

Acknowledgments

Translating Yan Zhitui's works was part of a larger research project on early medieval Chinese court culture and literature. Several years ago I had translated Yan Zhitui's autobiographical rhapsody, "Viewing My Life," for the benefit of my students in a graduate seminar. However, the lion's share of work on this volume was carried out during a year-long sabbatical leave that was made possible by a research fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies: In 2019–2020, I was awarded the ACLS Donald J. Munro Centennial Fellowship in Chinese Arts and Letters, which enabled me to finish the translation. I am grateful to the ACLS and Harvard University, my home institution, for their sponsorship.

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abrupt departure overwhelmed me with grief and regret, and left a void in my heart that would never be filled. Born in the war-torn China in 1938, my mother almost lost all members of her immediate family when she was still an enfant; she grew up deprived of parental guidance and love, and so she did her best to compensate, in all the ways she knew, by giving me all her affection, love, and “family instructions” in the Yan Zhitui sense, when I was growing up. Without her I would have never become the person and the scholar I am today. I dedicate this book to my mother’s memory.

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