

CHAPTER ONE

FAMILY BACKGROUND

During Wen Tingyun's lifetime, the Tang Empire was steadily on the wane, while the aristocratic clans, a mainstay of its rule, were also in decline. Coming to the fore in the political arena were instead some forces in the ascendant: first, the eunuchs, who had in the main usurped state power and sapped it at its core; next, the military satraps, who maintained a semi-independent position, defying the imperial authority in the capital Chang'an; and then the factions with their incessant contention, rendering the decision-making process all the more inefficient. It was against the backdrop of this situation that the Wen clan experienced its own vicissitudes of life. A study of Wen's family background, therefore, will serve not only to initiate our efforts to uncover hitherto unnoticed events concerning his life, but will also present a particular case for understanding the Late Tang problem of the politically entrenched eunuchs.

The texts of "Biographies of Wen Tingyun" in the two *Tang Histories*¹ are too inadequate and misleading to be used to draw a clear picture of Wen's life. Hence, we will consult various sources, especially his own works, for more reliable information.

CLAN ORIGIN AND NATIVE PLACE

To begin with, we will study Wen Tingyun's clan origin and his native place, as a convenient start to unraveling his poetic puzzles and probing into his life.

As indicated in Wen's biography in XTS, Wen Yanbo (573–636), the great-grandfather of his grandfather, was a native of Qi County of Taiyuan. This corresponds fairly well with one of Wen's notes to the fifth rhyme in "Hundred-Rhyme Poem":

My forefathers were dukes and ministers of our state dynasty,
and after having helped effect the Heavenly Mandate in Jinyang,
they were enfeoffed in the commanderies of Bing and Fen
(余先祖國朝公相，晉陽佐命，食采于并汾也).

Jinyang was the locale of the administration of Taiyuan Commandery (太原府), where the first emperor of the Tang, Li Yuan (李淵, 566–625, r. 618–625), rose up in arms against the Sui Dynasty (589–618), and Wen's forefathers rose to power and position by dint of their meritorious services to the Tang. The Wen clansmen had lived in the Taiyuan area, especially in the so-called Qi County (祁縣), up to Wen's lifetime. Qi is an older name for the county called Qingyuan (清源) during the Tang times.²

Since the aristocratic clans still had influence at this time, a Tang literatus would not take the locale of his immediate family as his native place unless the family had lived there since the time of his preeminent ancestors. Instead, he would identify his origins with the place where the family's famous forefathers lived, however distant they might be. The Song historiographers, when dealing with Tang biographies, followed the same practice. Therefore, we ought to take Taiyuan or Qingyuan as nothing more than the place of Wen's clan origin. Indeed, an eminent clan with the surname Wen had lived in Qi County since the Han (206 B.C.–220 A.D.).³ During the Tang Dynasty, some of the Wens, including the branch to which Wen Tingyun belonged, had moved to the south, perhaps because of the An-Shi Rebellion. From Wen's extant works we can infer that Wen was a native of Wu or Yue, the present-day south of the Jiangsu or the Zhejiang province. To pinpoint Wen's "native place," we shall have to cite more of his works.

In his first of the two "Epistles Presented to Vice Minister Jiang" (上蔣侍郎啓二首之一), Wen mentions Qingyuan in a meaningful manner: "Therefore I left the 'Qingyuan' of the mainthreads in the southern country,⁴ and had a commoner's audience from the eastern plain" (遂揚南紀之清源，因效東皋之素謁). "Qingyuan," beside referring to the county under Taiyuan in the north, literally means "pure source" or pure origin (of the family), thus denotes here Wen's native place in the south, which became Wen's second homeland after his progenitors emigrated to the south.

In "Fifty-Rhyme Poem Inspired by the Bygone, for Pouring My Heart, Presented to Chancellor Li of Huainan" (感舊陳情五十韻獻淮南李僕射, j. 6, WFQ, henceforward "Fifty-Rhyme Poem"), a poem presented to Li Shen (李紳),⁵ Wen writes at the beginning:

When Ji Shao was a lad with hair streaming down his forehead,	嵇紹垂髻日，
It was the year Shan Tao began his official service. ⁶	山濤筮仕年。
Your lute and wine-pot were placed between the seats.	琴尊陳座上。
I, in silk and brocade, prostrated myself in front of your couch.	紈綺拜床前。

Li Shen was a Presented Scholar of the first year of Yuanhe (806) when he began his official career as lecturer at the State Son's University; but in the same year he returned to Jinling and became secretary for Li Qi (李錡),

the Surveillance Commissioner of Zhexi Circuit (浙西道) at the time.⁷ In his childhood Wen may have lived somewhere close to Jinling, where he would have had easy access to Li Shen. Wen's "Sent to Scholar Lu" (寄盧生, j. 9, WFQ) supports this inference, with its mention of a nearby estate that Wen had inherited:

Close to the ancient capital, my inherited estate	
laid waste.	遺業荒涼近故都，
In front of the gate, the dike road stretched across	
the lake.	門前堤路枕平湖。

The so-called ancient capital described here can only be Jinling, where Wen's late father had once lived and where Wen was born, but it is not the place to which Wen frequently refers with nostalgia. Related to this place, in his "Epistle Presented to Prime Minister Pei" (上裴相公啓)⁸ Wen says:

Since the days when my ancestors were bestowed imperial favor and conferred fiefs, our family had enjoyed everlasting glory, which was inscribed on the imperial tripod. Then I took my registered residence in Liaoxi, before I studied the classics in Jixia (自頃爰田錫寵，鏤鼎傳芳。占數遼西，橫經稷下).⁹

Wen mentions briefly the Wen clan's ancestral glory, the emigration of the clan branch to which he belonged, and his experience of being a student at a state-managed university. Since the last two sentences give information about his native place and early career by recourse to elegant historical allusions, we cannot take seriously that he lived in Liaoxi, the modern region covering a part of Hebei and Liaoning in the north; even less can we take for granted that he studied in Jixia, a state school in the capital of the Qi Kingdom of the Warring States (475–221 B.C.) in Shandong. "Taking up registered residence in Liaoxi" alludes verbatim to "Biography of Zhao Zhi"¹⁰ (趙至, fl. 310):

[Zhao] went to Luoyang at fourteen. . . . After the death of Zhang Sizong, he went to Liaoxi to take registered residence (年十四，詣洛陽 嗣宗卒，乃向遼西而占戶焉).

We do not know the exact reason why Wen uses the allusion to Zhao Zhi to speak of his own residence, but there might be similarities in their early experiences. Anyway, the so-called "Liaoxi" should be somewhere close to Yuezhou, where Wen lived for most of his early years, as can be inferred from the following evidence:

1. Throughout Wen's literary works we have some twenty poems and essays showing that Wen cherished a special feeling toward the Yuezhou district.¹¹

For example, lines such as “Filling your room is the moonlight of my home mountain” (一室故山月) and “A former lecturer in Lanting” (蘭亭舊都講) in “Presented to the Yue Monk Yue Yun” (贈越僧岳雲, j. 7, WFQ), must imply something. The place “Lanting,” which Wen considered as his “home mountain” was in Yuezhou, the present Shaoxing.

2. In Wen’s “Epistle Presented to Grand Master Cui” (上崔大夫啓)¹² we read:

I, your humble servant, feel like I am seeing the spirited and charming Mount Ji, and the lucid and bright Lake Mirror, when looking upward to its [your] august loftiness, which stands firm and awe-inspiring. Secluded in my poor abode, I stay home while listening to stringed and wind instruments played; as a transferred immortal, you travel about, having banners and flags flying (伏想嵇山靈爽，鏡水澄明，仰止尊高，居然勝絕，隱貧居而坐聞絲管，調仙家而行有旌旗).

Mount Ji and Lake Mirror are in Shaoxing; therefore without a further investigation of the epistle, we know that Tingyun’s place of reclusion was not far from Yuezhou.

3. In his poem “Li Yu the Recluse Sends Me His Newly Brewed Wine, I Playfully Thank Him with an Impromptu Verse” (李羽處士寄新醞，走筆戲酬, j. 4, WFQ), Wen likened himself to “Xie the Guest” (謝客)—an appellation for Xie Lingyun (謝靈運, 385–433), who, an orphan since infancy, had been entrusted to a relative in the Yue district. This further suggests that Wen might have taken his registered residence in Yue by relying on a certain relative, as had Xie Lingyun.¹³
4. In *Yanlingji* (嚴陵集)¹⁴ by the Southern Song Dynasty writer Dong Fen (董夔) we have one lost poem written by Wen Tingyun:

“YEARNING FOR MY OLD ABODE IN TONGLU, I SEE OFF THE
NOBLE MONK JIAN” 思桐廬舊居便送鑒上人

Don't you say the southeast is not far away,	莫道東南路不賒，
A mere step is a great distance in my nostalgia.	思歸一步是天涯。
The forest of night, the two terraces, in the moonlight,	林中夜來雙臺月， ¹⁵
Spring in its prime, the blossoms on the Nine Li Isle.	池上春深九里花。 ¹⁶
Soaked in a fine drizzle, round the village are the green trees,	綠樹繞村含細雨，

Rolling the level sand, against the city wall is a cold tide.	寒潮背郭卷平沙。
Knowing that you, my master, are going into the hills,	聞師卻到山中去，
For me and to the tavern owner, please earnestly apologize.	為我殷勤謝酒家。

This poem, one of Wen's representative works, presents the transparent aspect of his poetic personae. Its third couplet was also taken as an exquisite sample for its "picturesqueness" (入畫).¹⁷ *Yanlingji* contains only the compositions of poets from the vicinity of Mount Yanling and Torrent Yanling, both named in memory of the famous recluse of the Eastern Han, Yan Guang (嚴光, 37 B.C.–43 A.D.). This strengthens the authentication of this poem as written by Wen.¹⁸ Since Wen had an old residence in Tonglu to which he was eager to return, he must have lived there long enough to call the place his homeland. Hence, "Liaoxi" in his allusion probably means Tonglu County of Mu Zhou (睦州), which was adjacent to Yuezhou.

REMAINING PRESTIGE OF AN ARISTOCRATIC FAMILY

Wen was descended from Wen Yanbo, Prime Minister of Emperor Taizong (r. 627–649). During the next two hundred years, the Wen clan's social position had been downgraded considerably. It inescapably shared in the general disintegration of all aristocratic clans. Contrasting finely with this, the following statement in "Biography of Wen Yanbo" gives a clear idea of the role the Wen clan played in its glorious days:¹⁹

The Yans and the Wens were once the most illustrious surnames during the Sui Dynasty. Now Yan Silu and Wen Daya both served in the Eastern Palace, while Yan Minchu and Wen Yanbo both served in the Secretariat, and Yan Youqin and Wen Dayou served in the Palace Library as proofreader. In the Tang Dynasty the Yan clan distinguished itself by its academic achievements, and the Wen clan by its official rank (初，顏氏溫氏在隋最盛。思魯與大雅俱事東宮，愨楚彥博同直內書省，游秦大有典校秘閣。顏以學業優，而溫以職位顯于唐云)。

Apart from its ancestral glory in early seventh century, the clan had produced other famous figures. From *Yuanhe Xingcuan* by the Tang genealogist Lin Bao (fl. 812–840) and "Genealogical List of the Prime Ministers,"²⁰ we find reference from the time of Wen Yanbo's father, Wen Junyou of the Sui Dynasty, to the seventh year of Yuanhe (812), to the following seven generations of preeminent Wen clansmen:

WEN JUNYOU'S (溫君攸) SEVEN-GENERATION
DESCENDANTS

1 Wen Daya	溫大雅	*Wen Yanbo	溫彥博
2 Wen Wuyin	溫無隱	*Wen Ting	溫挺
3 Wen Kerang	溫克讓	Wen Weng'gui	溫翁歸
4 Wen Jingqian	溫景倩	Wen Mian	溫緬
5 Wen Jie	溫佶	*WenXi	溫曦
6 Wen Zao	溫造	*Wen Xihua	溫西華
7 Wen Zhang	溫璋	Wen Yang	溫陽

In this table we list the name of only one clansman for each generation, representing each of the two main branches of the Wen clan, one of which Wen Tingyun claimed as his own. Many of these names bear high official titles, though not as exalted as those of Wen Yanbo. By Wen Tingyun's time, the Wens seem to have produced very few distinguished clansmen, especially in Wen Yanbo's line. No wonder that Wen spoke of his ancestral glory in "Hundred-Rhyme Poem" not without dismay:

- 5 The [ancestral] enfeoffment in the forlorn wild
is left waste, 采地荒遺野，
And our fief by the old capital has long been
divested. 爰田失故都。

From Wen's already quoted note to this couplet, it is evident that the later Wens failed to equal the distinction of their forefathers. Though we know little about the Wen clan's history before Wen's day, we have in our possession important information that helps to identify Wen's genealogical status: the Wen clan had for generations made marriages with the imperial family. There are three Wen clansmen who married imperial princesses and became imperial sons-in-law, with the special official title Commander of the Reserved Horses (駙馬都尉).²¹ All three were descendants of Wen Yanbo, as was Wen Tingyun: Wen Ting (Wen Yanbo's son) married Princess Anding (安定公主), daughter of Emperor Gaozu (r. 618–626); Wen Xi (a great-grandson of Wen Yanbo) married Princess Liang'guo (梁國公主), daughter of Emperor Ruizong (r. 711–712), and Wen Xihua (Wen Xi's son) married Princess Song'guo (宋國公主),²² daughter of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756). These marriages indicate that Wen Yanbo's descendants had kept the imperial favor to a remarkable degree. In addition, we have some internal evidence in Wen's poems proving that Wen was an imperial relative. In "Western Pool of the Heir Apparent" (太子西池二首, j. 3, WFQ), we have the following allusion, referring to Wen himself:

- Do not believe that Prince Zhang,
Will cancel his secret rendez-vous in front of the
window. 莫信張公子，
窗間斷暗期。

And in “Ode to a Night Feast” (夜宴謠, j. 1, WFQ), we find the same allusion:

The Prince of Zhang family at night heard the	
rain fall,	張家公子夜聞雨，
And at night, thought of the Chu dance in the	
Orchid Hall.	夜向蘭堂思楚舞。 ²³

“Prince Zhang” alludes to the Fuping Marquis, Zhang Fang (富平侯張放),²⁴ a well-known imperial relative of Emperor Yuan of Han (漢元帝, r. 48–33 B.C.). Another example, from “Sent to Chuwang on the Cold Food Festival” (寒食節寄楚望, j. 9, WFQ), reads:

Only the Marquis of Royal Blessing,	獨有恩澤侯。
Returns to watch the Chu dance.	歸來看楚舞，

Wen calls himself “the Marquis of Royal Blessing,” which was an appellation used exclusively for imperial relatives.²⁵ Considering that Wen Xi and Wen Xihua had been imperial sons-in-law, if Wen were not a near kinsman of Wen Xi or Wen Xihua, how else would it be possible for him to call himself an imperial relative?

Although little is known about Wen’s father, we can attempt to find out Wen’s genealogical position by tracing his relations with Wen Zao²⁶ (溫造, 765–835), Tingyun’s clan uncle and foster father. Wen’s “Epistle Presented to the Prime-Minister-Duke of the Honor Seat” (上首座相公啓),²⁷ as I shall prove, was addressed to Wen Zao. Since Wen Zao once told Emperor Dezong, “Your subject’s fifth generation ancestor is Wen Daya,”²⁸ we can say with certainty that Tingyun, as Wen Zao’s nephew, was the sixth generation offspring of Wen Daya’s brother, Wen Yanbo. Thus, Tingyun was probably a nephew of Wen Xihua, if not his son, and there is no doubt that he was the grandson of Wen Xi. In our later discussions, I will present more evidence supporting this.

The Wens played an important role in helping the first two Tang emperors found and consolidate the dynasty’s state power, by rendering both civil and military service to them. As can be seen from “Biography of Wen Daya,” the three Wen brothers all reached very high official rank, in one case the position of Prime Minister, and were enfeoffed as dukes. Wen Yanbo on his death was even honored with burial in the imperial tomb, Zhaoling. In acknowledgment of the meritorious service of the Wen clan, Emperor Gaozu once said to Wen Daya: “It was by the support of all your clan that I could rise up in arms in Jinyang “ (吾起兵晉陽，為卿一門耳).²⁹ This is no overstatement. It was because of this blood connection that Wen Tingyun took the prosperity and decline of the Tang Empire as his own affair and made every endeavor to bring about a restoration of the dynasty’s past grandeur.

In addition to being important ministers, both Wen Daya and Wen Yanbo were well-known writers, as can be seen from “Records of Literary Works” (藝文志) of XTS (j. 58). Wen Daya’s works are *A Record of the Present Emperor’s Imperial Enterprise* (今上王業記, 1467), *The Imperial Diary of the Great Tang in Its*

Founding (大唐創業起居錄, 1471), and *The Subordinate Officials of the Grand Prime Minister, The Prince of Tang* (大唐丞相唐王官屬記, 1477); Wen Yanbo's works are *Anthology of Imperial Edicts of All Times, Thirty Juan* (古今詔令集三十卷, 1473).

Wen Tingyun often refers to his family with a feeling of mingled pride and anxiety: he is proud of his ancestors' past glory, and he is anxious to restore his family's position by distinguishing himself. In "Hundred-Rhyme Poem," the following lines extol the Wen clan's distinguished stock:

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|---|--------|
| 7 For generations the Wens partook of the Zhou
emoluments, | 奕世參周祿， |
| As family tradition, we used to emulate the Lu
Confucians. | 承家學魯儒。 |
| 8 Witness of our family feats: the remaining swords
and court boots, | 功庸留劍舄， |
| Inscribed on imperial plates and basins: our
ancestors' admonitions. | 銘誠在盤盂。 |

Here we see that the Wens rendered remarkable services to the Empire for generations by adhering to the Confucian principles. In Wen's grandiloquent language, Wen's forefathers won the highest imperial favor: they were privileged to attend the court with a special sword and courtly boots and their admonitions of the emperors were inscribed on the vessels the emperor used. Tingyun himself, however, was born too late. The family past, of which he often boasted, obliged him to *restore* its glory, by reanimating the Confucian tradition. In other words, he desired to devote himself to the restoration of the country and to the simultaneous reglorification of his family, which, at this time, was somehow in a state of political disgrace. In his "Epistle Presented to Prime Minister Pei,"³⁰ Wen tells us: "I was thinking of sewing up the broken drapery³¹ of the Confucian House, and restoring the magnificence and grandeur of the Constant Norm," that is, reviving declining Confucianism and restoring imperial supremacy. What happened to Wen's forefathers that caused them to lose their hereditary honors and titles? In "Hundred-Rhyme Poem" we find the following hint:

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|---|--------|
| 6 Having lost the sheep, I still toss the dice, | 亡羊猶博塞， |
| Letting go the horse, I weary of shouting for stakes. | 放馬倦呼盧。 |

This couplet has rather complex implications and requires explanation. The first line alludes to the following fable:³² "Zang and Gu fed the sheep together, but they both lost their sheep," because "Zang had brought a book to study; Gu had been idling away the time tossing dice." So it implies that even though Wen's ancestors had somehow lost their official positions, Wen refused to change, adhering to the old way of his forefathers (the so-called "tossing the dice"). In the second line, "Letting loose the horse,"³³ in antithesis to "having lost the sheep," might be a reference to a political behavior; it

might be an extended use of its source in *Shangshu*: “[The King] hushed all the movements of war and proceeded to cultivate the arts of peace. He sent back his horses to the south of Mount Hua and let loose the oxen in the open country of the Peach Woods.”³⁴ Thus, it suggests retreat from politics. The reason for the retreat is that Wen “wearied of shouting for stake,”³⁵ which conveys that Wen, at the time, was no longer inclined to “play” the political game. This metaphorical usage can be found in another of Wen’s poems.³⁶ Briefly put, because of his adherence to family tradition, Wen was frustrated and showed a tendency to give up his political efforts. Now we must ask: what is the family tradition to which Wen always adhered, despite repeated rebuffs?

After a thorough reading of Wen’s works, we infer that it must be *the straight way* (直道), that is, straightforwardness, a dauntless spirit daring to speak against any social injustice, as Confucian doctrine advocates. It was *because of* this moral principle that Wen’s forefathers had lost their official positions, and it was *with* this principle that Wen confronted his troubled life filled with twists and setbacks. Another example that underscores this point is found in Wen’s “Epistle Presented to Bureau Director Han of the Ministry of Personnel” (上吏部韓郎中啓):

My wisdom is different from comprehensive mastery; my ability lacks a proficiency in any particular line. Fortunately I took over the august instruction [of my forefathers], so as not to lose the pure fragrance [of our clan]

(某識異旁通，才無上技。幸傳丕訓，免墮清芬)。

“Comprehensive mastery” alludes to a remark in Ji Kang’s “Letter for Breaking Off Relations with Shan Juyuan” (與山巨源絕交書):³⁷ “Your Excellency is a talent of comprehensive mastery, hence in most cases you say ‘yes’ and seldom show discontent” (足下旁通，多可而少怪). Since the Bureau Director Han was one of Wen’s father’s friends whom Wen compared to Shan Tao, Wen’s father was very possibly not a man of “comprehensive mastery,” but he must, instead, have been a man of strict principles and strong eccentricity, like Ji Kang. It was from his father that Wen inherited a character that made himself a worthy scion of the Wens. Such is the family tradition and reputation. As he says in “Hundred-Rhyme Poem”:

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|---|--|------------------|
| 7 | Among my compeers I was honored as a good
friend,
Of my pedigree, I have carried on an honest
fame. | 時輩推良友，
家聲繼令圖。 |
|---|--|------------------|

Judging from the extant writings of Wen’s contemporaries such as Li Shangyin, Zhang Hu (張祐, 805–860?), Ji Tangfu (紀唐夫, fl. 860), Duan Chengshi (段成式, 805–864), and Pei Tingyu (裴庭裕, fl. 820–860),³⁸ all famous poets

or writers of the Late Tang times, the self-evaluation in this couplet is no exaggeration.

Here, Wen's allusions to Ji Kang merit particular study. We can find nothing about Wen's father in all Tang and Song Dynasty sources. But Wen mentions his father in a way that is suggestive enough to enable us to infer what kind of person he was, or at least how he died. Wen seldom mentioned his father explicitly, but when he did refer to him elusively in his writings, he alluded to Wang Zun (王尊, fl.20 B.C.), Lu Ji (陸績, 187–219), and Xie Lingyun, all of whom were, perhaps by unhappy accident, orphans in their childhood,³⁹ as was Wen himself, "a distant scion and orphan of Wen Yanbo" (彥博裔孤).⁴⁰ Most noteworthy is that he repeatedly alludes to the trio of Ji Kang-Shan Tao-Ji Shao in such a way that, by likening himself to Ji Shao, who sought help from Shan Tao, he metaphorically likens his late father to Ji Kang. Ji Kang entrusted his son Ji Shao to Shan Tao before he was executed by the Jin Dynasty ruler. Wen's repeated use of the allusion no doubt tells us something about his father. Therefore, this allusion should not be allowed to slip by carelessly but must be rechecked. In addition to the couplet I have quoted: "When Ji Shao was a lad with hairs streaming down his forehead / It was the year Shan Tao began his official service"; which suggests that when Wen was a mere child like Ji Shao, his late father's friend Chancellor Li of Huainan had just begun his official service, like Shan Tao. We have the following four examples, all referring to different aspects of the same allusion, and all likening his late father to Ji Kang. I will examine each of them.

1. In "Epistle Presented to Prime Minister Linghu" (上令狐相公啓) Wen writes: "The boy of the Ji clan, eight years of age, is under the protection of an old friend" (稽氏則男兒八歲，保在故人), alluding to Ji Kang's remark in his "Letter for Breaking Off Relations with Shan Juyuan": "My daughter is thirteen and my son is eight years of age" (女年十三，男年八歲). If Ji Kang entrusted his orphans to Shan Tao, here "the boy of the Ji clan, eight years of age" must refer to Wen, and the "old friend" to a friend of his late father, expected to fill the role of Shan Tao in his relation with Wen Tingyun.

2. In Wen's "Fifty-Rhyme Poem" we find the following lines:

Whom shall I, a helpless man, seek asylum from?	有客將誰托？
Without a mediator, I inwardly have pity on myself.	無媒竊自憐。
Falling and rising is the melody of the Palace Leisure,	抑揚中散曲，
Drifting and wandering is the ship of Filialty and	
Incorruption.	飄泊孝廉船。

In the first couplet Wen is unburdening himself to Chancellor Li of his grievances, saying that in his frustration, what he needs most is the recommendation of a powerful mediator; and, to his dismay, no such recom-

mentation is forthcoming. But to what does the second couplet refer? It must have something to do with Wen's personal situation. "Fidelity and Incorruption" refers to Zhang Ping (張憑, fl. 370), who led an unsteady life in a ship before his talent was appreciated by Liu Shan⁴¹ (劉劭, fl. 370). So the line expresses a disappointment that, unlike Zhang Ping, Wen had as yet met no one who could appreciate his talent, and thus the line before it is a poetic description of the root cause of all his misfortunes. According to Ji Kang's biography, Ji, the Grand Master of Palace Leisure (中散大夫), was taught the exquisite tune *Guanglingsan* (廣陵散) by a superman (奇人 [sic]). Immediately before his execution, Ji asked for a lute on which to play the music for the last time; then he heaved a sigh and said: "*Guanglingsan* from now on is extinct." The "Melody of the Palace Leisure" thus allusively refers to something almost extinct—a particular principle that scarcely anyone of the day still adhered to. Set against the background of the Late Tang political ambiance, the term is used as metaphor for the "straight way" Wen's father had upheld, a political fearlessness in resisting the eunuchs, regardless of personal safety. The "falling (and rising)"⁴² of the "melody" is thus a reflection of the historical reality, in the face of which people could only sporadically raise their voices against the eunuchs. We can further infer that, after Wen's father's death as a consequence of his open criticism of the eunuchs, political protest, except in a few instances, became almost inaudible. One of these instances was the Sweet Dew Incident of 835 (which met complete failure).

3. "Epistle Presented to Prime Minister" (上宰相啓): "The former dependent of Shanyang will not be heartbroken alone" (山陽舊曲，不獨傷心). As "Biography of Xiang Xiu" (向秀) relates, Ji Kang for a time irrigated a vegetable garden with Lü An (呂安) in Shanyang. After Ji was executed, Xiang Xiu once passed by Ji's old residence and heard Ji's neighbor playing the flute, thereupon he wrote his "Rhapsody on Yearning for Old Days" (思舊賦).⁴³ "The former dependent of Shanyang" refers to Wen himself, and here again Wen likens his late father to Ji Kang, without mentioning him directly.
4. "Epistle Presented to Bureau Director Han of the Ministry of the Personnel": "Then a wretched orphan will find something with which to shelter himself, by always relying on the friendship of Shan Tao" (然後幽獨有歸，永托山濤之分). This line shows clearly that Wen assumed the role of Ji Shao, hoping Han would be like Shan Tao and help him. The allusion once more places his late father in the role of Ji Kang.

In all the above cases, Wen's implication is the same: his father was a man like Ji Kang. Because of his reluctance to cooperate with them, Ji Kang was executed by the Sima clansmen when they usurped the power of the Wei state. According to "Biography of Shan Tao" in JS, prior to his execution Ji Kang said to his son Ji Shao: "So long as Juyuan [Shan Tao] survives, you are

not an orphan” (巨源在，汝不孤矣). Thus, Ji Kang entrusted his orphans to Shan Tao; and it was in this sense that Wen used the allusion.

Normally one cannot derive substantial information from one casual use of an allusion. However, the frequency with which Wen used this allusion to the same person forces us to probe more deeply the factual basis for its repeated use. Even the fact that Ji Kang was the son-in-law of the Cao-Wei royal family suggests an analogy to Wen's case: that Wen's father or uncle might have been son-in-law of the Li-Tang royal family. The frequency with which Wen likens his late father to Ji Kang amounts to a confession that his late father was put to death for political reasons. Had the father not been similar to Ji Kang, how could Wen Tingyun have so insistently adhered to this peculiarly humiliating and ominous way of mentioning him? This unusual choice of allusion must be closely linked to Wen's personal experience. It is unlikely that he used the comparison repeatedly without careful consideration of its connotations. On the contrary, we can speculate that this was a deliberate choice intended to convey the very idea he wanted to express.

Such is our premise for further research with the limited materials available. By analogy, Wen was comparing the Sima usurpers at the end of the Wei Dynasty to the eunuchs who had usurped almost all court power during his time. This, then, is the basic assumption: Wen's father died as a result of persecution by the eunuchs for his straightforwardness. As to how he died, though it seems to have been death by execution, it was, more probably, death by exile. That would explain why Wen never speaks of his father explicitly, and why in his childhood, after being orphaned, he still enjoyed some degree of inherited privilege. We will draw more inferences to corroborate this explanation.

When did Wen's father die? Inferred from “When Ji Shao [himself] was a lad with hairs streaming down his forehead / It was the year Shan Tao [Li Shen] began his official service” (in 806), it seems that in about the year 806 Wen was orphaned, or that at that time something happened that precipitated his father's death.

History tells us that immediately preceding 806 was the year of the Yongzhen Reform (805). This was an effort on the part of the court officials to restore the Empire's normal functioning by seizing back imperial prerogatives from the eunuchs.⁴⁴ The organizers and the main participants of the Yongzhen Reform—“the two Wangs and the eight Prefectural Assistants” (二王八司馬)—should be more positively evaluated than they were by the Song Dynasty's prejudiced historiographers, as is now increasingly emphasized by modern scholars. What interests us here is Wen's connection with the Yongzhen Reform participants. Eunuch persecution caused Wen's father's death at the time, connecting both the father and the son to the same event. Based on the few traces that time has fortunately not yet effaced, we can indeed verify this point. Although Wen was a mere child at the time the Yongzhen Reform occurred, it precipitated the death of his father and had a far-reaching effect on his life.

Wen passed his early childhood in a wealthy and influential family. His “Epistle Presented to the Prime Minister” compares his past luxurious life to his present poverty:

An abider of a mansion with adorned pillars and towering lintels now dwells alone in a hut like a snail shell; and a man of brocade jacket and silk trousers has to sleep on a cattle’s grass coat
(梓柱云楣，獨居蝸舍；綺襦紈袴，已臥牛衣)。

While we cannot imagine precisely how rich his family used to be, we can, more readily, paint a picture of Wen’s “poverty.” In his “Epistle Presented to Bureau Director Han of the Ministry of Personnel,” he says of himself: “Like Ji Shao, I had an old mansion in Xingyang.” In “Sent to Scholar Lu” (寄盧生, j. 9, WFQ), he tells us: “Close to the ancient capital, my inherited estate is laid waste.” The title of another poem, “Sent to an Intimate Friend from My Villa of the Hu County Suburbs” (鄆郊別墅寄所知, j. 8, WFQ), tellingly offers information that Wen had some estates in Hu county (of the Metropolitan Prefecture). All these references indicate that, as the scion of a declining aristocratic family with estates in several places, Wen was not quite as poverty-stricken as his frequent complaints suggest. He still enjoyed considerable privilege inherited from his ancestors, despite his father’s untimely death. An aristocratic family in decline could still afford him a comfortable life, a life that Wen called “poverty” because it was different from that of the rising powerful families and degraded from that of Wen clan’s past wealth and rank. To give an exact description of the financial status of Wen’s early life in Wen’s own terms, there is the following couplet from his “Hundred-Rhyme Poem”:

45 My loom shuttle is unlike that of *the mulberry lady*, 機杼非桑女，
And my grove and garden differ from *the Wood*
Slaves. 林園異木奴。

“*Mulberry lady*”⁴⁵ suggests a life of an ordinary farmer, while “*Wood Slaves*,”⁴⁶ meaning orange trees, indicates a well-to-do economic situation. Wen does not need to work in the field like a mulberry lady to earn his daily bread, though he considers that his inheritance is less than that of “*the Wood Slaves*.” The family’s economic situation was neither bad enough to force him to engage in field labor nor good enough to separate him completely from husbandry. With such social status, it would not be difficult for Wen to live the life of an ordinary country gentleman. However, his problem was that he could not rest content with what his seniors had left him and wanted to restore his family’s glory by advancing himself as a successful court official. He was proud and confident of his family glory and literary talent, but the character he inherited from his forebears involved him in numerous troubles.

From Wen’s poems and prose works, we can see that he still enjoyed relations with a wide circle of people of rank and fashion, including many noble

lords and even members of the imperial family. Unlike Li Shangyin, who had no more than two or three patrons, Wen was closely connected with many of the influential and powerful court officials of the time. Indeed, we find that it was through surviving family influence that he was introduced into the circle of the *élites societés*. In his own terms, in “Epistle Presented to Prime Minister Linghu,” he asserts that his family was such:

I have extensively sought help from my family’s former favored subordinates, and it has taken me extremely long years [to be conferred an office] (某旁征義故，最歷星霜).

Aided by such social relations, as well as his own reputation, he made every effort to open the way for a successful official career when the situation was favorable to him, and sought protection and refuge when he was in adversity.

SPECIAL SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Of the dirges on Liu Yuxi’s (772–842) death, only those of Bai Juyi and of Wen are extant. Wen’s poems give a clear account of the friendship between the two men.

“TWO ELEGIES FOR THE LATE MINISTER LIU, DIRECTOR OF THE PALACE LIBRARY”⁴⁷ (秘書劉尚書挽歌詞二首, j. 3 WFQ)

Like Wang’s calligraphy, yours is as vivid as live phoenixes,	王筆活鸞鳳，
And like Xie’s poetry, yours is as charming as blooming lotuses.	謝詩生芙蓉。 ⁴⁸
When crimson curtain opened, you presided over academic lectures,	學筵開絳帳， ⁴⁹
Your eloquent discourses were [as amazing as] striking a huge bell.	談柄發洪鐘，
But when in the whitewashed office appeared a flying owl,	粉署見飛鵬。 ⁵⁰
Of the jade mountain was slandered a sleeping dragon.	玉山猜臥龍。 ⁵¹
You left to us a shining image with spotless integrity,	遺風灑清韻，
As the pines in the Nine-Plain stand in towering seclusion.	蕭散九原松。 ⁵²

After praising Liu’s calligraphy, comparing him to the great Jin calligrapher Wang Xizhi (王羲之, 321–379), this poem extols Liu’s poetry, matching him

to Xie Lingyun. Next, by alluding to Ma Rong, it recalls with admiration the occasions on which Liu gave insightful and eloquent lectures. Then the poem alludes to Jia Yi and Ji Kang, both talented and honest men frustrated by their lot, to represent how the antireform slanderous talks at court led to the failure of Yongzhen Reform and the dismissal of Liu from his “whitewashed office.”⁵³ The allusion to Ji Kang evidences that Wen regarded Liu with the same respect he would show his father. In the end, Wen pays high tribute to both Liu’s career and personality, mourning Liu’s decease with a deep-felt grief. (Poem Two)

A deer-tail duster in hand, you were a priceless jade,	麕尾近良玉，
When, the white crane-down of your robe waves in the breeze.	鶴氅吹素絲。
Like a Yin Hao banished, for failing to renovate the imperial tombs,	壞陵殷浩謫， ⁵⁴
With a Xie An playing chess, in a spring villa, at ease,	春墅謝安棋。
And what a noble prince of Jingkou you were,	京口貴公子， ⁵⁵
Also many a girl of Xiangyang you praised.	襄陽諸女兒。
[Even now], picking flowers or dancing in the moonlight,	折花兼蹋月，
[For your blessed memory] most people are singing Mr. Liu’s lyrics.	多唱柳郎詞。

The second poem starts with more depiction of Liu’s impressive personality. Then it turns to a representation of Liu’s life from a fresh perspective. The allusion to Yin Hao (?–356), who failed “to renovate the imperial tombs,” seems at first glance strange in this context. But if we notice that in the year of Yongzhen (805), apart from holding the post Investigating Censor (監察御史), Liu Yuxi was concurrently Assistant to Commissioner of Venerating the Imperial Tombs (崇陵使判官),⁵⁶ its connotation becomes clear. It is an analogy to Liu’s political reform in 805 whose failure was partly due to Emperor Shunzong’s (r. & d. 805) forced abdication and untimely death. Liu was even good at playing chess.⁵⁷ The allusion to Xie An⁵⁸ thus is also a reflection of Liu’s friendship with Prime Minister Pei Du, by way of compliment to Liu’s insight and wisdom in his late years. During his lengthy banishment in Langzhou and Kuizhou, Liu wrote a number of verses in the style of folk songs, such as the “Ballads of Bamboo Branches” (竹枝詞), by drawing from and revising the popular ballads. This fact, in Wen’s mind’s eye, is alluded to by “Many girls of Xiangyang,”⁵⁹ written by an eminent man. In conclusion, Wen declares affectionately that Liu’s poems enjoyed great popularity and would be forever remembered, by alluding to Liu Yun.⁶⁰

After a careful paraphrase, we find that almost all of Liu’s accomplishments are reflected in Wen’s dirges, and that even from our vantage point,

Wen's evaluation of both Liu's political role and his literary attainments is comprehensive and fair. The Qing Dynasty commentator Wang Mingsheng found in the above poems an indication of the profound friendship between Wen and Liu,⁶¹ a point with which I fully agree. In fact, Liu was Wen's senior and superior. With respect to political standpoint, literary career, and poetic style, they had much in common, and in particular, it was their shared political orientation that caused Wen to hold Liu in great esteem.

Even from a purely literary perspective, Liu and Wen are very closely related to each other, as can be seen from the similar comments on their poems, whether in positive or negative terms. For an example of the former: "The eight pieces of 'Nanxiangzi' by Feiqing, with their refined language and classic exquisiteness, are no less masterful than Mengde's [Yuxi] 'Ballads of Bamboo Branches'" (飛卿“南鄉子”八闕，高古不減夢得“竹枝詞”).⁶² Here we see how the two poets both excelled in drawing from the folk literature and how Wen inherited and carried forward Liu's typical poetic expressions. For an example of the latter: "From the masters of the Qi and the Liang dynasties down to the Tang writers such as Liu Mengde and Wen Feiqing, poets often spoiled their pure style with dazzling descriptions of wind and flowers; their failure lies in that their poetry lacks principle and is excessive of diction" (上自齊梁諸公，下至唐劉夢得溫飛卿輩，往往以綺麗風花，累其正氣。其過在于理不勝而詞有餘也).⁶³ Despite the apparent miscalculation, this statement at least notes some identical features and puts both poets in one category. Bai Juyi called Liu a "poetic hero" (詩豪) for Liu's indomitable spirit in the grip of misfortunes and for the undying vigor in his late-year poetry. This poetic individuality Liu evidences also occurs in Wen's poetry. The following is an example revealing Wen's indebtedness to Liu:

"PASSING THE RESIDENCE OF THE LATE HANLIN ACADEMICIAN YUAN"
(經故翰林袁學士居, j. 5, WFQ)

The jade's left in the dust, the sword gone	
with the surging waves,	劍逐驚波 ⁶⁴ 玉委塵，
Now under Xie An's patronage, what soul	
could still stay?	謝安門下更何人？
Outside Western Prefecture (Xizhou) city, the	
blossoms of a thousand trees,	西州城外花千樹，
Are all spring splendors, after Yang Tan has been	
inebriated.	盡是羊曇醉後春。

Both "jade in the dust" and "sword gone with the surging waves" are metaphors for the death of a talented and worthy man. To begin with, Wen laments his deceased friends the late Hanlin Academician Yuan and a Prime Minister. The late Hanlin Academician Yuan would have been under the Prime

Minister's patronage for a time. How did the two die? The poem implies that they died in some violent political incident (the surging waves); otherwise he need not vainly have shed his tears. "Outside Xizhou city, the blossoms of a thousand trees" is a reference to the political upstarts in the capital after the incident, which resulted in the death of both the Prime Minister and, later, Yuan. Yang Tan⁶⁵ was Xie An's sister's son, who did not walk in the lanes near Xizhou (the locale of administration of Yangzhou), where Xie An died; once when he was heavily drunk, when arriving unexpectedly in Xizhou, he burst into tears. By using Yang's story, Wen unbosomed himself of his sorrow for the incident that bereaved him of his beloved friends, and he castigated those who rose to power by taking advantage of the incident. Wen seems to have every reason to compare himself to Yang Tan, and he might even be a relative of the dead minister. Who this Prime Minister was will become clearer. For now let us compare this poem to the following one by Liu Yuxi:

"IN THE TENTH YEAR OF YUANHE, I WAS CALLED BACK FROM LANGZHOU TO THE CAPITAL, AND I JOKINGLY PRESENTED THIS POEM TO SEVERAL NOBLE MEN WHO WERE ENJOYING THE BLOOMING FLOWERS"

(元和十年自朗州承詔至京，戲贈看花諸君子，*Liu Yuxi Ji*, 24: 218)

The red dust in the purple alleys caresses
travelers' faces,

"Back from admiring the flowers," they all say.

In Xuandu Monastery, a thousand peach trees,

All are transplanted after Sir Liu's leave.

紫陌紅塵撲面來，

無人不道看花回。

玄都觀里花千樹，

盡是劉郎去後栽。

When he was called back to the capital, after ten years' banishment, Liu did not show deference to the hostile forces at court. For this poem, a satire on the ruling clique, he was banished to an even more remote region. It is clear that this poem was the prototype for Wen's, whose second couplet models itself on Liu's.

Since there is a close relation between the two, we will try to unravel an allusion in Wen's works by recourse to Liu's use of the same allusion. In his "Epistle Presented to the Censor-in-Chief" (投憲丞啓), Wen once called himself "*the junior party of Ganling*" (甘陵下黨).⁶⁶ In attempting to explain this, we can consult Liu's use of a similar term:

"THE DRAFTER BAI CONDESCENDED TO ANSWER MY CLUMSY POEM,
AND I SENT THIS POEM TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE"

(白舍人見酬拙詩，因以致謝，*Liu Yuxi Ji*, 1034)

For all my presence in the company of the
third rank sinecures,

雖陪三品散官中，

I had, from the very beginning, different records and qualifications.	資歷從來事不同。
My name, once for a while, was carved on the stone pillar.	名姓也曾鐫石柱，
My poetry, a failure, cannot be written on the imperial screen.	詩篇未得上屏風。
The former party of Ganling is all withered and decayed,	甘陵舊黨凋零盡，
While my new friend at court shows to me high courtesy.	廟堂新知禮數崇。
If ever I could find a partner in the misty-water of the Five Lakes,	煙水五湖如有伴，
To be an old fishing man, I think, could yet suit my taste.	猶應堪作釣魚翁。

Sixteen years after Liu Yuxi's banishment as magistrate of Hezhou, he was appointed Guest of the Heir Apparent (太子賓客), a third rank position. As a man who had survived his long political distress, Liu wrote this poem to Bai to express his feelings.⁶⁷ To understand its implication, we have to ask: what is "the former party of Ganling"? Ganling alludes to Filial Prince of Qinghe, Liu Qing (清河孝王劉慶, 78–106) of the Han Dynasty,⁶⁸ who was for a time appointed Heir Apparent. However, Empress Dowager Dou substituted his brother Liu Zhao for him. When Liu Zhao succeeded to the throne as Emperor He (r. 89–105), he treated Liu Qing very amiably. After Emperor He's death, it was Liu Qing's son, Liu You, who came to the throne as Emperor An (r. 107–125). Subsequently, Emperor An honored Liu Qing's tomb as Ganling, where Ganling County was established. Another account of this term is the following: Du Mi (杜密, fl. 150–160), a native of Ganling, had a large number of followers. Du's fellow townsman Fang Zhi (房植, fl. 150–160), the magistrate of He'nan, also enjoyed great fame at the time. The retainers of the two households took each other as objects of mockery and jealousy, and developed a mutual hostility. The two men from Ganling and their followers were known as the Southern and the Northern Party of Ganling.⁶⁹

In the historical context in which the poem was composed, Liu Yuxi evidently referred to all those participating in Yongzhen Reform as "the former party of Ganling." He did this because, during the short period when the reforming party headed by Wang Shuwen (王叔文, 752–806) was in power, the reigning Emperor was Shunzong, who supported the new policies of the reforming party and was forced by the eunuchs to abdicate in his son's favor, dying soon after. Shunzong's role in the royal succession bore a strong resemblance to Liu Qing's. Hence, Liu Yuxi ingeniously chose this historical allusion to express his idea. He used Liu Qing to point to Shunzong; and with "the former party of Ganling," he referred to those who had taken part in

Yongzhen Reform—by the time Liu wrote his poem (821), almost all of them had died, with the exception of Liu himself. In the same way, the Southern and the Northern parties of Ganling in the late Han resembled the Niu and the Li Factions of the Late Tang, being opposed to each other in regard to almost all important decisions at court, especially those involving the eunuch problem. Briefly, Liu's allusion indicates, in a way, that the Late Tang factional strife had its origin in Yongzhen Reform.

If Liu was one member of the “former party of Ganling,” while Wen called himself the “junior party of Ganling,” they must have belonged to the same political faction. If Liu's self-label came from his involvement with the Yongzhen Reform, Wen's must also have to do with this same political event. Junior by a generation, Wen was too young to be a member of the “former party of Ganling,” so when identifying himself with the Yongzhen Reform participants, he called himself the “junior.” If he is one of the “junior party,” a senior member of the “former party” is implied, that is, his late father. As a result of eunuch interference in all document drafting, few materials revealing the hidden truth of the Reform and the subsequent Niu-Li factional strife have survived. The names of many who had a role in the events are not recorded. Taking all these together, it is not far-fetched to regard Wen's father as a participant in, or at the least a supporter of, the Reform. Only from such a perspective can Wen's life long bitter hatred of the eunuchs be understood.

Liu Yuxi played a considerable role in the formation of Wen's personality. In Liu's works, there are more than ten poems and prose works addressed to or written for Li Cheng,⁷⁰ the man who, as Wen's professional teacher, had exercised an immense influence on Wen's personality and political orientation. The friendship between Li Cheng and Liu Yuxi may in a way reveal Li's attitude toward the Yongzhen Reform, and suggest influences that Wen received from his teacher.

Though they did not have much chance to be together, Liu Yuxi and Li Cheng maintained a friendship for more than forty years, throughout the difficult time of Liu's exile, when many of his friends kept their distance from him for fear of being implicated in political trouble. The two friends became acquainted in Chang'an in the eleventh year of the Zhenyuan era (795). Liu passed the Presented Scholar Examination in 795 and Li was the Principal Graduate (狀元) of 796. During the time of the Yongzhen Reform, Li was promoted from the position of Investigating Censor to that of Vice Director of the Bureau of Waterways and Irrigation (水部員外郎).⁷¹ Liu's poems reveal that, in the tenth and fifteenth years of Yuanhe (814 and 819), the first year of Changqing (820), and the fifth and eighth years of Dahe (831 and 834), Liu and Li exchanged poems. Li Cheng at least sympathized with the Yongzhen policies, as can be seen from his attitude toward Liu Yuxi and Liu Zongyuan. In the year following Liu Zongyuan's death in 814, Liu Yuxi wrote on Li Cheng's behalf a “Condolence Essay Written for the Grand Master Li of Ezhou as an Offering for the Supernumerary Gentleman Liu” (為鄂州李大夫祭柳員外文),⁷² which includes a full account of the friendship

between Liu Zongyuan and Li Cheng. The two men had passed the Erudition and Eloquence Examination (博學宏詞科) together in the twelfth year of Zhenyuan (796), and became Proofreaders of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies (集賢院校書) at the same time. Then they worked together as Defenders of Lantian County (藍田尉) before both were promoted to the post of Investigating Censor. Above all, both men shared the same political ideals. That is why the essay, although written by Liu Yuxi, praises Liu Zongyuan for his political attainments as well as for his literary achievements, and even expresses a determination to raise Liu Zongyuan's orphan as his own son. Since Li was the good friend of the two Lius, the two most talented participants in Yongzhen Reform, his political stance regarding the event can be deduced. As a royal scion and minister of great importance who served the Tang Empire for about half a century, Li Cheng certainly saw fully the problems of the Li-Tang Dynasty, especially the disasters brought about by the eunuchs. Like Bai Juyi, Li in his later career had adopted a self-protecting philosophy when confronted with turmoil of the age, but this political pose never prevented him from having a decisive say at crucial moments. Wen's choice of Li Cheng as his teacher surely had to do with Li's political orientation and personality.

In summation, Wen Tingyun was born into an aristocratic family, which was connected by marriage to the imperial clan and enjoyed great privilege and renown for several generations, continuing until the time of his infancy. However, the family had gradually lost its distinction. And after Wen's father's death as a victim of the eunuchs' power, the family fell into disgrace. This alteration left a deep impression on the boy Wen Tingyun, and from a very early age he felt impelled to restore his family's glory and to contribute significantly to effect the revitalization of the empire. Confronted with the reality that the eunuchs monopolized all state power and blocked his way to success, and that even the emperors were under the eunuchs' yoke, Wen faced enormous difficulties in achieving his ambitious goal. If Wen was to succeed in doing anything, he would have to pay a much higher price, and follow a much more tortuous path, than anyone else, in spite of his seeming advantages of talent and social connection. With this in mind, let us explore his early life.