Allusions

Standard Chinese and sinological practice is to cite the earliest important source for a reference. The actual source or sources for a particular usage is considerably more various. Sometimes the poet does indeed have in mind a source text. In other cases the poet may, while knowing the original source, think of a reference through a famous later usage, where new elements may be added (as in the case of Shao Ping below, where the Ruan Ji poem mediated later understanding of the reference). Often a writer is thinking of an epitome of the original text, as can be found in encyclopedias, leishu. In still other cases there are multiple sources which have come together as a “story,” reference to which was so common that it transcended any particular source.

Some references are straightforward and have pretty much only one meaning or association. Others, especially references to individuals, may be contextually straightforward, but can invite confusion and misinterpretation by those who are not familiar with the habits of usage. The most common problem is knowing too much. If a soldier is called “an Achilles,” it simply means that he is a skilled and daring warrior. It does not mean that he is going to die young, and it does not mean that he will regret having ever become a warrior—as the shade of Achilles tells Odysseus in the underworld. I have often purposefully kept these decriptions very short and to the point.

Du Fu uses “Old Deerskin” 鹿皮翁 three times. The full story in the Shenxian zhuan 神仙傳 is an account of how he became an immortal, with much unique detail, in which he climbs to a spring of the immortals and later summons his family partway up the peak, saving them from a flood that devastated the region. It is only after this, however, that he begins to wear deerskin and makes a living by selling medicinal herbs. Du Fu is clearly not thinking of the full story, but only of Old Deerskin as a recluse.

Sometimes certain aspects of a story may have great resonance in one context and be totally ignored in another context. Bo Yi and Shu Qi were two brothers who, at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty, went off to Mount Shouyang where they lived by picking wild beans or ferns and eventually starving to death. The reason that the two brothers made this decision was in protest of the Zhou’s overthrow of the Shang dynasty;
they refused to “eat the grain of Zhou.” When used by the poet Ruan Ji in the mid-third century, when the Jin dynasty overthrew the Wei, a protest against the illegitimacy of the new dynasty is an obvious possibility, though far from certain. Du Fu commonly refers to Ruan Ji, but the association of protesting the dynasty is clearly not present; rather it is simply poverty, withdrawal, and not knowing where to go or what to do.

“Wei and/or Huo” is an interest case of contextual determination of the significance of a reference. This primarily refers to Wei Qing and his nephew Huo Qubing, two of the Western Han’s best generals in the war with the Xiongnu. They were also imperial in-laws and treated with lavish favor by Emperor Wu. Du Fu twice uses “Wei and Huo” to unambiguously praise Yan Wu, his dear friend and patron, both as a general and for the deserved imperial favor he enjoys. Earlier, however, in 4.6 Du Fu speaks of the emperor’s golden plates all being in the homes of “Wei and Huo.” This is using the favor shown the Wei and Huo families to criticize the excessive favor shown to the Yangs, Xuanzong’s in-laws. The usage as praise shows no hint of criticism; to find such would be gross overreading. In the social criticism of 4.6 the major military merits of the two generals is irrelevant. I think no Tang reader would feel any ambiguity in the two cases, reading the same reference in different ways as the context demanded. The question becomes interesting in 4.11, where it is not at all clear how the reference to Huo Qubing is intended.

Two kinds of allusions need special remark: those regarding surnames and those regarding offices. In social poems Du Fu will allude to some earlier figure of the same surname as the recipient. If more appropriate, Du Fu will allude to someone who held the same office—even if the meaning of the office had radically changed from the Han to the Tang. Some such references are so routine that they seem to be from a mental textbook (or perhaps a written textbook) for references to make in social poems.

Bian He’s jade

**Primary Source:** *Han Feizi* (and other places):
“There was a man of Chu, of the family He, who found a piece of jade in the rough out in the mountains of Chu. He presented it to King Li, who had his jade expert examine it. The jade expert said, ‘This is ordinary stone.’
The king thought that Bian He was trying to deceive him and had his left foot cut off as a punishment. When King Li passed away and King Wu took the throne, Bian He again took his jade and presented it to King Wu. King Wu had his jade expert examine it, and again it was pronounced to be ordinary stone. This king too thought Bian He was trying to deceive him and had his right foot cut off. When King Wu passed away and King Wen ascended the throne, Bian He took his jade in his arms and wept at the base of Chu mountain. For three days and three nights he wept until he had no more tears left, until blood fell from his eyes. The king heard of this and sent someone to find out the cause. The envoy said, ‘There are many people in the world whose feet have been cut off. Why are you weeping about it so sadly?’ And Bian He answered ‘I’m not sad about having my feet cut off; I’m sad because this precious piece of jade has been judged a mere stone and because a most honorable gentleman has been called a fraud—this is what makes me sad.’ The king then had his own jade expert work on the stone, and he found the gem within. Consequently the king commanded that it be called ‘Bian He’s Disk’.

**Implications:** harboring talents that are unrecognized. **Example:** 23.28.

**References:** picking wild beans or ferns; Mount Shouyang; **Primary Source:** Shi ji: Two brothers, virtuous recluses, who went to live on Mount Shouyang. When the Zhou overthrew the Shang, they “refused to eat the grain of Zhou” and lived on wild beans (wei 薇) or fern (jue 蕨), subsequently dying of starvation. **Examples:** 8.36; 22.47; 23.4; 23.30.
Cangwu The burial place of Shun, one of the sage emperors of high antiquity. **Examples:** 2.9; 16.10; 18.28; 21.41; 22.34; 22.38.

Chaofu See Xu You

Ding Lingwei **References:** Crane of Liaodong; **Primary Source:** *Soushen houji*, attributed to Tao Yuanming. Originally from Liaodong, Ding Lingwei went off to study the Way. Eventually he was transformed into an immortal crane. He flew back to Liaodong and perched on a column outside the city gate. When young men tried to shoot at him, he took flight and sang from mid-air: “There is a bird, there is a bird, its name is Ding Lingwei, / he left his home for a thousand years and first came back today. / The city walls are as they were, the people are not the same, / why not learn to become immortal, with tomb mounds everywhere.” **Implications:** returning home and finding everything changed. **Examples:** 18.56; 19.38; 19.41.

Fan Li **References:** Master Leather Winesack; **Primary Source:** *Shi ji* and others: Fan Li served the Yue King Gou Jian, who was plotting his revenge against the kingdom of Wu. It was Fan Li who devised the stratagem of sending the King of Wu the beauty Xi Shi, thus distracting him from his duties. After the destruction of Wu, Gou Jian offered Fan Li rich rewards, but Fan Li refused them, retiring instead to a life on the rivers and lakes under the pseudonym “Master Leather Winesack.” **Implications:** Retiring from public life, sometimes after accomplishing great deeds. **Examples:** 14.26; 19.38; 23.35.
Feng Tang

**Primary Source**: *Shi ji* 102: Feng Tang served three Western Han emperors and was raised to high position only in his nineties by Emperor Wu. Feng Tang was still serving as Gentleman in Attendance (a court post usually reserved for young men) when old. **Implications**: Finally getting a good post when old. **Examples**: 3.27; 14.95; 17.3; 17.56; 17.68; 21.27; 22.66.

Four Graybeards

**References**: Four Graybeards; Mount Shang; “Purple Mushrooms.” **Primary Source**: *Shiji* 55; *Han shu* 72. These were four men—Lord Dongyuan 東園公, Master Luli 甪里先生, Qili Ji 綺里季, and Lord Xiahuang 夏黃公—who, in the turmoil that accompanied the collapse of Qin, withdrew to Mount Shang and composed the song “Purple Mushrooms.” When Liu Bang became emperor (Han Gaozu), he repeatedly summoned them to court, but they refused to leave their refuge. When the emperor planned to replace the crown prince, Empress Lü asked them to come to court to show their support for the crown prince, and they did so, preserving the prince in his position. **Implications**: Living as a recluse and refusing to serve; timely political action. **Examples**: 4.38; 5.33; 6.17; 6.55; 8.22; 8.23; 10.20; 16.12; 16.16; 18.71; 19.5; 19.41; 19.44; 23.9; 23.10.

general’s tree

**Primary Source**: *Hou Han shu* 47: “When all the generals sat together arguing about their achievements, [Feng] Yi would always be off apart under a big tree. In the army they called him the ‘General of the big tree.’” **Implications**: praising a military man for his modesty and implicitly for having merits greater than others. **Examples**: 1.12; 2.6.
Gong Yu

**References:** Gong’s delight; dusting off one’s hat. **Primary Source:** *Han shu* 72: Wang Ji and Gong Yu were close friends. After Wang Ji took office, Gong Yu “dusted off his cap,” was delighted, and decided to take office himself. **Implications:** when the addressee is in office, the speaker suggests that he too would like an office. **Examples:** 1.35; 3.27; 22.65.

**gulls**

**Primary Source:** *Liezi* 2: “There was a man living by the sea-shore who loved seagulls. Every morning he went down to the sea to roam with the seagulls, and more birds came to him than you could count in hundreds. His father said to him: ‘I hear the seagulls all come roaming with you. Bring me some to play with.’ Next day, when he went down to the sea, the seagulls danced above him and would not come down.”

**Implications:** Creatures of nature feel no alienation from humans who are free of motive and purpose; if there is motive and purpose, creatures of nature immediately sense it and keep their distance. **Examples:** 9.30; 21.12.

Huo Qubing

**References:** “Swift Commander”; refusing a mansion; Wei and Huo. **Primary Source:** *Han shu* 55, “Biography of Wei Qing and Huo Qubing.” Huo Qubing and his uncle Wei Qing were the famous Western Han generals who earned their reputation mainly through the Han-Xiongnu wars. Because of his outstanding military service, Huo Qubing received great rewards from Emperor Wu of Han. **Examples:** 3.15; 4.10; 11.3; 16.8; 21.69.

---

Ji Zha  
**Primary Source**: *Shiji* 31: When Ji Zha, prince of Wu, was going on a visit to the domain of Jin, he passed through the domain of Xu. The Lord of Xu admired his sword, but Ji Zha could not give it up. Later the Lord of Xu died; and as Ji Zha passed through Xu on his return, he hung up the sword on a tree to leave for his spirit. **Implications**: Doing something to honor the spirit of a dead friend. **Examples**: 22.2; 22.65.

Jia Yi  
**References**: Tutor Jia; the emperor moving his mat forward; owl; weeping in the courtyard; Changsha. **Primary Source**: *Shiji* 84. Jia Yi (200–168 B.C.) was known as a talented writer. He was slandered because of his talents and exiled for three years to the post of Tutor to the Prince of Changsha. There he encountered a “funiao,” a species of owl and bird of ill omen. He composed the “Poetic Exposition on the Owl” in which the owl delivers a message about the changes of fate, in face of which one should have equanimity. Han Wendi summoned Jia Yi back to court and held discussions with him late into the night in the emperor’s private chambers, with the emperor moving his mat closer to hear what he had to say. Later he became Tutor to the Prince of Liang, and died of grief when the prince himself died in a riding accident. **Implications**: Man of talent slandered and sent into exile. **Examples**: 5.11; 6.19; 6.22; 8.21; 14.19; 14.39; 14.93; 16.8; 20.2; 22.20; 22.51; 22.54; 22.65; 23.3.

Ju Yin  
**References**: Fireflies. **Primary Source**: *Jin shu* 83. When Ju Yin was young he was so poor that he often had no lamp oil. On summer nights he would gather fireflies in a bag and
read by their light. **Implications:** Devotion to study, poverty. **Examples:** 2.7; 6.22; 7.70; 8.19; 19.38.

**Kun**

see Peng

**Laolaizi**

**References:** brightly colored robes; **References:** *Lienü zhuan* (cited in *Yiwen leiju*) In order to entertain his even more aged parents, the seventy-year-old Laolaizi put on brightly colored clothes and played in front of them like a child. **Implications:** filiality **Examples:** 10.40; 10.68; 20.44; 21.6; 21.50.

**Li Guang**

**References:** Flying General, General Li. **Primary Source:** *Shiji* 109. The great Western Han general Li Guang defeated the Xiongnu army numerous times, but his fate went awry in his later years and he was never given a fief. When he retired to live in Lantian south of Chang'an, he used to go hunting at night and once mistaking a rock for a tiger, shot it with an arrow that embedded itself deep in the stone. Another night he was stopped by a drunk sheriff on his way back from hunting. He claimed his name of “the former General Li,” but the sheriff said he would not even let a general pass, not to mention a former one. **Examples:** 2.30; 8.21; 13.24; 18.8.

**Li Ying**

**References:** “asking after Kong Rong”; mounting Dragon Gate **Primary Source:** *Hou Han shu* 100: Li Ying 李膺, the Metropolitan Governor of He’nan in the Eastern Han was notoriously aloof from forming connections with others. To be received by him was known as “mounting Dragon Gate.” Li Ying immediately took to the young Kong Rong, who was later
to become one of the most famous writers of the end of the second century. **Implications:** Patronage. **Examples:** 1.33; 2.31.

**Lian Po**

**Primary Source:** *Shiji* 81. Lian Po was a famous general of the Warring States kingdom of Zhao, who continued to be effective even in old age. **Examples:** 3.16; 7.11; 11.3; 13.44; 16.6.

**Ma Yuan**

**References:** Han Wave-quelling General; Bronze Column **Primary Source:** *Hou Hanshu* 24: Ma Yuan (14 B.C.E–49 C.E.) was the primary general of Guangwudi in the restoration of the Han. He is most famously associated with the conquest of what is now the northern part of Vietnam, for which he earned the title “Wave-quelling General.” He set up a bronze column in the far south to commemorate his victory. **Examples:** 8.23; 11.35; 13.25; 18.1; 19.41; 20.100; 22.18; 22.59; 23.23; 23.41.

**Master Mu**

**References:** “going off.” **Primary Source:** *Han shu* 36, “Biography of Liu Jiao, Prince Yuan of Chu.” Prince Yuan of Chu always showed great respect for one Master Mu and whenever there was a feast, he had sweet ale set out especially for him. When the Prince passed away, he was succeeded by his grandson, who forgot to set out the sweet ale for Master Mu. Master Mu took this as a sign that he was no longer appreciated and left. **Examples:** 8.21; 8.23; 16.9; 16.17.

**Meng Jia**

**References:** Blowing off the cap; double ninth; Jingmen. **Primary Source:** *Shishuo xinyu* section 7, “Meng Jia biezhuan”: Meng Jia was accompanying Huan Wen, then a general, at
a party on the Double Ninth festival. Everyone was in military uniform. The wind blew Meng Jia’s hat off. Huan Wen stopped others from telling Meng what had happened in order to see what he would do. Meng Jia took no notice. Later the hat was handed back to Meng, and Huan Wen had someone compose something to make fun of him, to which Meng Jia immediately composed a satisfying reply. **Implications:** An admirable disregard for decorum and stylish self-possession, pleasure in drinking. The allusion is often associated with the Double Ninth festival. **Examples:** 2.45; 6.36.

### Mi Heng

**References:** Mi Heng; parrot; Jiangxia. **Primary Source:** *Hou Han shu* 110B: Mi Heng (173–198) was an erratic young literary talent, known for his arrogance and sad fate. Recommended to Cao Cao by Kong Rong, Mi Heng was summoned though unwilling. Asked to perform as a drummer at a feast, Mi Heng appeared naked. Cao Cao sent Mi back to his previous patron Liu Biao who, equally unable to bear his arrogance, sent him off to the governor of Jiangxia. In Jiangxia he wrote his “Poetic Exposition on the Parrot,” in which the bird becomes a figure for the poet, miserable in captivity. Later Mi Heng insulted the governor so badly that he had the poet killed. **Implications:** The unfortunate fate of a talented man of letters, but sometimes simply talent. **Examples:** 2.12; 3.32; 5.13; 6.22; 8.19; 8.23.

### Nongyu

**References:** Nongyu, Xiaoshi, riding a phoenix, playing panpipes, the tower of Qin; **Primary Source:** This occurs is various sources
with some variations. The following is the version in the *Liexian zhuan* (1): “Xiaoshi was a person of the time of Duke Mu of Qin. He was good at playing the panpipes and could bring peacocks and white cranes to the courtyard. Duke Mu had a daughter named Nongyu. She liked him. The duke subsequently gave him his daughter for a wife. Every day he taught Nongyu how to imitate the singing of a phoenix. They stayed there several years and she could play like the voice of a phoenix. A phoenix then came and perched on the roof…. One morning they both flew off with the phoenix.” **Associations:** marriage, especially to an imperial princess; **Examples:** 1.26; 3.23; 5.2; 13.20–21.

**Oxherd**

**Pang Degong**

**References:** Deergate Mountain; **Primary Source:** *Hou Han shu* 113: Pang Degong lived near Xiangyang, south of Mount Xian. While he was plowing, Liu Biao, the local governor, approached him and tried to persuade him to serve. Pang Degong said it was better to take care of oneself, then dropped his plow, taking his wife and children off to live in seclusion on Deergate Mountain. **Associations:** Becoming a recluse, especially taking one’s family along. **Examples:** 1.27; 4.30; 4:38; 7.20; 7.45; 8.20; 10.73; 16.16; 18 62; 19.23; 23.5; 23.46.

**Peach Blossom Spring**

**References:** Wuling, peach blossoms; **Primary Source:** Tao Yuanming, “An Account of Peach Blossom Spring”: A man of Wuling was fishing in a creek, saw a trail of peach blossoms in the current and followed it. He came to an
opening in the mountain, went through it, and discovered a village inhabited by the descendants of people who had fled the wars during the collapse of the Qin empire five centuries earlier. They had no contact with or knowledge of the outside world. Eventually the fisherman wanted to return home, and after he left he was never able to find his way back there. Associations: an idyllic place; Examples: 2.24; 5.27; 7.43; 7.57; 15.56; 18.56; 18.62; 19.35; 21.60; 22.59; 22.62; 23.49.

### Peng bird

References: “planning to go south,” “southern deeps”; Primary Source: Zhuangzi, “Xiaoyao you”: “In the Northern Deepes there is a fish, whose name is Kun. As for the size of Kun, I don’t know how many thousand leagues long it is. It is transformed into a bird, whose name is Peng. As for the Peng’s wingspan, I don’t know how many thousand leagues across it is. When it is excited and flies, its wings are like the clouds draping from one horizon to the other. When the seas moves in their courses, this bird will shift to the Southern Deepes. The Southern Deepes is the Pool of Heaven.” Examples: 1.31; 5.14; 10.55; 11.24; 21.41; 15.23; 19.42; 22.28; 22.36; 23.25; 23.37; 23.40.

### Riding the raft

References: wandering star; raft; Yan Junping. Primary Source: Zhang Hua, Bowu zhi: “There is an old story that the Milky Way, Heaven’s River, connects with the ocean. In recent times there was a man who lived on a small island in the ocean; and every year in the eighth month, without fail, a raft would float past. The man conceived an unusual intention: he set up a high tower on the raft in which he laid up a large store of provisions, and then
he went off riding the raft. For more than ten days he could still see the sun, moon, stars, and planets; but after that everything became murky and hazy, so much so that he could not even tell day from night. After over ten more days he suddenly came to a place that had the form of a city, whose buildings were constructed very regularly. From afar he could look into the palace, in which there were many weaving girls. Then he saw a man leading oxen to the bank to water them. The oxherd was startled and asked, “How did you get here?” The man told how he had planned the trip, and also asked what place this was. He was told in reply, ‘When you get around to Shu, if you go seek out Yan Junping, you will find out.’ He never disembarked onto the shore, but went on back as he had been told. Later he got to Shu and asked Junping about it, who said that in such and such a year, in such and such a month, on such and such a day there had been a wandering star that had trespassed into the constellation of the Oxherd. When they reckoned the year and month, it had been precisely when this man had reached Heaven’s River.” In some versions he takes the stone that supported the Weaver Woman’s loom. **Associations:** going to Heaven, associated with the court. **Examples:** 4.38; 8.23; 11.72; 13.45; 14.27; 17.27; 20.14; 20.64; 22.6; 22.36; 22.57; 23.25; 23.45.

Ruan Ji

**References:** “the end of one’s road,” “at a dead end”; “whites of one’s eyes”; Infantry Commander; “showing eye pupils” **Background:** Ruan Ji (210–263) was a poet and one of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.” Stories about Ruan Ji come from many sources,
especially *Shihuo xinyu*. He took the post of Infantry Commander because he heard that it provided good ale. He was famous for showing the whites of his eyes to anyone for whom he had contempt. And he is associated with weeping when he came to the end of a road—figuratively not knowing where to go. The Ruan family was famous for its talented members. Zhongrong is Ruan Xian 阮咸, Ruan Ji’s nephew, also one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. **Examples:** 1.33; 2.1; 2.12; 4.15; 5.2; 7.18; 7.45; 8.13; 8.19; 10.88; 11.58; 12.41; 13.68; 20.71; 21.41; 21.54; 21.68; 23.6; 23.47.

**Shan Jian**

**References:** Xi family pool; governor of Jingzhou; **Primary Source:** *Jin shu* 43: Shan Jian (253–312), one of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove,” was famous for his drinking, especially when governor of Jingzhou visiting the Xi family pool in Xiangyang. **Examples:** 9.40; 10.64; 10.65; 12.50; 13.33; 14.24; 20.1; 20.57; 21.7; 21.52.

**Shao Ping**

**References:** Shao Ping; Dongling [Count of]; Green Gate; melons. **Primary Source:** *Shiji* 53: “Shao Ping was the former Qin Count of Dongling. When Qin was defeated, he became a commoner. Being poor, he planted melons east of the walls of Chang’an. The melons were good, so they were popularly referred to as ‘Dongling melons.’” Green Gate was one of the eastward-facing gates of Chang’an and became associated with Shao Ping in Ruan Ji’s “Singing of My Cares” (*Yonghuai*) VI. **Implications:** Withdrawing from state service to live a private life. **Examples:** 2.10; 4.38; 6.8; 18.51; 19.6; 21.16; 22.34.
Sima Xiangru

**Primary Source:** *Shiji* 117: Sima Xiangru, formal name Zhangqing, was the leading literary figure of the Western Han. He married a widow, Zhuo Wenjun, and the couple kept a tavern in Chengdu until Zhuo Wenjun’s rich father recognized the marriage. Sima Xiangru was supposed to have attracted Zhuo Wenjun by playing the zither, and his “Zither Terrace” was one of the sites of Chengdu. He rose to literary prominence in the court of Han Wudi. He was put in charge of the park for Emperor Wen’s tomb complex. He suffered from diabetes, which led Du Fu, who suffered the same illness, to often compare himself to Sima Xiangru. **Examples:** 3.19; 3.33; 10.13; 13.45; 14.19; 17.1; 19.38; 20.71; 21.4; 23.25.

Song Yu

Whether he was a historical figure or purely legendary, Song Yu, considered a disciple of Qu Yuan, was credited with the “Nine Variations,” “Jiubian” 九辨, in the *Chuci*, the first of which is a lament over autumn. He is also the frame figure and putative author of some poetic expositions, the most famous of which are “The Goddess” and “Gaotang,” both treating the story of the goddess of Wu Mountain, who came as a spirit to sleep with the King of Chu in a dream. **Examples:** 14.85; 15.56; 17.3; 17:35; 18.37; 18.54; 21.69.

stick adrift

**Primary Source:** *Shuo yuan* 9, *et aliquo*: In a dialogue between an earthen statue and a wooden stick, the wooden statue claimed to be superior to the earthen one because, when heavy rains came, the earthen statue would dissolve in the water and disappear. The earthen statue replied that it started out as earth and the river will deposit it as earth again on the
shore, so that it will return to its natural state; the wooden statue, however, was once part of a peach tree and when the rains came, it would be swept away to who knows where. **Implications:** the continual wanderer. **Examples:** 1.14; 12.70.

**Su Dan**

**Primary Source:** *Shenxian zhuan*: Su Dan was a filial son who left to study to become an immortal. He told his mother that the well and the tangerine tree would provide for her. After he left there was a plague, and anyone who drank from the well or drank the juice from that tangerine tree was cured. **Examples:** 16.13; 19.41; 23.26; 23.37.

**Su Wu**

**Reference:** holding the standard (持節, also means “keeping integrity”); **Primary Source:** *Han shu* 45: Su Wu was sent out by Han Wudi as an envoy to the Xiongnu but detained among the Xiongnu for nineteen years, during which he herded sheep for a living. Finally, he took the standard given him when he first set out as an envoy and returned to the Han. He was also believed to be one of the earliest poets to write five-syllable-line poetry. **Examples:** 5.2; 6.22; 7.37; 8.23; 17.44.

**Sugarplum**

**References:** sugarplum, wagtails. **Primary Source:** *Shijing*, “Lesser Odes,” “Changdi” “Sugarplum” 164: “Flowers of the sugarplum, / does the calyx not spread outward? / None of these men today / are as good as brothers. / … Wagtails on the plain, / brothers hurry to each other in difficulties.” **Implications:** The closeness of brothers. **Examples:** 1.31; 1.34; 4.27; 8.19; 14.28; 17.20; 18.68; 21.14; 21.26; 21.27; 21.50.
Sword-dragon

References: vapor among stars (between Oxherd and Dipper), dragons, Lei Huan, “Dragonspring.” Story: When a purple vapor was seen in the heavens between the Oxherd and Dipper, the Jin Minister Zhang Hua asked Lei Huan what it was. Lei Huan said that it was the essence of some precious object in Yu-zhang. Zhang Hua made Lei Huan the magistrate of the county which was the source of the prodigy, and digging around the jail, Lei Huan discovered two buried swords, identified as the swords forged by the ancient smith Master Ouye, one of which was named “Dragonspring.” Lei kept one sword, and presented the other to Zhang Hua. Later when Zhang Hua was killed, this sword flew into the water by Xiangcheng. When Lei was on his deathbed, he warned his son to constantly keep the sword with him. After that the son was serving in Jian’an and passed by a shallow rapids. The sword suddenly leapt up from his waist, and he saw two dragons going off together.

Implications: secret wrongs suffered (including not having one’s talents recognized), rising from hiding; great talent. Examples: 8.9; 8.24; 18.1; 20.41; 20.41; 21.5; 21.61; 22.58; 22.75; 23.15.

Taigong

Primary Source: Shi ji 32, “The Lineages of Taigong of Qi”: Taigong, is also known as Taigong Wang, Jiang Taigong, and Lü Shang. Earlier in his life he worked as a butcher. Impoverished, in old age Taigong was fishing in the Wei River (sometimes Pan Creek or Huang Creek). The Count of the West, posthumously King Wen of Zhou, was going on a hunt; the divination told him that he would catch “not a dragon or a kraken, not a tiger or a bear; he
would catch the helper to make him overlord.” He met Taigong and made him his minister. **Implications:** the recluse (fishing) being recognized by the ruler late in life **Examples:** 2.31; 3.16; 3.32; 13.13; 13.22; 15.23; 16.16; 19.41; 21.41.

**Tao Qian**

Tao Qian (Yuanming) (365?–427) was the exemplary recluse poet. He served in office, but took off his seal of office at his last position as magistrate of Pengze and afterward made a living as a farmer. He was famous for his unrestrained manner, fond of ale and chrysanthemums, and he planted beans at the foot of south mountain. **Examples:** 1.33; 2.10; 3.3; 7.21; 8.22; 9.8; 9.46; 10.8; 10.16; 11.33; 11.45; 12.1; 12.64; 20.25.

**tugging robe-hems**

**Primary Source:** *Sanguo zhi*, “Wei zhi” 25: When Cao Pi, Emperor Wen of the Wei, was planning to move a hundred thousand families south of the Yellow River, Xin Pi remonstrated so vigorously that he tugged the hems of the emperor’s robe. In the end the emperor cut the number in half. **Implications:** Remonstrating with the emperor to one’s utmost. **Examples:** 9.53; 17.1.

**wagtails**

see *sugarplum*

**Wang Can**

**References:** giving books, leaving the capital, seven sorrows; well in Xiangyang; gazing from a tower. **Story:** Wang Can (177–217) was a leading literary figure at the end of the Han. When the famous Cai Yong heard that young Wang Can had come to see him, he said he would give Wang Can all his books. Caught up in the forced migration from Luoyang to
Chang’an, he fled the city on Dong Zhuo’s death, and wrote his famous “Seven Sorrows” poems. He went to Jingzhou, where he wrote his famous poetic exposition on “Climbing a Tower,” with the sentiment “though lovely, it is not my home.” Finally he joined Cao Cao.

**Examples:** 10.55; 11.59; 14.39; 14.14; 17.15; 19.29; 19.32; 21.54; 22.20; 23.12; 23.44; 23.48; 23.49.

**Wang Huizhi**

**References:** “following one’s whim,” Shanyin, going by boat on a snowy night; **Primary Source:** *Shishuo xinyu* 23: “Wang Ziyou [Huizhi] was lodging at Shanyin. One night there was a great snow. He woke from sleep and opened the rooms, ordering that ale be poured as he gazed on the gleaming white all around. Then he got up and paced about, reciting Zuo Si’s ‘Summoning the Recluse.’ All of a sudden he thought of Dai Kui (Dai Andao). At the time Dai was in Shan. Immediately that night he got in a little boat and went off to see him, only reaching Shan after two nights. He came to the gate, did not go in, but went back. When someone asked him why, Wang said, ‘I originally went following my whim; my whim is gone, so I go back. Why should I have to see Dai?’” **Examples:** 1.4; 1.27; 9.14; 17.41; 20.57; 20.81; 21.59; 22.2; 23.13.

**Wang Qiao**

**References:** duck slippers. **Primary Source:** *Hou Han shu* 82A. Wang Qiao was magistrate of Ye County; on the first and fifteenth of every lunar month he would appear at court in Luoyang. Noticing the regularity of his appearance—without a carriage—the emperor ordered the Grand Astrologer to investigate. The Grand Astrologer reported a pair of wild
ducks flying from the southeast. When he set a net to catch them, he caught one of a pair of slippers. When sent to the court of imperial manufactories, these were discovered to be slippers presented to officials in the Secretariat in an earlier era. In the end it was discovered that Wang Qiao was an immortal, the return of the famous immortal Wangzi Qiao. **Implications:** reference used when writing to county magistrates, especially those surnamed Wang.

**Examples:** 3.35; 4.5; 10.47; 12.62; 14.26; 17.14; 19.13; 21.58; 21.69; 23.25; 23.48.

**Wangzi Qiao**  
see Wang Qiao

**Wang Zhaojun**  
**References:** Evergreen Tomb, portrait, Mao Yanshou. **Story:** Wang Zhaojun was a beautiful court lady. The emperor asked the painter Mao Yanshou to paint portraits of his court ladies so he could choose among them. Wang Zhaojun could not afford to bribe Mao Yanshou, so he painted her as ugly. As a result, in marriage diplomacy, the emperor offered her to the ruler of the Xiongnu. Seeing her beauty for himself on departure, the emperor bitterly regretted his decision and had Mao Yanshou executed. Her tomb in the desert was a solitary patch of green, known as the Evergreen Tomb.  
**Examples:** 15.18; 17.36; 17.54; 21.41.

**Weaver Woman**  
**References:** Seventh Eve, bridge of magpies. **Story:** The Oxherd and Weaver Woman were lovers in Heaven, who were banished to be constellations on opposite sides of the Milky Way. They are allowed to meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month, crossing a bridge formed by magpies. When they meet there is supposed to be a flash of divine light.
Examples: 1.29; 13.20; 15.46; 17.32; 17.68; 19.38.

Wei Shu A young man whose physiognomy anticipated he would rise high. Examples: 1.32; 21.58.

writing in air Primary Source: Liu Yiqing, Shishuo xinyu XXVIII.3: Yin Hao, a failed general dismissed in 353 and demoted to the rank of commoner, spent his days writing characters in the air. People watched him to see what he was writing, and it was “duoduo guaishi” 咄咄怪事, roughly translated, “Goodness gracious, what a strange thing!” Implications: Distressed amazement at a world topsy-turvy. Examples: 4.23; 19.42; 22.50; 23.4.

Xi family pool See Shan Jian

Xi Kang Xi Kang (223–262) was one of the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove,” a thinker, and musician. He was described as “a wild crane among a flock of chickens.” One of his most famous works was “On Nurturing Life,” “Yangsheng lun,” to be understood in the context of the contemporary interest in prolonging life by various techniques as well as staying away from politics. Although he did try to keep away from the dangerous political life of the day, he was slandered in court and condemned to execution. Before he was executed he entrusted his son Xi Shao to the care of Shan Tao. Examples: 1.32; 7.18; 7.19; 17.1; 18.34; 23.25.

Xiaoshi See: Nongyu

Xie An References: East Mountain. Primary Source: Jin shu 79. Xie An (320–385) was a member
of one of the leading aristocratic clans in the fourth century. He lived in seclusion at his villa on East Mountain, but came forth to serve as minister when the Jin dynasty was threatened with an invasion from the North. He was famous as a figure of unruffled panache. **Examples:** 10.88; 12.55; 13.31; 14.18; 14.70; 22.15; 23.6; 23.37.

**Xu Chi**

**Primary Source:** *Hou hanshu* 53: Xu Chi was a poor but virtuous gentleman in Yuzhang, who never went to see officials when invited. When Chen Fan was governing Yuzhang, Xu Chi went to see him. Chen himself generally did not receive visitors, but he had a special pallet for Xu Chi, which he hung up on the wall whenever Xu Chi left. **Implications:** a poor scholar singularly appreciated by a high official. **Examples:** 15.63; 15.64; 16.13; 19.19; 22.6; 22.31; 22.63.

**Xu You**

**References:** Qi [Mountain] and the Ying [River]. Washing out one’s ears; Chaofu. **Primary Source:** *Lüshi chunqiu* 22: Sage King Yao wanted to give the empire to Xu You, who refused and withdrew to the foot of Mount Qi and the north shore of the Ying River, where he plowed and fed himself. Elsewhere Xu You was supposed to have washed out his ears, which were befouled by Yao’s offer of kingship. **Variation:** In some sources Chaofu (“Nest Father”) was treated as another recluse of Yao’s time, but he is sometimes identified with Xu You. **Implications:** Refusing to serve and living as a recluse **Examples:** 4.6; 7.10; 7.56; 10.20; 14.55; 16.13; 23.25.
Yan Guang

**References:** fishing, the wandering star; **Primary Source:** *Hou Han shu* 113. Yan Guang was the childhood friend of Liu Xiu, who later became Guangwudi, the founder of the Eastern Han. He refused Guangwudi’s invitations to serve and lived as a fisherman recluse. Once he did visit Guangwudi, and the two old friends went to sleep together, with Yan Guang’s head on Guangwudi’s belly. The next day the court astrologer reported seeing a wandering star invading the imperial constellation.

**Implications:** Refusing to serve and living as a recluse; close friendship with the emperor. **Examples:** 2.7; 8.21; 11.46.

---

Yan Junping

Yan Junping lived as a recluse in Chengdu and made his living selling fortunes. As soon as he made enough to get by on each day, he would close shop and study the *Laozi*. **Examples:** 3.13; 13.17; 22.18; 22.49.

---

Yang Xiong

**References:** leaping from the tower; “Hedong Poetic Exposition”; **Primary Source:** *Han shu* 87: Yang Xiong (53 BCE–18 CE) was a famous writer of the late Western Han, who in his youth had praised the emperor in four famous *fu*. He later wrote the *Supreme Mystery*, an imitation of the *Yijing*, the *Classic of Changes*. Yang had extensive lexicographical knowledge and taught rare characters to Liu Fen, the son of Liu Xin. Liu Fen was arrested by Wang Mang for making talismans (using rare characters) and Yang Xiong was implicated. When the authorities came to seize him, Yang Xiong threw himself from an upper storey and almost died. **Examples:** 1.33; 1.35; 3.10; 3.22; 5.14; 9.22; 16.12; 21.69; 23.49.
Yu Xin

Primary Source: Bei shi 83. Yu Xin (513–581) was the preeminent poet and prose stylist of the sixth century. His work profoundly influenced the Early Tang writers, but fell out of favor in the eighth century. Because of his most widely read work, the poetic prose of Lament for the South which was written in his old age after he had long been detained in the north as an envoy of the southern Liang, he was the figure of the displaced exile. 

Examples: 6.14; 11.10; 12.14; 17.34; 23.49.

Zhang Han

References: Zhang Han; water-shield soup; bream; the rising of the autumn wind. 

Primary Source: Shishuo xinyu 7: In the Western Jin, Zhang Han, a native of the southern region of Wu, was serving in the capital Luoyang. “He saw the autumn wind rising and thereby thought of the water-shield soup and bream sashimi of Wu, saying: ‘The most important thing in human life is to do what suits you. How can you be trapped as an official a thousand leagues from home to seek name and status?’ He then ordered his carriage and returned home right away.” 

Implications: To follow your natural inclinations and leave service, either as a positive or a negative decision. 

Examples: 1.25; 3.21; 6.55; 11.1; 12.90; 20.81; 22.34.

Zhang Qian

References: River source; eighth month raft. 

Story: Zhang Qian was sent by Han Wudi to find the source of the Yellow River. By some accounts he took a raft, which led to his being linked to the *riding the raft story. 

Implications: Often used for those sent on missions to Tibet. 

Examples: 7.38; 7.59; 8.21; 11.72; 22.2.
Zheng Chong

**Primary Source:** *Han shu* 77: In the reign of Aidi of the Eastern Han, Zheng Chong wore leather shoes, and the emperor said he could always tell when Zheng Chong was approaching by the sound of his shoes. **Examples:** 3:33; 16.8.

Zheng's lodge

**Primary Source:** *Han shu* 50: In Han Jingdi's reign Zheng Dangshi was known for his love of guests and set up welcome lodges to receive them on the outskirts of each side of Chang’an. **Implications:** Hospitality. **Examples:** 13.45; 14.66; 19.41; 21.51; 22.6; 22.30.

Zheng Pu

**References:** Zheng of Valley-mouth; Zheng Zizhen. **Primary Source:** Yang Xiong, *Fayan* 4: “Zheng Zizhen of the valley-mouth did not compromise his aims and farmed below a rocky cliff, and his name made a great stir in the capital.” **Implications:** a recluse, often used when someone surnamed Zheng was a recipient of the poem. **Examples:** 1.26; 2.33; 3.13; 8.22; 13.45; 18.63; 21.52.

Zhu Yun

**References:** broken railing. **Primary Source:** *Han shu* 67: Zhu Yun once remonstrated with Han Chengdi, demanding the execution of the Count of Anchang. Chengdi was so enraged that he wanted to have Zhu Yun executed. Zhu Yun held fast to the palace railing, which broke in the process, and Chengdi had the broken railing preserved to commemorate Zhu Yun’s loyalty. **Examples:** 14.51; 18.21; 21.68.

Zhuang Xi

**References:** Yue moan. **Primary Source:** *Shi ji* 70: Zhuang Xi was a native of Yue serving as a minister in Chu. Wanting to see if he still longed for his native land, the King of Chu
sent someone to listen to him when he was sick and found that when he spoke in a moan, he used the dialect of Yue. **Examples:** 17.15; 18.56.

**Zhuge Liang**

**References:** Sleeping Dragon; Eight Formations; “Liangfu Song”; **Primary Source:** *San-guo zhi* 35: Zhuge Liang (Kongming) was one of Du Fu’s favorite historical figures. He lived as a recluse farmer (the “sleeping dragon”) until Liu Bei persuaded him to become the minister of his Shu-Han kingdom in Sichuan. This was considered the perfect match between ruler and minister, the “conjunction of wind and clouds.” Zhuge Liang survived Liu Bei and supported his heir, trying in vain to defeat Wu and Wei. **Examples:** 7.19; 9.23; 14.24; 14.70; 15.9; 15.12; 15.13; 15.69; 15.70; 16.8; 17.38.