子，終不可谖兮！

Looking over at the Qi Water, [we] see green bamboos long and
graceful.\(^\text{14}\)

Here are the *junzi*. Eloquently and elegantly, they are arguing and
discussing with literary grace.
Their serious looks and self-respectful demeanor reveal their wealth and
power.

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

\(^{14}\) Qi Water was a river in today’s Henan Province in China.
Here are the talented gentlemen. How can [we] forget them!

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

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

The development of a bamboo aesthetic involved the process of personification of bamboo, and the earliest contributor to this process was Qu Yuan (340 - 278 BCE) of the Warring State period (475-221 BCE). He is the attributed author of the anthology Chu Ci (楚辞), or the Songs of the South, but the relationship between the text and the historical person is uncertain. Chu Ci was significant in the formation of an important literary tradition: the use plants to represent one’s inner qualities. Historical records indicate that Qu Yuan was a well educated man and served at the court of the King of Chu. After he was unjustly exiled from court, he toured around the country, mostly south of the Yangzi River. His nomadic life turned out to be fruitful in that reportedly collected shamanistic folk songs and enhanced them with his literary talent, which gave birth to Chu Ci which exercised great influenced on the development of Chinese literature.
One of the salient characteristics of *Chu Ci* is an excessive use of flowers and herbs in its imagery. The “Nine Songs” are some of the most read pieces in *Chu Ci*. A great many flowers and herbs are mentioned in these short poems. These plants are not merely decorative for the sake of poetic beauty. They form a literary archetype known as the *xiancao-meiren* (香草美人), or ‘fragrant beauty’, in which an appealing image of the plant is depicted as a way to reflect the inner beauty of the human subject. For example:

秋蘭兮青青，綠葉兮紫莖。
滿堂兮美人，忽獨與余兮目成。

The autumn orchid bloom luxuriant,
With leaves of green and purple stems.
All the hall is filled with lovely women,
But his eyes swiftly sought me out from the rest.  

The autumn orchid and its green leaves convey a sense of beauty. The sensual feeling carries on to the women in the ritual hall. In this way these women are also as fragrant as the orchid. The image of the women is therefore enhanced. In another example from “Mountain Ghost” in “Nine Songs”, Qu Yuan writes: “The mountain spirit is as fragrant as the flower of *duruo* (杜若). / She drinks spring water among rocks and takes shelter under pine trees.” (山中人兮芳杜若，飲石泉兮蔭松柏)  

In here, instead of using *xing*, the rhetorical device is a metaphor. The mountain spirit (山中人) is compared to the flower based on the similar quality they both have: being nurtured by the spring water and pine trees. In *Chu Ci*, the human subject is often given a generic name of *mei’ren* (美人). According to many scholars, *mei’ren* refers to either kings, shaman, or mythical figures. Other scholars posited that the reference is to Qu Yuan himself.

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15 These verses are taken from one of the nine songs and its title is “The Lesser Master of Fate” (少司命), translated by David Hawkes. See David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 111.
16 These verses are taken from *Mountain Ghost* 山鬼. IBid 70.
This archetype of “fragrant beauty” is highly influential in Chinese literature. *Chu Ci* lived on after the Qin emperor destroyed the texts associated with many schools of thought, and the archetype of the “fragrant beauty” later developed into the tradition of chanting about objects to express one’s feeling, that is, the *yongwu* style of poetry. While the term “fragrant beauty” includes numerous kinds of flowers and herbs, *yongwu* usually is more specific in its object or objects. Rather than attributing an indeterminate range of plants to human qualities, *yongwu* makes the attribution through careful logic, usually according to the physicality of the objects. For example, a pine tree grows in the cold winter, so it is used to express a feeling of toughness.

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

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

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17 The story of the Seven Sages can be found in *Zhulin qixian shiwen quanji yizhu* 竹林七賢詩文全集注释, written by Han Geping 韓格平. (Changchun: jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1997).
complicit with the warlords and government officials; on the other hand, for the sake of personal safety, they could not openly reject and provoke those brutal warlords. The strategy they used was to engage in eccentric social behaviour. For example, Ruanji (阮籍 210-263), who was the leading figure of the “seven sages,” was famously known to be always drunk and unconscious. Another sage, Liu Ling, was not only drunk but also dressed inappropriately in public. In this way, they warded off the government’s representative who came to persuade them to join the government without rudely rejecting the offer. In the story of the “seven sages,” we can see traces of the pragmatic side of Chinese intellectuals. Chinese intellectuals were less likely to involve themselves in direct confrontations with power.\(^{18}\) This tendency certainly explains in part the necessity of using an object as a proxy to express oneself.

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

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

\(^{18}\) They were more direct in the Warring States period. After China’s unification, Chinese intellectuals were losing some of their power because of the political environment did not allow them to do so. See Fang Ming 方铭, Zhang-guo wen-xue shi-lun 战国文学史论 (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2008), 61.
disillusioned with politics and purposely quit his position in the government, and retreated to the countryside. Similar to the Seven Sages, he was a role model for the many generations of scholars-officials who struggled with the dilemma between fulfilling one’s Confucian ambition in politics and maintaining his moral integrity when politics went awry. For Tao, his solution was simple: find peace in the countryside and enjoy its beauty. While the Seven Sages left a legacy of lifestyle through their behaviour, Tao influenced the literary world through his writing on retreating in life. The Seven Sages established a depoliticized space, which was in fact a buffer zone to ward off politics. They might come out of the bamboo grove had the political climate improved. In comparison, Tao carved out a private space that he truly enjoyed, a space where he found his true happiness and had no intention to go back to politics.

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

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

In his poem Drinking 饮酒, Tao writes: Picking up chrysanthemum under the east fence, I am awarded the view of the Southern Mountain. \(\text{采菊东篱下，悠然见南山。} \) Tao Qian 陶潜, \(\text{Tao Yuanming ji ciao zhu 陶潜明集校注, ed. Sun Junxi 孙钧锡 (Zhongzhou Classical Books Press, 1986), 58.}\)
planted lots of bamboo around his mansion. He was famously quoted as saying: “this gentleman [bamboo] is high and virtuous, comparable to none; how am I going to live without him even for just a single day?”

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

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

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21 The original Chinese text is as follows: 君子比德于竹焉：原夫劲本坚节，不受霜雪，刚也；绿叶萋萋，翠筠浮浮，柔也；虚心而直，无所隐蔽，忠也；不孤根以挺耸，必相依以林秀，义也；虽春阳气旺，终不与众木斗荣，谦也；四时一贯，荣衰不殊，常也；……夫此数德，可以配君子，故岩夫列之于庭，不植他木，欲令独擅其类，且无以杂之乎。”窃惧来者之未谕，故书曰《刘氏植竹记》，尚德也。See Liu Xue Wen 刘学文 ed., Gujin yong zhu ji 古今咏竹集 (Changsha: Hu nan ren ming chu ban she, 2002), 73.
Liu achieves two important things in this piece. First, *junzi* is identified with bamboo. Compared with Wang Huizhi, Liu’s bamboo is regarded not as a plant onto which we project our morality; rather, bamboo has its own subjectivity. It has all these essential virtues a *junzi* must have, such as toughness, loyalty, humbleness, etc. Liu used his bamboo as a measurement for *junzi*. In other words, the virtues of bamboo are the criteria for a *junzi*. Second, Liu established a moral superiority for bamboo. By comparing bamboo with other plants, Liu belittles other plants which are contrasted with the moral greatness of his bamboo. This moral superiority is in fact what Tang scholars felt about themselves. As will be demonstrated in a later chapter, this sense of moral high ground is the upmost value that delved deeply in the psyche of the literati scholars.

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

Bamboo is like a virtuous man (*xian’ren*). Why? Bamboo is strong and being strong is the foundation of its virtue. When he sees bamboo roots, the *junzi* is inspired to become a person with strong will. Bamboo is straight, and being straight is imperative to establish its integrity. When he sees the straightness, the *junzi* is inspired to be honest. Bamboo stems are hollow, and being hollow is the key to experiencing the *dao*. When he sees the hollowness, the *junzi* is inspired to be humble. Bamboo joints are firm, and being firm is important to carry out a will. When he sees the joints, the *junzi* is inspired to persevere. When he
encounters difficulties, the junzi maintains his belief without betrayal. For this reason, the junzi plants bamboo in his courtyard.\textsuperscript{22}

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{23} The original Chinese text is as follows: 嗟乎！竹植物也，於人何有哉？以其有似於賢而人愛惜之，封植之，況其真賢者乎？然則竹之於草木，猶賢之於眾庶。鳴呼！竹不能自異，唯人異之。賢不能自異，唯用賢者異之。故作《養竹記》，書於亭之壁，以貽其後之居斯者，亦欲以聞於今之用賢者雲。
help the reader to understand the situation of the virtuous man (and Bo clearly counts himself as one). Then, he reveals his ultimate objective: he wants to be noticed by those who can empower him. He needs to be empowered because Bo at the time of his writing this was downgraded in the government hierarchy for political reasons. He certainly hoped to be recognized again, and his only chance was to get the attention of those who were in power. This was his will, and his will was articulated through the story of bamboo.

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

数径幽玉色，晓夕翠烟分。
声破寒窗梦，根穿绿藓纹。
渐笼当槛日，欲碍入帘云。
不是山阴客，何人爱此君。
The bamboo forest is dark green, the colour of jade,
In dusk and dawn, mist rises and circles around the greenness.
Their voices shatter dreams in chilly windows,

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24 A xiù-cái 秀才 is a person who passed the country level imperial examination. See Du Mu 杜牧 Huangchuang shi jizhu 樊川诗集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1978). Also see Wen Shizheng 闻世震, Lidai mingjia zhu shi xin zhu 历代名家竹诗新注 (Shenyang: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 2010), 95.
Their roots pierce the green patterned moss.
They grow high above the balustrade to encircle the sun.
They won’t stop growing until they penetrate the curtains of clouds.
Apart from Wang Huizhi,
who else is falling in love with “this gentleman.”

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

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

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

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25 The turmoil was caused by the so-called An Lushang rebellion. An Lushang 安禄山 was a military general who rose up against the Tang emperor and sacked the capital city of Changan, forcing the emperor to escape to the west. Although the rebellion was put down some years later, Tang had never recovered from the turmoil and had to face
first two couplets when he describes himself, he actually presents an image of Ruanji (阮籍), the leading figure of the Seven Sage in the Bamboo Grove turning Ruanji into his persona.

我生性放诞，雅欲逃自然。
嗜酒爱风竹，卜居必林泉
My personality is completely open and utterly carefree.
[I] always want to escape into nature.
I love to drink wine and I love bamboo in the wind.
The place I choose to live must have water and a bamboo grove.26

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

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

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

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

露澆鉛粉節，風搖青玉枝。
依依似君子，無地不相宜。
Dew is washing the white powdered bamboo joints.
Wind is stirring the bamboo branches of green jade.
The bamboo stems support each other, just like junzi.
There is nowhere they cannot fit in.

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

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

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

独坐幽篁里，弹琴复长啸
深林人不知，明月来相照

Sitting alone in the dark bamboo forest,
I am playing my zither and I am singing a long tune.
No one knows where I am in the depth of the forest.
Only the bright moon comes in to accompany me.  

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

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

As I mention in the introduction, I noticed that most Chinese scholarship approaches bamboo from the singular perspective of ideography. A singular perspective, sophisticated as it may be, could be limiting to see the bigger picture. A typical ideographical analysis is to list the characteristics of bamboo, and then equate them to the moral qualities of ancient Chinese scholars. For example, bamboo’s height represents the moral high ground; bamboo’s hollowness is equated to the humbleness of scholars. The overall image of bamboo is a generic representation of the morality of the educated class. The mode of representation produces a closed aesthetic of bamboo. (Diagram 1) This analysis is certainly useful to understand the very loaded meaning of literary bamboo. However, I found what this perspective provides us is a static picture of a bamboo aesthetic, and in fact it misses out the dynamic part of the relations between bamboo and human qualities.
A simple question that is often not posed in most Chinese scholarship on bamboo is why the ancient scholars needed bamboo to represent themselves. Representation is a universal linguistic phenomenon. A representative is needed for a reason, either to elucidate a very abstract concept of what is represented, or for other linguistic factors. Assuming that bamboo was used to represent one’s morality, then why not simply wrote about one’s morality in a straightforward way? If the scholar discarded bamboo representations and wrote directly about their own moral traits, they could make themselves equally clear. One possible answer was that, in some cases, the politics was too unfriendly for the scholar-official to speak out the truth, so they had to find a proxy to make a statement. For example, Qu Yuan was exiled by King Huai of Chu. According to some contemporary Chinese scholarship, Qu Yuan could not speak out directly about his frustration with the king, therefore he invented the “fragrant beauty” to allude to his political situation. Tao Yuanming is another possible example of this technique. His writing created an aesthetic of a bucolic lifestyle, which could be understood as the antithesis of a political life, and hence his writing was an indirect critique of the politics from which he sought refuge. These examples are certainly true, but not enough to explain why writers still used bamboo as representative when the political climate became more friendly to scholars, as in the Song dynasty.

Regarding the bamboo aesthetic in Chinese literary works, I would argue that rather than seeing bamboo as a representation of the scholar’s self, it would be more helpful to see it as a correlation with the scholar’s self. A correlation between...
bamboo and the scholarly self assumes that both parties are substantive entities. Liu Yanfu, as I mention in Chapter One, says: “A junzi has to compare his morality to that of bamboo.” Bamboo was considered an entity that was independent of the scholar, and that bamboo had its own innate quality of morality. I would like to give another example, a poem titled “Planting Bamboo” (栽竹) by the Song poet Huang Shu (1019-1058):

小槛栽培得此君，绿阴疏韵似相亲。
从来风月为三友，吟社新添客一人。

I grew it from the small gardening patch and got this gentleman.
Its green shade is simple and elegant, as though full of intimacy.
Normally, the gentle breeze, bright moonlight, and I make a group of three friends.
But now our poetry society has a newly added guest.29

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

29 Yang Qincun 杨庆存, Huang tingjian yu song-dai wen-hua 黄庭坚与宋代文化 (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2002), 27. Also see Huang Su 黄庶, Fa tan ji 伐檀集 (Jiling: Jiling Publishing House Ltd., 1988
bamboo standing in for the moral qualities of the literati self (as is the case with the representative mode), in the correlative mode the aesthetic and moral qualities are shared between the bamboo and the literati self.

(Diagram 2)

Diagram of Correlations

Aesthetic

Bamboo  ←  Literati self

Morality

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

春雷殷岩际，幽草刘发生。
我种南窗竹，戢戢已抽萌。
坐获幽林赏，端居无俗情。

The spring thunder is rambling at the edge of the cliffs.
Lush grasses sprout and grow together.
I have planted the Bamboo of South Window.  
[Now] they are waking up and putting forth their sprouts.  
I sit down to appreciate the lushness of the bamboo trees.  
My sense of living is righteous without vulgar feelings.\(^{30}\)

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

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

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

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

\(^{31}\) Han dian 汉典, accessed August 12, 2013. [http://www.zdic.net/z/20/js/7AEF.htm](http://www.zdic.net/z/20/js/7AEF.htm).
poet is gradually unfolding the picture for us, we see a distinct poet and distinct bamboo trees. They interact with each other. Their relations are clearly not that of representing and represented. Towards the end of the poem, they suddenly merge into the single character duan. Duan really stands out because it is the only character in the poem that carries the meaning of morality—and yet at the same time it perfectly describes the upright bamboo stalks. The succinctness of duan carries more weight when placed towards the end of the poem. Duan therefore becomes the most powerful character in the whole poem, a carrying power imparted to it by the first five lines of the poem and the way that it carries both the aesthetic of bamboo and the poet’s moral self.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

34 The Chinese title of the article is: 文与可画筼筜谷偃竹记. See Bai Chunping 白春平 *Tang Song ba da jia wen jian* 唐宋八大家文鉴 (Beijing: Hua xia chu ban she, 2013), 373.
bamboo, to see what they were seeing and to feel what they are feeling. The representative mode presents a two-dimensional image of the bamboo aesthetic; the correlative mode can give us a three-dimensional image, revealing more dynamic meanings of the bamboo aesthetic. In the next chapter, I will use the combination of both methods to analyze the aesthetic of bamboo within the literary world of Song literati.
Chapter Three: Bamboo and the Moral Self in the Song

The Formation of Literati Identity

The transition from the Tang dynasty to the Song dynasty saw an important cultural paradigm shift: scholars became politicians. This change caused Song men of letters to place more moral responsibility upon themselves, and led to a more independent identity of a distinct scholar-official class. Scholar officials had been the distinctive cultural elite since antiquity; however, it was not until Song dynasty that they forged an independent cultural identity for themselves apart from the court. Song literati had a sense of self-contained cultural production and consumption that were not affiliated with the imperial court. The court, since the Han dynasty, had been the most important (and often only) cultural center. While the Song imperial court remained influential through patronizing the arts; from the perspective of art history, the cultural taste of Song court was overshadowed by that of the flourishing literati culture. Led by many well-revered scholar-officials, Song literati largely usurped the cultural authority of the imperial court. This new literati identity shaped the Chinese cultural landscape thereafter, so I would like to pause to explain its social and cultural contexts.

The ascendance of the Song literati was initially an outcome of the political system the first Song emperor adopted to secure his power. Although the civil service examination had been in place since the Sui dynasty to select well-educated individuals to be state officials, it was not until the Song dynasty that the exam became a meritocratic system that favored talented individuals even from non-aristocratic families. The Sui and Tang aristocrats had been phased out of politics in Song. The Song rulers held the conviction that military and aristocratic families should be dis-empowered, since these classes of people were responsible for the eventual decline of the mighty Tang dynasty. Therefore, the founding Song emperor Taizong (宋太宗 939－997) promoted Confucian literati vigorously to officialdom, and so did his sons. They believed that literati officials, or scholar-officials had neither the ambition nor the means to pose a threat to the ruler. As a result, the important government positions in Song were all
taken by well-educated and talented scholars selected through an imperial examination system that tested their literary skills and knowledge.

Given the opportunity to take part in power, Song scholar-officials brought their literary and philosophical concerns into the arena of politics, and in the meantime brought political concerns into their literary pastimes. One thing that bridged politics and literature was personal morality and social ethics. Song scholar-officials regarded personal morality as the source of ultimate legitimacy for rulers and literati alike. They looked to the sage kings of antiquity as moral ideals. Through moral cultivation, they believed that a well-educated and moral individual should take the lead for the society because he could set good moral examples for the society. An obsession with correct morality was the most important part of literati identity during the Song.

Song literati were mostly Confucian. The revival of Confucianism was first a political decision by the Song emperors which was then perpetuated by the imperial examination system that enshrined Confucianism as the cultural norm of Song society. The imperial examination required candidates to learn ancient classics and tested their knowledge of those books. These classics were mostly from the Confucian school, particularly after Zhu Xi anthologized the Confucian classics as the *sishuwujing* (四书五经), or Four Books and Five Classics, as the textbooks for the imperial examinations. The examination system cultivated Confucian scholars nationwide. Almost all the Song literati we know of today were a product of the imperial examination system. Therefore, it is not surprising that Song literati were very obsessed with Confucian ethics.

Another contribution to the emergence of literati identity was faction-ridden literati politics. Song literati were not entirely monolithic as a political group. Although most received a similar Confucian education, different scholars had their own approach regarding the way to perform good politics. Song scholar-officials were divided into

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different political factions. Factional conflict was fierce at the Song court. The winners assumed important positions to implement their political beliefs, while the losers were sent into exile or put in limbo. During the course of Northern Song, different factions at times gained favor, at times lost it. They were subjected to the often capricious decisions of Song emperors. The power struggle caused many ups and downs in individual scholars’ careers. For example, Fang Zhongyuan (范仲淹), Ouyang Xiu (欧阳修), and Su Shi (苏轼), were at some point in their lives the political elites, and then were removed from office and exiled. Su Shi, in particular, was exiled to faraway locations twice, and died on his way back to the court after his position was reinstated for the third time. His bumpy political trajectory was a typical one among Song scholar-officials.

While the group who was favoured by the court fulfilled their literary and political beliefs, the ousted groups had to find ways to settle with the new reality of losing political influence. As much as they studied literature to find their way up the political ladder, they returned to literature and art to find peace to cope with political frustration. Since they were in exile and disconnected from cultural center of the imperial court, the disfavoured literati found their own ways to foster a cultural domain, which led to an independent literati identity in literature. The political ups and downs often toughened the literati’s beliefs. Being tough and able to uphold one’s beliefs during difficult times was an important characteristic of their identity.

The most famously known literati friction were: (1) Fang Zhongyuan (范仲淹) and his follower Ouyang Xiu (欧阳修), who advocated the archaic prose style, or guwen style 古文 in place of the ornamental parallel style, or pianitwen style 骈体文. Guwen style was credited with having moral value while pianitwen was regarded as purely art for art sake. (2) The reformist Wang Anshi (王安石) versus the traditionalist Xima Guang (司马光). The duo were in direct confrontation in terms of political measures to tackle social problems. Wang was an activist to drastically transform Song into a more socialist state. His utopian and holistotalitarian outlook put him at the centre of the controversy by offending the interest of many rich local officials. Although both were working within the same parameter of Confucius school of thought, Xima’s philosophical interpretation of classic texts was different from Wang. Xima upheld that the tradition of socio-political system could not be changed. (3) The Neo-Confucianists, including Cheng Hao (程颢), Cheng Yi (程颐) and their disciple Zhu Xi (朱熹), who adhered to the Confucius doctrine most closely, and who are most instrumental in establishing orthodox Confucianism as the ideology of Song state. Their notion of “upholding the law of heaven; suppressing humanly desire” was at odd with Su Shi’s (苏轼) more freely expressive approach to obtain dao. See more at Peter K. Bol. “This Culture of Ours”: Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 148-299.
Another catalyst of the formation of literati identity was the rapid growth of the literati population. The large number of educated literati help sustained their own cultures and an economic market for its products. The number of literati was eighteen times bigger in the Song than in Tang dynasty. This increase of population was due to the aggressive expansion of the civil service examination during Song dynasty coupled with a general population increase. I have to note that the construction of an independent cultural identity for Song literati was a complex process, and other socio-economical transformation have to be factored in, such as the rise of a private school system. I will refer mainly in what follows to the factors that are relevant to my inquiry of the bamboo aesthetic. To sum up the cultural landscape in the Song, there were many cultural dynamics--among different literati camps, between the imperial court and the detached literati groups, between the obsession of morality and the political challenges. All these interrelations were woven into a complex web of political-philosophical and social-moral links, which shaped the understanding and construction of self among Song literati.

Given the political and cultural background of the Song, it is easier to sketch out the dimension of the Song literati self: its essence, its inclusions and exclusions. The essence of the literati self is founded in Confucianism; its inclusions admitted the eclecticism of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian thinking; and its outer boundary excluded cultural others to construct a singularity of self. In the following, I will explore in detail these aspects of literati self by examining their correlation with literary bamboo. My inquiry includes but is not limited to questions such as how bamboo reflects the literati self; how bamboo is used to present the literati self; how bamboo enables the self to occupy moral high ground. These inquiries are helpful to deconstruct the aesthetic of bamboo, and also helpful to understand the construction of a literati self along moral and aesthetic lines.

38 It was called the institute of books, or shuyuan 书院 system, in which children were sent to learn from the locally renounced Confucius teachers. Zhu Xi, for example, was one of the famous teachers, and he owned a school called bailudong institute 白鹿洞书院. See Guo Yingde 郭英德. Zhongguo gudai wenrenjituan fengmao 中国古代文人集团与文学风貌. (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1998), 7-10.
Confucian Selfhood

Song literati were essentially Confucian in their self-view. The Confucian self was defined foremost in concrete terms by what Confucius said himself about appropriate social conduct; the self was fundamentally defined by the practice of “self cultivation.” “Self-cultivation” was one of Confucius’ most important and persistent topics. A Confucian self needed to be morally cultivated through all kinds of activities such as reading Confucian texts and acting appropriately in domestic, social, and political contexts. Even writing about or painting bamboo could be a practice of cultivating the moral self. The bamboo aesthetic indeed became a means of practicing and expressing self-cultivation.

For Song literati, the theoretical basis for self-cultivation included the famous axiom from *The Great Learning* (大学), which was a foundational Confucian text in the Song. The axiom says that the mandates of a virtuous man are to “investigate objects, obtain true knowledge, accumulate sincerity, rectify the mind, cultivate the self, manage the family, govern the state, and harmonize the world.” The list of things was sequential, linked, and cumulative. One had to accomplish the stage of “investigate objects” to move to the next stage of “obtain true knowledge,” and so on and so forth until he got to the highest stage of “harmonize the world.” The first five dicta on the list concern the internal perfection of the self; and they were the prerequisite of the last three that concerned social achievements. The internal perfection was the process of self-cultivation. A writing of a typical bamboo poem could be a process of self-cultivation. Bamboo was also an object to be investigated. Through the contemplation of bamboo, the poet obtained the bamboo inner qualities, which was the “true knowledge.”

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39 Confucius emphasized the notion of *xiuji* (修己), or *xiushen* (修身). This notion was not coined by Confucius but was emphasized and made popular by him. In Analects 论语 for example, Confucius said to his disciple Zi Gong that one should *xiuji yijing* 修己以敬, which refers to the self-cultivation in order to show respect to others. See Jian Chaoliang 简朝亮, *Lunyu ji-zhu bu-zheng xu-shu* 论语集注补正述疏, Edited by Zhao Youlin, (Shanghai: Hua-dong shi-fan da-xue chu-ban-she, 2013). Song scholars followed the concept of self-cultivation closely. For example, Zhu Xi 朱熹 frequently quoted Confucius *xiuji yijing*. See “Ren yi li zhi and other names” 仁義禮智等名義 in *Zhu zi yu lei* 朱子语类 Vol.6 卷第六 xing and li No.3 性理三. Li Jingde 黎靖德 ed. Wang Xingxian 王星贤 trans. Zhu zi yu lei 朱子语类 (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 1985), 123.

He was then inspired by these qualities; hence he “accumulated sincerity.” The presence of bamboo was a reminder of uprightness. Therefore bamboo “rectified” the poet’s mind, and helped him to achieve his goal of “cultivate the self.”

The bamboo aesthetic was deeply rooted in the Confucian self. To understand why, it is necessary to look further into the internal logic of self-cultivation and the deconstruction of the Confucian self. Chung-ying Cheng, in her essay “A Theory of Confucian Selfhood”, deconstructs the Confucian notion of selfhood by interestingly dividing it into two sides.\textsuperscript{41} One is an “active and engaging self”; the other is a “reflective and receptive self.” These two aspects are “mutually dependent and mutually defining.”\textsuperscript{42} It is a rather complicated concept, and it can apply not only to the Confucian self, but to many notions of selfhood in many cultures. I would very roughly explain it in this way: when one interacts with the environment, he or she uses subjectivity, which sees things from the perspective of the self to evaluate the environment and act out accordingly. This “active power of thinking and willing of human mind” is one side of the self. In the meantime, this person is aware of his own consciousness. This consciousness of one’s consciousness constitutes the other side of the self, which is the “reflective-receptive power of human nature.”\textsuperscript{43} The first and second self are two sides of a coin. They are not hierarchical in the depth of thinking, and they simply suggest different functionalities of a unified self. These functionalities have to be combined together to become a functional self. One side of the self alone cannot independently express itself. One side of the self cannot suppress the other. They work with each other simultaneously like a pair of gongs. This two-sided self is one unity and union of self. For convenience of analysis, Cheng names the first self a \textit{zi}-self, and the second one \textit{ji}-self. This naming comes from the modern Chinese word \textit{ziji} (自已). \textit{Ziji} means myself. It is constituted by two characters \textit{zi} (自) and \textit{ji} (已). \textit{Zi} is the active self, and \textit{ji} is the reflective self.

\textsuperscript{42} IBid 130.
\textsuperscript{43} IBid 128.
I would suggest that in many bamboo poems, the two sides of selfhood are expressed respectively through the literary bamboo and the depiction of oneself. The active zi-self manifests as the literary bamboo; the reflective ji-self manifests as the poet himself. To support my argument, I will use an example to explore Cheng’s notion of the two-sided self in a Confucian context. There are many examples available, but I will choose a Song poem titled “Jurisdiction Officer Xie and Doctor Zhang Sent a Qiong Bamboo Walking Stick” (谢提刑张郎中寄筇竹柱杖).

玉光莹润锦绣斑。霜雪经多节愈坚。
珍重故人相赠意。扶持衰病过残年。
Shining like jade, the cane is bright and smooth, with embroidered and colorful decoration.
Toughened by frost and snow for ages, the bamboo joints only get stronger.
My caring old acquaintances [present to me the cane as a gift] of good wishes.
The cane helps support my sick old body to live through the rest of my life.

The author of the poem is Liu Guo (刘过 1154-1206). Living in Southern Song, he was a scholar but not an official because he failed in the imperial examination. However, his writing earned him reputation of patriotism because of his ambition to drive off the Tartars that conquered the northern territory of the Song dynasty. In this poem, he considered himself to be a senior even though he was most probably in his forties. He had a sense of unfulfilling sadness because he had become too old to fight for his country and the mission to take back Song territory had not yet been accomplished. As

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44 According to the Kangxi Dictionary 康熙字典, Qiong 筇 is a kind of bamboo that is very hard and strong, and it is known for its use as walking sticks. According to Baidu 百度, the Chinese online Wikipedia, Qiong is also a relatively rare species. Therefore a walking stick made of qiong was considered the best of its kind. See Baidu Baike 百度百科, accessed August 15, 2013. http://baike.baidu.com/view/128184.htm.
45 Cheng Naifan 成乃凡, ed., Li-dai yong-zhu shi-cong 历代咏竹诗丛 (Xi’an: Shangxi ren-ming chu-ban-shu, 2004), 166.
In the poem, the first verse depicts the look of the cane. The jade-like shining quality and the sophisticated decoration indicate that this cane is the best of its kind, distinguished from the ordinary. The second verse accentuates the bamboo cane’s joints. The joints are very strong because this piece of bamboo stick has been toughened by severe weather. A common knowledge of bamboo is needed to understand the logic in this verse. Qiong bamboo (筇竹) is a specific type of bamboo known for its toughness, so it was the best material to make walking canes. In fact, the older Qiong bamboo stems are, the stronger the stems become. The author certainly noticed the age of the bamboo stick; therefore, he imagined that the bamboo must have endured lots of bad weather years after years. However, the frost and snow do not weaken the bamboo; instead, they toughen the bamboo. The third and the last verse switch the attention to the people world, revealing where the cane is from and what it is for.

The characteristics of the bamboo cane are its outstanding looks and its strong quality. The characteristics of the poet late in life are being old and sick. The superficial resemblance between the bamboo stick and the poet himself was old age. The deeper meaning of similarity was the moral qualities of being tough and strong. Being old and sick needs to be understood within the context of the author. He had spent his life wishing to fight against foreign invaders. His old age was not suggestive of a depressing and hopeless experience. Rather, his old age is transmuted into a heroic sensibility through the figure of the seasoned, sturdy bamboo cane. Du Fu had a famous poem to commemorate Zhuge Liang (诸葛亮 181-234), a well-revered military leader and civil minister of Shu (蜀) state in the post-Han wars. In the last couplet of his poem, Du Fu writes: “Tragic is that war hero who died before he could conquer his enemy; / Tearful is the strong man upon hearing this story” (出师未捷身先死，长使英雄泪满襟).46 This was

46 These two lines are extremely popular in Song. It is said that the famous Song army general Zong Ze 宗泽 recited these two lines before his death. See Fu Demin 傅德岷 and Lu Jin 卢晋, Shi-ci ming-fu jian-shang ci-dian 诗词名句鉴赏辞典 (Beijing: Chang-sha chu-ban she, 2008), 67.
a feeling of sadness and heroism. People were painfully mourning Zhuge’s death, thinking that the mission could no longer be accomplished. At this moment, Zhuge was remembered to be a tragic hero. Similarly, Liu Guo’s old age has a sensibility of sadness and heroism. Although his will to conquer his enemy actually got stronger as he grow older, his aging body permanently deprived him of any accomplishment. Thus, a hero in his old age is even more tragic than a dead hero.

Now we can analyze the selfhood in this poem through the lens of Cheng’s two-sided self. First, I would like to suggest that the bamboo cane is the active/engaging self, or the zi-self. As many contemporary studies have pointed out, the writing of bamboo is indeed the writing of the poet himself. In this example, the toughness of the old bamboo cane is the quality the poet wants to say about himself. In this regard, I would call the bamboo cane as the bamboo self. So my argument can be rephrased that the bamboo self is the zi-self.

First, according to Cheng, zi-self is the part of self that emerges from the interaction with the environment, rather than a sense of selfhood that transcends contexts. The bamboo stick appears to be an image of the poet himself within the given context of the story. Because this bamboo self exists in the social setting, it is an engaging one. Second, Cheng states that the zi-self is the initiating aspect of the self. What this means is that this part of the self initiates its sense of self through interaction with the environment. In the poem, the bamboo stick’s toughness comes from its cold environment and it demands that its user be tough as well; therefore, the bamboo cane initiates the self-concept of toughness. Third, Cheng also points out that the zi-self takes action upon oneself. The evidence of giving and receiving the gift is an action that is taken upon himself. By receiving and celebrating the gift of bamboo, the poet affirms who he is. He is someone who is as tough as the bamboo stick. Fourth, Cheng suggests that the zi-self is temporal. This sense of selfhood exists within a limited timeframe. In the poem, the bamboo self has a beginning and an end. It begins from the point he receives and sees the bamboo stick, and ends at the point where he sees his own reflection through the bamboo cane.
My second argument is that the image of the poet himself in the poem reveals the ji-self, or the reflective part of the self. In this poem, the poet self appears in the last line. He was old and sick. He is not far away from death as he mentions he is living his cannian (残年), or the remnant of his life. This self-description suggests who he thinks he is. I would like to call this part the poet-self. The poet-self not only exists in the self-description, but also in the implied presence of the author beneath the lines of the poem. The existence of the poet-self is knowable through the tone of the poem and the movement of the gaze that implies the presence of the poet.

According to Cheng, the most distinctive characteristic of ji-self is self-reflectiveness. The poet in the poem sees the bamboo stick, which reminds him of his old age. There is apparently a direction of reflectiveness, which also attests to Cheng’s idea that the ji-self is the subject of reflection and the result of the reflection. Second, Cheng stresses that the ji-self is transcendental. In the poem, being incapacitated by old age is a self-perception that is universal. Third, Cheng states that the ji-self is the object of cultivation. In this poem, the main objective of the author is certainly not to inform or to educate the readers. The poem does not primarily serve any social functions, except perhaps a secondary purpose of expressing appreciation. The poem seems more likely to be written for himself, to affirm who he is to himself. Therefore, one might say that the writing of this poem was a way for Liu Guo to cultivate his self. Through the writing, the poet-self is cultivated because it is strengthened by the toughness of the bamboo stick, the bamboo-self. The poet-self is the object of cultivation and the means of the cultivation is the figure of bamboo.

The most complicated articulation of Cheng’s notion of the Confucan self is that the zi-self and the ji-self are not two selves; instead, they are “interdependently related and mutually defined.” They should not be understood as dichotomy or bifurcation. They are supposed to be a unity. Cheng further complicates the notion by drawing a

\[\text{IBid 125.}\]
\[\text{IBid 125.}\]
\[\text{IBid 138.}\]
\[\text{IBid 127.}\]
parallel to the relation between xin (心) and xing (性), or heart-mind and nature. Without going into the complexity of the unity between zi-self and ji-self, I would like to maintain their interdependence in meaning through the example of Liu Guo’s poem. From the reader’s perspective, we read the poem and have an impression that Liu Guo was a tough and strong old man. However, he does not mention his own toughness. What he mentions is the toughness of the bamboo cane. We have the impression of his toughness because of the apparatus of the poem: the toughness of bamboo is translated into the toughness of the old man. This transformation of meaning happens because the bamboo cane defines the traits of the poet. In other words, the bamboo-self defines the poet-self. Moreover, suppose that the poet were a young scholar, the bamboo toughness would seem groundless and less compelling in meaning to the reader. This is because the bamboo self is also dependent on the poet’s self image. Thus, the bamboo self and the poet self reinforce each other and are mutually defined.

My intention to deconstruct the Confucian self is to analyze the internal logic of the aesthetic of bamboo. The two sides of the Confucian self are expressed in a poem through the depiction of the bamboo-self (bamboo with human qualities) and the poet-self (the depiction or implication of the poet’s personal story). The Confucian self is the unity of zi-self and ji-self; the aesthetic of bamboo is constituted of the bamboo-image and the poet’s self-image. Just as zi-self and ji-self are two sides of a coin, the bamboo-image and the poet-image are an inseparable pair; they are two mutually defining aspects of the bamboo aesthetic; they form an unity to complete the bamboo aesthetic.

The deconstruction of self also supports my aforementioned notion that bamboo literature was a means of self-cultivation. The bamboo-self is initiating the action of cultivating; and the poet-self is the reception of the cultivation. One needs the bamboo-self to cultivate the poet-self. In this way, one completes the overall Confucian self. This is why writing about bamboo is a process of self-cultivation. The more a scholar writes about bamboo, plants bamboo, or paints bamboo, the more cultivated the self becomes, and hence the more high moral ground the writer seems to obtain. This is precisely why the bamboo motif was so popular among Song scholars.
The rushidao (儒释道) psyche

As I mentioned earlier, the core of the literati’s self-identity was defined by the practice of Confucian self-cultivation; the Song literati-self was also defined by the cultural content of this Confucian self. In my research, I found that the construction of the literati-self drew upon different philosophical schools and mixed Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian strains of thought together into an eclectic cultural psyche. This eclectic cultural psyche is known as rushidao (儒释道), literally “Confucian/Buddhist/Daoist.”

Before the Song, these philosophical beliefs were often in conflict with one another. Daoist and Confucian beliefs were often contradictory because the former promoted non-action (无为) towards society and the latter was intensely concerned with regulating social and familial responsibilities. The first generations of Buddhist believers were often persecuted, but after the collapse of the Han dynasty in the third century, Confucian beliefs declined, and Buddhism gradually gained power. During the Tang, Buddhism thrived. Some scholars were involved in the struggle among different beliefs. For example, the Tang writer and official Han Yu (韩愈) avidly promoted Confucianism and opposed Buddhism, and consequently he was exiled by a Buddhism-loving emperor. The integration of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions was gradually taking shape as early as the late Tang, and Song literati completed the process. The differences in belief systems came to be well-reconciled. The Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist doctrines were no longer enemies. They became internalized as one belief system. Although the subtlety of differences remained, they were perceived as different aspects of one unity. Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist ways of thinking worked together to define morality for Song literati.

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51 There are many books written in regard to how Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism came together. For example, in Zhong-gu shi-qi ru-shi-dao zheng-he yan-jiu 中古时期儒释道整合理研究, the author Wang Hongjun wrote extensively about the conflicts between different beliefs and he focused on Tang dynasty to explore the watershed events that led to the merge of ru-shi-dao. See Wang Hongjun 王洪军, Zhong-gu shi-qi ru-shi-dao zheng-he yan-jiu 中古时期儒释道整合理研究 (Tianjing: Tianjing ren-ming chu-ban-shu, 2009).

52 The Song court was behind the integration of different cultural beliefs. Song emperor Zhengzong 真宗 promoted Buddhism by sponsoring the translations of Buddhist Sutra. Buddhism had since become fully accepted into Chinese culture and merged with Confucianism and Daoism. See Zheng Shiqu 郑师棋, Zhong-guo wen-hua tong-shi 中国文化通史 (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2009), 57-65.
The rushidao psyche was made theoretically possible in part because Song literati studied *The Book of Changes*, or *Yijing* (易经).\(^{53}\) *Yijing* was the earliest Chinese classical text. It provided an overarching worldview for subsequent philosophical schools, such as Daoism, Confucianism, Moism, and other schools of thoughts. These beliefs were all subject to the ontology of *Yijing*. The Neo-Confucianists used *Yijing* to explain Confucianism and elevated its status to that of a cosmology.\(^{54}\) The use of *Yijing* brought another outcome: the reference to the earliest anchor point of Chinese thought provided an opportunity to bypass the differences among Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. For this reason, the Song literati were able to reconcile them into one unique cultural psyche.

In the following, I would like to explore the manifestation of this rushidao psyche in bamboo literature. My argument is that bamboo literature provided the literary space to combine Confucian ethics with Daoist notions of retreat, and this space was rendered with the tone of Chan Buddhism. On one hand, bamboo literature was a symptom of philosophical reconciliation; on the other hand, literary bamboo was the facilitator of such reconciliation. The process of integrating different beliefs can be seen as cultural pluralism within a melting pot. The Song dynasty social milieu was a melting pot to effect the coexistence of different cultural aesthetics into a single harmonious one. Therefore, to appreciate the beauty of bamboo literature, we can deconstruct this harmonious aesthetic and explore how Daoist and Buddhist aesthetics are integrated into the Confucian moral aesthetic through the media of bamboo literature. In my opinion, the collision and blending of different cultural aesthetics are more interesting than one single cultural aesthetic. Acknowledging this blending process reveals the vitality and richness of a bamboo aesthetic.

First, I would like to examine the reflection of Confucian ethics in Song bamboo literature. Confucian ethics concerns about *li* (禮), *yi* (義) and *ren* (仁), which are usually

\(^{53}\) Confucius considered *Yijing* as a very important classical text, so as the Neo-Confucianist in Song. Zhu Xi, Shao Yong 邵雍 were among many others to write about *Yijing* and these writings influenced many other scholars. See Shao Yong 邵雍, *Huang-ji jing shi shu* 皇极经世书 (Zhengzhou: Zhong-zhou gu-ji chu-ban-she, 1993).

\(^{54}\) See Wu Ning 吳宁, “For Whom Yijing was Written: Zhu Zi on Zhou Yi and its Conception” 易何为而作: 朱子论《周易》的成书过程 in *Weinan shi-fan xue-yuan xue-bao* 渭南师范学院学报 (issue 5, 2012).
translated respectively as rites and etiquette, righteousness, and humanity.\textsuperscript{55} These Confucian ethics was filtered in Song society. Some aspects were played down and some others were lifted up. What was mostly emphasized was social responsibility. Perhaps Fang Zhongyuan’s (范仲淹) famous line was the best summary of Confucian ethics understood by Song literati: “Be concerned about the affairs of state before others, and enjoy comfort after others.” (先天下之忧而忧，后天下之乐而乐) \textsuperscript{56}

In my research, I found the bamboo joints were one of the most written bamboo features by Song literati. Bamboo joints were associated with Confucian moral integrity. A bamboo joint in Chinese character is jie (节). The same character is used to refer to moral integrity. Jie was frequently written about in classic texts. For example, In The Chronicle of Zuo (左传), it says: “The sages achieve integrity; those who are second to the sage maintain their integrity; those who are low lose their integrity.” (圣达节，次守节，下失节) \textsuperscript{57} In here, the hierarchy of morality was measured by how much integrity one had. The sage king was at the top because he could reach out to achieve integrity, probably more than any other none-sage lay person could have. The ordinary people in comparison, were able to keep the integrity, and only those who were shamefully immoral lose their integrity. Jie thus was the highest reputation one would have. This notion remained true for Song literati. In their eyes, bamboo joints embodied jie as moral integrity. There are numerous examples; one by the Song poet Yuan Ye(袁燮 1144-1224) titled "Chanting Bamboo Two Poems" (咏竹二首).\textsuperscript{58}

去年种苍玉，今岁抽华簪。

\textsuperscript{55} The concept of \textit{li} 礼 concerns the appropriateness of social roles, from the emperor to the literati minister, from husband to wife, from father to son. \textit{Yi} 义 refers to sacrificing one’s own benefit for the sake of many others. \textit{Ren} 仁 consists of five basic virtues: seriousness, generosity, sincerity, diligence and Kindness. \textit{Li}, \textit{yi}, and \textit{ren} are all moral responsibilities that all literati should live up to. See Daniel Bonevac and Stephen Phillips, \textit{Introduction to World Philosophy} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{56} The title of this poem is 岳阳楼记. See Lu Zhongnan 卢中南, \textit{Fang Zhongyuan yue-yang lou-ji} 范仲淹岳阳楼记 (Changsha: Hunan ren-min chu-han-she, 2008).

\textsuperscript{57} The verse is taken from the article of “The Fifteenth Year of the Duke of Cheng” 成公十五年. See Liu Li 刘利 and Ji Lingyun 纪凌云, ed., \textit{Zuo Zhuang 左传} (Beijing: Chung hwa book co. ltd., 2007).

\textsuperscript{58} Liu Xue Wen 刘学文, ed. \textit{Gu jin yong zhu ji 古今咏竹集} (Changsha: Hu nan ren ming chu ban she, 2002), 233.
Last year I planted the green jade.
This year [it] sprouts splendidly.
Even as young shoots, it already has joints (jie).
It wants to grow up high, but it still lacks strength.

In this poem, the bamboo shoots is said to have joints (jie), which indicates that integrity is a born nature, not a learnt experience. The ancient Chinese tended to believe that the older one got, the more wise and moral one became. So the logic is that since the young bamboo has already shown its joints (jie), it will grow up to have moral integrity (jie). The last line implies that the young bamboo aspires to grow up to the moral high ground even though it is not yet strong enough to do so. This young bamboo sounds like the childhood of a sage. The third and fourth lines reveal the moral quality that can describe both the bamboo shoots and the poet himself. The bamboo-self and the poet-self merge into a unity, creating a compelling picture of a hopeful future.

Another popular theme in Song bamboo literature is the association with the ambition of a political career, one of the most important aspects of a Confucian identity among Song literati. Confucianism advocates social engagement and achievement, perhaps best articulated by Mencius when he says: "When one is in poverty, he maintains his kindness; when he is prosperous, he takes care of the world." (穷则独善其身，达则兼善天下) 59 Song literati wanted to become officials to “take care of the world.” This ambitious self was often expressed through literary bamboo. The aforementioned Yuan Ye’s poem is one example. Another example is Su Shi (苏轼). At a young age, Su Shi aspired to officialdom and wrote these lines: “In front of my house, there are ten thousand stalks of bamboo; In my studio, there are four categories of books.” (门前万竿竹，堂上四库书) 60 The tone of the poem is optimistic, suggesting the

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60 Four category of books 四库书 means all books. In ancient China, books were categorized into four types: the classics, the historical works, the philosophical works, and the literary works. In Chinese, it is jing-shi-zi-ji 经史子集. This verse is taken from an article “Answering Ren-shi-zhong and Jia Hangong” 答任师中、家汉公 in Su dong po quan-ji 苏东坡全集. (Zhuahi: Zhuhai chu-ban-she, 1996), 673.
young scholar’s prosperous future in officialdom. It is as if, by reading the “four categories of books,” the young Su Shi foresees his future as a government official, and his bamboo friends outside his studio are celebrating his success in advance. In these two simple lines, we can see the parallel between the bamboo and the poet, and their mutually complimentary relationship.

Here, I would like to accentuate the literary techniques poets used to fuse the bamboo-self and the poet-self. To appreciate the beauty of bamboo poetry, my personal preference is the synergic space where the image of bamboo and the image of poet come together. Therefore, I would like to invite a close-up view on the creativity of literary transition at this focal point. In the example of Su Shi mentioned above, the technique he used was the parallel sentence structure. The first line rhymes with the second one; and all the phrases in the first line have corresponding phrases in the second. For example, “In my house” (门前) is contrasted to “in my studio” (堂上); “Ten thousand stalks” (万竿) versus “four categories;” (四库) “bamboo” (竹) versus “book.” (书). In this way, the image of bamboo and the image of poet become two sides of a single unity.

Another often-used technique is using words with double meanings. For example, Yuan Ye writes in “Chanting Bamboo” (咏竹):

此君林下静无尘，苗裔生来便逸群。
头角崭然圆玉峙，养成直节要凌云。
This gentleman in the forest is quiet and clean free of dust.
Its shoots are distinguished from the ordinary at birth.
The horn on his head is high, like a round jade being straightened.
He grows straight joints, wanting to be higher than the clouds.  

In this poem, there are several terms that have double meanings. The horn on one’s head, or toujiao (头角), literally means the top of the tall bamboo trees; metaphorically, it refers to the brilliance of young people. Higher than the clouds, or lingyun (凌云), literally means the exaggerated height of the bamboo trees; metaphorically, lingyun refers to a person’s zhi (志), or one’s will to fulfil higher social value. In fact, upon close examination, most adjectives in this poem have double meanings, including wuchen (无尘), yiqun (逸群), zhanran (崭然). In the Chinese lexicon, these terms have multiple meanings, or at least two meanings. The first one in each case refers to certain visual qualities of things; the second describes abstract human qualities. Through these terms, Yuan Ye presented the bamboo as a young and brilliant gentleman who aspires to lofty political achievements.

Another aspect of Confucian identity that was often expressed through bamboo literature was social role ethics. Role ethics are concerned with the appropriateness of one’s conduct given one’s his position in society. For example, in Huang Tingjian’s (黄庭坚 1045-1105) rhyming prose piece ”The Fu of Bitter Bamboo Shoots”, he says:

盖苦而有味，如忠谏之可活国。
多而不害。如举士而皆得贤。

[The bamboo] is bitter but nutritious, just like the honest advice that keeps a state alive, [although the advice is unpleasant to the ear.]
[The bamboo] is abundant but harmless, just like many scholars who pass exams and become moral and kind.

In this poem, Huang is talking about two things: the minister’s (臣) responsibility to the emperor and the scholar’s ethical conduct. The behavior of these social roles are explained through the analogy of bamboo’s characteristics. The scholar-official’s ultimate job description was to admonish the Song emperor, even at the cost of

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62 According to Hanyu Da Cidian 漢語大詞典, Du Fu used this term to suggest a talented young boy. See Luo Zhufeng 罗竹风 et, al. ed., Hanyu Da Cidian 漢語大詞典, (Beijing: Han-yu da ci-dian chu-ban-shi, 2001).
63 Zhao Kuifu 趙逵夫 ed., Li-dai fu ping-zhu 历代赋评注 (Chengdu: Ba shu shu-shi, 2010), 208.
provoking the emperor. Such ethics were promoted by the early Song thinker Tian Xi (田锡 940-1003), who famously said: “The civil servant admonishes [the emperor] despite the risk of death; the military servant fights [for the emperor] until his death.” (文死谏, 武死战) 64 In the poem, this role ethics is compared to the flavor of bamboo roots. When bamboo roots are cooked, they taste better; however, according to the author, they are good for the health. Similarly, the multiplication of bamboo trees is analogous to the expanding population of Song scholars, whose social role is to enhance society. I have to note that the literary technique in the poem is different from the previous examples. Huang does not collapse the boundary between bamboo and the poet; instead, the bamboo is clearly stated as a metaphor because the proposition “like”, or ru (如) is used. This poem is a typical example for the representation mode I discussed in Chapter Two.

It is clear that bamboo embodies the social ethics of Confucianism. Bamboo was either considered as having an inborn nature of morality, or regarded metaphorically as the ethical conduct of scholar-politicians. However, a political career was not always smooth for Song scholar-officials. The political factional conflicts were tense at court, and the political climate changed over time. Scholar officials very often found themselves disfavored, their rightful admonishments not recognized, often suffering exile. At these times, they retreated and their philosophical outlook became more Daoist. Under this circumstance, bamboo provided a comfort zone for recuperating an injured morale.

As mentioned in Chapter One, bamboo was associated with the retreating lifestyle due to the legacy of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Tao Yuanming. These figures were the forefathers of literary hermetism. Their retreating lifestyle was indeed Daoist. The association of bamboo with a Daoist lifestyle remained consistent in the Song, and many exiled scholars followed the lead of Tao and the Seven Sages to find new meaning in their lives in the natural world. Su Shi referred to Daoist hermits as “secluded ones” youren (幽人). He writes: “Slender bamboos are like

64 See Tian Xi 田锡, Xiang ping ji 咸平集, Luo Guowei 罗国威 ed. (Chengdu: Ba shu shu-she, 2008).
These lines on bamboo reveal the retreating lifestyle of Su Shi. In another poem, he describes the life of a youren: “A secluded one hardly steps out of his door when he is free from business. / He chases the east wind and turns in the beautiful night.” These poems were all written after Su settled down in Huangzhou (黄州), a place where he was exiled. The hermitic life seemed to agree with him.

However, not all Daoist withdrawal lifestyle in bamboo literature corresponded to a real retreat in life. One example is a bamboo painting by Emperor Huizong (宋徽宗 1082-1135). Huizong was considered to be a literati-king because he was the most cultured of the Song emperors. He was an accomplished calligrapher and painter. He purportedly painted a silk handscroll titled “Finches and Bamboo” (Image 1). The painting is about two birds perching on bamboo leaves among rocks. It is in Song Academy style because of its naturalism, expensive media, and lavish color. However, there is an intrusive brilliant green color in the bamboo leaves, which is apparently unnatural in the Song Academy tradition.

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65 These two verses are taken from “Written for the Flower-and-bird Painting by the Governor Yuan Lingwang” 书 鄱陵太守所画折枝. It was categorized as gu-shi 古诗, or classical poems. Su Shi 苏轼, Su shi quan-ji 苏轼全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2000), 352.
66 The poem is titled “Walking Out of the Dinghui Courtyard in the Moon Night” 定惠院寓居月夜偶出. Ibid.241.
Contemporary scholar Wen C. Fong regards the unnatural rendering as an intention to add a magical quality to the otherwise realistic painting, and this magical element comes from occult Daoism. The meaning of the painting, according to Wen C. Fong, is “a sequestered ruler in retreat from a troubled world.” Obviously, Huizong’s bamboo representation of Daoist retreat did not correspond to the actual behaviour of retirement from politics. He had no intention to abdicate. The Daoist retreat is just a beautiful idea that he plays with in his artistic world, purely for the sake of aesthetics.

From this example, it is safe to say that the Daoist reclusive lifestyle had been decontextualized in Song arts. Traditionally, Daoism promoted a lifestyle opposite to Confucianism. Daoist philosophy is mostly known through the Daoist classics Daodejing (道徳經) and Zhuangzi (庄子). In these classics, the Dao is the most fundamental source of all things. It is more ontological than the philosophical concerns of the Confucian, or ru (儒) school. The Daoist lifestyle calls for retreat from society and promotes none-action. In its most strict sense, the Daoist lifestyle was mutually exclusive to the Confucian lifestyle, which was concerned with social and political living and the ethics of such living. However, in Song literature, the Daoist lifestyle was removed from its roots, and became, for Huizong, a transient moment of imaginary retreat within the Neo-Confucianist moral and political culture.

The decontextualization of a Daoist aesthetic allowed it to be subsumed into Confucian ethics. And thus Daoism and Confucianism came to be blended in bamboo literature. In Huizong’s painting, the Daoist quality of bamboo was fashioned as a moral aesthetic of Confucianism. I must emphasize the literary context here. In real life, the blending of Daoism and Confucianism was a complicated process, resulting from many interrelated political and cultural factors. In literature, the blending was easier to

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68 Ibid 183.
69 Ibid 182.
70 Huizong was on the throne until Northern Song was conquered by the Chin invaders.
71 Neo-Confucianists’ study of the Book of Change contributed to the theoretical basis for this process. Zhu Xi (朱熹) says: “the heaven’s law is the human’s law.” (天理即人理). The converse is also true. Within the language of Neo Confucianist, the human’s law refered to the Confucius ethics; and the heaven’s law was in fact a synonym of dao. Thus the Confucius ethics have expanded to the realm of dao. Dao not only carried some ethical meaning, but also became the ultimate end of a linear development of personal moral cultivation.
Bamboo literature opens up a window for us to see how Daoist and Confucian space were fused in the mind of Song literati. Xu Tingjun's (徐庭筠) poem "Chanting Bamboo" (咏竹) is one such window, in which he wrote:

不论台阁与山林，爱尔岂惟千亩阴。
未出土时先有节，便凌云去也无心。
It does not matter whether you are on a pavilion balcony or in a mountain forest.
[My] love for you is not just for the acres of shade you provide.
It is that you have integrity (jie) even before you sprout out of the earth;
When you surpass the clouds, you remain without ego.

In this poem, the blending of Daoist and Confucian ideas was achieved through unifying the meaning of terms that were contradictory. The balcony of pavilion, or tai’ge (台阁) literally refers to luxurious architecture; metaphorically refers to the official residence, or the central government. For example, in his poem “Seeing Off Li Xuangshu to Zhangzhou,” Wang Anshi (王安石) says: “The imperial court welcome brilliant talents; they prosper in the balcony of pavilion (tai’ge).” In Xu Tingjun’s poem, the balcony of pavilion (tai’ge) versus the mountainous forest (shang’lin 山林) was Confucian social accomplishment versus the Daoist social detachment. Either case, according to the poet, bamboo was favored and poised between Confucian and Daoist lifestyle.

Having no ego, or wu’xin (无心) is a Daoist stage of mind because it suggests a natural spontaneity of becoming, as opposed to a purposeful ambition of achieving. Being higher up than the clouds, or ling’yun (凌云) is a Confucian stage of mind as it

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73 Song literati writers were very good at comparing two contradictory entities and then merge them together into one. This dialectic tendency probably came from the influence of the Book of Change that they studied vigorously. Karyn L. Lai, in his book An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy states that, one of seven fields of influence from the Book of Change is “a dialectical and complementary approach to dualisms.”
refers to one’s will to fulfill something of higher social value. *Ling’yun* and *wu’xin* are contradictory, but in the poem, they are combined in the last verse and become oxymoronic. Bamboo’s unique physicality makes it possible to embody both stages of mind. One the one hand, bamboo grows very high, which is *ling’yun*; on the other hand, the bamboo stem is hollow inside, which is *wu’xin* (lit. “without centre”). As I mentioned, bamboo was considered a peculiar plant that was neither grass nor tree (非草非木). This in-between quality of bamboo made it an ideal object through which to blend contradictory ideas of Confucian *ling’yun* and Daoist *wu’xin*.

Bamboo was also used to reflect a Buddhist lifestyle. Buddhism was less prominent in the Song than it was in the Northern and Southern Dynasties period (3rd Century) and the Tang dynasty. Yet, I want to note that Buddhism remained influential in the Song artistic landscape. Although Buddhist thoughts were not very often discussed as a singular topic, they were included in the Neo-Confucian worldview.

One of the most accomplished Song writers who was also a Buddhist at heart was Su Shi (苏轼). His family tradition had close attachments to Buddhist temples. Many of his writings have some imprint of Buddhism. For example, in his poems “Walking Pass Shu Jiaoshou,” (雨中过舒教授) he writes:

*Scattered beyond the curtain are bamboo trees.*

*Pure and clean are raindrops spattering on the bamboo.*

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74 In his book *the Manual of Bamboo* 竹谱, Dai Kaizhi 戴凯之 (Late Fourth Century to early Fifth century) wrote about bamboo: “In the botanical kingdom, there is a plant called bamboo. It is neither hard nor soft; it is neither bushes nor woods.” (植类之中, 有物曰竹。不刚不柔, 非草非木) See *Wen yuan ge si-ku-quan-shu* 文渊阁四库全书 (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1986), 845-171. Also see Guan Chuanyou 关传友, *Chinese Bamboo Culture* 中华竹文化 (Beijing: Zhong-guo wen-lian chu-ban-she, 2000), 13.

75 His mother was raised up in a Buddhist temple. His father Su Xun befriended the most famous monks at Shu 蜀. Su Shi himself started to learn Buddhism at the age of twenty-eight. Some of his best friends were well-respected monk of his time. Hui Chan 慧禅, *Ming-ren yu fo-jiao* 名人与佛教 (Shanghai: Shanghai ren-min chu-ban-she, 2008), 129.

76 *Jiaoshou* 教授 was a government official title, which was equivalent to present day teaching administrator. *Shu* 舒 was the family name of this person.
Clean and dustless is the windowsill.
From the cold ink stone on my table a mist rises.  

The poem provides a contemplative image of an assemblage of still objects. Bamboo is the first object mentioned, followed by raindrops, the windowsill, and the ink stone. In the Chinese four-line poetic form, or *jueju* (绝句), the first line sets up the tone for the rest of the poem; the second line further elucidates the theme; the third one is the sudden transition to another essential scenario; the last one gives the summary. This format is known as *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* (起承转合). In this poem, scattered bamboo trees are first mentioned to invite the contemplative mood. Then comes the rain, which reinforces the meditative bamboo. At this point, the gaze suddenly moves to the windowsill and stays there. The window is spotless. *Wu’chen* (无尘), or without dust, literally refers to the cleanliness of the window. The term is also a metaphor for the Buddhist notion of a non-judgmental mind. In the last line, the gaze moves closer to reveal the ink stone and the table. The mist in the cold air indicates the austerity of the place. Overall, the poem conveys a very poignant Buddhist aesthetic.

The bamboo in Su Shi’s poem is conducive to the Buddhist sensibility. In fact, the attribution of a meditative quality made bamboo one of the favourite plants for Song Buddhists. For example, there was a branch of Chinese Buddhism whose adherents believed in the Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva. The believers always planted bamboos around the temples. There were quite a number of Song Confucian literati who were interested or engaged in Buddhism. The Neo-Confucianist Zhu Xi (朱熹) was an important figure who brought Buddhism into the Song Confucian system. In one of his writings, he quoted a Chan master as saying:

青青綠竹，莫匪真如；
粲粲黃花，無非般若

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77 Su Shi 苏轼, *Su shi quan-ji* 苏轼全集, 194.
For the flourishing green bamboos, none of them is not the eternal being.
For the brilliant yellow flowers, none of them is not the wisdom.  

This poem directly links bamboo to Buddhism. The terms of *zhēn’ru* (真如) and *ban’ruo* (般若) were all Buddhist terms. Bamboo was equated to the eternal being, which was the highest Buddhahood one could achieve. Thus, bamboo had the Buddhist nature in it. In this poem, the Buddhist bamboo is regarded as though it were a full human, which is similar to the Confucian bamboo. However, the Buddhist bamboo has a subtle meditative quality, which was not found in Confucian bamboo. The contemplative tone is characteristic of Buddhist sensibility.

In contrast to Zhu Xi and Su Shi’s directness, many other depictions of Buddhist bamboo by the majority of Song literati were quite subtle. The Buddhist sensibility of bamboo was often pushed to the background. Similar to a Daoist withdrawal aesthetic that can appear in Confucian literature, a Buddhist meditative aesthetic found in Song literature might not always correspond to an actual belief in Buddhism by the writer. Buddhist bamboo could be just another free-floating imagination that was played with by Song literati to self-fashion their morality. Few Song literati were as hardcore Buddhist as Wang Wei (王维). Buddhism was certainly not practiced as a religion by many of them. Buddhism was simply absorbed into the Confucian worldview and appeared in literature through subtle meditative tones or Buddhist symbols. One example is Xin Qiji’s (辛弃疾) prose piece “The Reputation Left Behind” (身后功名):  

身後功名，古来不换生前醉。
青鞋自喜，不踏长安市。
竹外僧归，路指霜锺寺。
孤鴻起，丹青手里，剪破松江水。
The reputation one leaves behind [has been cherished] since antiquity.
[No one] would compromise it and indulge in a drunken life.

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79 *Zhu zi yu lei* 朱子语类, 1535.
80 Xin Qiji 辛弃疾, *Xing qiji ci-ji* 辛弃疾词集 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2010), 99.
My straw shoes are happy with themselves. They won’t set foot in the city of Chang’an.\footnote{Chang’an 长安 was the capital city of Tang dynasty, which was famous for its wealth. The author mentioned about Chang’an in order to express his disinterest in wealth and vanity.}

Beyond the bamboo trees, monks are returning to the Frosty Bell Temple.

The lonely eagle rises from the hands of the painter, and rips through the waters of Pine River.

Xin Qiji was a patriotic writer after the fall of Northern Song. He had a strong desire to fight back against the nomadic peoples who sacked the capital of Northern Song. In this poem, the first two verses convey a regular Confucian sensibility. They are about the Confucian notion of righteousness, or \textit{yi} (义). \textit{Yi} demanded that a Confucian scholar contribute to the public good rather than pursuing personal interests, which was exactly what Xin Qiji did: he gave precedence to his personal reputation over a hedonistic lifestyle. The third line is where the Buddhist sensibility comes into play. The monks, the bamboo, and the Buddhist temple are brought into the poem. The word \textit{zhu} (竹) is used for the transition between the Confucian sensibility and Buddhist sensibility.

I have analyzed the \textit{rushidao} psyche through the lens of Song bamboo literature. It is clear that literary bamboo reflects the moral aesthetics of Confucian ethics, the beauty of Daoist withdrawal, the tone of Buddhist contemplation, and the overall interplay among these three sensibilities. Literary bamboo is an inclusive space for Song literati to construct an integrated self. The integration does not mean that the original cultural differences have been assimilated without a trace. Upon closer examination of some bamboo poetry, we may notice that the integrated aesthetic of bamboo embodies a self-contradictory literati self, which is simultaneously communicative and inaccessible to the reader. The self is communicative in its Confucian sensibility; meanwhile, the self is also inaccessible in its Daoist hermitic withdrawal appeal. Within this contradiction, there is another dimension arising from its Buddhist meditative quality that preempts the contradiction between communicating and
inaccessibility, and even their dialectic. This internal contradiction makes bamboo aesthetics complex and dynamic.

**Exclusion of Others and Construction of Singularity**

To demarcate the Song literati self, it is helpful to study who they were not, or in words, the cultural others. It is a long tradition in Chinese intellectual history to construct a morally superior self by excluding cultural others. Qu Yuan (屈原) was an early example. In Chapter One, I mentioned Qu Yuan’s ‘fragrant beauty,’ a notion which Qu Yuan used to liken people to beautiful flowers. Many Chinese scholars believe that the ‘fragrant beauty’ also refers to Qu Yuan himself. He was believed to be a patriotic writer and he was said to despise his political opponents who caused his exile. His emotion was translated into *Chu Ci* and hence the “fragrant beauty” also refers to himself. By using the distinctive names of metaphorical flowers, he championed himself as a moral crusader and set himself apart from the ‘immoral’ others. The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove carried on this tradition. They escaped from politics and chose to form their own group in the bamboo grove. Every time when government representatives came, the “sages” did whatever they could to ward them off. By distancing themselves from the ruling power, the Seven Sages maintained their moral integrity in a dark age of political unrest. There are many other examples in Chinese intellectual history. For Song literati, my interest is who were the cultural others and how bamboo was used to mark the boundary against them. Without going into the details, I will highlight a few prominent cultural others from Song bamboo literature and art.

“Ink bamboo” (墨竹) was a genre of painting invented by Song literati to differentiate their work from that of the academies at the imperial court. The court was considered the cultural other in part because of the legacy of the *shi* (士), or “scholar” tradition since the Warring States period, as *shi* upheld their independent values against the states; also because some Song scholar-officials were ousted from their positions and therefore they kept a distance from the culture of the imperial court. As I have mentioned, the court had been definitive of elite culture throughout history until the Tang dynasty, but the court’s cultural influence declined as Song literati forged an
independent cultural identity. From Five Dynasties to Song, the court set up the Academy of Painting to recruit and sponsor painters. The paintings included landscape painting, flower and birds, and figure painting, and history painting. They were mostly produced for the pleasure of the court members. Most paintings were painted on silk, and very often in vivid colors. The Song Academy had a standard of naturalism. Painters were encouraged to observe nature and to paint in meticulous detail. For example, Xu Xi’s (徐熙 886-975) painting Snow Bamboo (雪竹图) was a typical example of the imperial taste in the rich details of leaves, branches, and even some chiaroscuro on the bamboo joints. (Image 2)

In contrast, Song literati created their own taste of painting that was very distinctive from the Song court. Literati ink bamboo painting used cheaper paper instead of silk; and used ink instead of color. They valued the expressiveness of sketchy brushstrokes over naturalistic details. A typical ink bamboo painting was Su Shi’s

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82 Wen Fong, *Beyond representation*, 177-183.
83 Chen Baozhen 陈葆真, *Li-hou-zhu he ta de shi-dai nan-tang yi-shu yu li-shi* 李后主和他的时代 南唐艺术与历史 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009), 305.
Bamboo and Rock at Xiao’xiang (潇湘竹石图 Image 3).\textsuperscript{84} The painting well illustrates the characteristics of literati taste. In his painting, the bamboo was delineated by only a few strokes, which did not follow strictly the natural appearance of bamboo. Su’s painting skill seems almost amateurish. However, this simplicity of the painting was considered to be in refined good taste by Song literati standards. This painting received a comment from another influential Song scholar Huang Tingjian (黄庭坚) who said: “Dongpo (东坡, another name for Su Shi) painted bamboo. His bamboo looked like bushes. This is his shortage. Without any vulgar taste, this is his specialty.” \textsuperscript{85}

In fact, Su Shi was instrumental in the formation of the literati taste. Susan Bush, in her Chinese Literati on Painting, studies Su Shi’s writing on literati painting. Su emphasized the process of painting and ignored painting techniques.\textsuperscript{86} In his comments on the most celebrated bamboo painter of his time, his cousin Wen Yuke, he famously said: “When Yu-ke painted bamboo, he had already perfected the bamboo in his breast.”\textsuperscript{87} In other words, to paint bamboo well, the key was the process of internalizing bamboo. After bamboo was well conceived in your mind, your brush would follow your mind and spontaneously translate the conceptualized bamboo onto paper. This painting

\textsuperscript{84} Deng Qiaobing 邓乔彬, Song-dai hui-hua yan-jiu 宋代绘画研究 (Zhengzhou: Henan University Press, 2006), 256. Xiao’xiang refers to the Xiao River and Xiang River in today’s Hunan Province in China.
\textsuperscript{85} In Chinese: 东坡画竹多成林棘，是其所短，无一点俗气，是其所长。See Lu Fusheng 卢辅圣. Zhong-guo hua-niao hua tong-jian 中国花鸟画通鉴 (Shanghai: Shanghai shu hua chu-ban-she, 2008), 42.
\textsuperscript{86} Susan Bush, Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to tung Ch‘i-ch’ang (1555-1636), (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1971).
principle was the opposite of the Academy standard. While the Academy called for meticulous attention to be paid to the natural world in painting, Su Shi promoted a very subjective world of painting. When we put this painting in the context of art history, we can see more clearly the intentionality of the artist. Su Shi lived in the formative years of literati taste. He was using ink bamboo painting as the frontier to claim an independent cultural space within the territory of the imperial court. The painting was almost like a manifesto of a new art movement. The medium of paper and simplistic painting style were very deliberately made to suggest an austere aesthetic against the luxurious appeal of the imperial culture. It was as if a statement to address the Song court: “Behold. This is a culture of ours!”

Stephen Owen uses the term ‘singularity’ to describe the literati identity during the Mid Tang period. Rather than an ‘individuality’ that threatens the harmony of the collective society, singularity refers to the fact that “literati place their value in their alienation from the norm, isolation from society, and their distinction from other social values.” This identity gave them a feeling of superior morality. Owen mentions a few Tang poets who asserted a singularity, and among them are Han Yu (韩愈) and Bo Juyi (白居易). For them, the singularity was established through the rejection of conformity as literary conformity was associated with falseness (空文), or conventional text that did not correspond to real social concerns. This notion of singularity certainly applies to Song literati identity. Su Shi’s predecessors Fang Zhongyuan (范仲淹) and Ouyang Xiu (欧阳修) promoted gu’wen (古文), or classical style prose over the widely accepted ornamental parallel style essay. This practice was a Song dynasty echo of Han Yu’s assertion.

Assuming singularity is clearly the objective of Su Shi’s bamboo painting. What is painted on the paper was actually not so much about the bamboo; what was painted was the literati self. Please note that in this case, bamboo was a mere representation of the literati self. Bamboo was not important. It was void of meaning without the agency of

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89 According to Owens, Meng Jiao 孟郊 was very critical against kong-wen. He claimed that: “it is said that people’s words are most effective; yet there are many human bones left in the wild.” 徒言人最靈，白骨亂縱橫.
Su Shi’s self behind it. While Xu Xi’s meticulous details of bamboo was at the foreground and Xu was vaguely hovering at the background; Su Shi’s self was at the foreground in his painting. His self was presented right in your face. The simplicity of strokes revealed the movement of the brush. Every stroke was personal and carried the signature of the artist, hence it foregrounds the self. While Xu Xi’s densely realistic bamboo blocks off the expression of self, Su Shi’s bush-like and not-resembling bamboo allowed his personality to come through. In this way, Su Shi’s painting established a singularity that stood out from the conventions. This singularity was the focal point of a bamboo aesthetic as expressed in literati painting.

Another “cultural other” reflected in bamboo literature was aristocratic culture. Tang aristocratic society had been dismantled in Song, yet aristocratic culture still exerted influence in early Song through inertia. One example of aristocratic culture was the writing of the parallel-prose essay, or piantiwen. The parallel-style essay was generally flowery and ornamental. As I mentioned, Fang Zhongyuan (范仲淹) and Ouyang Xiu (欧阳修) thought this style to be lacking in morality, and they set out to eradicate it. For example, when Ouyang was the chief examiner of the imperial examination, he failed many excellent writers of piantiwen. In tandem with direct political means against aristocratic mannerisms, many Song literati used literature to distance themselves from overtly opulent lifestyles. In my research, I found that this territory was characterized as an austere lifestyle. One example is Xin Qiji’s (辛弃疾) “Qingpingle” (清平乐):

寿赵民则提刑，时新除，且素不喜饮。
诗书万卷，合上明光殿。案上文书看未遍，眉里阴功早见。
十分竹瘦松坚，看君自是长年。若解尊前痛饮，精神便是神仙。
Old man Zhao Minze was a jurisdiction officer. He avoids a flashy lifestyle. He prefers plain food and does not drink. He has read ten thousand volumes of books, and his knowledge qualifies him to work at the imperial court. Before he finishes reading
the official documents at his office, his merit shows as a furrow between his brows.

Most definitely, bamboo is thin and pines are strong. We respect this gentleman (Zhao Minze) for his natural longevity. If he empties the goblet and drinks to his heart’s content, his spirit makes him an immortal.  

This prose presents a very favorable, if not idealized image of a scholar-official. This old man Zhao held a government position but had no interest in vanity. He was bright and his interest was on reading many books. Because he lived an austere life, he enjoyed longevity comparable to an immortal. The terms “thin bamboo” and “strong pines” add flavor to this otherwise prosaic prose. The thinness of bamboo is the reflection of Zhao’s austerity. This aesthetic of austerity was very common in Song bamboo literature.

The cultural other was not directly mentioned in the poem, but was implied in mentioning that old man Zhao “avoids a flashy lifestyle” (时新除) and he “prefers plain food and does not drink” (且素不喜飲). This mention suggests that there were others who liked flashy lifestyles and indulged in good food and drinking. According to the writer, this old man Zhao was a contrast to those others. Because of this contrast, old man Zhao was placed on the moral high ground. He was not only moral but also bright. His charisma shined through the trees, and therefore bamboo became thin and pines became strong. Being thin and strong were the qualities of the old man projected onto the trees. In this way, the thin bamboo represents austerity and also indicates the moral aesthetic of singularity.

There were all kinds of cultural others implied in bamboo literature, depending on the personal experience of the writer and the larger socio-political backdrop. For example, in the Southern Song, the cultural others became the nomadic invaders to the North. Throughout the entire history of the Song, the most obvious cultural others for the

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literati scholar-officials were the merchant class, military personnel and the common people. Merchants and soldiers were despised in Song society. The literati maintained a strong sense of moral superiority over these cultural others. Many poems did not portray these people directly, but they were the unspoken others. When the Song literati fashioned themselves on the moral high ground, there were always hidden others posited below them.

I have to note that the cultural others were not always fixed throughout the Song dynasty. In fact, the relations between the literati group and their surroundings was organic. Cultural others at one time could become cultural allies and vice versa. For example, the Song Academy was the cultural other in Su Shi’s time, but during the reign of Song Huizong (宋徽宗), the Song court adopted literati taste. The line between literati and common people was not fixed neither. The common people could be included in the literati class, such as the aforementioned Liu Guo (刘过). He was nicknamed “plainclothes poet.” The cultural others could be someone from within the scholar-official class who held different values. Song literati culture was not always cohesive or monolithic. Literati culture could be subdivided into different groups and each one saw the other as “cultural others.”

Bamboo was a very effective subject in literature to assert such singularity. All the moral qualities bamboo had were considered to be singular, such as austerity, straightness, toughness, and humbleness. When Song literati wrote about these bamboo qualities, they very often presumed a cultural other out there. By writing about bamboo in fashioning the self, they found a sense of moral superiority. They felt that they possessed the qualities that none of the others could have. In this way, they reasserted their identity as scholar-officials, or as junzi.
Conclusion

Susan Bush considers Su Shi to be one of the most influential literati culture makers.\footnote{Sussan Bush, Chinese Literati on Painting, 29-43.} I would like to use a painting on Su Shi as a conclusion to this paper. This painting was produced by the Ming artist Du Jing (杜甫). Titled “Dong Po Writing on Bamboo” (东坡题竹), the painting captures the moment when Su Shi is about to write a bamboo poem at a bamboo grove.\footnote{Li Tao 李涛 and Zhang Hongyuan 张弘苑, Zhongguo chuang-shi can-hua 中国传世藏画 (Beijing: Zhongguo hua-bao chu-ban-shu, 2002), 300.} (Image 4) Su is situated in the middle of the picture frame, looking at the bamboo in front of him. On the right hand side of Su, there is a senior holding a cane who is probably Su’s literati friend. Su and the senior are having a conversation. On the left side of Su, a boy servant is holding a tray with an ink stone, the material for ink painting or poem writing at the ready. The ambience includes two big rocks on the far right of the picture frame and stone balustrades in the distance behind the bamboo trees.
This painting visualizes the relations between literary bamboo and the literati author. Su Shu apparently exemplifies a moral scholar. His dress, his graceful body posture, and his attention on bamboo are suggestive of his nature of a junzi. The bamboo stems are unnaturally winding and crisscrossing. This design is on the one hand to poeticize bamboo, and on the other hand, to suggest a dialogue of some sort between bamboo and Su Shi. One may say Su Shi is observing and appreciating the bamboo trees. However, the bamboo trees are obviously exerting influence back on the observer. Note that all the people in the picture are looking up at the bamboo trees. The body language attests to the fact that bamboo is the moral ideal and it is something to which scholars aspired. Therefore, there is an interaction of morality going on between bamboo and Su Shi.

Upon closer examination of the painting, one discerns a mixture of Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist strains in visual culture. The big rocks on the right create a secluded space for the people in the center. The height of the rock occupies the entire length of the picture frame, which shields off the everyday business for these people. This visual language suggests the Daoist retreat lifestyle. The architectonic stone balustrade indicates Su Shi’s officialdom. Su Shi’s gaze on the bamboo while conversing with a friend signals the Buddhist contemplativeness. The rushidao (儒释道) psyche is subtly presented in this painting.

Given the titled “Dong Po Writing on Bamboo,” the painter was supposed to depict the action of writing. Instead, he chose to paint the very moment before Su executes his writing. This decision is probably related to Su’s emphasis on the process of internalizing bamboo. More importantly, if Su were depicted looking down to write on paper, his gaze on the bamboo would be lost and therefore the visual connection between bamboo and author would disappear. The painter’s decision certainly suggests that the gaze on the bamboo is the most important detail of this painting that he would like to emphasize. This is to say that the connection between bamboo and the author is the focal point of this painting. It is also the focal point of the bamboo aesthetic, and the focal point of this paper.
This paper has explored the bamboo aesthetic and its relation to the self-fashioning of by Song literati seeking the moral high ground. Most contemporary scholarship studies bamboo aesthetics from the representation perspective. I have tried to expand our understanding by deconstructing it and investigating the dynamic relations between literary bamboo and the literati self. This study situates the bamboo aesthetic in the Song cultural world of poetry, prose, and painting. In fact, this study can be further extended to include more relations to the bamboo aesthetic. (Diagram 3)

In this diagram, the bamboo aesthetic is located in the interrelations between the bamboo plant, the representation of bamboo plant--such as those found in poetry and painting--the author (the literati self), and the community (the literati group or society at large). That is to say, on top of the relations between literary bamboo and the literati self, one can factor in two additional components: the bamboo plant itself and the literati community. As the diagram illustrates, all four components have effects on one another. The study of this web of interrelations may yield some more interesting discovery about bamboo aesthetics. In fact, the painting of “Dong Po Writing on Bamboo” has revealed these four components and their interplay. In the painting, there are bamboo trees as the plants in the grove; there is an implied bamboo poem that is soon to be written as suggested by the ink stone; there is the literati self of Su Shi; and there is the community suggested by the presence of the senior friend. These components in the painting come together to form a complete story. The exploration of their interplay would
reveal how a bamboo aesthetic functions within the Song social fabric. In fact, this methodology is not limited to bamboo aesthetics. Other popular topics in classical *yongwu* (咏物) poetry, such as plums, orchids, and pine trees can also be studied in this way.
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