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From *Xing* to *Hen*: The Lyrical Transformation in Wen Tingyun's "Dreaming of the South"

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Abstract: Through a close reading of Wen Tingyun's "Dreaming of the South," this paper traces the late Tang shift in the lyrical paradigm of *ci* from *xing* (evocation) to *hen* (regret). The negative words *buzhi* ("does not know") and *kong* ("in vain") turn objects from arousers of feeling into indifferent "others," dissolving the resonance (*gantong*) on which *xing* rested. This reflects the late Tang decline of belief in the resonance between Heaven and humanity (*tianren ganying*). In *ci*, *hen* thus becomes a structural lyrical category.

Keywords: *xing*; *hen*; estrangement of self and things; Wen Tingyun

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1. Introduction

Wen Tingyun, founder of the Huajian school, was long seen as a writer of "sensuous" lyrics [1]. Yet his twenty-seven-character "Dreaming of the South" [2] raises a basic question: how can poetry express emotion when things no longer respond to it?

Ten thousand regrets — / regret at its utmost, at the sky's far edge. / The mountain moon does not know what is in my heart; / water and wind in vain let fall the flowers before my eyes; / swaying, the blue-green clouds slant.

Under the *xing* paradigm, one "draws analogies and links categories so as to arouse one's own heart" [3]; feeling arises naturally from things. Ye Jiaying noted the "cold objectivity" of Wen's *ci* [4], and Stephen Owen the late Tang reduction of objects to sensory surfaces [5], but the shift has not been analyzed as a breakdown of *xing*. This paper argues that Wen's *ci* moves from a "logic of resonance" to a "logic of rupture," in which *hen* carries the late Tang sense of a "rupture between Heaven and humanity."

2. The coldness of objects

The *ci* opens with emotion, not scenery. Classical lyricism holds that things cause the movements of the

human heart [6]; here "ten thousand regrets" comes before any image: emotion is a priori, and objects are merely where it fails to settle.

The moon is the archetypal *xing* image. In the *Book of Songs* its light calls up the beloved; in Zhang Jiuling [7] and Zhang Ruoxu it shares and "stirs" human feeling. Wen's moon "does not know." This negative personification grants the moon the capacity to know only to deny it, cutting dialogue more coldly than mere insensibility.

Likewise, *kong* strips the falling flowers of meaning. In Du Fu's "truly it grieves one," petals and sorrow are isomorphic; in Wen's, they fall for no one.

This is not contrast. In traditional contrast, which Wang Fuzhi said "doubles the sorrow and joy" [8], objects still take part in a dialogue with the subject. Wen's *buzhi* negates projection itself: objects withdraw and become things in themselves. The world no longer answers.

3. The withdrawal of the lyric subject

Because emotion precedes scene, its relation to things is inverted. In *xing*, objects are constitutive of feeling [9]; in Wen's *ci*, feeling is pre-existent and things refuse its projection. "At the sky's far edge" names no place but the diffuse, objectless state of *hen*, which the *Shuowen* glosses as resentment [10] but which here exceeds any particular grievance.

The subject changes accordingly. Tao Yuanming [11] and Li Bai [12] live in mutual regard with hills and mountains; the world abandons Wen's speaker, his loneliness forced rather than chosen. *Hen* is the "aesthetic residue" of vanished *xing* [13], an objectless feeling that can only turn back on itself.

Wen's *shi*, such as "Passing the Tomb of Chen Lin" [14], still voices traditional concerns. *Ci*, "subtle and finely adorned" [15] and marginal to orthodox poetic teaching, was free of the didactic duty that "poetry can arouse," and so could house a rupture that *shi* could not admit.

4. The late Tang context

Xing rested on the cosmology of *tianren ganying*, articulated by Dong Zhongshu [16] and echoed in Liu Xie's "As the colors of things move, the heart too is stirred" [17]. After the An Lushan Rebellion, Liu Zongyuan denied that Heaven could "reward merit and punish misfortune" [18], and the view that Heaven and humanity do not interfere spread among the literati [19]. Wen's moon cannot know the heart because no resonance links them.

Zhong Rong's *xing* of lingering meaning [20] gave way to Sikong Tu's ideal of "not setting down a single word" [21], which weakens the object's mediating role. As *xing* lost its ground, *hen* rose in *Among the Flowers* as a core category: unlike *yuan*, *chou* or *bei*, it is tied to no object or circumstance. The shift thus runs from fusion to estrangement of self and things, from aroused to pre-existent emotion, and from *shi* to *ci* as the main vessel.

5. Conclusion

The mutation of *xing* in "Dreaming of the South" marks a turning point in classical lyricism: the lyric subject is no longer at home in nature but alone in a world that does not respond. Parallels in Wei Zhuang and Feng

Yansi show a general tendency of late Tang *ci*. Later poets such as Su Shi and Xin Qiji would rebuild the fusion of self and things, but consciously, after the rupture. Wen's *ci* first stated that rupture plainly, making "Dreaming of the South" a testimony in the history of the spirit.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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