Works of Gold and Jade –
Cao Zhi (192-232 CE): The Man and His Poetry

by

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Dedicated to all the poets of China,
past and present.
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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the life and poetry of Cao Zhi 曹植. It will seek to prove that Cao Zhi was a transitional poet during a transitional era. It will demonstrate how he revived the poetic traditions of the past, but at the same time, transformed literary traditions so that they embodied a new kind of individualism which revolutionised the Chinese poetic tradition. The seeds of this new poetic movement began during the Jian’an period 建安 (196-220 CE) and Cao Zhi’s life and poetry reflect this new individualist movement that would later be embraced by Chinese intellectuals during the Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220-420 CE) dynasties which is often referred to as the “literary awakening period.”

This thesis will demonstrate how Cao Zhi remained grounded in Confucian values throughout his life, mainly manifested by his love for, and loyalty to his family. However, it was this same loyalty that would create contradictions within him that were vividly revealed through his poetry. This thesis will not only explore the complex relationship he had with his family members, but also the rich and rewarding friendships he cultivated with his contemporaries and how their praise and encouragement enriched his poetic expression and led to his determination to redefine the traditional parameters of literary competence.

This thesis will also explore how Cao Zhi’s forthright personality led him to become alienated from the court. It will explore how his feelings of despair and rejection contributed to a new kind of awakening of the human spirit through the medium of poetry and this thesis will demonstrate that such a spirit emerges not from those who remain ensconced within the comfortable environment of the court but springs from a rebellious individual like Cao Zhi who forges ahead in an environment of oppression, by holding steadfast to his ideals and distancing himself, on an emotional level, from the petty affairs of the world.

This thesis will demonstrate that Cao Zhi forged a new path in poetry, in terms of his original imagery and rich imagination that surpassed that of his contemporaries. Cao Zhi longed to be remembered for his heroic deeds but this thesis will demonstrate that it was during his quiet moments away from the court, that he would produce his finest works which would become his legacy to the world, due to the fact that he revealed his heartfelt compassion for the downtrodden and his quest for freedom and justice for all.

This thesis will reveal how the life and works of Cao Zhi embodied the highest ideals of the Jian’an period which contributed to a new trend of individualism. It will explore how Cao Zhi questioned the past, while at the same time broadening his horizons by encompassing new themes into his poetry which showed his deep reverence for human life and his inherent belief that one individual can make a difference.
Chronology of Chinese Dynasties Up to the Tang Dynasty

Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors 三皇五帝 (Before 2070 BCE)

Xia 夏 (2070-1600 BCE)
Shang 商 (1600-1046 BCE)
Western Zhou 西周 (1046-771 BCE)

Eastern Zhou 東周 (770-256 BCE) which is traditionally divided up into:
  Spring and Autumn 春秋 (722-476 BCE)
  Warring States 戰國 (475-221 BCE)

Qin 秦 (221-206 BCE)
Western Han 西漢 (206 BCE - 9 CE)
Xin 新 (9-23 CE)
Eastern Han 東漢 (25-220 CE)

Three Kingdoms 三國 (220-265 CE)
Western Jin 西晉 (265-317 CE)
Eastern Jin 東晉 (317-420 CE)
Northern and Southern 南北朝 (420-589 CE)

Sui 隋 (581-618 CE)
Tang 唐 (618-907 CE)
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1. Introduction

The integral role that Cao Zhi (192-232 CE) has played, with regard to the development of Chinese lyric poetry is undisputed. However, the extent to which Cao Zhi’s political ambitions spoke through his poetry has been hotly debated by scholars in recent years. There has been much research done on the poetic trends of the Jian’an (196-220 CE) period but not a lot of in depth research on the individual poets of the era. Cao Zhi was deeply influenced by his friends and family and it is the influences of those around him, along with his highly individualistic personality, that speak boldly through his works and contribute to his highly original and thought-provoking lyric poetry. Cao Zhi wrote poetry at a time of momentous upheaval for China. This era would also prove to be a momentous age for Chinese poetry and it was Cao Zhi that spearheaded this new trend of individualist expression which steered Chinese lyric poetry along a whole new course.

All scholars agree that Cao Zhi played a key role in the development of lyric poetry in China. In the Wenxuan (Selections of Refined Literature), Xiao Tong collects more poetry by Cao Zhi than any other poet of his time. Liu Xie proclaims Cao Zhi to be “the outstanding talent of them all.” Cutter and Connery assert that no poet is more worthy of study than Cao Zhi who is considered the representative poet of the Jian’an period in that he combines the outstanding features of all his contemporaries.

However, according to Frankel, the image of Cao Zhi, the man, is “historically inaccurate in many details” and there has been a general reluctance to discuss the personality of the poet in relation to his work. However, there is general agreement that traces of Cao Zhi’s life were expressed in his poetry and reveal his particular moods at certain times in his life. Dunn writes a relatively brief account of how the events in Cao Zhi’s life speak through his poetry. However, since most of Cao Zhi’s work cannot be accurately dated, there was a general desire among scholars to see poetry as a work of art and not as “a factual record of happenings and experiences.” However, as Erlich relates, lyrical testimony becomes evidence when it is corroborated by other auxiliary testimonies and when the

4 Connery, “Jian’an Poetic Discourse,” 171.
7 Yin Yixiang, “Preface,” to San Cao Shi Xuanyi (Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 1990), 12.
9 Frankel, “Fifteen Poems by Cao Zhi,” 5.
interconnectedness of individual works are considered. As Frankel relates, it is important to keep in mind how elements of experience are transformed into poetry and how this differs from the historical events as we know them and “it will then be discovered how the poem has found its place in a great cultural narrative.”

Cutter points out that traditions have grown up around Cao Zhi’s name largely due to the 七步詩 (Poem in Seven Paces), which is an “anecdote and poem about fraternal conflict in political situations.” This poem has continuously been associated with Cao Zhi even though its authenticity has been doubted by scholars. Portraying Cao Zhi as the hapless victim to his brother’s machinations has had an effect on the interpretation of Cao Zhi’s poetry. Cutter notes that Cao Zhi’s alienation from the court could well have been due to slanderers within the court rather than the political persecution by his brother.

There has also been debate as to the extent that Cao Zhi’s political ambitions are prevalent in his poetry. It appears to me that Cao Zhi’s political ideals remained but evolved throughout his life. At first, he saw himself as the heroic knight warrior in such poetry as “Baima Pian” 白馬篇 (White Horse), but in his later poetry, he redefined this hero as someone who speaks out on behalf of the oppressed. Cao Zhi was one of the first poets to explore the theme of the neglected woman in poems that describe the yearnings of a lonely woman confined to her room revealing Cao Zhi’s “preoccupation with the solitary figure.” Cutter writes that it maybe what Miao has suggested, in that, locating this “lonely woman in a high place,” Cao Zhi is able “to emphasize the abandoned woman’s physical and emotional isolation.” Cai notes that the change in persona from the unmarried maiden to the abandoned woman in Cao Zhi’s poetry, indicate the profound changes in the poet’s life under his brother’s reign. I agree with Roy’s interpretation in that the abandoned woman represents a proclamation of Cao Zhi’s loyalty and desire for reconciliation.

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11 Frankel, “Fifteen Poems by Ts’ao Chih,” 5.
13 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 2.
15 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 29.
18 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 32.
19 Ibid., 405.
Cutter and Mok Wing-yin criticize traditional scholars who interpret the abandoned wife persona as a political allegory and encourage readers to look beyond the political allegory interpretation and to discover new interpretations. Cutter agrees with Frankel in that many scholars have been overly enthusiastic in finding interpretations of Cao Zhi’s works to fit their conceptions of his life. However, to the Chinese scholar, poetry could serve as a three-fold form of “social, aesthetic and moral discourse.” It was also widely accepted in ancient China that scholars and writers would also participate in politics. Cutter argues that, at times, Cao Zhi’s poetry “may be an expression of the poet’s personal desires.” However, since Cao Zhi’s political desires are so closely intertwined with his political desires, it appears to me that the abandoned woman image cannot but be a political allegory.

Cutter argues that the poets of the period, including Cao Zhi, “drew on a pre-existent tradition” of using the woman’s voice to express pent up indignation and explored the possibilities of this theme. He points to the fact that Cao Pi (187-226) and others “were writing similar poems at the same time.” However, it seems to me that Cao Zhi’s poems were highly political in their content and that Cao Zhi’s women poems were more closely related to the Qu Yuan legend than to Cao Pi’s more sensitive and observant approach. Qu Yuan, like Cao Zhi, was also “cut off from any opportunity to make his worth known and serve his country.” Cao Zhi’s poems burn with his ambition to unify his homeland and to achieve peace and stability and “his desire for worldly involvement, including official service was lifelong.” Confucius encouraged scholars to involve themselves in affairs of state and the desire to participate in politics became even more apparent during the Jian’an period as the intellectuals and writers of this period expressed hope that a new age of clean politics had come.

Most scholars agree that Cao Zhi’s father, the Regent Prime Minister, Cao Cao played an important part in Cao Zhi’s early life. Cao Cao was a first class poet who, “expressed a lofty and noble spirit in simple and clear language,” and by expressing traces of individualism provided the foundations for a new style of poetry. He likened an old steed that longed to gallop ten thousand li to a person who, though advanced in age, still desired to continuously forge ahead (lao ji fu li zhi zai qian li). The idea that “an ambitious spirit never dies” helped to shape Cao Zhi’s high ideals and

27 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 359.
28 Ibid., 378.
29 Ibid., 382.
30 Ibid., 39.
31 Yin, San Cao Shi Xuanyi, 8.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 5
34 Ibid.
emboldened him to put his talent to use in order to realize his political aspirations. However, on a much more profound level, Cao Cao inspired Cao Zhi to pursue his ideals on a spiritual level and not measure his success on the basis of what he had achieved while he was alive, but to measure his success in respect of his devotion to his ideals, his optimism for the future and the power of his spirit to continually strive ahead no matter what the obstacles. This spirit of continuously striving ahead would later become a contributing factor in Cao Zhi’s desire to share his personal contemplations through his writing and to create an individual self to live on for generations.

Cao Cao vowed to select courtiers on the basis of their ability, so Cao Zhi behaved exactly like a self righteous courtier who believed his life of greatness had been predestined. This explains Cao Zhi’s tendency to behave like a pampered nuisance from an aristocratic family who thought highly of himself. Most scholars acknowledge Cao Zhi could be disrespectful, intimidating, and even boastful. Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) criticizes Cao Zhi as being dizzy with success. Although Cao Zhi could rightfully be described as “lacking in tact” or “having no self modesty about his own importance,” his behavior needs to be judged in the context of traditional China. Court life was stifling during the Han (206 BCE-220 CE) era as literature during this time, instilled in people a need to suppress their emotions for the greater good. If, even a tiny amount of freedom is then permitted in such an environment, there will be an explosion of pent up emotion, so the fact that Cao Zhi’s personality was criticized in such a dreary and stifling environment is hardly surprising. Cao Zhi was seen by many as being possessed of a willful temperament and although the ‘Incident at the Gate’ where he boldly drove his coach through a gate that was strictly prohibited for use by those who were not of the imperial family were was seen as hastening Cao Zhi’s alienation from political life, Cao Zhi’s actions do not reveal that he acted out of malice as the major gate and speedway that Cao Zhi misused “seem not to have been those of the emperor, but those of Cao Cao.”

However, if Cao Zhi was simply seeking a life of leisure, he would have aligned himself with his brother’s faction. Some scholars note how his realization that happiness is impermanent

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38 Dunn writes that Cao Zhi claimed to have come to the same conclusions as Sun Wu, author of the *Art of War* without studying the doctrines in Dunn, *Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet*, 33.
41 Ibid.
43 Cutter, “The Incident at the Gate” 228.
44 Cutter, “The Incident at the Gate,” 232.
drove Cao Zhi “to prolong the joys of the moment.” However, the spiritual dimension of Cao Zhi’s personality was always present. If someone has a personality that is so at odds with their immediate environment, they will suppress that side of their personality in order to conform to the standards of behaviour around them. However, glimpses of this person’s unique view of life will always shine through at oddly unexpected moments, such as in the midst of enjoying a grand and extravagant banquet.

Modern scholars point to a more complex literary development in that they see the themes of feast and immortality as closely interrelated. I see the wide ranging themes in Cao Zhi’s banquet poetry as proof that even though he remained inside the palace walls, his mind wandered outside the palace walls as he pondered his position in the greater universe. Cao Zhi contemplated the lives of those who had not been born into the privileged life that he had been born into and he was able to put himself in their position, contemplate their thoughts and tap into the ideas that defined his time which were the sense of loneliness, but also a sense of hope, heroism and never ceasing to continue striving ahead.

Although many scholars write that Cao Zhi lived during an age where there was “ample opportunity for every capable man’s ambition to be realised,” very few of the Jian’an poets actually participated in politics. Cao Zhi had no military prowess and had a penchant for wine. Cao Pi had more skill in the martial arts and had won over many of the courtiers, so he was the obvious choice for heir. However, in Cao Cao’s dying moments, Cao Cao called for Cao Zhi as he wished to speak with him. Cao Zhi refused to grant his father an audience, fearing the fissures that may appear in the family after Cao Cao’s death. Many of the courtiers had repressed their feelings towards Cao Zhi as they knew that he was a favourite of Cao Cao. However, after Cao Cao’s death, many courtiers revealed their pent up anger and distrust of Cao Zhi. Cao Pi was also intensely jealous of Cao Zhi’s literary ability so sought to gain the upper hand in the political arena.

Although it was against the backdrop of restlessness and questioning that Cao Zhi and the Jian’an Seven realized the valuable contributions of individuals to change aspects of society, and brought forth “the concern they had for their country,” most of the “restlessness and questioning” came from the populace and not from the court. Many scholars

48 The seven famous men of letters from the Jian’an era—Kong Rong 孔融 (153-208 CE), Chen Lin 陳琳 (?-217 CE), Wang Can 王粲 (177-217 CE), Xu Gan 徐幹 (?-217 CE), Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (?-212 CE) Ying Chang 隠隠 (?-217 CE), and Liu Zhen 劉桢 (?-217) are collectively known as the “Jian’an Qizi” in Chinese literary and intellectual history for their influences and achievements in literature.
50 Xu Gongchi 徐公持, ed., Wei-Jin Wenzue Shi 穎晋文学史 (Beijing: Renmin Wenzue Chubanshe, 1999), 72.
point to Cao Zhi’s inability to deal with the hypocrisy of the political world and most scholars acknowledge that Cao Zhi was doomed by his very ability to remain a political spectator. However, I believe this view to be inaccurate. Cao Zhi grew up during a time in Chinese politics when decisive action was praised and a non conformist approach was advocated. He had plenty of political acumen and ability and “had a reputation for being quicker and more brilliant than the other advisors, including Cao Pi.” The Wei court eventually became engulfed in factionalism, which led to the downfall of the dynasty so Cao Zhi’s predictions regarding the downfall of the House of Wei turned out to be accurate. It was actually the chaos going on around him and the suffering of his people that drove Cao Zhi’s desire to participate in politics. Cao Zhi’s desire to perform great deeds for his country never wavered, and if anything, it increased.

Cutter states that Cao Zhi was not alone in his views when he saw that the “Confucian scholars at the time had no power to deal with the recurrent factionalism, governmental breakdown, and war that dogged the land.” However, Cao Zhi did not rebel against Confucianism but against Confucian scholars. Confucian Teaching had been twisted and manipulated by the Court for its own ends and as a result, humanity had disappeared from politics. Although certain scholars see Cao Zhi as having the rationality of a Confucian mind, his ideas cannot be attributed to one belief system. However, Cao Zhi’s high Confucian ideals of loyalty and desire to put into practice what he had learned to improve the lives of others burn through his poetry like a flame that cannot be quelled. The superficiality of the leaders had been exposed to the people and a new political system was needed.

Cao Zhi never blindly accepted the views of others, whether it was concerning his writing, or his political views. The literati in traditional China saw their primary mission in life as the fulfillment of a successful political career so many scholars see this as the main reason Cao Zhi belittled his poetic achievements by referring to his writings as xiaodao 小道. However, there is ample evidence that Cao Zhi was appreciated by his friends for his outstanding political talent and literary ability. He referred to his writing as xiaodao, simply because he

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51 Wang Xiuchun 王秀春 notes that that one of the reasons that the Jian’an Seven were not suited to politics was on account of their highly individualistic and headstrong personalities. For this note, see Wang Xiuchun, “Jian’an Zhuzi Houqi Xintai Tanxi” 建安諸子後期心態探析. Journal of Nanjing University 2 (2002): 186.
53 Dunn, Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet, 47.
54 Chen Shou 陳壽, Sanguo Zhi 三國志, Pei Songzhi 裴松之 annot. 3rd ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 431.
56 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 28.
57 Cutter, “Cao Zhi’s Symposium Poems” 18.
59 Wuchi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo, eds. Sunflower Splendour: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 170, states that Cao Zhi could achieve immortality by annotating the classics but could not achieve this by being only a writer.
60 Dunn, Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet, 17.
was open to suggestions about ways to improve his work. Also, at this time, documenting established knowledge was seen as the highest form of writing and the concept of literature in terms of creative writing did not exist as a separate genre in China.

Although most scholars witness the chaotic times that Cao Zhi lived through, and see his alienation from the court as contributing to the development of his poetry, little attention has been paid to how Cao Zhi’s personality and the influences of his friends and family contributed to his development and growth as a poet although, there has been some attention to how Cao Zhi’s relationship with Cao Pi speaks through his poetry. There has also been little attention paid to the close interaction and deep sentiments that were shared between members of the Jian’an literary circle despite the lively portraits of vividly individualistic personalities that are depicted in the Sanguo Zhi. The value that Cao Zhi placed on friendship can be seen in the large number of poems he wrote to friends.

Most of the Jian’an poets had experienced the horrors of war and there is “a strong sense of justice” in the poetry of the period. I agree with this statement in the sense that Cao Zhi’s environment fostered the concern he had for other human beings. If Cao Zhi had lived at a time when there was peace, he would have been less likely to ponder such issues as the significance of his own existence and the desire to contribute to posterity. The value that Cao Zhi placed on the life of each and every human being was part of his inherent personality but ideas about how he could improve the lives of those who were suffering were inspired by a combination of the observations he made of the world around him and the discussions he had with the people around him. Cao Zhi believed in the power of the individual. He felt an apathy toward the powerful and disgust at the aristocracy but valued friendship.

I agree that Cao Zhi’s poetry is that of “fearless involvement” from a poet who “felt great passion for and found deep faith in life.” He never detached himself from politics, as politics touched the life of every citizen. He lived at a time when new ideas about how one could serve one’s country began to surface and resulted in a surge of anger and pent up resentment towards the current political environment which was seen as largely responsible for the current state of affairs.

Scholars emphasize that it was his inward struggle with political setbacks that became the very source of complex feelings that enriched his poetry, demonstrating how a melancholy

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61 Lin, The Vitality of the Lyric Voice, 139.
65Xu, Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi, 74.
mood becomes a force for examining life. Scholars note that Cao Zhi’s brother, Cao Pi emphasized the political function of literature and was too occupied with affairs of state to devote himself to poetry. However, it appears to me that there was no political undertone in the poetry of Cao Pi. His legacy in terms of his political contribution was already assured relatively early in his career. Cao Zhi’s poetry, in terms of its style, content and political overtones was far removed from Cao Pi’s delicate “court poetry.”

Cao Zhi’s quest for a freedom of the spirit in an environment of political oppression propelled forth his interest in Daoist philosophies which emphasized how one should discover the essence of one’s own personality and not define oneself on the basis of one’s relationship with others, had a liberating effect on literature and the activities of intellectuals. The world of nature where the mysteries of the Dao could be found also propelled forth Cao Zhi’s quest for freedom of the spirit.

Scholars note how his increasingly melancholy and resentful mood is concretized in the form of natural phenomena. Cutter further develops this idea by noting how Cao Zhi’s use of the natural environment sets the tone. Scholars point out Cao Zhi’s ability to submerge himself into the world around him in order to reveal the level of his emotional engagement in it. In this way, the world of nature became a reflection of his inner world. He endows elements of nature with human feelings so that the distinction between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ no longer exists. Cao Zhi’s merging of his emotions with the natural world puts him in touch with his inner yearnings, and it is this process which testifies to the influence of Daoist teachings. Although he achieved a level of inner peace, Daoist philosophies advocated a passive approach to life and politics so Cao Zhi and many of the people who lived at this time, became stuck in a quandary, torn between the old world and the new, awash in confusion and bewilderment, and unsure of which belief system to follow.

Daoist philosophies enhanced Cao Zhi’s awareness of the world of beauty and physical sensation. His similes and descriptions are “capable of startling the ears and bewitching the

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70 Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩, Ye Jiaying Shuo Han-Wei Liu Chao Shi 葉嘉瑩說漢魏六朝時 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 177.
72 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 208.
75 Stephen Owen, Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 20, states that “writing appears from observing the world” and “is not created by historical evolution or divine authority.”
eyes of the reader." Some of Cao Zhi’s poems have been described as “celebrations of the zenith of feminine beauty and goodness” leading some scholars to point to the lack of realism in his poetry. However, Cao Zhi was simply experiencing the full limits of his untapped imagination. The images in his poetry reflect the ideas that were in vogue at the time. The literary portrayal of transcendent traditions expanded during the Six Dynasties and Cao Zhi wrote transcendent poetry in order to free himself from orthodox Confucianism and to explore the universe and poetic expression in new ways. Scholars point to his desire to be psychologically independent of the world. Although there is disagreement as to what extent Cao Zhi was an advocate of Daoism, most scholars agree that he turned his attention more to Daoist philosophies in the latter part of his life.

Cai states that the rise of the literati culture after the collapse of the Han dynasty brought about a wave of interest in aestheticism, or as Gautier notes, a new attention to “art for art’s sake.” The pentasyllabic metre was highly suited to this new mood in poetry but most attempts to write scholarly poetry in this new form were clumsy and crude. This was probably due to the fact that these attempts were too much in the vein of “salon poetry” and lacked sincerity. Cao Zhi reveled in the new-found freedom that he found at banquets and pursued a true freedom of the spirit which produced a new sense of aestheticism in poetry. Cao Zhi made use of the repertoires of the past and re-modeled the material for pentasyllabic poetry, becoming the first prominent poet to produce numerous works on wide ranging themes in this form.

Cao Zhi boldly tested new boundaries in both his life and poetry. Cao Zhi is sometimes seen as a controversial figure, whose diction and imagery are characterized by contrasting

79 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 381.
80 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 404.
81 Cutter, “The Incident at the Gate,” 244, notes that Cao Zhi avoids stark images depicting the horrors of war.
83 Tang “Cao Zhi Rudao Jianju de Dute Renge Meili,” 43.
84 Zhang “Lun Daojia Wenhua bei Cao Zhi Cifu Chuangzuo de Yingxiang,” 38.
88 Liu, Sunflower Splendour, 541.
89 Fu Zhengyi 傅正義 notes how Cao Zhi retains the poetic traditions of the Shijing and the Chuci and merges them with the realism of the yuefu to create his own style of pentasyllabic poetry. For this note, see Fu Zhengyi, “Yidai Shizong Cao Zhi: Lun Cao Zhi mai Zhongguo Shishi de Dute Gongxian” 傅正義 “一代詩宗曹植—論曹植對中國詩史的獨特貢獻.” Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities Humanities and Social Sciences 11 (2003): 177-180.
91 Fu, “Yidai Shizong Cao Zhi,” 177-180.
extremes and rapid changes. Some scholars criticize his style as leading to the overly ornate and flowery poetic style of the Qi 齊 and Liang 梁 dynasties (479-557 CE). Other scholars accuse him of expressing himself in ambiguous terms, with no presence of self in his works in contrast to Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427 CE) who many see as the greatest poet of the Six dynasties period. However Tao Yuanming is seen as transcendent of his age rather than typical of it, as was the case of Cao Zhi. Although some of Cao Zhi’s poetry does reveal that he wrote in a more ornate style than any of his contemporaries and some have described his poetry as “rather loose in reasoning,” a close examination of his poetry will reveal that it is not the writing of an high browed aristocratic who wrote fancy poetic phrases.

Cao Zhi is a transitional figure who revitalized and advanced poetic forms and transformed the entire mood of poetic expression in China, so there was a move away from politics and back to the lyrical mainstream, which “was to remain for centuries the main stream of Chinese poetry.” Cao Zhi did not pursue a particular kind of poetic style and did not conform to rules and regulations regarding rhyme schemes or the use of tonal emphasis in his poetry. Rather, he listened intensely to the rumblings of his own heart which manifested itself in a new age of literary self-consciousness. Cao Zhi let his own world take centre stage to reflect on his life resulting in poetry that was full of impassioned ideals and rebelliousness, and a heartfelt and all consuming lament. Any criticism he made was done by way of historical illusion or by way of “making the past serve the present.”

Liu Xie criticizes the three Caos as cutting up “both words and tunes to form trivial lyrics and common rhythms” but Cao Zhi’s poetry shows a development and expansion of existing forms which came to define the straight-forward and lofty aesthetic style of Jian’an period literature which was the sincerest expression of what the artist feels, thinks, and sees.

92 Liu, Sunflower Splendour, 541.
93 Ye, Ye Jiaying Shuo Han-Wei Liu Chao Shi, 177.
95 Cao, Worlds of Dust and Jade, 13.
96 Connery, “Jian’an Poetic Discourse,” 201.
97 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 149.
98 Cutter, ‘Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 43.
100 Chang, “Generic Transformation from Yuefu to Gushi: Poetry of Cao Cao, Cao Pi, and Cao Zhi,” 125.
103 Yin, “Preface” to San Cao Shi Xuanyi, 15.
104 Fu, ‘Yidai Shizong Cao Zhi,” 178.
106 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 81.
107 Cutter, “Cao Zhi and His Poetry,” 42.
The Chinese veneration of antiquity can stifle originality but this was not the Chinese veneration of antiquity, but rather the court’s veneration of antiquity. More than half of Cao Zhi’s poetry is written in the yuefu (folk ballad) style which injected new life into the Chinese poetic tradition. Cao Zhi’s poetry, more so than any of his contemporaries, draws on the traditions of folk poetry and burns with the spirit of rebellion as Cao Zhi felt the distress of all humanity and carried the burdens of those who suffered an injustice on his shoulders.

However, Cao Zhi’s most important contribution to literature is “his creation of a multifaceted individual self in his poetry” in that he imbues his characters with his own ideals. Cai further develops this idea by noting how Cao Zhi penetrates into the inner life of a character and achieves a level of empathy with them. The hero in “Yetian Huangque Xing” (Orioles in the Fields) is someone who assists the weak with no thought of return. The characters in Cao Zhi’s yuefu are all a reflection of Cao Zhi himself in that they refuse to be swayed by the opinions of the masses and inhabit a lofty realm and behave according to their ideals.

However, whilst in the court, Cao Zhi was always influenced in some way, by those around him. It was only after Cao Zhi was banished from the court that he could reach a level of self acceptance and attain a sense of inner peace. Cao Zhi disentangled himself from the haze of court politics and wrote about his innermost feelings and out of this; the murmurings of a deeply compassionate individual could be heard. Cao Zhi was unable to realize his high ideals in life, so he consoled himself by expressing his high ideals through his poetry and it is this mood of sorrow and loss that would provide the basis for his finest literary works. Although poets had revealed the inner yearnings of their soul before Cao Zhi, it was sporadic and much poetry written in this vein remained anonymous.

Mok Wing-Yin states that Cao Zhi’s poems are “unmistakably those of the ruling class.” However, the way that Cao Zhi’s high aspirations and noble ambitions go up in smoke reveals how “his individual misfortune merges with the national tragedy,” and gives voice to the undying sentiment of the Chinese people at the time, who desired “a universal system of thought and government on which all loyalties could centre.” Frankel notes that the high concentrations of negatives in Cao Zhi’s poetry “point to the negation of basic human

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110 Liu, Essentials of Chinese Literary Art, 3.
111 The yuefu is the title used to cover a genre of Chinese poems which has many subgenres. For more about the history and generic divisions of the yuefu, see Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩, Yuefu Shiji 楽府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007).
113 Ibid., 118. Xu, Wei-Jin Wenzhong Shi, 73.
117 Dunn, Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet, 8.
endeavours and hopes,” but it appears to me that Cao Zhi’s poetry can be summed up in the words of Kent; “His mind was that of a Confucian idealist while his spirit and mode of poetic expression were infinitely imaginative and profoundly lyrical.” As Kent relates, “kinship, friendship, human society, and history were real and important for him.” However, deprived of any proper place within social movements which may improve society, the writer “becomes increasingly driven back into the solitariness of his own solitary mind” and is unable to “transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies.”

Like Qu Yuan, Cao Zhi stood for the principles of “intellectual freedom against political tyranny and cultural sterility,” like Qu Yuan, he “stood as a rebuke to political tyranny and a reassertion of the moral autonomy of the intellectuals” and like Qu Yuan, Cao Zhi had a curious mix of “patriotic and self-assertive qualities,” and an abiding faith in the traditional cultural and intellectual values of his homeland such as “making a distinction between the valuable and the worthless, cherishing family bonds, treating worthy men with courtesy, and respecting the old and loving the young.”

However, Cao Zhi differs from Qu Yuan, in that he was able to break away from the complexities of court politics and bring about a new era of individualism in the Chinese poetic tradition and Chinese cultural life which contributed to an era of literary self-consciousness. It was a combination of Cao Zhi’s life experiences, the influences of family and friends and his unconventional personality that saw him blaze a new path in Chinese lyric poetry. Even though Cao Zhi’s poetry shared elements with his contemporaries, it was only after Cao Zhi, that the great tradition of individualistic Chinese poets began, which culminated in the magnificent poets of the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE).

It can be seen that Cao Zhi is a controversial figure, in terms of both his personality and his poetry. Cao Zhi lived during an age of transition and his life and work reflect the chaotic times he lived through. Cao Zhi had a complex personality but his loyalty to the state and the love that he had for his homeland were always present in his poetry. Cao Zhi’s unique life experiences along with his ability to manipulate traditional literary forms and images as well as the relationships he had with those around him shaped his poetry and helped him to discover his own uniquely individual voice. This new voice expressed the murmurings of his soul and it was this voice that has inspired generations of poets throughout the ages. I intend to explore the factors that contributed to the emergence of Cao Zhi’s individual voice through his poetry.

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119 Cao. Worlds of Dust and Jade, 13.
120 Ibid., 28.
121 Ibid., 26.
122 Ibid., 30.
124 Ibid., 26.
125 Ibid., 30.
126 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 427.
In this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that Cao Zhi was a key transitional figure between the Chinese poetic traditions of the past, best represented by the Shijing 詩經 (Book of Songs) and the Chuci 楚辭 (Songs of the South), and a new individualistic style of Chinese poetry. I will explore how Cao Zhi’s poetry evolved, due to his personality, the influence of his family and friends as well as the relationship he had with the court, into a style which surpassed that of his contemporaries and ushered in a new era of individualism in the Chinese poetic tradition.

This thesis is made up of four chapters with the present one devoted to a review of current scholarship concerning the life and works of Cao Zhi including the conflicting viewpoints of Cao Zhi’s poetry and the contradictory images of Cao Zhi’s life, personality, family influences and political views.

In Chapter Two, I will explore the factors that led to the “awakening period” in Chinese literature, which began during the Jian’an period and carried over into the Wei-Jin dynasty. The awakening of an artistic self consciousness during this time created a new era of individualism for Chinese intellectuals. Scholars agree that the Jian’an period was unique in that it had innovations and distinctive features that contrasted sharply with the literature of the past so that from this time on, literature had value in itself. I will provide a general survey of the society, politics, economics and culture of the Jian’an period. Based on this, I will discuss how Cao Zhi’s poetry portrays the spirit of the period which, despite a raging civil war, was a time of hope, optimism and a realization of how political activism can ultimately improve the lives of citizens. I will also examine how certain features that characterize the Jian’an period are vividly reflected in the poetry of Cao Zhi.

In Chapter Three, I will look at how Cao Zhi’s family and friends influenced his poetry and how Cao Zhi’s personality speaks through his poetry as the notion of performance in reference to the writing process is more prominent in Cao Zhi’s works than any of his contemporaries. I will first investigate how Cao Zhi’s relationships with his family members are reflected through his poetry. After that, I will investigate how Cao Zhi’s relationship with his contemporaries shaped his poetry. I will then attempt to uncover Cao Zhi’s unique personality and how it found an outlet in his poetry.

In Chapter Four, I will look at the distinctive elements that define Cao Zhi’s poetry and set it apart from other poets. I will examine how Cao Zhi’s poetry differs from his contemporaries.

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127 In 1917, Lu Xun described the Jian’an period as “wenxue de zijue shidai” 文學的自覺時代 (literary awakening period) in Lu, “Wei-Jin Fengdu,” 526. For more discussion on this, see “Preface” to Yin Yixiang 殷義祥 Sun Cao Shi Xuanyi, 9 which describes the literature of the period as “wenxue de zijue” 文學的自覺 (the awakening of literature); Other writers such as Li Zexu in “Lun Cao Zhi Shige de Shengning Yishi,” 12 describe the period as “ren de zijue” 人的自覺 (the awakening of people) as does Shuen Fu Lin in Cai, Chinese Aesthetics, 136.

128 Yin, “Preface” to San Cao Shi Xuanyi, 1.

129 Ye, Ye Jiaying Shuo Han-Wei Liu Chao Shi, 116.

and then demonstrate how the use of distinctive imagery and new poetic techniques that Cao Zhi incorporates into his poetry add to the lasting appeal of his poetry. Lastly, I will conduct a thematic analysis of Cao Zhi’s poetry.

Throughout this thesis, I will be focusing mainly on Cao Zhi’s lyric poetry as it is largely due to his development of the Chinese lyric that his reputation rests. However, when necessary, I will be making some reference to his other written works such as his *fu* (rhapsody).

The poems quoted for study throughout this thesis are all taken from the Zhonghua Shuju, 1983 edition of *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao Shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝時 edited by Lu Qinli 逯欽立 (1910-1973) unless otherwise stated.

All the Chinese Journal Articles referred to throughout this thesis are downloaded from the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database.

Publishing details for Chinese sources with respect to publishers, publishing places and journal titles will be given, in principle, in the form of pinyin, and for Chinese book/article titles, Chinese characters will be provided in addition to their pinyin. In cases where the English versions are given in the original for the publishing details, only the English version of the publishing details will be provided, in order to retain the originality of the source.
2. The Period of Disunion

In the first section of this chapter, I will explore the factors and conditions that led to the birth of a new literary style which is often referred to as the Wei-Jin style which refers to a new, creative, and unconventional style of literature which flourished throughout the period of Disunion (281-617 CE). Cao Zhi’s poetry shares elements of the style of literature that characterised the Wei-Jin period with its focus on individual expression and spontaneous creativity. However, it was the Jian’an period that gave birth to and nurtured Cao Zhi’s talent. In the second section, I will give a brief expose of the specific features that characterised the Jian’an period including what set it apart from the eras that preceded it and the eras that followed it. I will also address the reasons surrounding why the Jian’an period inspired an explosion of pent-up creativity amongst Han intellectuals and how this period came to be such an important era in the development of Chinese poetry. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss how aspects of the Jian’an period are revealed in the poetry of Cao Zhi. I will also explore how Cao Zhi’s poetry expresses the unique spirit of the Jian’an period which permeated much of the poetry produced during this period.

2.1. The Wei-Jin Style

The intellectuals of the Wei-Jin period lived during turbulent times. However, they refused to cower in fear at the challenges and obstacles that lay before them. Although the voice of the individual had been heard in ancient China before the Wei-Jin period, the collective whole had always been emphasized over individual expression. The roots of the Wei-Jin style can be found in the years surrounding the catastrophic collapse of the Han dynasty. After lamenting the transience of life and the insignificance of their own existence, intellectuals strove to perform great feats in the political arena. However, they found themselves becoming increasingly embroiled in the turmoil and social upheaval that was going on around them which drove them to treasure their relationships with others. In their concern for others, there arose within them, a sense of their own individual self which was expressed through their poetry. As they became increasingly engulfed in sorrow, the sense they had of their own individuality became more prominent. Gradually, they fully awakened to a sense of themselves as individual beings which influenced all sectors of Chinese society. A new thread of defiant individuality began to dominate Chinese literature and would profoundly influence the direction of poetry in China.

As it is an “awareness of time and place in which an individual finds him/her self that drives their mode of expression,” the lifestyle of the intellectuals during the Wei-Jin period determined, and was a decisive factor, in what made up the general direction of poetry at the time. Over this period, the makeup and structure of Chinese society underwent dramatic

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changes which “influenced how people view life, their thinking, feelings, and their chosen value system.”\textsuperscript{132}

When an individual faces a scene of war and destruction, which was all too common during the Wei-Jin period, “they feel even more weak and helpless which causes them to examine their ideas and emotions and ponder the root of their very existence.”\textsuperscript{133} The Wei-Jin poets emphasized an affirmation of life in order to distant themselves from an ever present death which awakened within them, the concepts of individualism and the freedom of the human spirit. For this reason, the Wei-Jin period has often been termed the “literary awakening period.”

There were hints of an emerging awareness of individualism in Chinese culture in pre-Qin (221-206 BCE) times. However, literature, in terms of people expressing their feelings and emotions, had always been seen as a lesser kind of art than literature dedicated to politics or philosophy. Qu Yuan was one of the first examples of a passionate intellectual possessed of a vibrant individuality within the Chinese literary tradition but his writing was still tied to the political affairs of the day.

It was not until the late Qin dynasty that the rumblings of an emerging individualism began to be heard. Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 BCE) was a spectacularly talented military and political figure. He was eventually defeated by Liu Bang 劉邦 (?-195 BCE), the founder of the Han dynasty. Xiang Yu composed “Gaixia Ge” 埒下歌 (Song at Gaixia) as the enemy surrounded him on all sides, praising the prowess of his own strength but then admitted that it was no longer his time and his “horse no longer moved forward” (\textit{shi bu li xi zhui bu shi} 時不利兮騅不逝). Xiang Yu “had fallen from the height of success to the miserable abyss of failure.”\textsuperscript{134} This new realization of the insignificance of human endeavour had never existed in China. In facing death, Xiang Yu’s voice was not that of a supreme military commander but rather, that of a helpless individual, railing against his changing fortunes. His thoughts turned to his beloved concubine as his inner self comes to the fore and he realized that, in his thirst for glory, he has suppressed his own personal desires.

Xiang Yu had been known as an evil and arrogant ruler but the spirit of love and affection speaks through this greatest work and it was such feelings that contributed to a sense of individual awakening that would influence the literature of the Wei-Jin period. Xiang Yu’s heartfelt plea of an individual who had fallen to the whims of fate clashed with the values of Xiang Yu’s age which were the values of human achievement and prowess and of how individuals could only progress as part of a collective unit. Up until this time, individual


emotions were not seen as having a positive effect on collective decision making and had no place in the political arena.

The Book of Songs also emphasized a repression of feelings in order to conquer one’s desires for the sake of the greater good. Literature was focussed on the trivialities of everyday life and concerned established norms and social etiquette. Emperor Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (259-210 BCE) burned the Books and cursed Confucius in his later years and this tendency of politics negating culture carried on over to the early Han dynasty. It was felt that each individual should behave according on their position within society and only in this way, would society progress, under a mantle of stability and harmony.

The image of a unified empire moving forward and burgeoning prosperity were further entrenched by the fu rhapsodies which were “written on a grand scale and full of momentum with a majestic tone.” This ensured that the cultural traditions of the past “penetrated the minds of the people and had a wide ranging and stabilising effect.” However, human sorrow still lurked in the deep recesses of the human soul and Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (Han Wudi) expressed this feeling of unease when he wrote that “sorrow is produced when extreme joy reaches its height” (huanle ji xi aiqing duo 歡樂極兮哀情多) in his “Qiufeng Ci” 秋風辭 (Ode to the Autumn Wind).

Xiang Yu’s poetry had also made people realize that the Heavens can bestow happiness but just as easily take it away and human effort and capabilities make no difference. This made people feel small, insignificant and powerless and their distress found an outlet in their poetry. During the Han (206 BCE-220 CE)-Wei (220-265 CE) period, nature was described in the way that it changed to the rhythms of the seasons and the poetry of this time is particularly concerned with old age and death as the poets lamented the swift passage of time and railed against life’s injustices. The Gushi Shijiu Shou provide a vivid account of the lives of the people at the time, their concerns and frustrations as well as their hopes and fears. All these poems are anonymous and originally, there were no titles for these poems.

People came to the realization that they “had lived with suffering for a long time and had no hope and no way out.” They saw their only escape in “riding the six dragons” in order to “dispel their fears and soothe their soul” (liu long zhi tiao shi wo xin ruo 六龍之調，使我心若). They bemoaned life’s brevity by crying out that “One cannot live more than a hundred years but one often harbours a thousand years of worries” (shengnian buman bai chang huai qian sui you 生年不滿百，常懷千歲憂). There was a sense that the frugal and oppressive traditions of the past had stifled their existence and bought them no foreseeable benefit as they bewailed that “the foolish scrimp and save, but cannot avoid being scoffed at by later

135 Pan Xiaolong 潘嘯龍, Chu-Han Wenzue Zonglun 楚漢文學綜論 (Anhui: Huangshan Shushe, 1993), 360.
136 Wang Mei 王玫, Jian’an Wenzue Jieshou Shilun 建安文學接受史論 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2005), 30.
137 All the lines quoted here are taken from “Gushi Shijiu Shou” 古詩十九首 (Nineteen Ancient Poems) in the Wensuan 文選, comp. Xiao Tong 蕭統, annot. Li Shan 李善 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2007), 3. 1343-1352.
138 Pan, Chu-Han Wenzue Zonglun, 368.
generations” (yuzhe ai xifei dan wei hou shi chi 愚者愛惜費，但為後世嗤). They saw their own destiny as being controlled by others and compared themselves to “a pond floating about in the vast ocean” (bo ru sihai zhi chi 泊如四海之池).

It was not until the disintegration of the empire that the laments of the common people were heard by society at large as people dared to doubt and questioned ingrained traditions. A short life followed by death and disease was common place as “white poplars rustled in the wind, and pine trees lined the avenue” (baiyang he xiaoxiao songbai jia guanglu 白楊何蕭蕭，松柏夾廣路) so there arose within people, a deeper attachment to life. At first, people sought short term satisfaction in material comforts and “nothing compared with wearing the finest quality silk and drinking the best wine” (buru yin meijiu pi fu wan yu su 不如飲美酒，被服紈與素). Such a pure and plain way of writing resembles the rhythms of folk literature and had not been seen in the works of the literati before. They sought to live life to the full by “going out at night with a lamp” (bingzhu you 秉燭游), or by bringing light to the darkness by indulging in merry pleasures. However, the world around them was becoming increasingly dark and terrifying as warlords fought to control the Chinese empire.

The heroes of folk literature such as the “herd boy” (qian niu 牽牛) and the “weaving girl” (zhinu 織女) also revealed the romantic aspirations of the people, cheered them on in the midst of their dreary existence and gave them hope. Cao Cao appeared to be the embodiment of the heroes in Chinese folklore in flesh and blood form. Cao Cao’s father had been a low-ranking government official and Cao Cao grew up listening to the sounds of the folk yuefu that were starting to be fashionable as a form of light-hearted entertainment in the court at the time. Soon, the political institutions that had instilled a sense of duty in the people were on the verge of collapse and Cao Cao rose to be a ferocious but brilliant military leader, poet and political strategist who eventually became the most powerful and influential warlord in Northern China.

Cao Cao sensed that people were constrained by tradition and that their souls needed release. He became the first poet to use the title and form of yuefu ballads to write about current concerns which injected his poetry with a spirit of realism. Although Cao Cao also wrote transcendent poetry, it retained the “the smell of smoke and fires of human habitation” which made it “an extension of life on earth” rather than the far off realm inhabited by the immortals. He discouraged beliefs in the supernatural, encouraging people to see that “it would be a long wait for Prince Qiao and the immortals” (xiaren wangzi qiao nan ke yu deng qi 仙人王子喬，難可與等期) which inspired people to focus on building up the country once more after the turmoil of civil war. He had an unconventional personality, not worrying about trifles or social niceties. People began to awaken to their own wisdom and intelligence to solve specific problems. Cao Cao thought logically about issues that reflected his time such as the brevity of life and performing great feats which resulted in awe-inspiring

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140 Ibid.
poetry that was filled with lofty aspirations that encouraged people to strive ahead, perform great feats, and make their mark, so as to be remembered by future generations.

Poets began to express their feelings in poetry reflecting the realities of a society in upheaval and the suffering of the people and from this time, poetry became known as an important means of creative expression. Attending banquets became a way for intellectuals to temporarily alleviate themselves from the horrors of war and upheaval, but it was also a chance for people to express their individuality, which was liberating after the conservatism of the past. There was an emerging appreciation for living, and enjoying the company of friends and family.

However, continuous warfare cast a shadow over people’s lives. People often had their lives cut short and their relatives and friends suffered a similar fate, which bound people together in a desperate plea for humanity. The Jian’an intellectuals longed to participate in politics in order to perform great feats and make the country strong once more. They spoke up for the lost and helpless individual and showed a new respect for the dignity of each individual. The poets of the Jian’an period did not adhere to the beliefs of the past which were based loosely on the principle of Zhongyong 中庸 (the Confucian Doctrine of the Golden Mean) which discouraged expressions of extreme emotion and the friendship poetry they wrote to each other, revealed the deep feelings they had for other individuals. They mourned sorrowfully at a friend’s death and expressed intense grief at partings.

Cao Pi praised the spirited voice of individuals who did not follow set forms and patterns in his essay, “On Literature” (Dianlun Lunwen 典論論文), where he listed the genres that made up different kinds of literature. Although prose and poetry writings appeared at the end of this list, implying that it was the least valued literary genre, the fact that it appeared at all is significant as, before this time, “literature” (wen 文) had almost always been identified as Confucian Teachings and historical documents as scholars had mainly “sought to document established knowledge.”

There was a new spirit of freedom expressed through writing which manifested itself in a new way of living. People started to behave in a haughty, arrogant, and unconventional way so as to preserve the essence of their individual spirit and not succumb to convention. They strove to sparkle with wit and originality. Kong Rong was a satirist who would regularly argue with Cao Cao, who eventually had him put to death on account of his lack of filial piety. 142 Many of the political leaders of the time had an uneasy relationship with intellectuals and this clash of ideals only increased over time. Intellectuals began to distance themselves from the political arena. Meanwhile, the ravages of war, mass starvation and the plague continued to reminded people of the stark reality and finality of death in all its horror. There were numerous usurpations of the throne as blatant hypocrisy and corruption became more

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142 Lu, Wei-Jin Fengdu,” 527.
rampant in government circles. In 249 CE, the Sima 司馬 clan seized power “initiating a bloody purge of all persons opposing their reactionary retreat to a pre-Wei ideology.”

The poetry of the Zhengshi 正始 (240-249 CE) period has a mood of despondency, gloom and a raw sense of tragedy and revealed the increasing influence of Daoist philosophies. Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263 CE) and other poets pondered the position of the individual in relation to the cosmos, society and fate and a heightened sense of depression and melancholy accompanied this awakening. As shown in his “Yonghuai Shi Bashi’er Shou Qiyi” 詠懷詩八十二首其一 (Expressing My Feelings in Eighty-two Verses, Verse One), Ruan Ji would lie awake at night, arise to play his zither and lament. “I am alone with my melancholy thoughts which cause me great sorrow” (you si du shangxin 憂思獨傷心). Intellectuals became obsessed with purifying their souls by distancing themselves from politics while continuing to uphold their high political ideals but the court was becoming an increasingly dangerous place for outspoken and ambitious intellectuals. Ji Kang 嵇康 (223-262CE) was sentenced to death for offending politicians and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433 CE) met with a violent death as a result of his burning political ambitions.

Many poets resorted to the life of a recluse or would find solace in drinking copious amounts of wine in order to reach a transcendent mystical realm. They regularly engaged in qingtan 清談 (pure talk) in order to expose themselves to new ways of living and thinking which led to a stimulating intellectual environment which encouraged diversity. The implicit rules and customs regarding life and human behaviour had oppressively weighed down on them but now, there was an increasing sense of apathy towards politics as well as towards the society in which they lived, so intellectuals expressed their ideas through literature and shared their inner most feelings with fellow intellectuals.

Up until the end of the Han dynasty, wenxue 文學 (literature) had referred to the annotation of the Confucian classics, historical documents or other kinds of high learning or scholarship. It did not refer to the concept of works of art expressed through language. The chapter in the Shishuo Xinyu 世說新語 (Tales of the World) entitled “Wenxue” deals not only with thought and learning but also prose and poetry which revealed that the “writers” in society had been recognised. The intellectuals of this period regularly indulged in reckless and brash behaviour that clashed with the Confucian Teachings that had been propagated by the court and their poetry expressed the disdain they had for society and was imbued with the spirit of rebellion. Intellectuals sought to unleash their creativity in more defiant ways. In the “Wang Meng” 王猛 chapter of the Jinshu 晉書, it is written that they would indulge in such unconventional behaviour such as “slapping the lice on themselves while talking and ignoring those who passed by.” They would discuss abstruse philosophies or “appraise themselves and others

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144 Quoted in Lu, “Wei-Jin Fengdu,” 530.
in a distinctly individualistic way.” As long as someone had talent, they paid no attention to how they behaved or presented themselves. In the chapters of the *Shishuo Xinyu*, children were quizzed on the subtle meanings behind poetic works and the barriers between men and women became freer. Women were no longer treated as second class citizens. The feistiness and independence of women is praised in the chapter entitled “Worthy Beauties” in the *Shishuo Xinyu* where they would “sit beside [men] and talk with them as equals.”

There was a new respect for those from humble origins with stubborn personalities but who were sincere of temperament. Strange quirks of people’s personalities were celebrated and there was a rejoicing in the fact that no one is the same as somebody else and each person is bestowed with a different range of talents. Descriptions of natural scenery were employed to describe the virtues of human behaviour and intellectuals began to take an interest in pastoral poetry.

During the Eastern Jin (317-420 CE) dynasty, Buddhist and Daoist beliefs merged, and intellectuals began to ponder how they could find a spiritual refuge from the contradictions that raged within them. Tao Yuanming, the first pastoral poet in the Chinese poetic tradition, could not compromise his high sense of personal integrity and high political ideals so he shunned the world and lived as a virtual recluse for much of his life. He saw living amongst nature as attaining a true freedom of the spirit and in doing so, brought the awakening process of individuals to a higher and more aloft realm.

The seventh through to the ninth centuries were the golden age for Chinese lyric poetry. The Tang dynasty poets expressed their emotions through the portrayal of landscape and the poetry of this period depicts the splendour of nature with no human presence. The most famous poets of this period were not aristocrats. The pressures they faced within society gave them a sense of their own insignificance. However, they continued to see themselves as individuals with their own unique personalities which awakened them to new possibilities and in this way, they followed in the vein of the Wei-Jin poets.

The Wei-Jin period was a unique time in Chinese history. A period of social upheaval had made people feel desperately alone in a seemingly vast universe. However, out of this sense of vulnerability, a sense of an individual self emerged and it was the writers of this period who keenly felt this emerging thread of individualism which they expressed vividly through their poetry. The Wei-Jin intellectuals displayed an unyielding and uplifting spirit in the face of great suffering which continues to inspire Chinese intellectuals today and the poets of this period greatly contributed to the proud tradition of individualistic poets that live on in Chinese people’s hearts and minds today. Even though it is written in the preface to the *Wei-Jin Sixiang* 魏晉思想, that in terms of the danger of death that Chinese intellectuals faced

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146 Yue, *Zhongguo Zhishi Fenzi de Xin yu Shen*, 19.
and the anguish that raged in their souls, nothing surpasses the Wei-Jin era\textsuperscript{147} and a mighty and prosperous era was no longer, minds can be free and creativity can flourish.

Cao Zhi lived during a hopeful time for Chinese intellectuals. His father, Cao Cao was a pragmatic and able leader who wrote poetry that broke with the staid traditions of the past. He paid much attention to the education of his sons and it was Cao Zhi who very quickly revealed himself to be one of the most outstanding poets of his age. The Jian’an period was an exciting time for a promising young poet with bold ambitions. Many of the literary trends that came to define the Wei-Jin spirit were influenced by the new ideas that were being put forward during the Jian’an period and are vividly reflected in the works of Cao Zhi.

2.2. The Jian’an Period

The Jian’an period refers to the period encompassing the final years of the Han dynasty and the founding years of the Wei 魏 Kingdom. Confucian values had been heavily propagated and manipulated by the Han court which “were against passionate outbursts of individual sentiment.”\textsuperscript{148} There were great strides made in certain areas such as art and science but dissatisfaction simmered beneath the surface, creating social instability and culminating in the downfall of the dynasty. Cao Cao was a renowned military strategist as well as a pragmatic leader. He also happened to be a poet, which saw poetry and art flourish in his Wei kingdom. The literati longed to put their abilities to use in order to build up the empire. However, factionalism was engulfing politics so they so sought a new value system based loosely on Daoist philosophies which inspired an interest in nature and the greater universe. A yearning to express one’s innermost thoughts in words precipitated a new kind of self awareness and rebellious spirit which outlasted their deaths.

The Han dynasty espoused Confucianism and outlawed all other forms of thought and even sought to “secure high official posts for Confucian scholars.”\textsuperscript{149} Recommendations became the preserve of the elite which generated “a whole web of ties of recognition, tacit promises of loyalty between inferiors and their superiors, and a sense of allegiance.”\textsuperscript{150} Court writers produced long descriptive \textit{fu} poems “to flatter the throne and its achievements”\textsuperscript{151} or endlessly annotated Confucian classics. Confucian Teachings also stressed the value of moral principles, and the need for a disciplined mode of behaviour to regulate the relations of the individual, the home and the state. They also stressed ancestor worship which was manifested in the construction of grand tombs and monuments. It was a very constructive and confined world-view and there was little individual sentiment or feeling.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{147} Quoted in Zhao Zhizhong 趙治中, “Hanmo Wei-Jin Wenren Shengming Yishi de Yanjin” 漢末魏晉文人生命意識的演進, \textit{Journal of Lishui Teachers College} 24, no.4 (2002): 45.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Wang Yunxi and Gu Yisheng 王運煕 顧易生 eds. \textit{Zhongguo Wenxue Piping Tongshi (Er) 中國文學批評通史 (貳)} (Shanghai, Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1996), 2. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Cai, \textit{Chinese Aesthetics}, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Michele Pirazzoli-t’Serstevens, \textit{The Han Dynasty}, trans. Janet Seligman (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1982), 151.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Michael Loewe, \textit{Everyday Life in Imperial China During the Han Period 202 BCE-220 CE.} (London: Jarrold and Sons Ltd, Norwich for the Publishers, 1968), 99.
\end{itemize}
The Han dynasty showed great progress in the areas of astronomy, sciences and medicine. Han art works expressed a vigour and dynamism but this was largely for show and artists were heavily patronised by government departments. Literature at this time was largely dominated by folk songs and was only in its formative stages. Lyric poetry of the Han period was closely associated with music and often livened up court banquets. Court writers began to experiment with the *yuefu* which was derived from popular song and speech and strongly influenced the writers of the “Nineteen Ancient Poems.” The “Nineteen Ancient Poems” were a heartfelt lament about the changeability of human emotions, separation from loved ones amongst the turmoil of war, and the brevity of life. These anonymous poems hinted at a sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs.

Towards the end of the Han dynasty, peasant revolts began to flare up. The Yellow Turbans drew their strength from popular cults and were associated with emerging Daoist religious practices. The northern warlord, Cao Cao, suppressed the Yellow Turbans but the Han dynasty had begun to collapse and there was continuous rebellion and civil strife between competing warlords. Peasants not only had to contend with constant military conscription, war, plague and political upheaval but also severe droughts and flooding as well as the fear of starvation as crops lay wasted in the fields.

This was a time when people could be ripped away from all that was familiar and sent away for long periods on military expeditions; never knowing when or if they would be reunited with loved ones. Their whole world was being turned upside down, which caused immense grief and sorrow as people feared that life would never be the same again. The social fabric of society had been ripped apart leading some statesman to re-assess the value of the Confucian system which had failed to sustain the integrity and strength of the empire.

Political divisions required a constant state of preparedness and frequent outbreaks of war led to advances in military technology. Military campaigns awakened a patriotic spirit and an admiration for the glories of the past. There was a belief, shared by many, during this period of transition, that disunity was inherently wrong. This gave birth to a patriotic fervour to unify the country. Cao Cao, “a brave warrior in an age of disorder, but a treacherous rebel in an age of order,”152 was seen as having “the ability to control the world”153 by displaying qualities of individual prowess and unflinching fearlessness. However, Cao Cao failed in his bid to unite the empire and China was eventually divided into three kingdoms with each jostling for supremacy, Cao Cao’s Kingdom of Wei was the largest and most populous and Cao Cao proved himself an able politician by settling farmers on to Yellow Turban lands and bringing about an economic upturn which “provided people with a sense of hope and courage.”154

However, conspiracy and treachery continued to dominate court politics. Former friends became foes in an instant. Cao Cao had been fond of “playing the knight errant with Yuan

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152 Liu, *Shishuo Xinyu*, 208.
153 Ibid., 208.
Shao, 袁紹 (?-202 CE)"155 but later, because of the tripartite division of the empire, they began to go their separate ways. Cao Cao could be callous and cruel. He once knifed a courtier to death after he warned no one to approach him while he was sleeping.156 For this reason, "those who were plotting rebellion suppressed their feelings."157 Cao Cao eventually defeated Yuan Shao and established his capital at Ye 邺 on the Zhang 河 River.

Cao Cao displayed magnanimity of spirit in selecting officials, emphasizing talent over Confucian virtue, and the range of ways to describe an individual became more multi-faceted. People began to take this same unconventional approach to daily affairs and did not adhere to ritual, behaving in a natural and spontaneous way and expressing themselves boldly and fearlessly. Cao Cao was also a patron of the arts and a poet who transformed the yuefu to express current affairs and the contemporary concerns of ordinary people. Under Cao Cao’s influence, the Kingdom of Wei transformed into a dynamic centre for the arts and literature.

Officials and aristocrats would participate in hunting, banquets, variety entertainments, evenings of music and dance and drinking wine. There was also time for cockfighting, chess, storytelling, calligraphy and poetry writing competitions as the literati became liberated from the shackles of the past and freely engaged in creative pursuits. Surrounded by death, they embraced life in all its fullness. They “were willing to enjoy themselves to their heart’s content”158 as they sensed the changeability of their own personal fortunes and how the fleeting nature of power mirrored the fleeting nature of happiness itself as they lamented a disappearing world and an uncertain future. The atmosphere was lively and animated and under the influence of these men of Ye, the literary style “went from realistic to romantic.”159

There were no large scale printing presses, so the only way to cement one’s reputation as a poet was to “write out their poetry and send it to friends.”160 If “they desired their poems to spread to a wider audience, they needed to set the words to music”161 so poets cultivated a good relationship with musicians. There was a revival in traditional music and folklore as “they absorbed the dances and movements of outsiders from the border regions”162 and new instruments were introduced. Non-Chinese entertainers, musicians, singers and dancers were popular at this time and “there are indications of foreign elements in yuefu songs.”163

The Jian’an poets immersed themselves in their stimulating surroundings and this enabled them to broaden their outlook and they became “passionately concerned about their time and circumstances.”164 Literature became “a tool to express personal hopes and aspirations”165

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155 Liu, Shishuo Xinyu, 476.
156 Ibid., 477.
157 Ibid.
158 Lin, The Vitality of the Lyric Voice, 144.
159 Qian Zhixi 錢志煕, Wei-Jin Nanbeichao Shige Shishu 魏晉南北朝詩歌史述 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2005), 44.
160 Wang, Jian’an Wenzue Jieshou Shilun, 23.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid., 24.
164 Ibid., 144.
165 Wang, Jian’an Wenzue Jieshou Shilun, 3.
and poetry established itself as the dominant literary genre. The pressing sense of life’s brevity compelled them to build careers in their own time and they “took great strides forward to create an error of heroism and performing great deeds”\textsuperscript{166} in order to improve the miserable fate of ordinary citizens. However, government institutions were in disarray so there was no opportunity for many of the literati to realize their political ambitions. Power was up for grabs as all kinds of slanderers and evildoers came out of the woodwork. Men of letters lamented the absence of loyalty and human affection which prompted contemplation into the meaning of existence from philosophical perspectives. They pursued an interest in Daoism which drew inspiration from the natural world.

The parallel developments of the “heightened awareness of the beauty of nature and the appraisal of human character”\textsuperscript{167} draw on the same vocabulary. It was believed that nature possessed a clear and pure spirit that represented a mind that was aloft from worldly desires and “nourished by mysterious, profound resources”\textsuperscript{168} like “a cassia tree growing on the slopes of Mt. Tai.”\textsuperscript{169} There was the sense that those who were rejected by the court or who chose to live a reclusive lifestyle in order to purify themselves, were not necessarily unprincipled or lacking in Confucian values. There was a desire not to pursue materialistic desires but to concern oneself with one’s legacy to the world.

People sought a sincerity of temperament in their relations to others and poets began to express their own private sentiments through literature. Along with “an awakening of the self, there was an awakening to and a realisation of aesthetics.”\textsuperscript{170} Cao Pi “comments on and compares the character and tone of each author’s style”\textsuperscript{171} in his “On Literature” which is the earliest example of literary criticism written in China. Cao Pi wrote that literature was “no less noble an activity than the governing of a state, it is also a way to immortality”\textsuperscript{172} and alerted writers to the fact that “the affairs of the day are seen to, but the task that matters more down the ages is altogether ignored.”\textsuperscript{173} There was a new, almost cathartic desire, to put one’s sufferings into words and to share one’s noble ideals and emotional torment through writing. There was a move away from the celestial figures and mythological beliefs of the Han dynasty and a desire to find one’s own kind of immortality here on earth before “the years pass and life runs out its natural course.”\textsuperscript{174}

Cao Pi’s letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (177-230), illustrates how many of the Jian’an intellectuals became embroiled in the chaos and upheaval that marked the age when he writes of how “the plague of years gone caused calamity and many of our dear friends left us, Xu, Chen, Ying, Liu, they all left us in an instant, how can such pain be expressed!”\textsuperscript{175} However, a trend of

\textsuperscript{166} Pan, \textit{Chu-Han Wenxue Zonglun}, 370.
\textsuperscript{167} Cai, \textit{Chinese Aesthetics}, 252.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 255.
\textsuperscript{169} Liu, \textit{Shishuo Xinyu}, 4.
\textsuperscript{170} Wang, \textit{Jian’an Wenxue Jieshou Shilun}, 7.
\textsuperscript{171} Xu, Gongchi, \textit{Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi}, 25.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Chen, \textit{Sanguo Zhi}, 453.
independent thought and self-awareness manifested itself in the form of distrust and growing cynicism directed toward those who wielded power which resulted in the “independent position of literature being strengthened.”

The fighting between political factions and the unpredictable political environment meant that many literati were killed on account of their political beliefs and allegiances. However, the seeds of rebellion had been sown and the conflict between the government and intellectuals was to reveal itself more starkly in the years to come.

The Han dynasty was a glorious epoch and it displayed the apex of human progress in such areas as art, science and music. However, the activities of intellectuals were tied to the affairs of the state which shackled their independence of thought. The chaotic turmoil preceding the collapse of the Han dynasty and a loss of faith in government institutions along with the magnanimous leadership of Cao Cao propelled many intellectuals to search for a new value system and form of expression which could give meaning to their existence. They were exposed to the infinite possibilities of the universe and their minds were broadened. They retained their high political ideals but their alienation from the political world forced them to ponder other ways to perform great deeds for posterity. They revealed their heartfelt yearnings and impassioned fervor thorough their writings which came to be known as the Jian’an style. Cao Zhi’s poetry, in particular, his earlier poetry, breathes with what is often referred to as the “wind and bone of Jian’an” and is typical of much of the poetry produced during this period.

2.3. Cao Zhi and the Spirit of Jian’an

Although the Han dynasty was a prosperous and unified empire and people appeared to be optimistic, discontent simmered beneath the surface. The frequent incursions by the barbarians on the northern border along with a yawning gap between rich and poor, culminated in civil unrest and the empire began to disintegrate. The poets of the period were deeply affected by the turmoil surrounding them so their poetry became a lament on behalf of the oppressed and a war weary populace. New philosophies began to stimulate the intellectual environment which opened the minds of intellectuals to new possibilities. Cao Zhi and the other Jian’an poets became filled with hope for the future and became eager to participate in government affairs. They refused to be bound by convention and would indulge in music, dance and feasting to free themselves on a psychological level but it was amongst the vast natural realm that they experienced a sense of true liberation. The poetry of the period evolved to express a new spirit that not only revealed their intense feelings of life’s brevity but also the value and reverence they had for life itself.

The Jian’an spirit refers to the particular literary style that characterised much of the poetry that was produced during the turbulent Jian’an period which was a time when a great empire had began to disintegrate and barbarian customs influenced Chinese culture. Poetry with a quality of beiliangkangkai (tragic and impassioned lament), flourished during the period and encompassed such uplifting themes as striving ahead to perform great feats, a

\(^{176}\)Wang et al., *Zhongguo Wensue Piping Tongshi*, 49.
desire to participate in politics but this was also tempered by a rebelliousness, a mistrust of authority figures, a quest for freedom of the spirit and a sympathy for the oppressed. The Jian’an spirit celebrates life in all its fullness manifested through leisure pursuits, music, dance, but most of all, the Jian’an spirit emphasizes loyalty to friends during times of strife. There was an emerging interest in Daoist philosophies which peppered the poetry of the period and drove within the poets, a new appreciation for the world of nature, beauty and aestheticism in poetry.

The Jian’an spirit reveals a distaste of materialism and the values of collectivism and military aggressiveness that had been propagated during the Han dynasty and this development is vividly reflected in the poetry of Cao Zhi. The Han dynasty was a time when “many aspects of Chinese genius were fostered and brought to a flowering”\(^\text{177}\) People absorbed the splendour of their surroundings and there was a sense that China had entered into a glorious new era:

\[
\text{Precious swords worth a thousand pieces of gold hang from men’s belts,} \\
\text{The women are dressed in vibrant splendid colours.}\text{178}
\]

There can be no doubt that for the nouveaux riche and middle class who lived in “blue storied buildings with double bolted gates,”\(^\text{179}\) material needs were being met and there was a hope that present day luxuries would continue forever:

\[
\text{The dusk clouds scatter and the people disperse,} \\
\text{We will continue this life of pleasure tomorrow. ("Famous Capital")}
\]

Cao Zhi’s poetry reflects the joyful mood and sense of optimism that many people had during this time. Although meat was eaten in Pre-Han times, during the Han dynasty, animals were killed indiscriminately and meat was hung up for sale and fish was brazenly taken without a thought for the remaining stock:

\[
\text{The Lamb is roasted,} \\
\text{The succulent cow is slaughtered.}\text{180}
\]

\[
\text{There is minced carp and stewed shrimp,} \\
\text{Baked tortoise shell and bear’s paw. ("Famous Capital")}
\]

People began to indulge themselves and wine was enjoyed all year round:

\[
\text{Plentiful food comes from the kitchen.}\text{181}
\]

\[
\text{The beautiful wine costs ten thousand per gallon. ("Famous Capital")}
\]

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\(^{177}\) Loewe, Everyday Life in Early Imperial China , 27.


\(^{179}\) Cao Zhi. “Meinu Pian” 美女篇 (Beautiful Girl).

\(^{180}\) Cao Zhi. “Konghou Yin” 簫篌引 (Lute Piece).

\(^{181}\) Cao Zhi. “Zeng Ding Yi” 贈丁翼 (To Ding Yi).
It was not only food but jewellery such as the gold, emerald and coral mentioned in “Beautiful Girl” that came from distant lands as far away as Parthian Iran and the Red Sea. Although the incursions on the border threatened the empire, contact with the peoples outside their borders enriched Chinese culture and provide a record of the vast regional differences that have contributed to the make-up of Chinese civilisation as the Chinese absorbed barbarian customs “even more avidly than their ancestors.”\textsuperscript{182} The belt that the maiden wears in “Beautiful Girl” that allows objects to be suspended from it came from the non-Han peoples. Although women were generally considered inferior to men in traditional Chinese society, the status of girls was “comparatively liberal in the ruling class.”\textsuperscript{183}

In the morning she frolics on the river’s northern bank,
In the evening she rests on the islets.\textsuperscript{184}

Leisure activities were pursued with gusto and were no longer seen as sinful or decadent. The ideal personality at this time was someone who participated actively and celebrated life in all its splendour. People enjoyed leisure pursuits such as horse racing, hunting, cockfighting and other light hearted competitive games that were in vogue at the time:

Horses race between the tall Catalpas. (“Famous Capital”)

In times gone by, he would shoot his bow,
His quivers were stacked unevenly in his wooden case. (“White Horse”)

The cocks flap their wings with a flourish,
Their tail feathers fly up with a start.\textsuperscript{185}

They dart about playing ball and woodchip,
Their cleverness and quickness is ten-thousand fold. (“Famous Capital”)

However, by the end of the Han dynasty, incursions on the border became more and more frequent and threatened the empire:

In the cities on the border there is much agitation and excitement,
The northern barbarians make many incursions. (“White Horse”)

The court was anxious to propagate the concept of a unified and powerful empire so court writers often depicted idealised accounts of battle. A granite sculpture found near the tomb of Huo Qubing 霍去病 (140-17 BCE), a Western Han dynasty military general shows a horse trampling a Xiongnu (匈奴) which “possesses an air of immense power.”\textsuperscript{186}

He rides ahead to trample the Xiongnu,
He turns right to destroy the Xianbei (鮮卑) who behave with unbearable insolence. (“White Horse”)

\textsuperscript{182} Pirazzoli-t'Sertevens, \textit{The Han Dynasty}, 162.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{184} Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qisi” 雜詩六首其四 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Four).
\textsuperscript{185} Cao Zhi. “Dou Ji” 斗雞 (Cockfight).
\textsuperscript{186} Pirazzoli-t'Sertevens, \textit{The Han Dynasty}, 218.
Advances were made in military technology. Iron weapons were produced in greater numbers and crossbows improved which allowed the aim to be adjusted to suit the distance of the target:

He takes his bow and attaches a whistling arrow,
He gallops to the southern mountains.
He lifts his bow and shoots two rabbits,
One shot and both animals are pinned. (“Famous Capital”)

However, there was a hint of boredom at such a one dimensional and monotonous existence:

Our eyes wander having already feasted on the entertainment,
We have tired of listening to the music. (“Cockfight”)

Questions about the greater universe and a world outside their borders eluded people and fuelled their curiosity. The daring nomadic people beyond the northern border rode more swiftly and confidently on horseback than the Chinese, which captured their imagination:

A white horse with a golden bridle,
Gallops swiftly towards the northwest. (“White Horse”)

He resembled the dynamic swashbuckling knight errant of Chinese folklore:

He is a knight errant from either You or Bing county. (“White Horse”)

This knight errant now acquired political connotations. He would exert his all for the glory of the empire:

Courageously sacrificing all for his country,
He treats death as returning home. (“White Horse”)

However, horses decked out with sparkling pendent jewellery and other strange exotic beasts that were kept at the time were of little use when it came to farm work. The fields were not worked to their full capacity:

Millet lies rotting in the fields
What can the farmers bring in? 187

Lowly peasants increasingly became the victims of unscrupulous landlords while warlords wreaked havoc across the land. Political institutions began to crumble and many young men were conscripted into the army wearing only “coarse hemp that hardly covered the body,” 188 and eating “bracken and leaves which barely fill the stomach.” (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Two). There was massive displacement all across the country:

The wandering roamer in the distance,
He serves in a far off place and is unable to go home. 189

I am originally a gentleman from the north,

187 Cao Zhi. “Zeng Ding Yi” 贈丁儀 (To Ding Yi).
188 Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qi’er” 雜詩六首其二 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Two).
189 Cao Zhi. “Qingshi” 情詩 (Feelings).
Now I have become a person of the south.\textsuperscript{190}

There was also an emerging sympathy for the miserable living and emotional condition of a woman whose husband had been conscripted into the army and sent on military expeditions. This lonely woman would spend her days on monotonous tasks never knowing when her husband would return:

\begin{center}
From early dawn she sits at her loom and by the day’s end,  
She has still not produced a single pattern.\textsuperscript{191}
\end{center}

The raging fighting between the warlords came to a climactic head in the horrific burning and pillaging of the once glorious city of Luoyang:

\begin{center}
The city walls are crumbling,  
The brambles are reaching up to the sky.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{center}

A decade had passed but the scars of such wanton destruction were still apparent in the ravaged and desolate landscape:

\begin{center}
How desolate look the fields,  
One thousand \textit{li} without the smoke of man! (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One”)
\end{center}

Chinese tradition had it that in the remote and glorious past, a happy and peaceful way of life “had rested on the productive work of eight households who worked on adjoining plots of land”\textsuperscript{193} and Cao Zhi yeamed for such a peaceful existence for the peasants:

\begin{center}
I turn and see there is no path for walking,  
The desolate fields can no longer bring forth a harvest. (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One”)
\end{center}

War had ripped away the only world they knew:

\begin{center}
When I think of the place where I used to live,  
I choke up and cannot find words. (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One”)
\end{center}

In their despair, the literati awakened to a sense of social justice. They felt the brevity of life all the more intensely and as they closely examined the value and meaning of their own existence, there arose within them a heartfelt sympathy for the poor and unfortunate:

\begin{center}
Many of the rich forget the poor,  
Who can extend them mercy? (“To Ding Yi 丁儀”)
\end{center}

\begin{center}
The common people who live near the sea lead a wretched life,  
They use the same grass that wraps around their bodies to build a house.\textsuperscript{194}
\end{center}

They had previously lived within a confined but comfortable environment:

\textsuperscript{190} Cao Zhi. “Men You Wan Li Ke”門有萬里客 (At the Door is a Stranger from Afar).  
\textsuperscript{191} Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qisan” 雜詩六首其三 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Three).  
\textsuperscript{192} Cao Zhi. “Song Yingshi Ershou Qiyi” 送應氏二首其一 (Sending of the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One).  
\textsuperscript{193} Loewe, \textit{Everyday Life in Imperial China}, 164.  
\textsuperscript{194} Cao Zhi. “Taishan Liangfu Xing” 泰山梁甫行 (Mount Tai and Liangfu).
A small bird in a cage flies back and forth,  
How can it know the freedom of the goose that soars in the sky?^{195}

Everyone had been affected by war in some way and there was a hint of rebellion as they began to question the ability many of their leaders whom they saw as a “common Confucian traditionalists” (To Ding Yi 丁翼) but were far from conducting themselves according to the teachings of the Great Sage.

Small men spend their days in pleasure,  
Our country’s enemies have not been stopped.^{196}

The sense of life’s transience drove their high ideals. They needed a hero who would break with the past and protect them from the horrors of war. Cao Cao, a ruthless general but superb military commander, “arrogated many of the trappings of imperial power.”^{197} Cao Cao “revived the custom of holding poetry writing competitions”^{198} as mere knowledge of the canonical texts was not satisfactory, “what one does with such knowledge is the means of constituting competence.”^{199}

A poetry competition was held to celebrate the construction of the “Bronze Bird Terrace” lookout that Cao Cao recently had constructed. The young Cao Zhi “was full of elation as he climbed up onto the dais.”^{200} In the Shuijing Zhu 水經注, Li Daoyuan 醈道元 (?-527 CE) describes the city of Ye that Cao Cao built as having “marked an important advance in city planning.”^{201} There was a “transition from the austerity of the Han style to a more embellished style.”^{202} There was a tower “every 100 paces”^{203} and the “storied rafters reached to the heavens, the flying eaves brushed the clouds.”^{204} It was said that when one looked towards the city from far away, “the structures towered like the dwellings of the immortals.”^{205}

Cao Zhi looked across at “the two watchtowers floating against the transparent blue sky”^{206} and the “the flying pavilions to the West”^{207} and absorbed the panorama before him. There was a greater emphasis on roof structures, particularly in the depths of the eaves and the ridge decorations also became increasingly ornate. There were intersecting crossbeams on the ceiling and the rafters were richly carved and decorated:

The lingering tunes float,

^{195} Cao Zhi. “Xiashan” 鰕鱓 (Shrimps and Eels).
^{196} Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qiliu” 雜詩六首其六 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Six).
^{197} Dunn, Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet, 14.
^{198} Dunn, Cao Zhi: The Life of a Princely Chinese Poet, 21.
^{200} Quoted in Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 417.
^{201} Quoted in Albert E. Dien, Six Dynasties Civilisation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 20.
^{202} Ibid., 46.
^{203} Quoted in Dien, Six Dynasties Civilisation, 20.
^{204} Quoted in Dien, Six Dynasties Civilisation, 20.
^{205} Quoted in Dien, Six Dynasties Civilisation, 20.
^{206} Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 417.
^{207} Ibid.
Amongst the patterned roof beams, the guests raise their heads to see the decorative patterns on the balustrades. They look across to see the coloured patterns on the rafters and pillars.\(^{208}\)

Cao Cao had “constructed walls that reached the clouds”\(^ {209}\) and there was hope that his “benevolence would be spread far and wide:”\(^ {210}\)

The Prime Minister bestowed his imperial mercy, across the four seas, there were no fighting armies.\(^ {211}\)

The literati had high political aspirations:

This vast country is abundant in materials, just like the sea gives up bright pearls. ("To Ding Yi 丁翼")

Cao Cao advocated an unconventional approach not only in politics, but also in daily affairs. People began to throw off the oppressive restraints and constrictions of the past which was shocking in the context of ancient China which always emphasized “how the individual existed in relation to others:”\(^ {212}\)

After three glasses they loosen their belts. ("Lute Piece")

There was relative stability for a short period, so intellectuals could enjoy banquets in the palace gardens while basking in their intoxicating surroundings. These banquets were similar to those held during the Han dynasty but there was now a more intense desire to enjoy the present moment as they attempted to shut out the horrors they had experienced and to escape from a world of war and death by enjoying time with friends even though the increasing turmoil beyond the palace walls was threatening to change their world forever. Although they appeared to be preoccupied with the pleasures of the moment, their language was “expressive of mournful thoughts:”\(^ {213}\)

Bolt the door and serve the wine, we will merrily indulge ourselves.\(^ {214}\) Our best years cannot be repeated, a hundred years flashes before me. ("Lute Piece")

This awakened in them a desire for freedom of the spirit:

“I wish we were winged birds and could spread our wings and soar into the sky.”\(^ {215}\)

Daoist philosophies were an emerging area of interest among Jian’an intellectuals and would increase in popularity among every sector of society during the Wei-Jin dynasties.

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\(^{208}\) Cao Zhi. “Yuanhui” 元會 (New Years Ceremony).
\(^{209}\) Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 417.
\(^{210}\) Ibid.
\(^{211}\) Cao Zhi. “Zeng Ding Yi Wang Can” 贈丁儀王粲 (To Ding Yi and Wang Can).
\(^{212}\) Yun, Zhongguo Zhishi Fenzi de Xing yu Shen, 9.
\(^{213}\) Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 81.
\(^{214}\) Cao Zhi. “Dang Lairi Danan” 當來日大難 (Great Trouble in the Coming Days).
\(^{215}\) Cao Zhi. “Song Yingshi Ershou Qi’er” 送應氏二首其二 (Sending of the Yings in Two Verses, Verse Two).
Metaphysical reasoning “became an outlet for their many profound thoughts.”

Music was a way to release one’s melancholy feelings and thoughts. The qin (琴) was “considered conducive to meditation and was closely associated with the literati” and was not only played to “dispel our melancholy” but to inspire high aspirations:

The strings are tight and a sad tune is plucked,
Listen to my words of noble lamentation. (“Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Six”)

However, the Jian’an poets veered away from assuming an overtly philosophical stance in their poetry. Rather, they strove to understand the “naturalness, spontaneity, and simplicity of the Dao itself” by advocating a simpler way of living and returning to nature:

Even though we may live in a magnificent palace,
In death we return to the same mountain grave. (“Lute Piece”)

A timely rain falls deep into the night,
Thunder envelops my courtyard. (“Timely Rain”)

During the Han dynasty, nature had only been of interest when it was seen to be connected to human activities. However, during the Jian’an period, nature increasingly figures in the foreground as they “described mountains and rivers, and the patterns of clouds and things.” This static natural scene that features in the opening lines of “To Xu Gan” suddenly comes to life as pigeons begin singing in the eaves and foreshadows the trend of Chinese landscape painting and pastoral poetry during the Jin (265-420 CE) dynasty. There were some intellectuals at this time that lived as virtual recluses, far from the political world and amongst nature; they spoke with a truly lyrical voice that was full of heartfelt feelings and an impassioned lament:

Lamenting and with a sorrowful heart,
He produces many magnificent passages. (“To Xu Gan”)

Despite their alienation from the political world, they upheld Confucian ideals of loyalty and held steadfast to their ideals:

Who can one blame when precious jade is rejected? (“To Xu Gan”)

Cao Zhi’s poetry reveals how foreign cultures and customs influenced the culture and thinking of Chinese people during the Jian’an period. Continuous war caused great suffering but for Cao Zhi, and many of the other Jian’an poets, it also presented an opportunity to question and rebel against the ingrained thinking of the past. Cao Zhi’s poetry shows his willingness to broaden his horizons beyond his confined and privileged existence to encompass new ideas concerning the value of the seemingly insignificant individual. The vast

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216 Yue, Zhongguo Zhishi Fenzi de Xing yu Shen, 9.
217 Dien, Six Dynasties Civilization, 341.
218 Liu, Shishuo Xinyu: A New Account of Tales of the World, 64.
219 Lin, The Vitality of the Lyric Voice, 10.
220 Cao Zhi. “Xiyu” (Timely Rain).
221 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 381.
222 Cao Zhi. “Zeng Xu Gan” (To Xu Gan).
world of nature reflected his magnanimous spirit and even though he was unable to realize his dream of participating in politics, his poetry burns with heartfelt indignation as well a fervent desire to perform great deeds to improve the life of his people and in this way, it truly embodies the spirit of Jian’an in the form of a tragic and impassioned lament of an individual who steadfastly refuses to forsake his high ideals.

The Wei-Jin period was a unique period in Chinese history. It was a violent and turbulent time that left people feeling vulnerable and afraid. However out of the ashes of their old world, arose the individual voices of people expressing what they felt in the depths of their souls. Cao Zhi was one of the first prominent poets to forge a new individualistic style that came to define the Wei-Jin period. He followed in the vein of the courageous intellectuals of the Jian’an period in daring to boldly question the past. The Jian’an poets were filled with hope at the promise of new and exciting possibilities in the political arena but their age made their dreams difficult to realize so they sought solace in their writing, producing heart wrenching and soul stirring poetry that came to define the Jian’an spirit. It is this spirit which has a tone of sorrow and tragedy that continues to inspire readers today. Cao Zhi was a product of the Jian’an period and his poetry breathes with the ethos of his times. His poetry demonstrates how intellectuals became “awakened” to new ideas about the value of life which manifested itself into sympathy for the oppressed and to the idea that society can be improved by the active participation and cooperation of intellectuals within the government. Cao Zhi’s immediate environment was made up of his friends and family but his uniquely flamboyant personality can only attributed to Cao Zhi himself. Cao Zhi’s poetry in particular was shaped by his unique life experiences. His poetry was also molded not only by the voices around him but also by the voices within him and it is these voices that are reflected in his poetry.
3. External and Internal Voices

First I will explore the extent to which Cao Zhi’s poetry was influenced by the words and actions of members of his own family and how the relationship he had with each of his family members speak through his poetry. I will then look at the stimulating intellectual environment at Ye which Cao Zhi heartily took part in, and analyse how Cao Zhi’s contemporaries influenced the development of his poetry. Lastly, I will investigate how elements of Cao Zhi’s personality are revealed through his poetic works.

3.1. Shattered Dreams

The father of Cao Zhi, Cao Cao not only influenced Cao Zhi’s political views but also his poetry. Like Cao Cao, Cao Zhi continued to keep striving ahead in pursuit of his high ideals regardless of the obstacles. He enjoyed a close relationship with his brothers and his father but this aroused the envy of Cao Zhi’s elder brother, Cao Pi. Cao Zhi was relentlessly persecuted by Cao Pi and later by Cao Pi’s son, Emperor Ming of the Wei dynasty 魏明帝 (r. 205 CE-239 CE) which “not only changed his life but also changed his writing.”223 Cao Zhi’s undying loyalty gave his later poetry an impassioned sense of heartfelt lament with bursts of pent up resentment lifting Chinese poetry to a whole new level.

Cao Zhi had brought stability and prosperity to a war ravaged people. Cao Zhi greatly admired his father and proclaimed, “Your achievements are as glorious as the light of the sun and the moon.”224 Cao Zhi’s poetry followed in the vein of his father’s in that it was “the impassioned fervour of a brilliant man.”225

The Prime Minister bestowed his imperial mercy,
Across the four seas, there were no fighting armies. (―To Ding Yi and Wang Can‖)

Cao Zhi had a “similar temperament to his father,” 226 who in his youth, “roamed about freely without restraint.”227 Cao Zhi also displayed phenomenal literary talent and “was skilled in composing literary pieces,”228 so Cao Cao “especially doted on Cao Zhi.”229 Cao Cao sought to pass on his wisdom and life experiences230 in the hope that Cao Zhi would perform great feats. Cao Zhi accompanied Cao Cao on military expeditions where he “noticed the ingenious way Cao Cao commanded troops”231 and “thoughts of chivalrous heroism surged within

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223 Xu, Wei-Jin Wenzhu Shi, 81.
224 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 417.
225 Ye, Ye Jiaying Shuo Han-Wei Liuchao Shi, 115.
226 Pan Xiaolong 潘啸龍, Yexia Fengliu 鄺下風流 (Taiyuan: Shanxi Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1994), 90.
227 Liu, Shishuo Xinyu, 476.
228 Ibid., 134.
229 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 416.
230 Ibid., 417.
231 Ibid., 424.
In “White Horse,” the hero is actually a young knight errant but he envisions Cao Cao’s heroic military exploits when he writes:

He raises the bow and shoots a target on the right,
He then shoots at the target on the left. ("White Horse")

Cao Zhi pictured himself as like Cao Cao, a fearless hero, whose bravery would be remembered forever:

His name will be recorded in the Book of Heroes. ("White Horse")

However, Cao Zhi observed that the outcome of a battle “cannot be foretold, things change in an instant.” There were certain factors out of one’s control:

Poverty cannot be foretold,
Luck and ill-fortune are equally difficult to predict.

Regardless of the result, Cao Cao continuously strove ahead in pursuit of a magnificent ideal. Cao Cao’s poetry has a breadth of vision that reflects the grandeur of the universe which is often seen in Cao Zhi’s poetry:

How wide and vast the blue sky is,
Nurturing all forms of life. ("Timely Rain")

Nature’s dignity reflected Cao Cao’s magnanimous spirit:

The mountains do not tire of height,
The seas do not tire of depth.

Cao Zhi also reflects this spirit of magnanimity:

The five peaks are high,
Because they don’t refuse any dirt.

Cao Cao had the ability to lift himself above the trivial concerns of everyday existence and find a spiritual release in the wonders of nature which inspired Cao Zhi:

The stone is solid but breaks easily,
Only the sun and the moon shine their splendour forever.

The vast mysteries of the natural world made human concerns seem trivial and insignificant:

The four seas look small,
The nine provinces look even smaller.

This gave rise to a sense of melancholy at the transience of existence:

233 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 424.
234 Cao Zhi. “Yuzhangxing Ershou Qiyi” 豫章行二首其一 (Yuzhang 豫章 in Two Verses, Verse One).
235 Cao Cao 曹操. “Duange Xing” 短歌行 (Short Song).
237 Cao Zhi. “Yuanyou Pian” 遠遊篇 (Roaming Far).
238 Cao Zhi. “Xianren Pian” 仙人篇 (The Immortals).
I am not made of gold or stone,  
It makes me sigh with pity and lament.  

Cao Cao compared human life to the morning dew as did Cao Zhi:

Heaven and earth are eternal,  
But the life of a person is like the morning dew. (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse Two”)

Cao Cao’s poetry encourages one to hold steadfast to the ideals of one’s youth in order to maintain a spirit of optimism. Cao Zhi also inherited Cao Cao’s optimistic spirit. Even though he was pained to see the hardship and suffering of those around him, he chose to look to the future and cultivated an optimistic demeanour:

I’ll toss it aside and will not raise it again,  
Too much worry makes men grow old. (“Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Two”)

Cao Cao wrote poetry that involved flights into the immortal world in order to achieve a realization of his ideals. His transcendent poetry contained the sights and sounds associated with the human world. Cao Zhi’s transcendent poetry also revealed an attachment to his home:

I look to the heavens and sigh,  
Thinking of my native place.  

Cao Cao valued talent over Confucian virtue and was even willing to employ those who “utterly despised him as a person.” He engaged in character appraisal when selecting officials. Like Cao Cao, Cao Zhi saw the intimate connection between a benevolent government and the prosperity of the people. Cao Cao decided to put Cao Zhi’s skills to the test “to provide the foundations for him to become heir.”

Cao Cao’s spirit of continuously forging ahead regardless of the obstacles as well as an open and magnanimous approach to life shines through Cao Zhi’s poetry. During Cao Zhi’s early years, his father showered praise on him which aroused the envy of Cao Zhi’s elder brother Cao Pi. It was Cao Pi’s relentless persecution of Cao Zhi that ironically, contributed to Cao Zhi becoming the brilliant poet that we know today. Cao Pi’s actions resulted in Cao Zhi’s inner sentiments coming to the fore in his poetry and the birth of a rebellious individual who understood the pain of suffering and alienation but refuses to give up his ideals. Cao Zhi’s most magnificent poetry was produced after Cao Pi had banished him from the court. Cao Pi never physically threatened Cao Zhi and he tolerated him for a longer period than would be expected under the circumstances. The two brothers had conflicting personalities and there

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240 Cao Zhi. “Panshi Pian” 盤石篇 (The Great Rock).
241 Liu, Shishuo Xinyu, 154.
242 Ibid., 208.
always existed a sense of intense competition which eventually culminated in a power play
within the court.

Cao Pi was an able poet himself and “had a way with words.”\textsuperscript{244} He was skilled at pellet
chess and played by “using the corner of his handkerchief.”\textsuperscript{245} He could see that Cao Zhi had
“grand and lofty political aspirations,”\textsuperscript{246} so he took every chance to discredit him with
“clever tricks:”

\begin{quote}
The elegant and graceful prince,
He is witty and clever like a spirit.\textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

Cao Zhi was indulgent and didn’t take to restraints. After he “rode his carriage at high speed
through the palace gates,”\textsuperscript{248} Cao Cao’s “affection for Cao Zhi gradually waned.”\textsuperscript{249} Cao Zhi
was “presumptuous and couldn’t be taught to listen to orders.”\textsuperscript{250} These factors led to Cao Pi
being proclaimed as heir. However, while Cao Cao was alive, there remained the possibility
that Cao Zhi’s political career could be revived:

\begin{quote}
The Great Sun\textsuperscript{251} nourishes all things,
Why worry that his blessing will not extend to you?\textsuperscript{252}
\end{quote}

Cao Zhi praised Cao Pi’s ascension to the throne by referring to him as a sovereign who
“radiates glory across the kingdom with prodigious martial arts skill and refined polished
writing:”\textsuperscript{253}

\begin{quote}
The emperor’s virtue sees the country stabilized and the people in harmony,
The heavenly spirits compel you forward.\textsuperscript{254}
\end{quote}

Such optimism was short-lived. When Cao Pi heard that “though we rejoice…still the old
loyalty shows in our faces,”\textsuperscript{255} he “sought to prevent groups and individuals from challenging
his authority:”\textsuperscript{256}

\begin{quote}
A sad wind rustles the trees,
The waves billow forth from the sea.”\textsuperscript{257}
\end{quote}

There is a sense that the individual is being overwhelmed by the evil forces at play in his
environment. Cao Pi “knew Cao Zhi’s weak points like the palm of his hand.”\textsuperscript{258} He knew

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[244]{Chen, \textit{Sanguo Zhi}, 417.}
\footnotetext[245]{Liu, \textit{Shishuo Xinyu}, 390.}
\footnotetext[246]{Yun, \textit{Zhongguo Zhishi Fenzi de Xing yu Shen}, 47.}
\footnotetext[247]{Cao Zhi, “Dai Taizi Zuo” 侍太子坐 (The Seat of the Prince in Waiting).}
\footnotetext[248]{Chen, \textit{Sanguo Zhi}, 417.}
\footnotetext[249]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[249]{Pan, \textit{Yexia Fengliu}, 92.}
\footnotetext[249]{The Great Sun” (\textit{Zhongyang 重陽}) here refers to Cao Cao.}
\footnotetext[249]{Cao Zhi, “Zeng Wang Can” 贈王粲 (To Wang Can).}
\footnotetext[249]{Chen, \textit{Sanguo Zhi}, 421.}
\footnotetext[249]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[249]{Pan, \textit{Yexia Fengliu}, 340.}
\footnotetext[249]{Cao Zhi, “Da Wei Pian” 大魏篇 (The Great Wei Capital).}
\footnotetext[249]{Liu, \textit{Shishuo Xinyu}, 155.}
\footnotetext[249]{Cao Zhi, “Yetian Huangque Xing” 野田黄雀行 (Orioles in the Fields).}
\footnotetext[249]{Xu, \textit{Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi}, 81.}
\end{footnotes}
that Cao Zhi’s fierce political fervour would fade once he was sent far from the palace, so he banished him from the court and employed non family members in key positions:

The years have passed and I have aged,  
I suspect my lord has found another. 259

Cao Pi also knew Cao Zhi treasured ties of friendship and family so he sent several of Cao Zhi’s closest confidants to their deaths. Cao Zhi was dismayed and expressed his sense of helplessness through the voice of an abandoned woman who tries earnestly to please her husband:

When we first married,  
I had my hair done up and our feelings were deep. (“Planting Arrowroot”)  

It reveals the illusions that Cao had about his relationship with his brother. It also reveals the betrayal and heartache that Cao Zhi felt when he “was no longer tolerated in the royal court.”260 Cao Zhi compared his plight to that of a beautiful maiden, who spends her youth in misery:

In my best years I am confined to my quarters,  
In the dark of night, I let out a long sigh. (“Beautiful Girl”)  

He also employs this same metaphor of a beautiful maiden unable to find a mate later in his life when he realized that his political aspirations had burst like a bubble:

This fine girl admires morality,  
Finding a virtuous man is extremely difficult. (“Beautiful Girl”)  

Cao Zhi was consistently transferred from one fiefdom to another. He led a lonely and drifting existence:

Alas this floating zhuanpeng (轉蓬),  
Why is life so lonely here? 261

Cao Zhi was constantly watched. He had no place to settle and establish his roots, so he could not “put his talent to use and reveal his full potential.”262

Separated from my roots I flutter to and fro,  
From morning to night I know no rest. (“Alas”)  

Cao Zhi perceived that he was the victim of slander and deceit so he urged Cao Pi to “strengthen the bonds between family members.”263 Cao Zhi desperately wanted to have a heart to heart chat with Cao Pi but this was virtually impossible:

The dragon must ride the floating clouds to ascend to the heavens,  
People who move up in the world must rely on someone from inside...

259 Cao Zhi. “Zhonggua Pian” 种葛篇 (Planting Arrowroot).  
260 Jing Shuling 景蜀靈, Wei-Jin Shiren yu Zhengzhi 魏晉詩人與政治 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007), 51.  
261 Cao Zhi. “Yujie Pian” 呼嗟篇 (Alas).  
262 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 423.  
263 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 426.
I wish to pour out my heart but my monarch is surrounded by many gates,
The road is long and there is no way to cross the river.\(^{264}\)

However, this lonely and isolated existence led Cao Zhi “to examine his soul which propelled his literary creativity forward.”\(^{265}\) In order to escape such an environment, Cao Zhi became increasingly attracted to a reclusive Daoist way of living:

> He takes me and we wander along together,
> He teaches me to forget words.”\(^{266}\)

Cao Zhi sought to free himself from the cares of the world by way of his transcendent poetry:

> My heart leaps,
> My heart immediately ascends to the clouds to seek after [the two immortals]. (“Painful Thoughts”)\(^{267}\)

> A thousand \textit{li} does not cover one step,
> I lightly float over the mounds and hamlets.”\(^{267}\)

It is a place where he envisioned that “the illustrious emperor, who bestowed blessings on all things, would crown him with an official’s hat:”\(^{268}\)

> The Emperor places a beautiful jade sash on me.”\(^{269}\)

Cao Zhi is accepted by the emperor, which is in stark contrast to his present reality. However, such an escape was merely on a psychological level as he remained fully involved in the world around him. The “Poem in Seven Paces,” recorded in the “Wenxue” chapter of the \textit{Shishuo Xinyu} is presented as having been composed by Cao Zhi but it is widely considered legendary without historical truth in it. It metaphorically explains how brothers should remain loyal to one another. According to the anecdote, Cao Zhi had won the day which made Cao Pi “profoundly ashamed.”\(^{270}\) However, Cao Zhi still hoped to be reconciled with Cao Pi as suggested by a poem in which he compares his political situation to that of a woman who does not know when she will be reunited with her husband:

> Floating and sinking, our positions are different,
> When can we meet in harmony?”\(^{271}\)

Even though they occupy different positions, Cao Zhi believed that they could both complement each other and work together. However, “his pleas of loyalty and sincerity were

\(^{264}\) Cao Zhi. “Dang Qiang Yu Gao Xing” 當墻欲高行 (Wishing to Climb Over the High Walls).
\(^{266}\) Cao Zhi. “Kusi Xing” 苦思行 (Painful Thoughts).
\(^{267}\) Cao Zhi. “Shengtian Xing Ershou Qi’er” 升天行二首其二 (Ascending the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse Two).
\(^{268}\) Chen, \textit{Sanguo Zhi}, 421.
\(^{269}\) Cao Zhi. “Wuyou Yong” 五遊詠 (Five Roaming Songs).
\(^{270}\) Liu, \textit{Shishuo Xinyu}, 134.
\(^{271}\) Cao Zhi. “Yuanshi Xing” 怨詩行 (Poem of Resentment).
disregarded by the emperor. As Cao Zhi began to understand the futility of his requests, he became more overtly critical of Cao Pi’s behaviour:

The beautiful flowers were blooming profusely,
But an autumn frost destroyed them.

Cao Zhi hopes that Cao Pi will rectify his behaviour. He makes allusions to both dissolute and enlightened monarchs of the past in the hope that Cao Pi would see the error of his ways and thereby “his majesty would spread glorious light and harmony to the age” and he will be remembered favourably by future generations. Cao Zhi made every effort to reconcile with Cao Pi, and later, Cao Pi’s son, Cao Rui, but his attempts to be provided with an audience with the emperor were constantly thwarted. Cao Zhi’s experience in exile ignited within him a fierce sense of social justice and sympathy for the oppressed. In contrast to his relationship with Cao Pi, Cao Zhi enjoyed a close relationship with his other brothers, particularly Cao Biao 曹彪 (195-251 CE), whom he addressed one of his most outstanding works to, and Cao Zhang 曹彰 (189-223 CE). Although the women in Cao Zhi’s life do not feature prominently in his works, Cao Zhi, displayed tenderness towards his mother who acted as his protector and looked lovingly on his daughters.

Cao Biao was the brother who enjoyed the closest relationship with Cao Zhi and it pained Cao Zhi to be apart from him:

When can my small boat reach you?
Thinking of you is hard for me to bear.

Cao Pi was envious of Cao Zhang “for his valour and manliness.” Cao Pi knew that Cao Zhang was close to Cao Zhi, so he poisoned him during a chess game. If it had not been for the intervention of the mother of Cao Pi and Cao Zhi, the Empress Dowager Bian 卞太后 (160–230 CE), Cao Zhi’s life would have been in danger. Cao Zhi’s mother regularly intervened on Cao Zhi’s behalf and “had the virtuous conduct befitting a mother.” Cao Zhi also wrote dirges for his daughters who died in infancy. However, his main pillars of emotional support were his brothers and those who shared his high ideals. While in exile, he lamented that, “I am in lonely place…there is only my wife to talk to.” A loyal citizen of the state did not burden themselves with such concerns:

He thinks not of his parents,
Let alone his wife and child. (“White Horse”)

He dismissed private needs in order to work towards his high ambitions:

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273 Cao Zhi. “Shuofeng” 朔風 (North Wind).
275 Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qiyi” 雜詩六首其一 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse One).
276 Liu, *Shishuo Xinyu*, 506.
Those with their names recorded on the rolls of heroes,
Do not consider their own concerns. (“White Horse”)

On one occasion, on leaving the capital, Cao Zhi and Cao Biao were barred from accompanying each other on the journey back to their respective fiefdoms. Cao Zhi wrote “To Biao, Prince of Bai Ma” as a parting gift to Cao Biao. Cao Zhi poured out his feelings and reflected on his life journey, revealing the deep level of trust and close bonds that existed between the brothers. Without the support of his brother, the world around him seems full of obstacles and beset with difficulty:

The Yi and Luo River are wide and deep,
I want to cross but there is no bridge. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

It was a laborious journey, full of toil but this is not the main reason that he felt such melancholy. It is rather, due to the fact that he was separated from his kin:

Why do I have such melancholy thoughts?
Because I am forced to be apart from my kin. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

He placed Cao Pi squarely at the centre of this state of affairs:

An ominous looking owl cries on the yoke of the carriage. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

An owl signifies a bad omen. Amongst this ominous environment, there is a hideous force which is controlling the reigns and bringing about destruction. Cao Zhi begins to lose faith in fate and the idea of a life predestined for greatness:

What is the use of worry?
Heaven’s decree is consistently dubious. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

Cao Zhi sees a dark and dismal world around him as animals dart about on the road. His feelings merge with the surrounding environment. His reference to a magnanimous leader is meant to console Cao Biao and is a lone voice of defiance against Cao Pi:

A great man’s ambition spreads to all corners,
Even though we are ten thousand miles apart, we are with each other. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

Cao Zhi awakens to the realization that the soul of a person and their ideas remain after death. Even though the body decays with death, the spiritual and emotional bonds the brothers shared will always stay with him:

Bonds between loved ones are not easily broken,
They increase over distance and time. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

Cao Zhi reached a level of acceptance regarding his relationship with Cao Pi. Cao Zhi’s situation remained largely unchanged under Cao Rui who “was narrow-minded like his father and had no lofty aspirations to achieve great feats” but Cao Zhi remained loyal:

I am willing to cultivate my talent,

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279 Pan, Yexia Fengliu, 147.
To aid my enlightened monarch.\textsuperscript{280} Cao Zhi warned Cao Rui that, ministers who flatter and cajole “do not respect their monarch”\textsuperscript{281} and that their actions will lead to usurpation:

\begin{quote}
The zhuyu (茱萸) has sweet smelling leaves, \\
But does not have the simple elegance of the cassia flower or the orchid.\textsuperscript{282}
\end{quote}

Cao Zhi’s alienation from the political world resulted in a sense of loneliness and sorrow which compelled him to reflect on his own personal feelings. The second and third verses of “North Wind” illustrate how unhappy Cao Zhi was with his political situation but he then shifted the focus to that of his own unfortunate life experiences at the hands of Cao Pi and Cao Rui. Only when he saw no hope of reconciliation with Cao Pi and later, Cao Rui, did Cao Zhi seriously consider achieving immortal fame through his literature:

\begin{quote}
I hastily pick up my brush, \\
To leave a lasting fragrance to future generations. ("Dew on the Shallot")
\end{quote}

Cao Cao influenced Cao Zhi’s early poetry but Cao Zhi had unique life experiences which contributed to his wide-ranging themes and sense of social justice. He was raised in an aristocratic household but his poetry is not that of a typical aristocrat. He did not confine himself to the limited vision of a courtier but looked out to the grandeur of the universe which propelled his vision of forever striving ahead. He was admired by most of his brothers and his parents for his heroic vision and loyalty. He sacrificed his personal desires to show his loyalty to the state. He almost became heir to the throne but his life ended in an abyss of loneliness and misery. He attempted to escape into a transcendent world but returned to the world of the living and found some solace reflecting on his personal ambitions and revealing his rebellious spirit through his poetry. It was precisely his alienation from the court that strengthened his desire to achieve immortal fame through his literature. Cao Zhi’s contemporaries also influenced Cao Zhi’s poetry in that they praised and encouraged him which provided him with a stimulating intellectual environment in which to hone his poetic skill.

3.2. Playing with Words

The Literary Men of Ye were instrumental in the development of Cao Zhi’s poetry. All members of this literary circle influenced one another in their literary pursuits. They shared their opinions with each other in the spirit of friendly and open competition. Their intense feeling of life’s brevity drove them to bask in the pleasures of the moment. Life’s transience also drove them to pursue high ideals. Friendships became based on shared aspirations and common goals. They supported one another in times of strife. Many of the Jian’an poets were concerned with Confucian ideals of social justice and participation in politics which

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{280} Cao Zhi. “Xielu Xing” (Dew on the Shallot).
\textsuperscript{281} Chen, \textit{Sanguo Zhi}, 427.
\textsuperscript{282} Cao Zhi. “Fuping Pian” (Floating Duckweed).
\end{flushleft}
influenced Cao Zhi’s poetry. Cao Zhi’s contemporaries awakened him to new possibilities as to how he could achieve immortality through his writings.

The three Caos played a key role in establishing the literary circle at Ye because Cao Cao, after unifying the kingdom, “wished for the colours of literature to remain.”\(^{283}\) This poetic circle was made up of enthusiastic participants who regularly gathered to write poems. Cao Zhi and Cao Pi were the central figures of the group. At no time before the Tang dynasty had there been so many poets producing such a large number of works that displayed such a vividly individualistic style within such a short period. Many of the Jian’an poets including Cao Zhi wrote about the banquets they attended, where they would “pass goblets along the canal, enjoy traditional stringed and woodwind instruments, drink to their hearts’ content and write poetry.”\(^{284}\) At that time, Cao Pi “had the generosity of an open-minded scholar”\(^{285}\) and he spent much time with Cao Zhi indulging in artistic pursuits in a leisurely fashion:

The master\(^ {286}\) does nothing and remains silent,
The guests bring in the musicians. (“Cockfight”)

Cao Pi writes about the keen sense of enjoyment of the guests as they delight in the beauty of their surroundings:

A sudden gust of wind lifts up the hub of the wheels,
Birds fly ahead in front of us.\(^ {287}\)

They told “terse and close-knit”\(^ {288}\) riddles and shared their views on poetry, so their styles and themes were similar in some respects:

On this clear night, we stroll around Xiyuan,
The flying carriage canopies follow each other in pursuit.\(^ {289}\)

From the images of flying canopies and gusts of wind lifting the carriages, there was a sense of soaring high in the sky and towering aloft from the world below where one can be carefree to wander about and release one’s emotions freely. Both these poems have a kind of sumptuous luxuriousness showing the leisurely aristocratic lifestyle that the brothers enjoyed. Cao Pi was refined and courteous and particularly enjoyed currying favour with the rich and powerful:

The prince respects and loves his guests,
To the end, he does not know fatigue. (“Public Banquet”)

Cao Zhi wrote “Public Banquet” around the same time as Cao Pi wrote “Lotus Pond Piece.” While there were similarities, Cao Zhi scoffs at attempts to imitate others’ work by stating

\(^{283}\) Xu, *Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi*, 31.
\(^{284}\) Chen, *Sanguo Zhi*, 453.
\(^{285}\) Pan, *Chu-Han Wenxue Zonglun*, 329.
\(^{286}\) The “master” (*Zhuren 主人*) here refers to Cao Pi.
\(^{287}\) Cao Pi 曹丕. “Furong Chi Zuoshi” 芙蓉池作詩 (*Lotus Pond Piece*).
\(^{288}\) Liu, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 163.
\(^{289}\) Cao Zhi. “Gongyan” 公宴 (*Public Banquet*).
that those “who try to draw a tiger only end up drawing a dog.” However, Cao Zhi acknowledged that “writers of the world cannot have no room for improvement,” so opinions from others “became the basis for a heated discussion,” as they analysed terms and sentence structure “to the point of hair splitting.” Cao Zhi had an engaging personality and his relationship with the poets of Ye “was closer and more intimate” than Cao Pi:

Friends and family gather around me. (“Lute Piece”)

While Cao Pi “reflected on the six classics and discussed the ancient masters” and “listened to the heart wrenching plucked strings of the zheng (箏),” Cao Zhi and the other Jian’an poets never forgot the miseries of their earlier lives “which resulted in a heartfelt lament to leave their mark on the world.” They indulged in leisure pursuits but this “never quenched their spirit of performing great deeds for posterity.”

Giving full release to our ambitions,
May it be so for one thousand autumns. (“Public Banquet”)

They were all too aware of partings and the fleeting nature of happiness itself:

In peaceful times we cannot meet often,
Joyful reunions do not happen often. (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse Two”)

This emboldened Cao Zhi to embrace life and bask in the beauty of the moment:

The dishes are not returned empty,
The goblets are returned without a drop left. (“To Ding Yi丁翼”)

However, there was a constant sense of the inescapable passage of time, a sense of doubt that there would ever again be such a gathering of fine minds and of not knowing what lay ahead:

A sudden wind blows away the blazing sun,
Its rays move quickly to the west. (“Lute Piece”)

Cao Zhi awakened from his dreamlike state and a tinge of sadness could be felt. However, he was spurred on by the scene around him and showed gratitude for the glory that was bestowed on him including the frivolous trappings of the lake:

The autumn orchids line the slope,
Vermillion red appears in the green pond. (“Public Banquet”)

However, Cao Zhi had more serious ambitions than feasting and discussing the finer points of language. He yearned for a glorious career on the political stage. Cao Zhi often consulted
with his contemporaries, in particular, with Yang Xiu 楊修 (175-219 CE) and Wu Zhi 吳質 (177-230 CE) not only about how to improve his writing, but how to hone his skills in the political arena. They sometimes gave him advice that was ill advised but Cao Zhi continued to respect them and sought their counsel. Cao Zhi cultivated deep friendships with the literati and he grew in confidence amongst the stimulating intellectual environment at Ye, which encouraged him to push new boundaries with his writing techniques.

Yang Xiu did not see how Cao Zhi’s writing could hinder his political career. Cao Zhi would “give his work to Yang Xiu and Wu Zhi to share their views on his writing.” Yang Xiu and Cao Zhi “pointed out each other’s faults in a forthright way” in the spirit of friendly competition. Cao Zhi was frustrated over the lack of uniformity in creative writing but his contemporaries encouraged him to write “according to his own nature and gifts.” The literati graded each other and also “evaluated the good and bad points of historical figures as an artistic past time.” This was the beginnings of character appraisal. Cao Zhi stated that “everyone has their good points” and they encouraged each other to capture the essence of their own individual spirit:

How can I not be close to those who are different?  
They are all friends of mine. (“To Ding Yi 丁翼”)

They enjoyed music and songs from all corners of the kingdom:

The qin and zheng produce the sounds of the west,  
From the se (瑟) are folk rhymes from the east. (“To Ding Yi 丁翼”)

Cao Zhi insisted that formalities be done away with and that they relate to one another on equal terms:

Polite and benevolent gentlemen,  
What is it you desire when you bow so graciously? (“Lute Piece”)

Literature and writing activities “became a part of their everyday life as their poems painted a picture of the scenes that greeted them in their daily life.” They were “in full appreciation of one another’s genius” as “everyone professed to have captured the jade of Jingshan mountain.” They were “heroic in giving free play to their vitality, open and artless in the appreciation of their talents.” The Jian’an poets exploited the possibilities of language as “the five-word line pattern developed by leaps and bounds.” Cao Zhi “galloped ahead with

299 Wang, et al., Zhongguo Wenxue Piping Tongshi, 49.  
300 Pan, Yexia Fengliu, 82.  
301 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 418.  
302 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 73.  
304 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 418.  
305 Wang, Jian’an Wenxue Jieshou Shilun, 9.  
307 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 417.  
308 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 67.  
309 Ibid.
a free rein” becoming the first poet to write a large amount of poetry in this metre. The Jian’an poets all shared similar aesthetic ideals. Liu Zhen was “quick-witted in argument” and “was looked upon with favour by Cao Zhi.” They both influenced each other by writing poetry “with a strong sense of rhythm.” Cao Zhi’s style is typical of the younger members of the Jian’an period which is characterised by “harmonious and refined construction, a rushing torrent of ornate diction, a merry and harmonious atmosphere, and a spirit of elatedness.”

Cao Zhi was exposed to a wealth of new ideas regarding creativity and the potential for brilliance that lay within each individual:

Our country has the finest materials,
Like the sea has fine pearls. (“To Ding Yi丁翼”)

However, he was direct in his criticism when he saw it necessary:

Gentlemen have perfect morals and self cultivation,
Small men possess no such virtue. (“To Ding Yi丁翼”)

This drove Cao Zhi to treasure friendship and forge lifelong links with the likeminded:

May we never forget, in times of distress,
The former pledges we have made to one another. (“Lute Piece”)

The large volume of friendship poetry that Cao Zhi wrote testifies to the importance that he placed on friendship:

I play a tune and thoughts race around my head,
Who can I unburden my worries to? (“North Wind”)

Cao Zhi never sought to align himself with those who could elevate his position in the court and he revealed his immense sorrow at being unable to rescue his friends in times of danger:

Forsaking a treasure, who can one blame?
Your friends have committed errors. (“To Xu Gan”)

He supported his friends in their endeavours and was gripped with sorrow at being unable to help them in their distress:

Our friendship is deep and suffering makes it deeper,
How can this not cause intense anguish? (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse Two”)

Xu Gan became so disillusioned with politics that he retreated to a reclusive lifestyle:

I think of the poor scholar,
Dwelling in the thatched hut. (“To Xu Gan”)

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310 Ibid.
311 Liu, Shishuo Xinyu, 34.
312 Qian, Wei-Jin Nanbeichao Shige Shishu, 40.
313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
Cao Zhi encouraged his contemporaries to remain optimistic about the future and to involve themselves in politics. He reminded Xu Gan that his efforts were still needed:

A friend who dusts their cap and recommends you,
Isn’t that what a friend must do? (“To Xu Gan”)

He respected the personal integrity of his friends and came to the realization that they could not compromise their ideals so they were forced to retreat from politics. The values of the court clashed with the high ideals of the literati. Cao Zhi’s poetry became more focussed on the needs and feelings of the lone individual.

The Jian’an poets would not shrink back from challenging authority or ingratiating themselves with those in power. They eventually “distanced themselves from government officials and even looked down on them.”

I use my talent to serve my monarch,
I remain upright and alone and not part of the general crowd. (“Dew on the Shallot”)

The Jian’an poets wrote poetry that “revealed a heroic heart that sympathised with others in their time of sorrow.” They believed in the traditional ideals of “benevolent government, humanistic politics and curing the ills of society,” so Cao Zhi’s friendship poetry was not only concerned with his own personal feelings, but also included the problems his country was facing:

Those who wear fox furs to ward off the cold,
How can they understand those with no coat? (“To Ding Yi”)

In one of his poems on military expeditions, Wang Can reveals his high ideals and loyalty while also expressing the heartfelt feelings and insecurities of the seemingly insignificant individual which led Cao Zhi to express concern that Wang Can’s poetry appears to be too melancholy:

What causes you to reflect so much,
And causes you all these sorrowful thoughts? (“To Wang Can”)

The idea of an emerging individual came to the fore, along with the awareness that a person’s ideas can produce extraordinary writing. Xu Gan was the most “aloof from politics and material pursuits, and modest” of all the men of Ye. Even though he lived in poverty, he was calm and composed and made determined efforts in literature:

A lamenting and sorrowful heart,
Creates passages of magnificence. (“To Xu Gan”)

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315 Xu, Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi, 104.
316 Pan, Yexia Fengliu, 101.
319 Xu, Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi, 76.
Such poetry triggered an awakening process in the poetry of Cao Zhi which led to a change in direction amongst the literati of “revealing one’s inner sentiments that came from one’s own soul.”\textsuperscript{320} This gave Cao Zhi’s later poetry a sorrowful but soul-stirring and lamentful tone:

\begin{quote}
I hurriedly play the lute strings and a sorrowful lament comes forth,
Listen to my words of impassioned lament. (“Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Six”)
\end{quote}

The Jian’an poets “admired the famous figures of the past that had left a name for themselves through their writings.”\textsuperscript{321} Cao Pi argued that literature “was not measured according to its inherent moral content”\textsuperscript{322} and that each person was “original in his own style.”\textsuperscript{323} Yang Xiu had once wrote in many of his letters to Cao Zhi, that “trivialities are worth expression.”\textsuperscript{324} Cao Zhi’s contemporaries gave voice to the possibilities that Cao Zhi was pondering. Towards the end of his life, Cao Zhi reminisced back to the delightful and carefree days of his youth:

\begin{quote}
Precious swords worth a thousand pieces of gold hang from men’s belts,
The women are dressed in vibrant splendid colours. (“Famous Capital”)\end{quote}

Cao Zhi seems to be adopting a satirical tone when describes the youth who is whiling away his time. However, he was also expressing a kind of endearing admiration for this youth and his follies:

\begin{quote}
The dusk clouds scatter and the people disperse,
We will continue this life of pleasure tomorrow. (“Famous Capital”)\end{quote}

Writing such poetry later in life, while he is in a gloomy state of mind helped Cao Zhi to see the inherent value in literature. Cao Zhi “goes against the belief of his earlier years”\textsuperscript{325} and the sense of an individual voice became increasingly prominent in Cao Zhi’s poetry. The relationship that Cao Zhi had with his contemporaries brought him to a new realization, that the power of a person’s ideas can make a difference. Cao Pi’s “On Literature,” the first piece of literary criticism written in China helped Cao Zhi to see the importance of literature. Cao Zhi had always been concerned with how to write so as not to be “jeered at by later generations”\textsuperscript{326} but now, he had come to realize “the importance of literature and he devoted his heart and soul to it.”\textsuperscript{327}

Cao Cao patronised the arts but the poets of the Jian’an period lived during a time when there were new ways to think about literature and new ways to assess people’s talents. There was no longer a single Confucian standard propagated by the court to appraise the character of would-be officials. This new approach to the role of literature in society emboldened the Jian’an poets and resulted in the Jian’an period developing into a monumental age for Chinese poetry and producing such outstanding poets as Cao Zhi. The leisurely banquets in

\textsuperscript{320} Chen, “Cao Pi, Cao Zhi de Neixin Jingshen Shenmei Guanzhao,” 70.
\textsuperscript{321} Xu, Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi, 60.
\textsuperscript{322} Ye, Ye Jiaying Shuo Han-Wei Liuchao Shi, 118.
\textsuperscript{324} Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 419.
\textsuperscript{325} Pan, Yexia Fengliu, 149.
\textsuperscript{326} Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 418.
\textsuperscript{327} Wang et al., Zhongguo Wenxue Piping Tongshi, 48.
Ye propelled forward Cao Zhi’s creativity. He was held in the highest esteem by his contemporaries on account of his literary talent and political potential. Cao Zhi and his contemporaries related to each other in a sincere and honest manner which spoke through Cao Zhi’s poetry. As Cao Zhi’s contemporaries became alienated from the political world, he saw that they were still able to produce outstanding writing which emboldened him to express his personal thoughts and feelings through his poetry. Cao Zhi enjoyed banquets and it was at these banquets that the Jian’an poets were able to rediscover their own unique individual personalities which exposed Cao Zhi to the fact that all human beings expressed themselves in different ways. Cao Zhi saw that he, himself, was also a unique and distinct individual who was not part of the general crowd. Cao Zhi’s passionate and unconventional personality burst through his greatest works and foreshadowed a new trend of individualistic poets in the Chinese literary tradition.

3.3. The Lustre of Jade

From a young age, Cao Zhi dazzled those around him with his literary talent and this led him to believe that he was destined to perform great feats. Although he possessed an irrepressibly bold and individualistic spirit, he never ceased to profess his loyalty to the state even while he was being politically persecuted. He was born into wealth and privilege and although he had an appreciation for beauty, he despised superficiality, shunned materialism and refused to let himself be caught up in petty affairs. He questioned accepted wisdom and was straightforward in his appraisal of others. He was concerned with how he was perceived by others and when he faced rejection, he escaped into an immortal world. However, he always returned to actively engage himself in the world and to improve the lives of his people. The natural world reflected his magnanimous spirit and his acceptance of change and death.

Cao Zhi, more than any of the other Jian’an poets, reflected the spirit of the Jian’an period, characterised by the pursuit of high ideals, a desire to be remembered by future generations, and a concern for the plight of others. However, he also displayed distinctly individual characteristics which lead others to question his intentions:

No one knows of my loyal heart,
Their suspicion causes me misfortune.328

As a youth, Cao Zhi was “a literary genius who read aloud poetic passages of ten thousand words”329 and when asked a question, “responded quickly and fluidly.”330 He no doubt, felt destined for greatness and “was not aware of the limits of his own capabilities.”331 Everything Cao Zhi attempted was on a grand scale and full of exaggeration:

The Nine Provinces are too small for my steps,
I wish to spread my wings among the white clouds. (“Five Roaming Songs”)332

He adored being the centre of attention:

328 Cao Zhi. “Yuange Xing” 怨歌行 (Song of Indignation).
329 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 416.
330 Ibid.
331 Xu, Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi, 72.
A white horse with a golden bridle,
Gallops swiftly to the northwest. (“White Horse”)

The vivid splendour of the horse majestically emerges before us. Cao Zhi also longed to impress with his superior skills and make his presence felt in the same grand and magnificent way:

He raises his arm to shoot the flying monkey,
And lowers himself to shoot the horse’s hoof target. (“White Horse”)

There is a sense of continuous movement and surging ahead at full speed without stopping. Cao Zhi “wrote quickly and all in one go” and “as easily as if he were reciting” revealing an irrepressibly bold spirit and a heroic vision:

I stroke my sword as I hear the sound of thunder,
The spirit of heroism rings out across the sky. (“Shrimps and Eels”)

His admiration for heroism would never diminish throughout his life:

In her prime, she courageously avenged her father’s death,
Her name has been passed down throughout the ages.

Cao Zhi had the same headstrong and forthright approach to life, often not reflecting on the consequences of his actions and not taking fondly to regulations on his behaviour. He once rode his carriage through the palace gates and was severely reprimanded by his father. He was “reckless and wilful, did not exercise self restraint and drank alcohol to excess.” Cao Zhi was an extremely talented individual who saw a bright future unfolding before him which filled him with self confidence. He admired a heroic spirit and had a forthright approach to life. However, despite his youthful follies, like the hero in “White Horse,” Cao Zhi’s actions are driven by his intense loyalty and spirit of self sacrifice:

Courageously sacrificing all for his country,
He treats death as returning home. (“White Horse”)

Lichen attaches itself to the pine,
The floating duckweed remains on the water’s surface.
I attach myself to you like a belt,
Not leaving you day and night.

Noticeably, loyalty to family remains at the core of Cao Zhi’s value system:

Even though you create alliances with others,
They can never be like that of blood relations.

332 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 416.
333 Liu, The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons, 303.
334 Cao Zhi. “Jingwei Pian” 精魏篇 (The Essence of the Spirit).
335 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 417.
336 Cao Zhi. “Guiqing Ershou Qiyi” 閨情二首其一 (Sentiments from an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse One).
337 Cao Zhi. “Yuzhangxing Ershou Qi’er” 豫章行二首其二 (Yuzhang in Two Verses, Verse Two).
When he felt that he was unable to achieve great feats, Cao Zhi consoled himself by reflecting on his loyal heart:

Great deeds I cannot achieve,
Loyalty and righteousness satisfy me. 338

Even while he was the target of intense political persecution, he compared his loyalty to that of a sunflower that “tilts towards the sun, and even though the sun doesn’t shine back,” 339 it continues to follow the sun. Cao Zhi was willing to suffer for his ideals:

Is it not painful to be burnt in a blazing fire?
But I am willing to return to my roots. (“Alas”)

He was intensely loyal but at the same time, fiercely committed to his ideals. His ardent desire to perform great feats is articulated in “Qiqi” 七啟 (The Seven Guiding Principles) in which Cao Zhi gives an account of a Confucian attempting to entice a Daoist out of reclusion. It was only after he described the pursuit of high ideals and building up the country through active participation in politics, does the Daoist see the virtues of leaving his Daoist hideaway and joining society once more. This fu poem does not have the tone of a moral commentary. Rather, its “beauty lies in its grandeur and vigour.” 340 Cao Zhi’s desire to serve his country surpassed all other desires and speaks boldly through his poetry. However, this does not mean that he sacrificed his independence. Cao Zhi was not afraid to voice an opinion. He never held back in his appraisal of others. He could be critical of government ministers:

Idle living is not my ideal,
I am willing to attend to my country’s woes. 341

Cao Zhi was completely honest in his appraisal of people or a situation and could be dismissive of others who did not share his ideals:

I look down at the people on the road,
Who conspire for power and benefit. (“Shrimps and Eels”)

He was also critical of, and rebelled against the pursuit of materialism, hypocrisy, and the confined vision of pedantic courtiers and aristocrats and those who had no courage to question the current state of affairs. Even though Cao Zhi was born into a “stately house of rich food in ding vessels, served to the accompaniment of music (dingshi zhongming 鼎食鐘鳴),” 342 he did not wish to live the easy life of a pampered aristocrat. His carriage “was not splendidly adorned” 343 and he was not materialistic:

Even though we may live in a magnificent palace,
In death, we return to the same mountain grave. ("Lute Piece")

He detested the rich aristocracy that flaunted their wealth:

Those who wear fox furs to ward off the cold,  
How can they understand those with no coat? ("To Ding Yi 丁儀")

Cao Zhi refused to let himself get caught up in the petty affairs of the world:

The magnanimous adhere to grand plans,  
The commoners are tied down in trivial affairs. ("To Ding Yi 丁翼")

He questioned traditional wisdom:

What is the use of many sons,  
When one talented daughter is capable of great things? ("The Essence of the Spirit")

Cao Zhi detested superficiality, valued sincerity, treasured times with friends and craved acceptance from all people. Cao Zhi prized sincerity in mind and spirit in his dealings with others:

Sincerity shines like gold,  
A sincere heart moves the gods. ("The Essence of the Spirit")

He despised superficiality and treasured intimate friendships:

Myself with two or three others,  
Enjoy a feast in this corner of the wall. ("To Ding Yi 丁翼")

He was raised amongst a Confucian ethical value system, so he saw his own value in how he was perceived by others. He took every opportunity to showcase his talents:

He has yet to display his superior skill,  
He raises his bow to shoot a flying hawk. ("Famous Capital")

Cao Zhi displayed his sword fighting, juggling and dancing skills to the renowned writer and calligrapher, Han Danchun 邯郸淳 (132 -221 CE). Cao Zhi then discussed with him, theories and philosophies regarding the principles of good and bad and the beginnings of creation which led Han Danchun to proclaim that Cao Zhi was "a genius."

Cao Zhi was sincere of heart but there were many in the court who did not share his ideals. He sought freedom from the trivialities of palace life but at the same time, he had a yearning to be accepted and liked by others. He did not wish to be alienated from the court as that would have made it impossible for him to realize his political aspirations so at first, he strove for a sense of self liberation within the confines of aristocratic life:

Flapping wings in the fresh breeze,  
Their blood-red eyes shoot out fierce rays. "Cockfight"

He developed a taste for leisure activities and the finer points of life:

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344 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 449.
I take the time to enjoy myself today,
How can I also have time to worry about everything else?\textsuperscript{345}

At banquets, he appreciated wide open spaces and ease of movement:

The fish are leaping about in the limpid waves,
The birds are singing high in the branches. ("Public Banquet")

He was intoxicated by the trappings of royalty and the splendour of the capital:

The place of former kings,
Its greatness and majesty surpasses one hundred cities. ("To Ding Yi and Wang Can")

Cao Zhi appreciated and praised the captivating beauty of women at a level which has not been surpassed in Chinese poetry:

She moves swiftly like a frightened swan,
And frolics gracefully like a dragon.\textsuperscript{346}

Even Cao Zhi’s male heroes display a kind of feminine beauty. He paid careful attention to descriptions of their appearance. Many of them are attractive and eye catching:

Precious swords worth a thousand pieces of gold hang from men’s belts,
The women are dressed in vibrant splendid colours. ("Famous Capital")

Cao Zhi came to the realization that even though he may not have been able to extricate himself from a world that espoused values that were increasingly at odds with his own value system, in the midst of leisure activities and losing himself in the magnificent splendour of the world that existed around him, he was able to free himself from the confines of the world on a psychological level. This desire is also reflected in his increasing interest in Daoist philosophies. Cao Zhi’s transcendent poetry displays the breadth of his imagination. Daoist philosophies also advocated a naturalness of spirit in one’s interactions with others. Cao Zhi’s transcendent poetry displays the power of his rich imagination. He ascended into the world of Daoist immortals when the world of the present provided him with no answers:

At night I see a galaxy of stars sparkling,
Whose direction I will follow. ("The Great Rock")

Wandering in the realm of the immortals freed him from the constraints of time and distance:

I wish to tie up the sun with ropes,
And return it to the east. ("Ascending to the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse Two")

The world of the Daoist immortals was a place where he could retain his purity of character:

On the mountain top gush pure water springs,
The splendour of crystal pure jade shines radiantly.\textsuperscript{347}

\textsuperscript{345} Cao Zhi. “Guiqing Ershou Qi’er” 閨情二首其二 (Sentiments from an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse Two), Quoted from Cao Cao, Cao Pi and Cao Zhi 曹操 曹丕 曹植. San Cao Shiji 三曹詩集. Ning Zhirong 宁志榮 eds. (Taiyuan: Shanxi Chuban Jituan, San Jin Chubanshe, 2008).

\textsuperscript{346} Cao Zhi. “Luo Shenfu” 洛神賦 (The Goddess of the Luo River).

\textsuperscript{347} Cao Zhi. “Quche Pian” 驅車篇 (Driving My Chariot).
Many like-minded individuals found Cao Zhi “easy to get along with and natural,” not only reflecting his intense appreciation for the natural world which represented his lofty and magnanimous spirit but also reflecting his increasing interest in Daoist philosophies:

The way of the immortals is not difficult or troublesome,
Be pure and tranquil, following the laws of nature. 349

However, Cao Zhi disagreed with some of the fundamental precepts of Daoism such as practices concerned with the prolongation of life:

Vain is the pursuit of the immortals,
Songzi (松子) has long cheated me. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

Daoist beliefs such as “detesting those who seek to strive ahead” were also in direct conflict with Cao Zhi’s value system. Cao Zhi’s ardent desire to become actively engaged in world affairs and his love for people in general saw that his value system remained firmly entrenched in Confucian ideals and he adhered to Confucian humanistic principles in his dealings with others:

Honour the intelligent and pity the weak,
The Great Sage did the same. (“Wanting to Roam in the Southern Mountains”)

He encouraged his friends to actively engage in world affairs:

Holding a grudge is not a virtue,
Moderation, peace and sincerity are the norms. (“To Ding Yi and Wang Can”)

Cao Zhi yearned for the warmth of human contact: “How lonely I have been for such a long time!” When he saw how war affected the common people, he “lifted his goblet and wrung his hands in sorrow and despair” and no longer wrote of the glories of combat:

Even though soldiers love to be victorious,
Making the enemy surrender and unifying the country makes a reputation. (“To Ding Yi and Wang Can”)

Cao Zhi loved places that contained the clamour of human voices and longed for the land to be filled with the sounds of ordinary folk going about their work. He deplored eerie silences and isolated places where he could “hear the racket that tigers were making in the forests:” How desolate look the fields,
One thousand li without the smoke of man! (“Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One”)

Cao Zhi felt the concerns of the common people should not be carelessly cast aside. In “To Biao, Prince of Baima,” he employed a technique commonly used in folk songs whereby the

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348 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 418.  
349 Cao Zhi. “Gui Zhi Shu Xing” 桂之樹行 (The Cassia Tree).  
350 Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 424.  
351 Ibid.  
352 Ibid., 428.  
353 Ibid., 427-428.
last line of the previous stanza is repeated at the beginning of the following stanza. His presentation poems to friends became merged with the concerns of the common people and reveal the respect, love, and concern he had for them. He also admired the lone individual that acted valiantly to save the lives of the weak which revealed how much Cao Zhi valued the life of each and every individual, not just those whom he was closely connected with. Cao Zhi’s poem, “Orioles in the Fields,” about a selfless youth does not hesitate to help when he sees injustice imitated a folk song style. He ardently wished to be able to save others from their miserable fate which revealed the true reverence he felt for the life of every individual, including those whom society had forgotten, such as the abandoned woman:

Morning and night she weaves at her loom,  
When the sun sets she still hasn’t produced a silk pattern. (“Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Three”)

He sympathised with the hard toil of the peasants and was grateful for the gifts that nature bestowed on the earth:

The good seeds are planted in the fertile earth,  
The autumn harvest will be good. (“Timely Rain”)  

He could see injustice in the world and longed to participate in politics in order to help the common folk. After his political ambitions had gone up in smoke, he noticed the changes and cycles in nature and came to understand that nothing could last forever and that all people were a combination of good and bad. All people had the ability to contribute and adapt to their life circumstances, provided they were sincere of heart:

The seasons change and the sun never stops,  
We have not been separated long but it feels like three autumns. (“North Wind”)  

In the same way, he saw that a person’s time of glory and splendour were reflected in the changing seasons, nothing could last forever. He had faith in human beings to turn over a new leaf and change for the better. He saw no human being as entirely without fault; “Not all the five emperors possessed wisdom.” Cao Zhi had a tolerant and forgiving nature and believed in people’s innate goodness. He believed that people should not be judged on their past actions but for their present intentions and that all people could contribute in different ways as they “differ in their natural bents or styles.”

An awl and a blade have different capabilities,  
How can one judge which is superior? (“Wanting to Roam in the Southern Mountains”)  

Although, the political situation forced him to retreat from politics, he held steadfast to his ideals and committed to his poetry. He became disenchanted with the current political environment and pondered “the pleasures to be had in cultivating the earth.” Confucian
Teaching states that when an intellectual feels his own powerlessness due to the chaos around him, he “should nurture and hold steadfast to his ideals.”

If your ideals are not understood, float across the seas in a wooden raft,
I sigh at the thoughts of Confucius. (“The Great Rock”)

He was industrious and “never far from his books.”

Idle living is not my ambition,
I am willing to sacrifice myself for my country. (“Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Five”)

His poetry became a way to release the emotional tension burning within him and in the process; he created an individual self through his poetry in the form of a real flesh and blood human being with fears and misgivings. His “Miscellaneous Poems” in particular have a strong sense of wo (我) or “I” in them, as he revealed the innermost workings of his mind and expressed the passionate emotion of a distinct individual. It appears as if “a direct and upfront man is chatting to us with a melancholy mood.”

Cao Zhi had a distinctive personality and he was often misunderstood by others. He had a brimming self confidence that manifested itself in his youthful exuberance. Increasingly his straightforward and honest style of government that put the needs of the people before all else clashed with the ideas of the court. The trappings of the aristocratic lifestyle were not important to him. After he accepted the inevitability of change and death, he revealed his deepest personal sentiments through his poetry. His later poetry, in particular, revealed the lonely heart of an individual who professed loyalty to the state, pursued high ideals, and listened to the voices of the common people. It is the lament of an oppressed individual with a deep sense of social justice which stirs the conscience of the reader.

Cao Zhi’s negative life experiences due to the actions of his family became a positive force in his poetry in that they became a voice for the oppressed against injustice. Cao Zhi held steadfastly to his high ideals throughout his life. Many of Cao Zhi’s contemporaries, whom he trusted and confided in, encouraged his literary creativity and shared his high ideals and unyielding strength in the face of relentless political persecution. Cao Zhi remained loyal to the state and continued to strive ahead in order to improve the lives of his country folk and it is this humanistic quality that shines through his poetry and has enlightened generations of readers. While Cao Zhi’s poetry is filled with the highest ideals of the Jian’an period, his poetry also incorporated unique artistic elements that set him apart from his contemporaries. Cao Zhi was a poet who borrowed, but then manipulated traditional literary images in a non-traditional way to produce extraordinary and uplifting poetry that truly reveal his magnificent talent, not only justifying his inclusion in the “top poets” status of Zhong Rong’s 鍾嶸 (468-
518 CE) *Shipin* 詩品 (Poetry Gradings), but also justifying his unrivalled reputation amongst poets of later generations.
4. Distinctive Features of His Poetic Art

In this chapter, I will firstly compare the poetry of Cao Zhi with Cao Cao, Wang Can, Chen Lin, Ruan Yu, Liu Zhen and Cao Pi. Although this list of contemporaries is by no means exhaustive, it represents some of the most outstanding poets of the Jian’an period. While Cao Zhi’s poetry shares similarities with his contemporaries, it also retains its own distinctive characteristics. I will then explore the distinctive use of imagery and metaphor in the poetry of Cao Zhi and examine how this contributed to the development of Chinese poetry. It is through Cao Zhi’s incorporation of powerful imagery, the original use of metaphor, and characters that are presented as fully alive for the reader, that Cao Zhi was able to lift Chinese poetry to new heights. Lastly, I will analyse the major themes that are revealed in Cao Zhi’s most significant works. The dominant theme that speaks through Cao Zhi’s poetry from beginning to end is his devotion to high ideals. He intensely felt the passage of time as he longed to perform great feats. Although he lifted himself beyond petty affairs and roamed around in a transcendent realm, he always returned to earth to contemplate the needs of the nation and to ponder his own legacy to future generations. He remained loyal to the state while at the same time, becoming a voice for those who suffer at the hands of those in power.

4.1. A Phoenix Amongst Birds

The Jian’an poets lived during a time of upheaval, and this gave them a distinctive voice and world view. The *kangkai* 慷慨 (impassioned lament) prevalent in the poetry from this period “represents a period of a trend towards aesthetics.” The Jian’an poets revived a new kind of passion and feeling in poetry. However, Cao Zhi also differed from his contemporaries in many ways. This was mainly due to the fact that none of Cao Zhi’s contemporaries had quite the same life experiences as Cao Zhi. He once stood on the cusp of fame and glory and then found himself suddenly banished to a life of exile. Cao Zhi’s poetry has distinct characteristics that can be found to a lesser extent, in the poetry of his contemporaries. However, Cao Zhi’s poetry has an energy and dynamism that outshines his contemporaries on every level.

While Cao Zhi’s poetry, particularly his later poetry, focuses mainly on the feelings of the individual who is yearning for a political career, Cao Cao wrote poetry from a politician’s standpoint, which injected his poetry with a sense of optimism, and hinted at new possibilities for those with grand and lofty aspirations. Cao Cao’s poetry centres on the building up of his country and making it strong with the help of heroic individuals:

Blue collared gentleman,
Set my heart at ease. (“Short Song”)

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More than the poetry of Cao Zhi, Cao Cao’s poems demonstrate the untapped potential of human endeavour against the backdrop of the vast grandeur of the universe. In “Guan Canghai” (Looking Over the Sparkling Blue Ocean), Cao Cao depicts a powerful and stately ocean scene where all the planets, including the milky way look small and insignificant by comparison. The splendour of nature inspires Cao Cao’s high ideals whereas in Cao Zhi’s later poetry, namely, “To Biao, Prince of Baima,” Cao Zhi’s emotions merge with his immediate environment to a greater extent than Cao Cao’s poetry does:

The autumn wind sets off a faint coolness,
The cold cicada sings beside me. (“To Biao, Prince of Baima”)

Cao Cao wrote most of his poetry in the tetrasyllabic metre which gave his poetry a kind of restrained and dignified aura of cultured elegance. He wrote in a crisp and straightforward manner and his Yuefu ballads have a more of a folk quality than Cao Zhi’s Yuefu. Cao Cao’s “Quedong Ximen Xing” (Going East Out of the Western Gates) is open, direct, slow moving and mild. Although Cao Zhi’s poetry “has its roots in Guofeng” (Airs of the States), and some of his best poetry imitated the style of a simple folk song or parable, Cao Zhi wrote mostly in the pentasyllabic metre and his diction could be highly ornate. More than half of Cao Cao’s works were written while on military expeditions so his poetry focussed mostly on battles, military affairs and governmental concerns.

Wang Can accompanied Cao Cao on military campaigns so even though his “Congjun Shi Wushou Qisan” (Poems on Military Expeditions in Five Verses, Verse Three) revealed his high ideals and heroic ambitions, his poetry was intertwined with a kind of gloomy despondency:

The boat sails along the wide river,
Dusk falls and we still have no place to rest. (“Poems on Military Expeditions in Five Verses, Verse Three”)

Wang Can spent much time in exile, escaping the turmoil of constant wars. Many of his poems describe his intense feelings of homesickness and sentimental attachment. His style of writing made him particularly suited to the writing of rhapsodies. Wang Can’s “Zashi” (Miscellaneous Poems), are written with a soft and subtle sentiment, sadly and in a moving way. As he comes into contact with the world of the living, he becomes depressed. Wang Can’s poetry does not have the zest, vitality and engagement with society that Cao Zhi’s poetry displays.

Cao Zhi’s poetry reflects the ideas that permeated the society in which he lived. However, Cao Zhi did not experience war and upheaval up close with his own eyes as Wang Can had. In “Sincere Feelings Presented to Caizi,” Wang Can describes a dark and cruel society that is marred by continuous fighting. In “Congjun Shi Wushou Qiwu” (Poems

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361 Zhong, Shipin, 21.
362 Wang Can, “Zeng Caizi Du” (Sincere Feelings Presented to Caizi).
on Military Expeditions in Five Verses, Verse Five), Wang Can paints a realistic picture of a society in turmoil, as he “personally experienced such events and described in concrete detail the calamities that the common people faced.” Much of Wang Can’s poetry painted society as a cruel and uncaring place. He told of the inescapable realities of a people who had led a miserable existence and how this had left deep scars on their souls:

Starving women on the road toss their babies into the grass.  

Wang Can’s poetry, more so than Cao Zhi’s, is an up close account of human suffering:

Outside the gates there is no one to be seen,  
White bones fill the plains. (“Seven Lamentations in Three Verses, Verse One”)

Other Jian’an poets also wrote about human suffering caused by the injustices of society and authority figures. Chen Lin wrote with heartfelt intensity about human suffering in the construction of the Great Wall in “Yinma Changcheng Ku Xing” （飲馬長城窟行）(A Horse Stops by the Great Wall to Drink) and Ruan Yu wrote about an orphan crying by his mother’s grave after being treated cruelly by his stepmother in “Jiachu Bei Guomen Xing” （駕出北郭門行）(Riding Out of the Outer Northern City Walls). This poem is written in the first person who is a passerby. This was a common technique used in the yuefu that Cao Zhi also employed. However, in his most famous poems, Cao Zhi does not write from the viewpoint of a bystander but harmoniously integrates his own voice into the poem so that the distinction between subject and object fade and they become one voice such as in “Alas,” where he chants to the zhuanpeng but then his voice becomes the voice of the zhuanpeng and they become one entity.

Cao Zhi writes more about present day realities, such as describing the lonely wanderings of the conscript soldier and the pining of an abandoned woman rather than past injustices. His poetry has more political overtones than any of the other Jian’an poets and with the exception of the poetry he produced very late in his career, retains the lofty political sentiment that is seen to a greater extent in the poetry of Cao Cao. Cao Zhi was constantly concerned with the current political situation. He makes allusions to the past only when he feels the need to demonstrate his loyalty to the state and at the same time, conceal his own political ambitions such as the allusion made to the three loyal ministers of pre-Qin times who sacrificed their lives for their sovereign in “Three Good Men.”

Cao Zhi also displayed more than any of the other Jian’an poets, a kind of unyielding strength in the face of political persecution. Liu Zhen’s poetry is the most like Cao Zhi’s of all the Jian’an poets and he “is unrivalled in his position directly under Cao Zhi.” Liu Zhen’s poetry brims with a sense of righteousness and unyielding spirit in the face of hardship:

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363 Xu, Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi, 75.  
364 Wang Can. “Qiyuan Shi Sanshou Qiyi” 七哀詩三首其一 (Seven Lamentations in Three Verses, Verse One).  
365 Zhong, Shipin, 23.
Why does it not wither in the frost?
The pine and cypress have inherent qualities.”

However Liu Zhen’s poetry does not have the fiery passions of Cao Zhi’s poetry. It is more subdued:

Water clover grows on the water’s edge,
The splendid leaves scatter and become submerged.

In “Hefeng cong Donglai” 和風從東來 (The Gentle Wind from the East), Liu Zhen writes of a timely eastern wind that blows unexpectedly and cools on a hot summer day. This is one of the only poems from the Jian’an period that is written purely about scenery without comparing the scenery to the virtues of humanity and its simple unadorned style is more similar to the style of Tao Yuanming than Cao Zhi’s poetry.

Cao Pi’s poetry also possesses “the unadorned simplicity of the ancients” in that it is subtle, implicit and restrained. In “Liyang Zuo Sanshou Qi’er” 黎陽作三首其二 (Poem at Liyang in Three Verses, Verse Two), Cao Pi uses onomatopoeia to marvellous effect. The style of Cao Pi’s poetry was heavily influenced by Qu Yuan’s Lisan 禦騷. The meandering tone of his “Miscellaneous Poems” more closely imitated the style of the “Nineteen Ancient Poems” than any of Cao Zhi’s poems:

Despondent, depressed and full of melancholy thoughts,
Pining and longing for my hometown.

Cao Pi’s poetry focuses on the deepest sentiments that exist between loved ones:

If you are in the far corner of the seas,
My soul will speak to you, bestowing on you a pearl.

Cao Pi’s use of the septasyllabic metre provided his poetry with a particular meandering and lingering effect which was unlike the robust and masculine style of Cao Zhi’s poetry:

The forsaken wife stays alone in her room,
She worries and frets and cannot forget him.
Before knowing it, tears have moistened her sleeve.”

Cao Pi “had a refined and gentle personality.” He lived in a coddled aristocratic environment and his poetry “steers away from politics,” although he did write poetry praising the menacing might of his army before battle:

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368 Ye, Ye Jiaying Shuo Han-Wei Liuchao Shi, 113.
369 Cao Pi. “Zashi Ershou Qiyi” 雜詩二首其一 (Miscellaneous Poems in Two Verses, Verse One).
370 Cao Pi. “Qiuhu Xing” 秋胡行 (Qiuhu Poem).
371 Cao Pi. “Yange Xing Ershou Qiyi” 燕歌行二首其一 (The Song of Yan in Two Verses, Verse One).

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A thousand riders galloping in the wind,
Ten thousand riders are advancing forward like dragons.\(^{374}\)

In Cao Pi’s “Lotus Pond Piece,” there is no sense of a sudden threatening wind overpowering the scene that appeared in Cao Zhi’s banquet poetry. Cao Pi did not hint that his current comfortable level of living would change at any time. He did not indulge himself in good food and wine to the extent that Cao Zhi did:

We will not go home until we are intoxicated,
Continue the feast while the lanterns are lit.\(^{375}\)

As Cao Pi gazes at the night sky, he appears to be aloft in some transcendent realm:

Splendour hangs in the night sky,
Five vivid colours appear at once. (“Lotus Pond Piece”)

At times, Cao Pi even seems to be dogged by a sense of dissatisfaction:

I cannot taste the delicacies,
I stop drinking the sumptuous wine. (“Qiuhu in Two Verses, Verse Two”)

Cao Pi’s poetry does not display the unyielding spirit or heroic vision that is prevalent in Cao Zhi’s poetry. Cao Zhi’s personality takes after his “father who in his youth possessed a free and easy temperament.”\(^{376}\) Cao Zhi strove for freedom of movement as well as for freedom on a psychological level. Cao Zhi’s poetry features more sudden jolts of movement than any of his contemporaries. He often describes an extremely high place as far as the eye can see and then suddenly descends to the depths of the earth:

The peaks of the mountains are hidden in the clouds,
The pure and impure waters of the Jing and Wei Rivers are distinctive. (“To Ding Yi and Wang Can”)

The emphasis that Cao Zhi placed on height in his poetry enabled him to explore new techniques. In “Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One,” Cao Zhi surveys the scene of the devastated city below, from the surrounding hills. He employs the line drawing technique, used in traditional Chinese painting, to provide an outline of the uncultivated and desolate scene of Luoyang and from this, the reader can sense the prosperity from long ago and at the same time, a bleak desolate picture of reality springs up before the reader’s eyes. Cao Zhi also employs the technique of “painting clouds to set off the moon” which refers to describing images around the object to make an image appear more prominent, in a more vivid and dramatic way than any of his contemporaries:

\(^{372}\) Pan, *Yexia Fengliu*, 104.
\(^{373}\) Xu, *Wei-Jin Wenxue Shi*, 33.
\(^{374}\) Cao Pi. “Liyang Zuo Sanshou Qisan” 黎陽作三首其三 (Poem at Liyang in Three Verses, Verse Three).
\(^{375}\) Cao Zhi. “Dangche Yi Jia Xing” 當車已駕行 (Driving my Chariot).
\(^{376}\) Pan, *Yexia Fengliu*, 104.
A white horse with a golden bridle,
Gallops swiftly towards the northwest. (“White Horse”)

Cao Zhi describes the rider on the horse by first describing the horse. In “Beautiful Girl,” Cao Zhi describes the swaying of the mulberry trees in order to introduce the image of the girl’s fragile and slender figure. He describes in meticulous detail, the individual skills and the temperament of the heroes that he introduces so that they are not simply one dimensional characters but complex human beings. Cao Zhi goes a step further than the other Jian’an poets in the sense that he analyses how the external behaviour of his characters mirrors their frame of mind. In “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Number Three,” Cao Zhi provides a reason as to why the lonely weaving woman appears to be absent minded and is so flustered with all her silk threads in disarray. It is due to the fact that she is lonely and pining for the company of her husband. Cao Zhi harmoniously integrates an external observation of the character and follows this with a probing into their psychological makeup. In “White Horse,” there is a stark change in momentum as the poet explains the background of the hero and integrates it into the poem in order to form a harmonious whole. Cao Zhi also employed antithesis on a more complex level than any of his contemporaries which added momentum, dynamism and rhythm to his poetry:

As crafty and nimble as a monkey,
As courageous and as swift as the panther and the mythical hornless dragon. (“White Horse”)

His use of such similes lifted Chinese poetry to a whole new level. Cao Zhi is skilful at creating a tone and mood which can be seen in many of his opening lines:

The pomegranate tree stands in the courtyard,
Shimmering green leaves with flashes of blue. 377

Cao Zhi’s use of colour in his opening lines is more vivid and spectacular than any of the other Jian’an poets. The pairing of white and gold in “White Horse” depict a scene of majesty and awe. “Orioles in the Fields” opens dramatically, with lines that hint at rebellion and are caked in political overtones:

There is a forlorn wind rustling the trees,
Ocean waves billow forth.

Cao Zhi’s poetry possesses a rare unyielding spirit, and moral integrity. Cao Zhi is more focussed on the freedom of the individual than any of the other Jian’an poets and in this way, Cao Zhi’s poetry best represents the pulse of a period that is striving for self-liberation. The hero in “Orioles in the Fields” rebels against the ruling elite who value power more than loyalty:

Without a sword in my hand,
Why make so many friends?

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377 Cao Zhi. “Qifu Pian” 棄婦篇 (Deserted Wife).
The image is particularly jarring to the reader, as it appears to conflict with notions of Confucian humanity and fraternity and “rebels against common sense and accepted ways of thinking, forcing the reader to think deeply about the issue.” Cao Zhi was one of the most individualistic, forthright and outspoken of all his contemporaries. He was a model for not only the Jian’an Seven but also for later poets such as Ji Kang, Ruan Ji and Tao Yuanming.

Cao Zhi’s poetry speaks volumes about the society in which he lived. It was a society looking for a hero. None of Cao Zhi’s contemporaries or any Chinese poets before him created “a more multi-faceted or compelling self-image.” Cao Zhi had gone from being a contender to the throne and a future full of possibilities to a banished exile. He knew more than any of the other Jian’an poets, the pain of the broken dreams of youth, isolation, rejection and despair, and it is these emotions that speak through his poetry and give it its lasting power, making it the most outstanding poetry of the Jian’an period. It is indeed true that the poetry that “most revealed the pursuit of the highest humanistic ideals of the Jian’an period is the poetry of Cao Zhi.”

Cao Cao wrote in a crisp and straightforward manner. He compared his lofty aspirations to the splendour of the natural world. Wang Can wrote about human suffering and the sentiments of a nation torn apart by war. Many Jian’an poets bewailed the injustices in society. Liu Zhen’s poetry was similar to Cao Zhi’s in that it displayed an unyielding spirit. Cao Pi’s poetry was subtle, and meandering, and focuses on the sentiments between loved ones. The poetry of Cao Zhi has a robust and vibrant quality that sets it apart from the works of other Jian’an poets. It contains political overtones and hints at rebellion. His use of poetic techniques reached a more sophisticated level than those of his contemporaries. His is the poetry of a poet who is striving for self-liberation.

4.2. Gleaming With Brilliance

Since ancient times in China, objective images have been couched in poetic language in order to reveal inner emotions. The Chinese language is a language of comparisons so many of the images that Cao Zhi employed are enhanced by the way he describes the objects around the images in order to bring out the qualities of the image itself. Often the scenery around the image serves as a contrast or “foil” in order to make the image stand out. In one of his most famous examples, that is, “White Horse,” the rider of the horse is not mentioned, what is visible is only the rider’s hands but we know that someone is riding the horse. This attests to Cao Zhi’s superb incorporation of imagery into his poetry. Many of Cao Zhi’s images “were often employed by later poets.”

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380. Qian, Wei-Jin Nanbeichao Shige Shishu, 41.
381. Wang., et al., Zhongguo Wenxue Piping Tongshi, 52.
The following images were used by Cao Zhi to present his ideas in a distinct and unusual way and usually related to his political aspirations: the chivalrous knight errant, the unmarried or abandoned woman, images from nature and animal imagery. There are some images that Cao Zhi began himself such as the image of dust and turbid water merging together as one.

Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 or 135-86 BCE) wrote of the chivalrous knight errant in the “Youxia Biography” 遊俠 of the Shiji 史記 (Records of the Great Historian), as a person who was always ready to help people in distress, full of confidence and talent, and loyal to the end. In “White Horse,” Cao Zhi’s image of the knight errant acquires a political element. He becomes a patriotic hero who would exert his all for his country.

However Cao Zhi could not become such a hero. His martial and political ambitions were constantly blocked. The technique of employing an unmarried woman as a metaphor for a virtuous and talented person who cannot put his talents to use had been used previously in ancient Chinese poetry, notably in the Lisao, by Qu Yuan. However, Cao Zhi goes further than Qu Yuan in that he not only describes the girl’s appearance but probes into her inner life. The “Beautiful Girl” that Cao Zhi presents, has a gentle and refined personality. The soft and supple mulberry branches that ruffle in the breeze enhance the elegant movements of the girl as she picks the mulberries. Her high sense of personal integrity ensures that she will remain aloft from the general crowd. The girl is consumed by depression and sadness and full of pent up resentment as she sighs deep into the night. This is a metaphor for the depression and rejection of a virtuous person who has no outlet for his talents.

Like the young maiden who frets that she cannot find a mate, Cao Zhi felt the pressure of the fleeting nature of time, which he often compared to the “morning dew” (chaolu 朝露). In “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Number Four,” Cao Zhi refers to himself as a jiaren 佳人, which originally referred to a woman of unrivalled beauty. The pairing of a scholar and a jiaren was considered a perfect match in ancient China. Cao Zhi followed in Qu Yuan’s Lisao tradition in the sense that the jiaren was used as a metaphor for someone who has high ideals, talent or high moral integrity. Her facial features are compared to peaches and pear blossoms, which is a metaphor for a person of great talent and potential. However, like fruits that only stay ripe for a short time, Cao Zhi felt the prime of his youth fading before his eyes.

The “white sun” (bairi 白日) which features in “Famous Capital” also implies that life is changeable, nothing is certain, young people will soon grow old, sorrow begets happiness, and a joyful mood cannot continue for long as worry as anxiety will eventually follow. The “sudden wind” (jingfeng 驚風) that blew away the “white sun” in “Lute Piece” is unexpected and seems to come out of nowhere. The wind seems out of place and casts a dark shadow over the proceedings. This image is at odds with the carefree vigour of the scene and the tone of the poem changes suddenly as the poet becomes more matter of fact. Cao Zhi employs the same image of a “sudden wind” blowing away the sun in the opening line of “To Xu Gan.” It has an overpowering force and creates a gloomy setting. This wind reflects the poet’s state of mind as his thoughts turn to his friend, Xu Gan, who was living in straitened
circumstances. This wind also hints at unfulfilled political aspirations and the fleeting nature of time.

After Cao Pi ascended the throne in 220 CE, Cao Zhi was separated from his friends and brothers and began a long period in exile. The “north wind” (shuofeng 朔風) in “North Wind” triggers Cao Zhi’s yearning for the capital of Wei 魏. This image originated from a line in ancient poetry where a fine horse from the North is taken to the South. When it feels the north wind blowing up against it body, it shows its feelings of attachment by letting out a long cry. Cao Zhi wishes to ride this horse against the wind and speed towards Luoyang. In “Sending off the Yings,” the wind rustles in the field amongst bleakness and desolation which evokes memories for the poet and Cao Zhi lets out a long sigh as he looks over the bleak vast open fields. The wind reminds Cao Zhi that he does not wish to return to the dreams of his youth, but to realize his ambition of helping his country.

The “sorrowful wind” (beifeng 悲風) in “Orioles in the Fields” along with the tempestuous waves depict a dark and brooding scene which represented the political environment at the time. In this dark and foreboding environment, a yellow oriole flies about. An oriole is a brightly coloured tree dwelling bird with a musical call. This technique is similar to a Chinese painting style where washes of ink or pale smudges are added to heighten the overall artistic effect. The wind heightens the atmosphere of tragedy as the oriole unwittingly finds itself trapped in a net. The oriole is small, meek and docile, so when it is caught in a net, it will have no ambition to burst through the net and will happily spend time there.

The oriole’s plight symbolises the plight of Cao Zhi’s friends who have unwittingly fallen into a trap prepared by those in power and are the innocent victims of court politics. It shows the contempt Cao Zhi has for those in power. The image of the oriole had been previously used in the Book of Songs. It symbolised righteous ministers that were unjustly treated by society. Cao Zhi employed this image to portray how helpless he was to save his friends, who met their deaths due to their political affiliations.382

Cao Pi sent Cao Zhi into exile and transferred him from place to place, so he had no sense of stability and security. The zhuanpeng drifts away from its roots and is easily blown about by the wind. It was eulogized by poets to emphasize how people drift away from each other. This image took on political implications in “Alas,” revealing how Cao Zhi’s political career was full of trepidations, dashed hopes and frustrations. He lived as an outsider and was unable to associate with those in the court. He had no fixed abode and nowhere where he could return to establish his own base. He was full of anger and resentment at having no control over his fate. The same image appeared in “North Wind,” which was written one year before “Alas.”

In “Sentiments from an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse One,” the image of a lonely woman wandering around the house depicts Cao Zhi’s sense of isolation. Like the woman in

382 Cao Cao had Yang Xiu put to death. The Ding brothers, who were closely associated with Cao Zhi’s faction, were put to death by Cao Pi when he ascended the throne and proclaimed himself Emperor Wen of the Cao-Wei period 曹魏文帝 (220-226 CE). (See Chen, Sanguo Zhi, 419, 420).
“Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Three,” the image of the solitary bird singing and calling for its mate intensifies a sense of sorrow against a vast and uncaring world. However, this bird also symbolises the freedom to roam about, and not to remain in an imprisoned existence which inspired the woman to indulge in an impractical and romantic flight of fancy, of becoming the rays of the sun and flying south to see her husband and to shine upon him. The sun which illuminates everything on earth is able to lift her irrepresible yearnings to the highest level.

Qu Yuan employed images in nature to describe a virtuous individual. Qu Yuan committed suicide in order to show his loyalty to the court of Chu 楚. Both Qu Yuan and Cao Zhi were unyielding in their devotion to their high ideals in the face of relentless persecution. The “autumn frost” (qiushuang 秋霜) in “North Wind” represents evildoers. Cao Pi caused the autumn frost to crush the orchids and make them wither. However, contrary to expectation, they bloom during the height of winter. This image reveals the poet’s courage and unyielding spirit in the face of persecution. The “cassia tree” (guishu 桂樹) in “North Wind” is also a symbol of strength and unyielding personal integrity. The cassia tree also represents purity and idealism in “Ascending to the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse One” and the “The Cassia Tree.”

The cassia tree in “Deserted Wife” represents strength in adversity. It only produces fruit during the frost and during the summer, no fruit grows. Cao Zhi is referring to a person who has high ideals. It is only during times of difficulty that the true worth of an individual of high ideals and moral integrity becomes apparent. It is by having hope and high ideals that a person will find themselves rewarded when they least expect it. Cao Zhi continued to strive ahead with his political ambitions and waited patiently for someone to recognise his talent.

The “abandoned woman” in Cao Zhi’s poems remain faithful to their absent husband just as Cao Zhi remains loyal to his monarch. In “Poem of Resentment” Cao Zhi used the image of mud and turbid water to describe the loyalty that should exist between man and wife. The absent husband is the mud or dust that is free and light and can flow with the wind whereas the woman is the mud that is forever sinking into the water and cannot move about freely. Like the dirt that becomes mud in the water, a husband and wife are one entity. This was a new and ingenious metaphor begun by Cao Zhi. It demonstrates how two things with completely different properties can become one. It is a reflection of the poet’s sorrow and grief at his political circumstances and his hopes for reconciliation. Cao Zhi compares the sentiments between a man and a woman to the loyalty that should exist between a minister and his monarch.

Cao Zhi employs the image of a wanderer in “Feelings” to emphasize his isolation from the Court. The imagery of fish and birds convey a realm of wide open spaces and portray a lively freshness and vigour. The fish can swim about freely and the birds can fly up above the clouds. Their movements are uninhibited and unimpeded, and the scene bursts with a sense of freedom. This image greatly contrasts with the tragic soldier who cannot return home and also portrays the author’s political situation where his movements are continually watched and he is under heavy constraints.
The boat in “North Wind” represents political power and prestige. The poet cannot find a boat to cross the river. There is no one to help him reconcile with the Court. He turns to friendship for consolation. The “mandarin ducks” (yuanyang 鴛鴦) are a metaphor for Wang Can and Cao Zhi. The image of a pair of mandarin ducks was often used in ancient poetry to refer to wedded bliss or to a devoted and affectionate couple. In “To Wang Can,” the same image is used in a different way: the lone duck is pleading for a mate in the same way that Cao Zhi longs to go to the side of Wang Can. It is an unattainable and a hopeless illusion, and aptly portrays the mental anguish of the poet.

Cao Zhi eventually gave up hope of ever being able to see his political ambitions come to fruition. He was forced to part with his brother on their way back from the capital to their respective fiefdoms. Cao Zhi grudgingly drives his carriage forward. The scene that unfolds before him is like a Chinese scroll picture of magnificent mountains and vast deep valleys, as birds and animals follow him along the road. In “To Biao, Prince of Baima,” Cao Zhi’s use of metaphors and his complete integration of emotion and scenery reach a climactic stage of development and reveal the poet’s hitherto buried feelings and emotions regarding his experiences with the court.

The cool autumn wind, the wail of the cicada and the white sun setting behind the mountains present a bleak and desolate scene. The image of the solitary beast, eager to return to the herd and the migratory birds returning to their groves intensifies the pain of parting as Cao Zhi is unable to return to the court. The animals he sees are metaphors for the evil-doers and slanderers in the political world who have blocked his ambitions. The leopards and wolves blocking the way represent evildoers or those who usurp an important political post which was a political reality at the time. The image of flies flying about and forming a black and white haze was employed in the Book of Songs and referred to slanderers who were adept at using language to cajole and influence others.

While Cao Zhi felt that there was still a chance that he could be reconciled with his family, he projected his indignation and frustration at forces within the court as well as at other states. However, Cao Zhi can no longer conceal the resentment he feels towards his brother, Cao Pi. The central image in Cao Zhi’s poem “Mengdong Pian” 孟冬篇 (The Depth of Winter) is the yoke across the front of the carriage, which is magnificently decorated with the luan 鴞, a mythical bird related to the phoenix which symbolizes good fortune. This carriage would have belonged to the emperor. However, painted on the yoke of the carriage that Cao Zhi is riding in, as described in “To Biao, Prince of Baima,” were owls, which were a political omen and refer to evil tactics. The holder of the reigns is Cao Pi. Cao Zhi is referring to Cao Pi as someone who dictates the actions of those around him and controls the outcome. By portraying the scenery in such a way, Cao Zhi reveals his deeply entrenched bitterness and resentful feelings towards Cao Pi.

However, by revealing his hidden emotions, Cao Zhi awakens to the reality of life itself. He comes to the important realization that no one is able to control their own fate and that life is short and full of suffering. One’s high ideals outlive one’s death, in that even though one’s
body decays, one’s spirit and ideas can live forever. He comes to accept his own fate by enjoying his short time on earth and leaves his fate to the decree of heaven.

Cao Zhi incorporated much traditional Chinese poetic imagery into his poetry but many of these images acquired political overtones. Cao Zhi probed into the psychology of the characters he portrayed and in the process; he created a fully dimensional flesh and blood human being. These characters aptly portray Cao Zhi’s own state of mind which was mainly focussed on issues such as the brevity of life and his inability to realize his ideals. He created images by using language in a highly artistic way. He also created highly original metaphors to give voice to what was on his mind. As he developed as a poet, his external environment became a metaphor for the obstacles he faced in life and this became a way for him to release his pent up indignation and revealed his unyielding and courageous spirit.

4.3. Plucking the Lute Strings

Cao Zhi long to be remembered for his heroic deeds, but after seeing the suffering of his people, he aims to make his mark in the political arena. His banquet poetry reflected his aristocratic lifestyle but Cao Zhi never abandoned his lofty ambitions, and he treasured his friendships with those who shared these ambitions. After being sent into exile, he professed his loyalty and hoped to be reconciled with the court. He strives to liberate himself, and to realize his political ideals through his transcendent poetry but it was amongst nature, that his soul finds the ultimate release. However, Cao Zhi’s high ideals continued to speak through his poetry in the form of a heartfelt and impassioned lament. He interspersed his poetry with classical allusions as a way to remonstrate against the court and his poetry became a heartfelt plea on behalf of humanity against injustice and oppression. Later in his life, he wrote of his own personal sentiments, and in doing so, he discovered a way in which he could “leave his mark” and inspire generations of readers.

Cao Zhi’s irrepressible desire to perform heroic deeds is intricately linked with the swift passage of time. In “Lute Piece,” the sudden wind reminds him of the fleeting nature of good times. In “Beautiful Girl,” he reveals his pent up frustration at the passing of time and his inability to utilise his talent. It is the transience of existence, coupled with the chaos and violence of his times that emboldens Cao Zhi to perform great feats. In “White Horse,” the hero is a bold and daring youth who does not fear death in his quest to perform great deeds. It reveals the stirrings of a noble heart calling people to action and reflects the mood of Han Dynasty literature in the way that the individual sacrifices himself for the collective whole.

However, after having seen the ravages of war in “Sending off the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One,” Cao Zhi desires to perform magnificent feats in the political arena in order to improve the life of his country folk. In “To Ding Yi and Wang Can,” Cao Zhi praises Cao Cao’s heroic deeds which helped people dare to hope for a better future. He encouraged his friends to see hope amongst the chaos and to uphold high ideals. In “To Xu Gan,” Cao Zhi reveals that people who stay true to their high ideals during chaotic times are precious like jade, which becomes brighter and more precious over time. Those who do not uphold high ideals are like the fish in “Shrimp and Eels,” which satisfy themselves with the stream, not
knowing the currents of the Yangtze. Those with high ideals are able to ride across the lofty and sacred mountain peaks and look down on those conspiring against one another for their own benefit. The poet looks down below him, as thunder arouses his valiant spirit and he strokes his sword.

In “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Five,” the poet longs to unify the country by subduing the Kingdom of Wu 吳. He wishes to cross the river but he regrets that there is no boat to take him across. The absence of a boat symbolises the major obstacles Cao Zhi faced within the court. Like the girl in “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Four,” Cao Zhi was unperturbed at not being appreciated or valued by the masses and remains true to his ideals of performing heroic deeds. However, in “To Biao, Prince of Baima,” the description of the toils of travel and his life journey become intertwined and coagulate into a confession of heartfelt emotion and resentment. Cao Zhi pondered his legacy in terms of the greater universe in “Dew on the Shallot,” by revealing his personal thoughts and his desire to make a contribution to society. Even while he was happily feasting in the gardens of Ye, he was haunted by the fleeting nature of time and his desire for immortality. As can be seen in “To Ding Yi 丁翼,” the main purpose of banquets was to share one’s aspirations with others and to expose oneself to new ways of thinking.

Although, Cao Zhi’s banquet poetry does not reflect the realities of the society in which he lived in, these poems unleashed a new kind of creativity in his poetry. “Public Banquet” describes the surrounding scenery of the moon, flowers, fish and birds at Ye, and reveals the free and easy lifestyle of the aristocrats. In “The Seat of the Prince in Waiting,” the refreshing and uplifting atmosphere can be discerned as the sun glistens in the blue sky, timely rain washes away the dust particles, the cool breeze provides refuge from the sweltering sun and mouth watering dishes are laid out. There are also musicians from the state of Qi 齊 playing captivating tunes and singers from the western state of Qin 秦 singing in chorus. In “Great Trouble in the Coming Days,” Cao Zhi attempted to “seize the day” as he indulged in life’s pleasures, drinking alcohol freely and enjoying the company of fellow guests. “Cockfight” portrays the spirit of riotous excitement and friendly competition that existed at these banquets.

Banquets held on more formal occasions had a more solemn atmosphere. “The Great Wei Capital” describes a formal banquet for government ministers during Cao Pi’s reign. The splendour of the occasion can be discerned in “New Years Ceremony” as the guests raise their heads to gaze at the patterned balustrades and to the coloured pillars while listening to ancient tunes. Government officials living a life of easy pleasures worsened under Cao Rui. In the banquet poetry that Cao Zhi wrote in the latter part of his life, the guests do not ponder the past or attempt to strive ahead. “The Immortals” and “To the Tune of ‘Driving My Chariot’” depict the lavish, unrestrained and indulgent banquets held in Cao Rui’s court.

After Cao Pi ascended the throne, the economy improved and people became more self-important and sought to show off their wealth. In “Famous Capital,” Cao Zhi reveals the feasting and leisure activities of a typically indulgent aristocrat. There is a tinge of sadness as the sun travels quickly across the sky but the youth is oblivious to the fleeting nature of time.
and has no desire to leave his mark on the world. This common emphasis on life’s brevity
was mostly employed to lament that life was too short to perform great deeds. However, Cao
Zhi also employs it to express “the preciousness of friendship, the rarity of reunions and the
sorrow of parting.”

In “Li You Ershou” 離友二首 (Parting Friends in Two Verses), Cao Zhi reveals the deep
affection he had for his friends. He assured Ding Yi 丁儀 in “To Ding Yi” that the bonds
between them will not be broken by events in the political world. Cao Zhi’s friendship poems
reveal the trust and intimacy that can exist between human beings when outside forces are
tearing people apart. Partings during a time of war, as written about in “Sending off the Yings
in Two Verses, Verse Two,” reveal how an individual, in times of uncertainty, will feel all
the more intensely, that life is like the morning dew, and turn to old friends and memories of
happier times. In “To Wang Can,” Cao Zhi reminisced back to the carefree days in the
gardens of Xiyuan 西園 where he catches sight of a solitary bird. This relates to the yin and
yang principle that when one is on the cusp of extreme happiness, one also experiences
sadness.

However, a person with high ideals faces a dark reality when they cannot realize their high
ideals in life. Like the zhuanpeng in “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Two” and “Alas,” Cao
Zhi was caught up in the whirlwinds of fate during chaotic times. After being sent into exile,
Cao Zhi employed the image of a loyal wife in “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Three,”
“Planting Arrowroot” and “Poem of Resentment,” to reveal his sense of anxiety as he was
constantly transferred from place to place. Like a loyal wife who is committed to her spouse,
Cao Zhi’s high ideals will never fade. Cao Zhi admired Xu Gan for upholding his high
principles but like the mud and turbid water in “Poem of Resentment” and the harmonious
sounds of the qin and se in “Planting Arrowroot,” Cao Zhi yearned to be welcomed back at
the court again.

Like the Duke of Zhou 周公 in “Song of Indignation,” Cao Zhi had been sent into exile due
to the actions of slanderous courtiers. In “The Essence of the Spirit,” Cao Zhi admonished
Cao Pi for rejecting his kin. In “Wishing to Climb Over the High Walls,” Cao Zhi accused
ministers of planting the seeds of suspicion among family members. In “Floating Duckweed,”
Cao Zhi warned that what appears enticing and exotic can never match the old and familiar.
In “Sentiments From an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse One,” he wrote that even though
loved ones become estranged when they are separated for long periods, loyalty never fades
and only becomes stronger with time. Loyalty and sincerity are values that transcend the
fickleness of the world and are unyielding in the face of difficulty. In “Yuzhang in Two
Verses, Verse Two,” he wrote of how the bonds between those who are unrelated can never
match those of kin, and in “Dew on the Shallot,” he compares his loyalty to animals that pay
homage to divine creatures.

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383 Ren Liying 任麗英, “Cao Zhi de Youqingshi Qianxi” 曹植的友情詩淺析. Zhonggong Zhengzhou Shiwei
Cao Zhi’s strong attachment to his roots provides him with a sense of identity and affirms his rightful place in the universe. In “Alas,” he reveals how he would rather suffer and die in the autumn field fires than lead the life of a wanderer in exile. From “New Year’s Ceremony,” it can be seen that Cao Zhi respected and admired palace rituals and the ceremony of officialdom as an outward display of his own loyalty. He wished for the kingdom to last forever as his banquet poetry became intertwined with themes of immortality.

Cao Zhi suffered many setbacks and experienced the torment of not being able to exercise his talents. In “To the Tune of ‘Yuzhang’ in Two Verses,” he ponders on how poverty and misfortune are difficult to predict and in “Youxian” (Roaming Immortal), Cao Zhi reflects on a life full of worries, where happy times are few, and how he longs to escape the dreary affairs of the world, and like the Yellow Emperor, train himself to understand the way of the immortals. In “Ping Lingdong” (Assailing the Eastern Mountain), the Father of the East enables him to eat magic mushrooms to attain immortality and in “The Immortals,” the immortals invite him to drink the elixir of immortality. In “Feilong Pian” (Flying Dragon), he follows two fairies, riding a white dear while picking magic mushrooms, to the Jade Palace of the Mother of the West. In “Shengtian Xing Ershou Qiyi” (Ascending to the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse One), he longs to ride the white waves up to the clouds and frolic with the immortals.

In such a world, Cao Zhi could be free to realize his political ambitions. In “Five Roaming Songs,” he ascended into the skies in a splendid dragon drawn carriage. As he enters the heavenly gates, the emperor adorns him with the jade sash of officialdom. However, he cannot cease the inevitable passage of time and yearns to tie ropes around the sun and pull it back to the east in “Ascending to the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse Two.”

Natural images abound in Cao Zhi’s transcendent poetry. It was amongst the irrepressible and all encompassing force of the natural world that Cao Zhi could give full play to his magnanimous spirit. In “Roaming Far,” Cao Zhi roams over the seas and looks down to see the roaring waves. He whistles and raises his voice in song. Nature in its constant renewal of life also provides hope in world of disillusionment. The “Deserted Wife” is unable to bear a child but the sight of flowers blooming radiantly in the courtyard give her hope. In “Wanting to Roam in the Southern Mountains,” Cao Zhi saw how the rivers welcome many streams and the mountains don’t reject dirt. He gathers with the immortals under the “Cassia Tree” to talk of the purity of the Dao.

However, like the oriole that gets caught in a trap in “Orioles in the Fields,” the court was a complicated net of relationships, in which innocent people are caught up in. Cao Zhi was transferred from one fiefdom to the next, and like the zhuanpeng in “Alas,” floating along in the wind, and then suddenly finding itself blown into a deep abyss and then blown back to the field where it came from, Cao Zhi had no control over his own destiny and did not know what the future held. In “Great Rock,” he sighs and looks to the sky, and his thoughts turn to his original dwelling place.
Cao Zhi relied on his brother, and later his nephew, to provide him with not only a political career but also a sense of stability and security, in the same way that the abandoned woman in “Planting Arrowroot” is vulnerable to the fickleness of a man’s changing emotions and reliant on him for a sense of emotional stability. In “Sentiments From an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse One,” the lonely woman feels that as time goes on, it will be less likely that she will be reunited with her husband as people change over time. Like the woman in “Floating Duckweed” who has worked diligently in order to regain her husband’s affection, Cao Zhi worked diligently to please his sovereign but was suddenly cast aside for no apparent reason.

In “Wishing to Climb Over the High Walls,” Cao Zhi laments how he must have a person to recommend him if he is to rise in the world. He satirizes those who surround and flatter the emperor. Cao Zhi’s political ideals have begun to clash with those of the court. In “Wanting to Roam in the Southern Mountains,” Cao Zhi asserts that, in selecting officials for office, there should not be one standard by which all people should be measured. In “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Six,” he reflects on his life experiences and ponders how those who uphold high ideals are beset with melancholy. However, he did not give up his ideals and was full of a rebellious spirit. The music from the stringed instruments plucks at his heart strings and arouses his passions.

In “Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Two,” Cao Zhi ponders the injustice of his own situation and how he was powerless to change it. He equates the fate of the lowly individual with his own fate. His experiences of continuous warfare and a wandering life have led their fates to become intricately interconnected. Cao Zhi tasted the bitter suffering of his people. In “At the Door is a Stranger From Afar,” Cao Zhi expresses sympathy for those far from home. In “Poem of Resentment,” he reveals the heartache of a lonely woman. Cao Zhi took pity on the voiceless masses who society had forgotten.

In “Wei Han Xing” (Remembering the Han Dynasty), he warns that the heavens cause natural calamities when a ruler does not put the needs of his people first. Cao Zhi drew on examples of good and bad governments of the past to reveal his dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and his desire to see competent ministers employed in the court which will bring prosperity to the kingdom. He describes how the latter monarchs of the Xia (2100-1600 BCE), Shang (1600-1046 BCE), and Zhou (1045-256 BCE) dynasties did not address the needs of the people which brought about their own destruction. Cao Zhi feels that this would be the natural result for a monarch who rules in a despotic way. During times of clean politics when the legendary emperors reigned, there were many people of great talent working in the court and there was flourishing prosperity in the kingdom.

The prosperous age of the Yellow Emperor is described in “The Depth of Winter.” In “Yuzhang in Two Verses,” Cao Zhi makes an allusion to Confucius whose talent was not recognised during his lifetime, which hints at his own miserable situation. Cao Zhi wishes for the leaders to follow the example of Zhou Wen Wang 周文王 (fl. 1050 BCE) who recruited scholars of superior talent. In “Three Good Men,” Cao Zhi praises the government ministers of the past who were loyal to the extent that they followed their sovereign to the grave. Cao Zhi is criticising current government ministers who profess to be loyal but are actually
guarding their own interests as most of them are not related to the emperor. This poem warns of impending peril.

In “Danxia Biri Xing” 丹霞蔽日行 (A Pink Mist Blocks the Sun), Cao Zhi describes how the rise of the Han dynasty came about due to the decadence and depravity of Emperor Qin Shihuang of the Qin dynasty. There were numerous outbreaks of war at the end of the Han dynasty leading to its collapse. Cao Zhi is warning Cao Pi and revealing his pent up indignation. In “Remembering the Han dynasty,” Cao Zhi states that even though the sun has set on the Wei capital, indicating it has become corrupt and depraved, he sees hope for the kingdom and is appealing to Cao Rui to give him an opportunity to turn the political situation around. He reminds Cao Rui to consider the type of reputation he will have after he dies. “Yuzhang in Two Verses, Verse Two” shows how brothers should preserve harmonious relations and work together in the spirit of cooperation against outsiders. In “The Essence of the Spirit,” Cao Zhi makes an illusion to the Confucian values of the past including filial piety.

Cao Zhi came into the world during violent times which drove within him his heroic heart and the desire to improve the lives of his countrymen. Even when he was alienated from the court, his heroic ambitions never faded. His intimate experience of human suffering saw him encompass new themes into his poetry and saw it branch off into a new direction so that it spoke on behalf of those who have suffered on account of their beliefs. It is this, along with Cao Zhi’s steadfast devotion to his high ideals that makes Cao Zhi’s poetry transcend borders and generations and ensures that it still stirs the conscience of readers today.

Cao Zhi’s poetry is not dissimilar to the poetry of his contemporaries, but it also retains unique characteristics that set it apart from his contemporaries. In much of his poetry, there is the sense of a distinct individual with his/her own feelings and motivations. He drew on traditional poetic images and manipulated them to reveal his own ideas in a new and original way. His high ideals and undying loyalty injected his poetry with a lamentful and tragic tone. He lived during an age which was looking for a hero, so he longed to perform magnificent feats but his ambitions were constantly blocked either by people or the passage of time. He found solace by temporarily escaping into a transcendent realm. After he was alienated from the court, he expressed his righteous indignation and noble aspirations through his poetry as his poetry became intertwined with the lives of the individuals around him. In doing so, his poetry reveals his sincere respect for the value of every individual, particularly those who have been dealt an injustice by society.
Conclusion

The Han dynasty was a glorious epoch, but literature at this time, was very much tied to the state and centred on the collective whole. The voice of the individual was struggling to make itself heard. Dissatisfaction and pent up frustration resulted in an outburst of explosive emotion during the Jian’an period. Cao Zhi’s motivations were influenced by the age in which he lived as well as the people around him. Cao Zhi’s poetry is so imbued with the vigour of life that it cannot be read without reference to his own circumstances at the time of production.

The Jian’an intellectuals were heartened by new developments in the political arena advocated by Cao Cao. Banquets were often held at the palace where Cao Zhi indulged in alcohol and feasting with reckless abandon as he yearned to capture the essence of his own individual spirit and for the personalities of those around him to be revealed to him in a relaxed setting. As the dark clouds of war loomed ahead, he vowed to never take for granted any of the pleasures that life bestowed on him. He also never desired to follow in the footsteps of others, either in his life or in his poetry. Cao Zhi saw that while there were similarities between his work and the work of other poets, his poetry also contained elements that set him apart from his contemporaries leading him to lament that there was not one standard for what constituted “good” literature.

Cao Zhi wrote most of his poetry in the pentasyllabic metre and his attempts at this new and developing form were the most outstanding for his time. The characters of Cao Zhi’s yuefu were recognisable characters from Chinese folklore. However, in Cao Zhi’s hands, they became living, breathing, and three dimensional human beings. These characters, not only by their actions but also by their thinking, reflected Cao Zhi’s own ideals. For Cao Zhi, a bright future beckoned with unlimited opportunities. At a time of war and turmoil, he believed in the power of the individual to make a difference.

He had seen the misery and intense suffering of a war weary populace. He longed to see China united under one realm, for the fighting to cease forever and for those who were lonely and miserable, to be reunited with their loved ones and under a Confucian mantle of harmony, China would become prosperous once again. He was intensely aware of the injustices inherent in society and longed to improve the lives of his country folk by participating in politics. Cao Zhi felt life’s transience all the more intensely due to his ardent desire to perform great deeds for posterity.

Cao Zhi wrote with heartfelt sincerity about current concerns that touched the lives of ordinary people. However, he was an extraordinarily talented and extremely ambitious individual who could sometimes not contemplate the effect that his decisions or actions could have on those around him. This aspect of his personality would cause him extreme distress and anguish after Cao Pi was crowned emperor in 220 CE. Some of his closest confidants were executed on account of their associations with him. However Cao Zhi never lost his
faith in the world or his belief that human beings were essentially a force for good in the world.

It was after Cao Zhi’s alienation from the court and in his moments of solitude, that he produced his most inspirational poetic works, as a human being must be alone with his/her thoughts in order to be able to listen to the quiet rumblings of their own soul. Cao Zhi chose not to wallow in self pity but to continue striving forward and it is for this reason that his poetry makes a lasting impression, as we can sense his confusion and the contradictions that raged within him as he continued to uphold his high political ideals.

He employed the persona of an abandoned woman to project his intense feelings of despair, but these women were never completely abandoned by their husbands; rather, they were left in a state of confusion and bewilderment. The unmarried maidens depicted in Cao Zhi’s poetry hint at the possibility that they will find a mate in the near future. These poems reflect Cao Zhi’s own situation in regard to his relationship to the political world. He never gave up hope that he would one day be reunited with the court. Cao Zhi follows in the tradition of Qu Yuan in that he has become a symbol of “moral rectitude and creative genius in the face of political oppression”\(^\text{384}\) and like Qu Yuan, he reasserted the high moral stance and personal integrity of Chinese intellectuals by employing the image of a fragrant plant or a beautiful woman as a metaphor for moral uprightness and high political integrity.

He rebelled against materialism and the pettiness of aristocratic life and sought spiritual solace amongst the world of nature. The mountains and the seas were eternal but human pursuits of position, honour and glory could be lost in an instant and could not be relied on. Cao Zhi’s interest in Daoism reflects his desire to inhabit a lofty realm where he is undisturbed by worldly comforts and is able to focus on his own high ideals. His transcendent poetry reveals his quest for freedom and gives full play to his powerful and roving imagination. He recognised the beauty around him which enriched his poetic expression. Cao Zhi saw beauty in the most unlikely of places such as the eaves of buildings, a woman relaxing by the lake or a dashing young man on a horse.

Cao Zhi manipulated traditional literary forms, and in the process, discovered new expressions and poetic techniques in order to convey the complexities of his own fears and emotions as well as his staunch sense of loyalty. Eventually, his political ideals became merged with his own personal sentiments and concerns. In “To Biao, Prince of Baima,” Cao Zhi’s incorporation of metaphor, his merging of the world of nature with his own psychological state, and the harmony and unity of his lyrical voice reached the highest levels of poetic expression. Along with an acute sense of loss, there is also a sense of hope that the bonds that the brothers shared can never be broken and that despite the fact that a person’s body decays, their spirit never dies.

Although Cao Zhi advocated a Confucian approach to world affairs, it was, ironically his very isolation from the court that spurred on his poetic talent and saw his poetry reveal a level of individuality that had not been seen previously in ancient China. More than any other

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\(^{384}\) Crozier, “Qu Yuan and the Artists,” 25.
Jian’an poet, he understands all the bitter emotions of despair, betrayal, rejection and loneliness. He was no longer a government official who wrote poetry but a poet.

If Cao Zhi had died a heroic death and had his name inscribed on ding vessels, or he had worn the splendid robe of an official, his image would have become frozen in time after death and he would not be remembered as the human figure whose faults, insecurities and failures make him all the more human and endearing to readers. Cao Zhi represents the beginning of a powerful new movement in Chinese literature which was the awakening of human voices which unleashed a wave of creative expression and manifested itself more prominently during the Wei-Jin period.

The poetry of the Jian’an period is like a cluster of flowers that stand upright in a chaotic, turbulent and miserable landscape, blooming profusely in a myriad of bright fresh colours. The beauty of these flowers shine through all the more as they are not growing in a well cultivated lush green field but in a place where no one would expect to see such flowers growing so radiantly. Even though all the evil forces around this cluster of flowers conspire to destroy them, they remain upright and shine forth with courageous dignity. The brightest and most vividly coloured flower amongst this cluster is the poetry of Cao Zhi whose poetry, more than any of his contemporaries, rages with the fiery passions and rich emotion that have stirred the souls of generations of readers. Cao Zhi’s high Confucian and humanistic ideals speak nobly and uprightly through his poetry making it not only the poetry of China but the poetry that has the power to inspire all of humanity.
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Appendix

Poems that are quoted from throughout this thesis:

Cao Cao. “Duange Xing” 短歌行 (Short Song).

Cao Cao. “Guan Canghai” 觀滄海 (Looking Over the Sparkling Blue Ocean).

Cao Cao. “Quedong Ximen Xing” 卻東西門行 (Going East Out of the Western Gates).

Cao Pi. “Furong Chi Zuoshi” 芙蓉池作詩 (Lotus Pond Piece).

Cao Pi. “Liyang Zuo Sanshou Qi’er” 黎陽作三首其二 (Poem at Liyang in Three Verses, Verse Two).


Cao Pi. “Qiuhu Xing Ershou Qi’er” 秋胡行二首其二 (Qiuhu in Two Verses, Verse Two).

Cao Pi. “Yange Xing Ershou Qiyi” 燕歌行二首其一 (The Song of Yan in Two Verses, Verse One).

Cao Pi. “Zashi Ershou Qiyi” 雜詩二首其一 (Miscellaneous Poems in Two Verses, Verse One).

Cao Zhi. “Baima Pian” 白馬篇 (White Horse).


Cao Zhi. “Dangche Yi Jia Xing” 當車已駕行 (Driving My Chariot).

Cao Zhi. “Dang Lairi Danan” 當來日大難 (Great Trouble in the Coming Days).


Cao Zhi. “Dang Qiang Yu Gao Xing” 當墻欲高行 (Wishing to Climb Over the High Walls).

Cao Zhi. “Da Wei Pian” 大魏篇 (The Great Wei Capital).

Cao Zhi. “Danxia Biri Xing” 丹霞蔽日行 (A Pink Mist Blocks the Sun).
Cao Zhi. “Dou Ji” 斗雞 (Cockfight).
Cao Zhi. “Feilong Pian” 飛龍篇 (Flying Dragon).
Cao Zhi. “Fuping Pian” 浮萍篇 (Floating Duckweed).
Cao Zhi. “Gongyan” 公宴 (Public Banquet).
Cao Zhi. “Guiqing Ershou Qi’er” 閨情二首其二 (Sentiments from an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse Two).
Cao Zhi. “Guiqing Ershou Qiyi” 閨情二首其一 (Sentiments from an Inner Room in Two Verses, Verse One).
Cao Zhi. “Gui Zhi Shu Xing” 桂之樹行 (The Cassia Tree).
Cao Zhi. “Jingwei Pian” 精微篇 (The Essence of the Spirit).
Cao Zhi. “Konghou Yin” 竹篌引 (Lute Piece).
Cao Zhi. “Kusi Xing” 苦思行 (Painful Thoughts).
Cao Zhi. “Li You Ershou” 離友二首 (Parting Friends in Two Verses).
Cao Zhi. “Meinu Pian” 美女篇 (Beautiful Girl).
Cao Zhi. “Mengdong Pian” 孟冬篇 (The Depth of Winter).
Cao Zhi. “Men You Wan Li Ke” 門有萬里客 (At the Door is a Stranger from Afar).
Cao Zhi. “Mingdu Pian” 名都篇 (Famous Capital).
Cao Zhi. “Panshi Pian” 盤石篇 (The Great Rock).
Cao Zhi. “Ping Lingdong” 平陵東 (Assailing the Eastern Mountain).
Cao Zhi. “Qifu Pian” 棄婦篇 (Deserted Wife).
Cao Zhi. “Qingshi” 情詩 (Feelings).
Cao Zhi. “Qiqi” 七啟 (The Seven Guiding Principles).
Cao Zhi. “San Liang” 三良 (Three Good Men).
Cao Zhi. “Shengtian Xing Ershou Qi’er” 升天行二首其二 (Ascending the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse Two).

Cao Zhi. “Shengtian Xing Ershou Qiyi” 升天行二首其一 (Ascending to the Heavens in Two Verses, Verse One).

Cao Zhi. “Shuofeng” 朔風 (North Wind).

Cao Zhi. “Song Yingshi Ershou Qi’er” 送應氏二首其二 (Sending of the Yings in Two Verses, Verse Two).

Cao Zhi. “Song Yingshi Ershou Qiyi” 送應氏二首其一 (Sending of the Yings in Two Verses, Verse One).

Cao Zhi. “Taishan Liangfu Xing” 泰山梁甫行 (Mount Tai and Liangfu).

Cao Zhi. “Xiashan” 鰕鱓 (Shrimps and Eels).

Cao Zhi. “Wei Han Xing” 惟漢行 (Remembering the Han Dynasty).

Cao Zhi. “Wuyou Yong” 五游詠 (Five Roaming Songs).

Cao Zhi. “Xianren Pian” 仙人篇 (The Immortals).

Cao Zhi. “Xielu Xing” 萱露行 (Dew on the Shallot).

Cao Zhi. “Xiyu” 喜雨 (Timely Rain).

Cao Zhi. “Yetian Huangque Xing” 野田黃雀行 (Orioles in the Fields).

Cao Zhi. “Youxian” 遊仙 (Roaming Immortal).

Cao Zhi. “Yuange Xing” 怨歌行 (Song of Indignation).

Cao Zhi. “Yuanhui” 元會 (New Year’s Ceremony).

Cao Zhi. “Yuanshi Xing” 怨詩行 (Poem of Resentment).

Cao Zhi. “Yuanyou Pian” 遠游篇 (Roaming Far).

Cao Zhi. “Yujie Pian” 吁嗟篇 (Alas).

Cao Zhi. “Yuzhangxing Ershou Qi’er” 豫章行二首其二 (Yuzhang in Two Verses, Verse Two).
Cao Zhi. “Yuzhanging Ershou Qiyi” 豫章行二首其一 (Yuzhang in Two Verses, Verse One).

Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qi’er” 雜詩六首其二 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Two).

Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qiliu” 雜詩六首其六 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Six).

Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qisan” 雜詩六首其三 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Three).

Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qisi” 雜詩六首其四 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Four).

Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qiwu” 雜詩六首其五 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse Five).

Cao Zhi. “Zashi Liushou Qiyi” 雜詩六首其一 (Six Miscellaneous Poems, Verse One).


Cao Zhi. “Zeng Ding Yi” 贈丁翼 (To Ding Yi).

Cao Zhi “Zeng Ding Yi” 贈丁儀 (To Ding Yi).


Cao Zhi. “Zeng Xu Gan” 贈徐幹 (To Xu Gan).

Cao Zhi. “Zhonggua Pian” 種葛篇 (Planting Arrowroot).

Chen Lin 陳琳. “Yinma Changcheng Ku Xing” 飲馬長城窟行 (A Horse Stops by the Great Wall to Drink)

Han Wudi 漢武帝. “Qiufeng Ci” 秋風辭 (Ode to the Autumn Wind).


Liu Zhen. “Zeng Congdi San Shou Qi’er” 贈從弟三首其二 (Poem to My Brothers in Three Verses, Verse Two).

Liu Zhen. “Zeng Congdi San Shou Qi’er” 贈從弟三首其二 (Poem to My Brothers in Three Verses, Verse Two).

Ruan Ji 阮籍. “Yonghuai Shi Bashi’er Shou Qiyi” 詠懷詩八十二首其一 (Expressing My Feelings in Eighty-two Verses, Verse One).

Ruan Yu 阮瑀 “Jiachu Bei Guomen Xing” 駕出北郭門行 (Riding Out of the Outer Northern City Walls).


Wang Can. “Qi’ai Shi Sanshou Qiyi” 七哀詩三首其一 (Seven Lamentations in Three Verses, Verse One).


Xiang Yu. “Gaixia Ge” 垓下歌 (Song at Gaixia).