This is the twentieth issue of East Asian History in the series previously entitled Papers on Far Eastern History. The journal is published twice a year.
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Lions have never been found on Okinawa, and the custom of revering them as 'king of the beasts' and symbols of protection is said to have originated in ancient Persia. By the time this custom reached Okinawa via China in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the stone figures bore less and less resemblance to real lions. Early Chinese recordings of a stone 'lion-dog' figure placed within a shrine of the Ryukyu Kingdom (currently Okinawa) date back to 1683. From the late seventeenth century, influenced by Chinese conceptions of *feng shui*, the lion-like symbols or 'seasar' (シーーサー, also spelt *sabisaa* or *seesar*) became known for their powers of protection against fire, and could be found in front of the gates of temples or castles, at entrances to the tombs of noble families, and at the entrances of villages or sacred shrines. Today, seasars are placed to ward off any kind of evil spirit, and many different lion-like forms made not only from stone, but from clay, concrete and other materials, with varied colours and styles, may be seen on roofs, gates and at entrances to buildings across the Okinawan archipelago. (—Julia Yonetani)
The order of birds in the Guiyi jun — the autonomous Han-Chinese-dominated warlord regime which ruled the oasis of Dunhuang in the ninth and tenth centuries — was a product of politics. Whether in the case of magpies kept as pets, wild geese exchanged in wedding ceremonies, swallows who shared the space of the household with other human and non-human lives, or even kites scavenging carrion, the avian history of the Guiyi jun was structured by political rather than economic forces. The social and physical spaces in which the history of Guiyi jun birds unfolded—those of family life in the intimate domain of homes and gardens; those of 'public' life in the fields, streets and wastelands; those of literary and ritual action, carried out on paper and in the spaces of assembly and performance in temples and other ceremonial zones—were structured by multiple intersecting relations of power. Taken together these power relations constituted a complex 'politics' of avian life. But birds had a more direct and obvious relationship to political life as it is conventionally understood: hawks and avian omens were major elements in the top level politics of the Guiyi jun, particularly in the ninth century when the Guiyi jun's leaders invested enormous amounts of political and symbolic energy in distinguished birds, who constituted an élite stratum placed above the rest of the avian realm. 1

But the bird order was politically structured not only because of these investments in particular birds, and the practical hierarchies between birds that this produces. The government was the principal force of co-ordination in the Guiyi jun, the point at which other networks of power joined. Because

1 Seen, above all, in the four goshawks given to the Tang court by the Guiyi jun in 866 (see Jiutang shu, juan 19a [Old Tang history] [Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975] [hereafter 'Zhonghua Shuju edition'], p.660); in the white goshawk sent as a gift to the Uighur Qaghan in 884 (S.389, transcription in Rong Xinjiang, Guiyi jun shi yanjiu [Studies of Guiyi jun history] [Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1996], p.304—1 thank Rong Xinjiang for giving me a copy of this book); and in the white goshawk given to the head of the Guiyi jun, whose miraculous attributes were the subject of a poem of praise (S.1655v, transcription in Kanaoka Shoko, Classified catalogue of literary and popular works in Chinese in Dunhuang documents from Stein and Pelliot collections [Tokyo, Tōyō Bunko, 1971], p.123). Amongst avian omens, the most politically privileged was undoubtedly the white sparrow that served as a presage for the declaration of the establishment of a new state at Dunhuang, the Jinshan guo in 910. (On the date of the foundation of the Jinshan guo, see Rong Xinjiang, ibid., p.219.) The white sparrow's appearance is celebrated in the Baique ge [Song of the white sparrow], mss. P.2594v and P.2864v. For a transcription, see Lu Xiangqian, Dunhuang Tulufan wenshu lungao [Preliminary studies of Dunhuang and Turpan documents] (Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1992), p.172–5.
birds are present in almost every area of human activity from family life to agricultural labour and warfare, political power's co-ordination of all these different spheres and relations of power was in effect a co-ordination of all the different domains in which birds were situated. The linking of the various social, political and geographical spaces that were under government authority from gardens to guard posts, to temples and marshes was in effect a linkage of wild geese, kites, pet crows and swans in a common field of power.

Government authority also joined the physical order of birds to the written one. One of the distinguishing features of the avian history of the Guiyi jun is the centrality of the relationship between birds and writing. The written order sought to articulate avian ranking, to set out the differences between birds as a coherent hierarchical system. The avian hierarchy was the product of a history of relations of power between birds and people, which were condensed into the schematic form of a diagram of positions. It was a product of a history of different and often unanalysed power relations between birds and social interests. These contrasts are usually understood as 'allegories' or 'symbols', through which the human mental order is imposed upon the natural order of living birds. But they are as much histories as allegories, condensed versions of the heritage of power relations between birds and people which gave birds their differentiated social identities.

The ranked order of Guiyi jun birds as set out on paper was distinguished by its indebtedness to the avian order brought into being by the Tang empire, from which the Guiyi jun was itself descended. The systems of rank for both humans and birds in the Guiyi jun were of Tang origin: the struggle for title and office, which was both the object of social competition and the formal structure through which social capital was recognised and acknowledged, continued to be articulated in a Tang grammar and vocabulary. The ways in which birds were positioned in Guiyi jun writing were likewise a product of Tang avian histories. The history of Guiyi jun birds was distinguished by the determining effect of this absent imperial totality. The most comprehensive Guiyi jun accounts of the bird world referred to an avian order which had come into existence with the centralising drives of the Tang emperors in the century and a half before the An Lushan rebellion in 750. A history of imperial relations to birds, the co-ordination of the different matrices of power in which avian lives were located, was thus reproduced in the Guiyi jun.

In this history, the written order of birds and the order of living birds were both structured by the operations of political force. Like the order of human rank, they were a product of a myriad of separate social struggles, struggles that ruling authorities attempted to adjudicate, profit from, resist and ratify. The structuring of social space by rank determined the network of institutions with which birds were associated. The order of writing and the order of birds made and remade each other: both were historical products that arose within, but also helped to produce, the ensemble of power relations out of which
the social and physical space of Guiyijiun Dunhuang was generated.

The concern in the Guiyijiun, and indeed in Chinese imperial states more generally, with the articulation of an order of birds—and with birds as an articulation of order—could be construed as stemming from a desire to impose coherence on something beyond social determination or, conversely, a wish to discover outside the human realm an autonomous system of ranking which could serve as a model for social distinction between people. From this point of view, a poem about an oriole and the act of capturing and disciplining goshawks, as discussed below, are two faces of a common ordering project, superimposing human authority on the avian realm. Put like this, the distinction between real birds and represented ones is less important than that between ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ order.

However, the relationship between birds and social power extends beyond this opposition of the controlled and the uncontrolled, between birds ‘as they are in themselves’ and birds as they are imagined or appropriated by people. For one thing, human action structured the bird world by organising physical space. This was especially obvious at Dunhuang, where the irrigated oasis with its elms, poplars and crops of wheat, millet, beans and hemp (all creations of deliberate social effort) contrasted with the surrounding deserts and mountains with their open ground, clumps of swamp poplar, salinity-tolerant grasses and patches of thorn bush. This produced two different bird realms: the one of sparrows, crows and swallows, and the other of vultures and sandgrouse. Of course, this basic vegetational order had been in existence for a long time. Geographical texts from the middle of the Tang dynasty, more than a century before the founding of the Guiyijiun, say that the plants of the Dunhuang oasis were the same as in China to the east—and if the continuity of document production can be taken as a mark of the stable reproduction of a particular order of plants and animals, it would appear that the establishment of an independent warlord regime by Zhang Yichao 張義潮 did not bring any substantial change to it.

The contrast between oasis birds and desert birds that this order of space produced was a social contrast. Though both were outside the direct control of human power, swallow and sandgrouse had different social identities, differences that were created by and registered in the system of distinctions expressed in language. Bird identities were organised in a structure determined by social value: some were exalted, others were demeaned, and still others ignored. These hierarchical arrangements constituted an order of power and value implicitly and explicitly linked to structures of domination in the human world. If the order of birds was at one level a purely imaginary object, something existing only in the nowhere of human language, it had correlates in the physical world. The imagined bird world had a logic grounded in relations that were not imagined, relations between birds as well as between birds and people.

Unlike the horses enlisted in military service, or the sheep counted and registered by temples, Guiyijiun birds generally did not exist within relations

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Domestic chicken abnormalities—primarily abnormalities in the sphere of reproduction (strange births, females turning into males, in other words, distortions in the rightful order of gender at the humblest level in the household, suggesting problems in the sphere of gender authority in the empire at large)—were of concern to imperial institutions, and were catalogued as a special domain of abnormality in the monographs on the Five Elements in the official histories. In the summer of 865, a chicken in an ordinary family in Xuzhou (present-day northern Jiangsu) grew horns. “Horns are an image [or ‘correspondence’, xiang] of soldiers. Chickens are small domestic animals, resembling the lower orders.” Xin Tang shu [New Tang History], juan 24, wuxing zhi (shang) [Monograph on the Five Elements, part 1] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975) (hereafter ‘Zhonghua Shuju edition’), p.881. This chicken is directly linked with the rebellion of the soldiers of Pang Xun from the Xuzhou area taking place at that time; distortions amongst the bottom rank of the domestic hierarchy and insubordination amongst ordinary soldiers paralleling each other. In Dunhuang writings, chickens appear in manuals for deciphering dreams. Significantly, dreaming of chickens meant that one would be recruited for military or government duties, but could also mean that everything one sought would be obtained. To dream of chickens clucking meant that one would be involved in a dispute. See S.620, transcription in Zheng Binglin and Yang Ping, Dunhuang ben mengshu [Dunhuang dream texts] (Lanzhou: Gansu Wenhua Chubanshe, 1995). I am grateful to Zheng Binglin for giving me a copy of this book.

Flight also meant ubiquity. Birds were everywhere, passing from the remotest peripheries into the most intimate confines of hearth and home. Their movements, unlike those of large terrestrial animals (whether domestic ones like horses, sheep and camels or wild creatures such as foxes and wolves) were not bound by the forces of social power which prescribe spatial boundaries. Swallows could build their nests on the beams of the houses of Dunhuang’s rich and of its poor; they could also fly between the two. Indeed, what distinguished birds under human authority from wild ones was their absolute subjection to the divisions of physical (and thus social) space, divisions which they themselves helped to produce. Roosters and pet birds belonged to the home, residing within its confines, contributing to its decoration or structuring its timetable, and thereby marking its boundaries. Tame hawks and falcons joined the domestic realm with open space and its grand politics of the exhibition of power. Wild birds, by contrast, were present in those domains that social power could not dominate—most notably the air, but also spaces like mountains, waste ground, desert—as well as in the very heart of dominated space, in fields, houses, gardens, granaries and public squares. Other categories of wild animals did not have this simultaneous presence in dominated and undominated space—in fact most of them belonged to the latter, their presence in the former being a mark of the breakdown of regular domination, or at least a sign of its limitations. Birds intersected with the lives of everyone in the Guiyi jun. They constituted a domain of collective social experience, crossing boundaries of rank, gender and livelihood. Indeed, birds helped to constitute the fabric of everyday existence, an existence that was (at some level) a common one, shared by all. But proximities between birds and people were also hierarchically structured. Peacocks and parrots had relatively little part in the daily labours of poor farmers. Swallows were much closer to women confined at home than were the birds of the desert or mountains. The spatial and temporal structures of the lives of tamed goshawks and their owners differed markedly
from those affecting crows and the people who chased them away from newly-sown fields. Birds marked, created and were affected by the divisions of human estate in the Guiyi jun, while simultaneously transcending and escaping them.

Birds were thus part of the order of social power in the Guiyi jun, and also independent of it. They were not generally involved in relations of economic and physical force, but the effects of these relations determined the conditions of their lives indirectly. Their existence was thus characterised by a relative autonomy.

**Symbolic Power**

The principal power relations with which birds as a group were involved in Guiyi jun society—relations of symbolic power—followed from the specific logic of this position of being simultaneously affected by the broader determinations of social power and detached from them. Unlike the order of donkeys or hemp, the avian order is not produced in everyday acts of material struggle; it appears to exist independently of any deliberate intervention, in particular, any relation of coercion or exploitation. But neither is it an arbitrary imposition, an invention of the human will alone and thus open to challenge as a wilful deception. It is produced partly by the total ensemble of material relations, and thus has a concrete existence beyond its depiction in a linguistic or pictorial code.

In this respect, the social structure of the bird world has the same structure as the field of symbolic power itself, which is defined by its relative autonomy from relations of economic or physical force. The principal arenas of symbolic (or cultural) power—ritual relations, the religious field, poetry and painting, relations of rank and honour and so on—are governed by forms of symbolic force that are grounded in economic or physical coercion but are not directly reducible to them. Because birds in the Guiyi jun were generally neither economically significant nor a direct physical threat to humans, but were distributed throughout its physical and social space, they were something on which and through which symbolic structures and strategies could be unfolded. The genres of writing from the Guiyi jun that involve birds are overwhelmingly of an ornamental or symbolic character. This literary placement produces and reflects the position of birds in the social field in post-imperial Dunhuang, enacting the logic of their place in the ensemble of relations of power, something that accords with the situation of birds in other histories and societies.

The distinctions between birds set out in the cultural products of the Guiyi jun correspond with the structures of material and symbolic domination in human society. Because the majority of birds were not under regular domination, acquisition of them involved the exertion of deliberate and
Like the domain of language, birds represent a common experience that is also socially differentiated. Their deployment to describe human society reflects just this condition of constituting unity and distinction simultaneously. The inequalities in the social uses of language coincide with inequalities in the social appropriation of birds, both of which are historical products (albeit historical products whose historical nature is frequently misrecognised). Indeed, the social divisions in language use are one of the main constituents of the social differences in the structures of bird knowledge. Those who possess larger quantities of linguistic capital (whether it be in the classical or vernacular language), masters of eulogistic prose or village raconteurs, are able to take greater possession of the repertoire of bird knowledge available in their specific linguistic domain than those not endowed with these symbolic skills. In the cultural products of the Guiyi jun that survive in the Dunhuang documents, the differences between these socio-linguistic domains (or symbolic markets, to use Bourdieu’s terminology) are visible in the differences in deployments of bird knowledge. Bird knowledge was inherently knowledge of the function of birds in these different symbolic domains and a capacity to deploy them accordingly.

This is how Claude Lévi-Strauss articulates the relationship of birds to human society: “To sum up: birds and dogs are relevant in connection with human society either because they suggest it by their own social life (which men look on as an imitation of theirs), or alternatively because, having no social life of their own, they form part of ours. Cattle, like dogs, form part of human society, but as it were, asocially, since they verge on objects. Finally, racehorses, like birds, form a series disjoined from human society, but like cattle, lacking in intrinsic sociability. If, therefore, birds are metaphorical human beings and dogs metonymical human beings, cattle may be thought of as metonymical inhuman beings and racehorses as metaphorical inhuman beings.” Lévi-Strauss, *The savage mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972), p. 207. These comments arise in an attempt to explain why bird species are given human names in French. He comments more fully: “Birds are given human christian names in accordance with the species to which they belong more special effort. In other words, the possession of birds meant freedom from material necessity. This applied both to possession of the physical bodies of birds (whether alive or dead, whole or dismembered) and to the possession of knowledge of them. Knowing about birds was the outcome of access to the means of acquiring knowledge, whether in the objectified form of books, or in the possession of the time to learn and the cultural capital to assimilate what was learnt and deploy it in the most profitable way. The physical or symbolic possession of birds exhibits the social capacities which make that possession possible. The distinction of rare birds—those not part of everyday life (everyday physical life and everyday language)—is produced by the extraordinary expenditure of material and symbolic resources involved in their acquisition. What creates the exotic bird’s value is the effort of its acquisition, which involved not only wealth but political relations—domination over others—through which the physical and political constraints of distance could be overcome to bring creatures from far away. Knowledge is the same. Especially before the rise of printed books and a market in them, familiarity with unusual birds is a mark of privilege, since it involves connections with a world beyond the domain of common knowledge, the knowledge of ordinary experience. Mastery of the names and attributes of birds which are not ‘all around’ is the product of a labour of acquisition, which can only be undertaken by those with the means to do so. The social appropriation of rare birds therefore conforms to and confirms the existing division of society, divided between the distinguished and the common; the immutable difference between crane and sparrow equated with the division between ruler and commoner.

These comparisons do not reproduce the hierarchies and divisions in human society in avian lives simply because human power relations are the primary model for all systems of classification. This is not a matter of an ‘image’ of human society projected onto the avian realm. Rather, bird lives reproduce the structures of human hierarchy because birds are connected to social interests that are themselves struggling for position in an order of rank. The involvement of birds with social power—the thing that constitutes their social identities—is an involvement with human agents who are engaged in social struggles. The constitution of birds as common or noble, of bird pairs as spouses, of nests as homes, of territory as property, is a matter of the relationship of birds to people who are themselves involved in struggles for rank, or who are trying to get married, or preserve territory. This makes birds /easily than are other zoological classes, because they can be permitted to resemble men for the very reason that they are so different. They are feathered, winged, oviparous and they are also physically separated from human society by the element in which it is their privilege to move. As a result of this fact, they form a community which is independent of our own /but, precisely because of this independence, appears to us like another society, homologous to that in which we live: birds love freedom; they build them selves homes in which they live a family life and nurture their young; they often engage in social relations with other members of their species; and they communicate with them by acoustic means recalling
more than a reflection of the social order; they are involved in social struggles, the practices and relations of power that we refer to as a social order. Birds are not "metaphorical human beings," but constituents of an ensemble of relations of force involving people, plants and animals that together make up the domain of social action. Struggles over rank, struggles to articulate an order of society, that is, to possess the authority to produce an authoritative description of the world—in sum, symbolic struggles: these are the fields of social power in which birds are situated. 'Names' or 'descriptions' of birds are not simple 'representations' of an external object; rather, they are the specific instruments through which these power relations operate.

Moreover, these articulations of bird lives have a concrete institutional location that is the context of their production. A system of knowledge about birds is generated by a certain mode of producing and disseminating knowledge, a formal order (that is, an institutional order) that imposes certain meanings and excludes others. Bird knowledge thus seems like the polar opposite of domination by physical or economic force (and thus of utterances explicitly related to the maintenance of that kind of domination). Indeed, it appears not to be a form of domination at all.

Ornamental Power

The types of writing in which birds appeared in Guyi jun times—poems, songs, parables and model letters—represent domains of social activity in which form has as much significance as content. They belonged to the sphere of what may be called 'ornamental power', in which command of ornament is a form of social authority. The capacity to deploy representations of birds was part of the exercise of dominance over these genres, and thus of the exercise of dominance through these genres. The presence of birds distinguished these kinds of writing from other documentary forms (and thus from other spheres of social action). The register of grain loans contains no magpies or

/articulated language. Consequently everything objective conspires to make us think of the bird world as a metaphorical human society: is it not after all literally parallel to it on another level" (p.204). Lévi-Strauss's argument is that the use of human names for birds (which he contends is widespread in world culture, although his primary frame of reference is French usage) contrasts with dogs, where the names used in French constitute "a series parallel to the names people bear in ordinary life or, in other words, metaphorical names" (p.205). He notes that this is culturally specific, contrasting with the situation in some Australian Aboriginal languages, where he says dogs have proper human names and kinship terms (p.205), but does not explicate this in terms of differing historical contexts, and differing relations of power between humans and non-humans which are enacted and recognised in the names used.

Figure 1

Birds help to create that song’s ‘lyricism’, the property that makes it effective within its own domain, and thus socially effective, able to win authority for those who create or deploy it. Again, it was because wild birds were not controlled that these meanings had their distinctive force, that they could be sources and objects of ornamental power, a power defined by its distance from practicality (the domain of material power) and by emphasis on the self-sufficiency of form. The linkage between birds and poetry—the dominant context in which birds are situated in the written products of the Guiyi jun—involves the business of making statements about the order of the world, and thus of inculcating a view of that world. Birds are part of what makes poetry a form of language that addresses itself to abiding realities, in contrast to the prosaic language of daily material struggle. Poetry in turn locates birds beyond the ‘pragmatic’ domains of social activity, and associates them with commentary on the order of things, whether it be to affirm that order or to challenge it. (At this level, the sociological similarity of poetry [or art] and science, which so often seem to be opposed modes of viewing the world, becomes obvious. Both belong to the arena of symbolic power, being characterised by the activity of observation and [more importantly] description, and hence with the privileged social position of observing and describing. It is thus no surprise that poetry/art and science are the primary ways in which birds are socially apprehended in industrial states).

These genres are distinguished by concern with protocol—that is, they are defined by relations of force that are self-enforcing, in which transgression carries no explicit sanction. Writers impose these rules on themselves, and struggle to internalise them so that their writing will automatically conform to the established norms. Failure is never punished, but the unspoken need to obey the rules exerts a constant disciplining force.

Virtually no Guiyi jun-period documents dealing with commercial transactions involve coinage. Ikeda On notes that Stein’s excavations of sites in the Dunhuang region recovered virtually no late Tang or Song coins. He observes that the decline of the money economy throughout the Gansu corridor in the late Tang put the region at odds with the enormous increase in the use of money in China during the Song, and suggests that this may be linked with the weakening of interregional trade at this time. See Ikeda On, “Tonkō no ryūshū keizai” [The Dunhuang commercial economy], in Ikeda On, ed., Tonkō no shakai [Dunhuang society] (Tokyo: Daidō Shuppansha, 1980), pp.318-19.

Poetic Unity

This bird empire expressed what might be termed a poetic unity. The Guiyi jun shared a poetic language with the regimes of the Five Dynasties (五代) and the Song 宋 and Liao 辽 states—all were successors to the great poetic unification whose practical foundation was the military expansion of the Tang empire in the seventh and eighth centuries. At the same time, its relationship to the centre can be understood as an acceptance of poetic authority, a power with relatively little material content and limited material effect, but which structures and organises symbolic activity. The very act of organising language into songs or poems entails a fixed structure of expression, patterns of rhyme and rhythm, a unity generated at the level of form. But the unity of poetic language is not just about the acceptance of rules for word use. It also involves establishing a set of objects for poetic activity, among which birds have a privileged place.

Poetic unity refers to a market in which these poetic objects formed a common symbolic currency. The Guiyi jun did not use the monetary currency of the Tang or its successor dynasties, but it did acknowledge the symbolic currency of central China’s ornamental language. The deployment of birds...
in ornamental language in accordance with practices followed in the centre placed the Guiyi jun within the common market of literary Chinese, a market which united all who employed this language, including 'non-Chinese' countries like Korea, Vietnam and Japan. The distinctive characteristic of such a market is its capacity to create a unified structure of feeling, generated by a unified mode of expression that crossed administrative borders (which became far more numerous with the decline of centralising power throughout Central and Eastern Asia between 840 and 940). The 'universality' of poetry only existed where people accepted the authority of poetic language enough to undertake the labour of learning it.

If this authority was less centralized than it had been at the height of the Tang when the capital was the hub of ornamental power, able to draw on the ornamental resources of the empire (from poets and embroiderers to flowers and elephants) and disseminate them to the periphery as symbolic products (in the form of poetry, exegetical scholarship, and literary essays but also as hair styles, jewellery, and wedding ceremonies), the fidelity of the Guiyi jun to the practices of central China shows that an authoritative symbolic language continued to exist. This fidelity was expressed in the copying and recopying of texts, the unceasing importation of new material from the Chinese heartland throughout the period of the Guiyi jun's existence, and the constant invocation of connections with the centre in its cultural products.

In its most concentrated and unified form, the poetic order of the avian empire was literally convoked as an assembly of birds. In The Names of the Hundred Birds (百鳥名), a short piece of mixed poetry and prose subtitled The Ceremonial Array of Ruler and Ministers (or Rulers and Subjects) (君臣儀仗), birds gather when their sovereign the Phoenix appears in the middle of the forest. The act of writing involves a listing of the names of a multitude of birds, an account of their arrangement in a ceremonial order, and the enunciation of relationships between birds as a political hierarchy. The gathering of the hundred birds before the phoenix was a crucial invocation of deference and hierarchy in the Guiyi jun: it appears also as a figure in the collection of the hundred birds before the phoenix was a crucial invocation of connections with the centre in its cultural products.

The Names of the Hundred Birds articulates the structure of authority by which the bird world is organised. Not only does it bring together birds whose shared identity was a common historical involvement with Chinese empire (as a physical space and as an engine of cultural production), it situates those birds as a political hierarchy. The act of writing involves a listing of the names of a multitude of birds, an account of their arrangement in a ceremonial order, and the enunciation of relationships between birds as a political hierarchy. The gathering of the hundred birds before the phoenix was a crucial invocation of deference and hierarchy in the Guiyi jun: it appears also as a figure in the exchange of songs between the families of the bride and groom on the occasion of the wedding. The male side likened itself to the phoenix, before whom the female side paid court. Avian political hierarchy was thus incorporated into the articulation of gender power in the marital relationship as it was being formed.  

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10 The focus of this present article is the version of The Names of the Hundred Birds in the manuscript numbered S 3835. Portions of /The Names of the Hundred Birds appear in S.5752 and there is a fragment in P.3716. The foundational modern transcription is that pro-

11 The term yizhang 儀仗 refers to insignia, particularly weapons; but according to Xiang Chu, it here connotes the parade of officials at court.

12 See "Xia nü fu ci" 下女夫詠 (Songs for bringing down the bridegroom) in Wang Zhongmin, Dunhuang bianwen ji, p.273 (the manuscripts used are P.3350, S.3877, S.5949, S.5515, P.3893, P.3909 and P.2979). Arthur Waley translates the passage thus: [the groom says],"'The phoenix having come here should be welcomed by the hundred birds. The aunts and sisters-in-law, unless they mistrust us, ought ... to turn and come our way.'" Arthur Waley, Ballads and stories from Tun-huang (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p.191.
In both, the central feature is distinction. Birds and people are allotted their positions according to unvarying principles of division. There is a government whose members are clearly identified and distinguished from the rest of society, and within which functions are allotted to specific personnel. Human roles in society and government differ as greatly as do the bodies and habits of birds. Furthermore, these differences are fixed: housewives will no more perform the duties of generals than wrens will be falcons. The job of the head of the Board of Rites is as different from that of the prime minister as a wild goose is from a crane.

This was established by decree in 1391. See Ming shi (Ming history), juan 67, yufu (Carriages and clothing), 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), p.1638.


The paradise flycatcher is included as an insignia for those outside the formal hierarchy in the text. The Ming sequence extends from crane to quail, which is discussed below, although the paradise flycatcher is included as an insignia for those outside the formal hierarchy of nine civil ranks (see previous note).

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Yin Hong 殷宏, who was active around 1500, produced a painting depicting the “hundred birds admiring the peacock” (now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, no.74.31). The work has been read as “a probable allusion to the emperor surrounded by his courtiers” (see comments by Henry Kleinhenz in Wai-kam Ho et al., Eight dynasties of Chinese painting: the collections of the Nelson Gallery–Atkins Museum, Kansas City and The Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1980). The title given in this text (in Wade-Giles romanisation) is, however, “A picture of peacocks and peonies” (kongque mudan tu 孔雀牡丹圖), so the connection to imperial power is allusive rather than direct. Sherman E. Lee asserts that the work “epitomizes the respect due the emperor by his subjects, [which] suggests Yin was working...

birds in a political formation that reproduces the form of the imperial state. The logic of this bird polity derives from the way in which the Tang state and its successors positioned birds linguistically and physically: the social order of birds that existed under the empire, from the birds brought to the capital as tribute to those that were objects for poetry, divination or spectatorship, provides the foundation for the bird world spelt out in the text. The differences between birds equate with the differences between the functionaries of the imperial state, so that the two structures overlap on each other, the world of birds explaining the world of human government and the world of ministers and generals explaining the world of birds. Thus, visible differences between bird bodies were articulated as conforming to a bureaucratic logic. Like the uniforms of officials, they marked differences in function and status in a hierarchy. Bureaucratic uniform, with its insignia of rank, divided the strata of the civil service; the dress of women distinguished them from men. These contrasts separated social groups just as plumage marked off bird varieties. The foundation of this is the assumption that the physical differences between birds constituted unequal positions in a hierarchical order. To some extent avian demography supplied an underlying logic. Bird population structures resembled the social pyramid—common birds, like commoners, were the most numerous, making rarer ones ‘naturally’ distinguished. Higher order feeders like herons or eagles were fewer in number than species like passerines, as the pervasive Chinese rhetorical contrast between the solitary crane and the mass of sparrows made clear. Furthermore, they tend either to be bigger and thus more visually striking or else birds of prey, and thus distinguished for their predatory behaviour.

This particular political organisation of avian life is linked other

Different political histories grouped birds into different structures of sovereignty. Rooks convened as a parliament in seventeenth-century England, “which used to order the execution of delinquents.” See Keith Thomas, Man and the natural world (Harmondsworth, Mddlx.: Penguin Books, 1984). The birds in Farid ud-Din Attar’s Conference of the birds, however, believing they are the only nation without a king, go on a journey in search of their ruler, the simurgh, who they eventually discover to be themselves. Farid ud-Din Attar, Conference of the birds, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth, Mddlx.: Penguin Books, 1984).
orderings of birds by the logic of state power, and to the representation of state power by reference to the avian order. The prototypical case in Chinese antiquity is the pairing of government officials with birds by Shao Hao 少皞 in the Zuozhuan 左傳. The order of officials becomes a framework through which avian life can be ranked, and vice versa. By the Ming 明 dynasty an exact emblematic correspondence had been established between birds and the ranks of the civilian bureaucracy. Each level of official had its own bird insignia, worn as a surcoat on the front of official robes, in the Qing case extending from the paradise flycatcher for the bottom of the hierarchy to the white crane at the top. This ranking has some resemblance to the order of The Names of the Hundred Birds (the first section of the text begins with the crane and ends with the paradise flycatcher, but with many variants in between), suggesting a codified system already taking shape in the Tang and Song periods. The theme of the hundred birds gathering around their ruler appeared in painting in the Ming dynasty; the dynastic bureaucratic order continued to unfold on the bird world and generate it as a political entity.

This correspondence between the avian and the bureaucratic is not simply a matter of two parallel orders mapping on to each other. Empire produced an organisation of birds, of which the system of avian titles and emblems for officials was but one: the order of division amongst birds was an order of contrasts that obtained in the world and on the page. Cranes occupied more privileged spaces than quails because more privileged people took an interest in them. The order of The Names of the Hundred Birds is thus as much historical as textual. It condenses a history of avian placements, of which the placement of birds in written systems and in a hierarchy of images is a vital structuring element. The name, in this sense, is a bearer of history, and the writing of it is a reproduction of that history.

Writing the Names of Birds

In manuscript culture the labour of cultural acquisition is registered materially in the copying out of texts. Copying constitutes socially approved reproduction; the work of learning, and hence the structure of value which determines what should be learnt, exists in objectified form, as a thing. The traces of three writing events reproducing The Names of the Hundred Birds have survived into this century as manuscripts. Suo Buzi 索不子, who recorded the date of his copying work (in the winter at the end of 990), was the writing life responsible for the reproduction of the bird history that is The Names of the Hundred Birds. He held the title of ‘officer’ (yaya 押牙), a pervasive but usually minor title in the latter years of the Guiyi jun. The concrete context for the reproduction of the bird world is thus that of Suo Buzi's place in the order of power of the Guiyi jun. The order of birds is reproduced by someone situated in a field defined by struggles for rank, and the reproduction of avian rank is carried out by someone who is himself
individuals of note in the Guiyi jun had the rank of yaya and in the tenth century yaya often held joint appointments as local government officials in charge of settlements around Dunhuang. By the late tenth century, however, yaya had become a pervasive title for persons of moderate social standing in the Guiyi jun and did not necessarily denote a formal military or administrative function. Military rank thus constituted the pre-eminent source of rank and title in Guiyi jun society. See Feng Peihong, "Wan Tang Wudai Song chu Guiyi jun wuzhi junjiang yanjiu" (Studies on the officers in the military system of the Guiyi jun in the late Tang, Five Dynasties and early Song), in Dunhuang Guiyi jun shi zhuanti yanjiu (Specialised studies in Guiyi jun history), ed. Zhang Binglin (Lanzhou: Lanzhou Daxue Chubanshe, 1997), pp.100-9 (I thank Colin Jeffcott and Paul Clark, both of whom procured a copy of this book for me). The position of the yaya in the structure of the Guiyi jun administration between 899 and 901 is dealt with on pp.151-8 of Lu Xiangqian's "Guanyu Guiyi jun shiqi yifen buzhi poyong li yanjiu" [Research on a register of cloth and paper expenditure of the Guiyi jun], in Lu Xiangqian, Dunhuang Tulufan wenshu lungao. 'Officer' therefore seems an appropriate translation. Wang Gungwu gives 'administrative official' for yaya in his The structure of power in North China during the Five Dynasties (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1963), p.14. In reference to the internal organisation of the yajun 衛軍, guard of the military governors (jiedushi 節度使), Wang quotes Robert des Rotours, Traité des Fonctionnaires et Traité de l'Armée traduits de la Nouvelle Histoire des Tang (San Francisco, Calif.: Chinese Materials Center, 1974), pp.224-6.

Figure 2
Suo Buzi's copy of The Names of the Hundred Birds, S3835
ranked, and ranked, moreover, with one of the commonest of Guiyi jun titles, and thus neither clearly distinguished nor clearly abased.

The manuscripts of *The Names of the Hundred Birds* thus situated its copying with other examples of the frozen labour of struggling to master recognised knowledge, defining it as something to be taught and learnt through the apparatus of formal instruction—although perhaps in a peripheral position relative to the ‘core curriculum’ represented by the *Thousand Character Classic*. This differentiates it from common knowledge, knowledge transmitted in less institutionalised contexts—by word of mouth, or by experience.

Whatever the date and place of its original composition, the fact of its being copied out in Guiyi jun times marks the text as a piece of knowledge that mattered in independent Dunhuang in the tenth century; indeed it was the most complete articulation of the structures of the bird world produced by that society. The expenditure of paper, ink and scribal effort that the manuscript embodies demonstrates its importance. *The Names of the Hundred Birds* is a primer of cultural literacy, copied out with other basic texts, an indication of things that need to be known about the world. Its title appears in a list of works associated with basic instruction: *Soushen ji* 据神記, *The Family Instructions of Taigong* (太公家教), *The Classic of Filial Piety* (孝經), and *The Dialogue of Tea and Wine* (茶酒論). Reproducing this list of birds was affiliated with the work of acquiring core knowledge of the written world, knowledge that gave power over the domain of culture and power in the domain of culture, and indeed in the world more generally. Given that most of the birds in the text were not seen in the Guiyi jun, the utility of learning about them lay in the acquisition of a specifically linguistic competence, a capacity to know and manipulate language—cultural literacy, but above all literacy.

*The Names of the Hundred Birds* enunciated a structure of associations, which articulated and were founded on the historical and social identities of birds, that is, their historical placement by social forces. The written representation of the structures of the bird world not only produced order, but also made possible the decipherment of the codes of written culture, allowing people to grasp the order of birds read about in other contexts. The deployment of unseen birds in writing posed problems of intelligibility, even more so for people in Guiyi jun Dunhuang than for those in other parts of the Chinese cultural world. The bird code required explication, so that legitimate culture could be acquired and deployed. *The Names of the Hundred Birds* made possible the mastery of the system by setting forth not only the defining characteristics of birds, but also their placement relative to each other.
Learning Names

Names are vital to the social order of birds. If bird names seem the ultimate in cultural arbitrariness, unable to affix themselves permanently to the flying beings they purport to name, they mark the presence of an organising power. They are an historical artefact, arising from a history. While the name itself has a history, which is what can be charted through its occurrence in different texts, the changes in the history of a name arise from and are an index of overall transformations in the power relations between birds and human authority. In this sense, bird names are not simply ‘representations’. All bird names have some degree of social authority, since they are the product of communal acts of naming rather than individual acts of naming like insults.24 Yet because the communities with which bird names are associated differ, the authority of bird names varies. Moreover, because the communities using the names are unequal, bird names are ranked by their status.25 A bird name that remains the same across history and over a territory is a function of the social importance of the bird concerned, a mark that people continue to pay attention to it, and pay attention to it in the same way. Not only does the work of reproducing the name insure against the eroding force of forgetfulness (which would mean that the bird had ceased to be socially important), it also resists other names which might replace it. The ability to recognise a bird name results from this process of reproduction. Thus the bird names that show the least spatial and temporal variation are those which have been most consistently reproduced, those which matter enough to be remembered.26

When writing is removed from the site in which it was originally produced, the possibility of a divided system of knowledge comes into being; there is knowledge of the written order (its forms and regularities, knowledge that has its own autonomous authority) and there is knowledge of practice. Writing also raises the problem of the decipherment of the forgotten or unknown name, the bird name written down long ago or far away, which contains no trace of the bird to which it refers and which does not explain itself.27

Bird names reflect the cultural condition of empire. On the one hand there is standardisation—the creation of a common set of names for things commonly experienced: people in the deserts of Central Asia and people on the coast of China have a shared vocabulary for talking about swallows, founded on the existence of a name for swallow understood in both places.28 On the other hand there is heterogeneity—local life is penetrated by forces from outside, things heard of but never seen, things known in name only. Territorial annexation means that the names of things are picked up and deposited elsewhere, far from their homeland; Cantonese francolins, for example, are written about on the edge of the Mongolian steppe. Moreover, the nature of writing means that these ‘foreign’ elements can become

24 Bourdieu draws attention to the fundamental difference between the bestowal of an official title (like an academic qualification) by a recognised delegate and calling someone an idiot or a bastard (names that have “very limited symbolic efficacy and involve only the person who offers them”). See Bourdieu, Language and symbolic power, p.105.

25 The phenomenon of the vernacular name (suming 俗名 in Chinese) assumes a hierarchical positioning of names in which there exists some notion of a correct name, usually that used in writing, in other words the name employed by the authoritative group. Essential to this distinction is the difference between the centre (or the global sphere in the case of scientific names) and the locality.

26 However, it is obvious that a name that is applied to a bird in a particular time and place can be applied to another bird in a different time and place. The continued use of a name and the stability of the link between name and bird do not amount to the same thing. The system of Linnaean classification and the Confucian doctrine of the rectification of names both hinge on the absolute fixity of the connection between name and thing, a fixity which relies on an authorising power exerting rigorous control over the granting of names and their utilisation.

27 Social effort is directed not only to preserving and deploying bird names now in use, but also at managing names that in some sense come from ‘outside’, from another place and another time. Moreover, since the rare bird is the distinguished bird, these unfamiliar names are associated with the social capital of distinction, the symbolic profit that comes from mastering what others do not know.
This is the result of a unified language, but it is also something that makes a unified language possible, by creating a set of objects to which it refers, the ground for common understanding. There are also things that mark the difference between local life and central knowledge, products of the social and physical structures of distance. Local life has its own birds and its own names, which do not intersect with those of the unified imperial structure. Local practice either cannot attain or actively resists the ‘standards’ set by the centre; there are areas where central usage provides no guide, or where central usage is unknown. It arranges things in its own way, reflecting its own structures of social power.

Works of reference constitute one of the definitive forms of this authoritative knowledge, an authority represented by their capacity to give definitions, to act as the arbiter of meaning and correctness, fixing the form of names and their explanation. Such works prescribe the forms of legitimate knowledge, not only what should be known but how it should be known. In central China between the Tang and Song dynasties, this power was directly allied with the authority of the emperor in the form of encyclopedias commissioned for imperial use, notably the Chuxue ji [Record of elementary learning] and Taiping yulan [The Taiping imperial survey]. Consisting largely of quotations from canonical sources, they powerfully confirmed the linkage of names to specific contexts, defining their meaning within an intertextual web of authoritative writing. The proximity of the names in The Names of the Hundred Birds to the names in these works of reference constitutes their proximity to centralised intellectual power.

Bird names which show the greatest durability through history and across territory are those with the most stable relationship to this power. Stability involves the name being written in the same way and related to the same set of attributes. The capacity of modern scholarship to ‘identify’ the birds in an historical text—that is, the capacity to reconcile old names with those used by the modern naming powers, those who are ‘authorised’ to fix the names of birds (primarily lexicographers and ornithologists, the essential parts of social experience, objects of an intense investment of effort and concern, no less ‘real’ (from a social point of view) than what can be apprehended directly.

The Names of the Hundred Birds distinguishes between names that are standardised, names that are exotic, and names that are local. Although it belongs to the arsenal of cultural technologies which sought to bring order to birds and their names—encyclopedias, dictionaries, commentaries on the classics, descriptive poems produced by recognised figures and so on—it remains ‘non-standard’. The names it contains do not conform fully with authorised usage, that is, the culturally authoritative knowledge of the centre. Thus from the point of view of centralised knowledge represented by imperial works of reference or modern scholarship, the most ‘recognisable’ bird names in The Names of the Hundred Birds are those which have the strongest ties to its own unified naming power.

‘Common’ bird names are literally that—common, both shared and pervasive. These names—sparrow, crow, wild goose—were part of the basic vocabulary, names whose uniformity registered their position as part of the invariant structure of things. In written form they were the stuff of fundamental literacy. Graphic variation was limited, demonstrating that writers reproduced them without change, proof of their status as words that every literate person knew how to write. These names defined an essential commonality, their continued use in independent Dunhuang representing an ongoing and constantly restated connection not only to central China but also to the past, a connection grounded in using a common (in the sense of shared) name for a common (in the sense of basic or pervasive) thing.

The Names of the Hundred Birds not only contained these standardised familiar names. There were also exotic birds, creatures which the experience of empire brought into the consciousness of literate people (and perhaps of illiterate people as well) but which dwelt on the peripheries of culture rather than at its centre. Their names were harder to master. They were part of the expanded domain of bird knowledge, not its basic contents. These names offered the profit of linguistic distinction because they differed from common currency.

Finally, there were bird names that were neither common nor exotic, names that modern scholarship can only ‘identify’ by extrapolation and analogy. They are beyond the reach of legitimate knowledge represented by
reference works; that is, they have been subjected neither to the activity of regularisation (by which variants are suppressed and authoritative versions established, which in practice meant that there was an authoritative poem or other literary reference to it, thereby denoting its legitimacy) nor to commentary and explanation, the other defining feature of legitimate knowledge. Scholarship conducted exegesis and analysis only on those names culturally important enough to merit it (e.g. those in the Erya 爾雅 or the Shijing 詩經 (Classic of Poetry). Bird names that do not tally with authoritative texts are those which have been historically repressed: they constitute Guiyi jun indigenous usage, unknown among (or at least not easily reconcilable with the 'standard' usage of) the bird names of the centre.32

The Significance of ‘Errors’

The manuscripts of The Names of the Hundred Birds show the struggles to take possession of a system of names and birds derived from Chinese empire, the exertion of effort to attain mastery of it, and the obstacles that distance and isolation presented to its acquisition. These difficulties are represented by textual 'mistakes'. ‘Errors’ in the text represent the distance between The Names of the Hundred Birds and orthodox bird knowledge, the knowledge enshrined in encyclopedias, dictionaries, exegeses on the classics, and other authoritative works. The nature of written Chinese makes the effort involved in using obscure words particularly obvious—names that were not common, such as those of birds which are not part of the basic vocabulary, being easy to 'miswrite'. The 'wrong' character can be used, or the character can in some way be incorrect. In addition to the errors that are invariably associated with manuscript copying, it was easy to mistake the forms of characters, to include elements not in the standard versions.33

The frequent 'errors' in the text, the variant characters and the apparently heavy reliance on phonetic equivalents are all consequences of the process of attempting to take possession of a bird world that was not the stuff of 'essential' literacy, in which it would be ensured that the words were all correct, that is, that they had been subjected to a rigorous process of correction and 'regularisation'. Vernacular names raise problems of transcription in Chinese. Since they do not have an established form, other characters must be borrowed to write them down. Thus almost all birds mentioned in the text that are not native to the Dunhuang region or that do not have names derived from some other familiar context (such as 'swamp guardian' buze 護澤) are written 'incorrectly'; 'francolin' (zhégu 黟鶴), or 'tufted duck' (xichi 鴛鴦), both southern birds, are deductions based on graphic or phonetic similarities between what is written in the text and what can be seen in other books. Most of the 'identifications' made here are thus provisional.34

32 Yet whether or not the names it contains can be 'recognised' The Names of the Hundred Birds remains intelligible. Its function is explanatory—it lays out the order of the bird world, making it available for assimilation. As such the text is fully autonomous, teaching the structure of the empire of birds to readers in the Guiyi jun and in the present, allowing both of us to learn how to write bird names and how to understand them.

33 How a name is written can disclose something of its social identity and the social conditions of its acquisition, circulation and reproduction. In print culture the distinction between a name written out by hand and a printed name usually represents a distinction between the private domain of individual effort—a note between friends, or a personal letter—and the institutionalised context of 'publication', whether it be the name printed on a rates bill or the name reproduced in a newspaper gossip column. In manuscript culture, the fact of being written down at all is, as already observed, a mark of social importance (unlike print culture, where almost everyone's name is written down somewhere). Moreover, the conditions of writing, how carefully the name is written, on what kind of paper, and whether it is scrutinised by anyone else to insure against scribal error (the inevitable corollary of non-mechanical reproduction) are all indices of the social significance of what is written. To oversimplify, in a culture of writing by hand, regularity equals power. ‘Error’ can also be seen as autonomy, the use of names that differ from those prescribed by authority, indicating a hierarchy of bird value whose structures do not conform to those of canonical power, an arrangement of the bird world responding to local rather than central needs.

34 This is in itself a reflection of the specific circumstances of the bird empire: names circulate widely, so birds from south China are written about in an oasis on the edge of the Gobi desert, but standardisation is not complete—the names are not reproduced in standard form. The names of all birds except those that are part of the basic vocabulary are difficult to 'spell', since they are not something appearing in everyday writing. Moreover, they are also difficult to check and correct.
Flowers, new leaves and spring warmth are seemingly universal pleasures. For those who live in places where the seasons vary greatly, they summon up an experience of comfort in the bodies and minds of people in all segments of society. Ornamental power annexes these collective pleasures for itself, combining its general authority to describe the movement of time and hence to claim privileged access to the most basic regularities of the world, with the specific pleasures of springtime. Poetic language generally and birds in particular are textually associated with this collective social pleasure. This is of course also an inculcation of what constitutes collective enjoyment, a process of conferring social meaning on non-human phenomena (warmth, light, plants, birds). The Names of the Hundred Birds both draws upon and engenders these social understandings.

Figure 3

Qing encoding of avian order—phoenixes (Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 册 515, p.25a)
that can be registered in material experience: it does not eat,\textsuperscript{37} and thus does not involve itself in relations of exploitation with those it rules. Its rulership, like that of the dragon, is an authority without any kind of material dependency on its subjects, an emanation of the pure energy of righteousness. The phoenix had sovereignty over both heaven and earth, a dream of unrestricted power and also of unimpeded moral rule,\textsuperscript{38} something with which the tiger’s terrifying violence could not compare.

For the Guiyi jun, the phoenix’s power had an even more profound similarity to the power of the emperor than it did in central China. With no effective administrative control over Dunhuang, the emperor was an embodiment of the pure principle of royal government, vital energy and moral goodness, as disengaged from the actual operation of power in the Guiyi jun as the phoenix was from the world of organic life and death.

The phoenix’s relation to his subjects is one of authority realised as perfect and self-sufficient order. Its natural form is thus the ritual parade, in which the structure of government is expressed in the physical organisation of bodies, serving no other purpose than to express order itself.\textsuperscript{39} When the phoenix appears in the forest, all the birds arrive, accompanied by (or likened to) gathering rains and speeding clouds. They line up in ceremonial array, in imitation of the ruler of humans.

The ceremonial array sets out the structure of the bird government. Despite its appearance here in a ritual context, this government was founded on clearly demarcated powers and duties. The drafting of official documents, the supervision of official probity, the defence of the realm, the processes by which birds and the human interests with which they were connected were incorporated into the system of dynastic empire. The ranking of birds recounts a history of avian and human trajectories within the imperial state. The grasp of the ornamental order of avian life, which those struggling to learn to write sought to acquire as part of their own struggle for rank, is a grasp of these histories in condensed form. The

\textsuperscript{37} In commentaries on the \textit{Shijing} the phoenix is said to eat only bamboo shoots, and to rest only in the \textit{wutong 梧桐} tree. See \textit{Chuxue ji, juan 30} (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1973), p.723. However, the \textit{Diwang shiji 帝王世紀} [Worldly record of kings and emperors] quoted in the same source declares that a phoenix witnessed in the imperial palace did not eat living animals (or living insects) and did not step upon living plants; in other words, the phoenix lived only on the ether (\textit{qi 氣}).

\textsuperscript{38} The \textit{Baopu zi 抱朴子} [The master who embraces simplicity] analyses the phoenix's body as a composite of the five colours, identified with the five phases, each structured in terms of a cardinal virtue: “the wood phase is humanity; it is green. The top of the phoenix's head is green, so it is called 'crowned with humanity'. The metal phase is righteousness; it is white. The phoenix's neck is white so it is called 'garlanded with righteousness'. The fire phase is decorum; it is red. The phoenix's back is red so it is called 'bearing decorum'. The water phase is wisdom; it is black, the phoenix's breast is black, and so it is called 'facing towards wisdom'. The earth phase is faith; it is yellow. The phoenix's feet are yellow, so they are called 'standing on faith'.” Quoted in \textit{Guji tushu jicheng 古今圖書集成} [Complete collection of pictures and books, old and contemporary] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1934), ce 515, p.26a. The \textit{Diwang shiji} states that in addition to having all of the five colours on its body, the phoenix's plumage formed three patterns in the form of characters: “The pattern (or 'script'—\textit{wen 文}) on the head says 'compliant with virtue'. The pattern on the back says 'faithful to righteousness'. The pattern on the shoulder says 'humanely wise'.” See \textit{Chuxue ji, juan 30}, p.724.

\textsuperscript{39} Again, this purely ceremonial convocation of the kingdom of birds resembled the ornamental unity of the Guiyi jun with the empire of the central Chinese dynasties. The Guiyi jun encountered the emperor primarily when its emissaries went to the capital. Their chief experience of empire was thus of court ceremonial. The gathering of the government on the unusual occasion of the Phoenix's appearance amongst those struggling to learn to write sought to acquire as part of their own struggle for rank, is a grasp of these histories in condensed form. The
correspondence of bird names and bureaucratic function is not just a diagram or template of 'general knowledge' necessary for 'understanding the world'. Rather, it offers a strategic sense of a complex series of interlocking fields of power. As much as being a guide to 'avian symbolism', The Names of the Hundred Birds outlines the history of relations between birds and structures of authority which structured not only the social division of avian life in the Guiyi jun through instituted systems of ranking, but the field of force operating on and through ornamental writing. To understand how birds were ranked was not simply to assimilate a valued body of knowledge, but to learn the dynamic of a field of struggles translated into an objectified form as a piece of writing.

Crane, Hill Partridge and Kingfisher

The Crane (baihe 白鶴) holds the title of Grand Councillor (zaixiang 宰相) (in practice the office of Prime Minister) and the Hill Partridge (shan zhegu 山鹧鴻) is the Loyal Minister of Upright Remonstrance (zhijian zhongchen 諦諫忠臣), while the Kingfisher (cuibiniao 翠碧鳥) ('the bird of halcyon-blue') is the Attendant Censor for Correction and Impeachment (jiudan shiyu 纂彈侍御). These birds register with particular clarity the effect of Tang institutions on avian life. The structures and practices of the dynastic state and the bureaucratic civil government and its personnel made specific and different investments in cranes, hill partridges and kingfishers. Their different functions and ranks in the avian government equate with the different histories of these birds, and the different forms of power affecting them.

Distinguished by their size and longevity and the purity of their colour, cranes have a position of pre-eminence amongst birds. This placement arises from a long-standing connection between cranes and the most exalted individuals in the political and religious institutions of Chinese dynastic states. Cranes were an object of direct interest to those struggling for prime-ministerial rank, some of whom kept them as pets. The crane is thus 'logically' the head of civil government. In addition to cranes being the target for poetic investments, and a privileged object for poetic attention, the details of crane qualities and habits and the standards for judging them were set out in manuals. A whole technology of crane appraisal existed in written form,

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40 The hierarchy is spatially realised. As a parade it ranks people in order of precedence. On paper it marks their positions by the movement across the page (in fact down and along it)—the placement in columns, running from top to bottom and right to left defines a ranked sequence articulating the structure of importance.

something that produced and was created by the practice of keeping cranes as pets, a hobby of Bai Juyi (772–846) and other leading scholar-officials. Cranes were appropriated physically and symbolically by those in positions of pre-eminence, above all in the political-literary field, those, in other words, who had commanding positions in the most institutionally legitimate and recognised field of symbolic production—classical writing. This field was of course intimately and directly related to the struggle for administrative authority, a struggle determined by and registered in writing skill. The effects and structures of the struggle for political-literary pre-eminence in a field which was largely, but not wholly, dominated by the relationship between writing and competition for office, had a direct effect on the historical placement of cranes.

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Crane histories are written histories, and thus histories of the political destinies of those who wrote. To learn to write well meant at least an acquaintance with writing about cranes. In this way, investments of literary power in cranes were reproduced: cranes were part of literacy, and literacy produced intensified interest in cranes. It is notable, however, that the relationship of cranes to institutionalised political and literary power was essentially private: cranes were part of the private leisure of noted writer-officials, not part of the paraphernalia of public office or its public ceremonies. One of the defining features of the poetic geographies in which cranes were located was their situation in a world apart. Above all, cranes are placed in a relationship of detachment to environments of pollution and struggle, especially amongst smaller, pettier interests. The wetlands in which cranes live are constructed as turbid, sullying environments in the midst of which

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42 This is not an official post, simply a description of behaviour.
43 This is the literal meaning of the name, as translated by Paul Kroll in “The halcyon kingfisher in medieval Chinese poetry,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104.2 (1984): 245. He comments, in reference to a poem about the bird by the late-Tang poet Han Wo (844–923): “The bird of halcyon-blue ... is a kingfisher whose shimmering blue feathers are tinted with metallic green, or it may be a species of snipe, another small fisher sometimes confused with the halcyon” (ibid). He refers to the citations in the *Gujin tusbu jicheng* (ce518, p.53a). The chief source for the identification of the bird of halcyon-blue as the kingfisher is the *Erya yi* 爾雅翼 [Erya supplement] which states, “Present-day people call it the bird of halcyon-blue; they also call it the fish dog. Sometimes small ones are called fish dogs and big ones are called emerald slaves” (quoted in *Gujin tusbu jicheng*).

44 “Attendant Censor” (shiyu) is Hucker’s translation; he notes, however, that the title refers to any kind of censor (*Dictionary*, p.431). Correction and impeachment (jiudan) are activities of the office rather than a formal description of its duties.

45 As well as connoting gerontocracy, longevity was of course also a mark of social privilege, since it was by and large secured by good diet and avoidance of the strains of work.

46 Commentarial literature stated that the crane was distinguished by calling at midnight, and that its cry was high and clear, able to be heard over distance corresponded with the capacity to divide time, was also given explicit formulation in some of Bai Juyi’s poetry, where a dialogue between the crane and various other birds allows the former to assert its pre-eminence. See *Bai Juyi ji* [Collected works of Bai Juyi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), *juan* 36, pp.838–9. See also Madeline K. Spring, “The celebrated cranes of Po Chü-i,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111.1 (1999): 17–18.
crane purity survives without stain. Cranes are also presented in structural contrast with smaller, pettier birds driven by less dignified motives. These contrasts are often seen as allegorical: the literatus is a crane in an arena of moral corruption and pettiness. From the viewpoint of the social division of avian life, the significant thing is the way in which the logic of political and literary competition structures the social identities of cranes. The possession of literary capital does not always translate into the possession of economic or political capital. Those recognised for their talent as writers cannot always attain office. Crane life is given literary organisation by those who are directly affected by this predicament. The separate-ness of crane-keeping from material urgency and thus from engagement in struggles to make a living, together with the separateness of poetry specifically about cranes from more prosaic forms of writing, the essentially detached relationship to the struggles of the world that underlies much of what is called ‘allegory’ (written when one does not have to write contracts or adjudicate legal cases), produce at the level of literary description a repeated emphasis on the aloof distinction of the crane and its transcendence of the squalor of its context. The effect of literary interests and literary politics on crane life was to stress the detachment of the bird from political existence (both literally—in that it was out of office that scholar-officials played with their pet cranes, and metaphorically—in the contrast between crane purity and dignity and the swamp of lesser birds) while simultaneously asserting the leadership and pre-eminence of cranes in relation to their peers. In this way the social and textual placement of cranes arises in a literary politics defined by the contradictory position of scholars being recognised for writing skill, but ineligible for office in a context where literary talent was supposed to ensure an official career (a practical condition of imperial government, which can never rely on writing alone, but requires political and military force). The professionalisation of writing, the constitution of a more clearly autonomous literary domain separate from the political field, thus contributed to the intensification of interest in cranes.

The Hill Partridge, which is closely allied with the Francolin (zhegu)—both members of the partridge family found in south China—was also a favoured object of poetic description. Indicating its unfamiliarity to Guiyi jun people, a function of the distance of its native habitat from Dunhuang, the

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Figure 5

Qing encoding of avian order—the crane (Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 515, p.30b)
name is not written in standard form in the main manuscript of *The Names of the Hundred Birds*. In the writing of the centre, however, hill partridge and francolin had a prominent place. Both birds dwelt in seclusion in the mountains, associated with the lands of exile in the south whither critics of the imperial government were banished. The francolin was the definitive southern bird, and thus an important part of the literary self-production of exiled ministers, who deployed it as a metonym for the fate of the righteous consigned to the wilds of political disfavour. The francolin was praised for the straightness of the path it made to the sun (with the bright forces of clear *yang* 阳 rather than the conspiratorial feminine forces of *yin* 阴); this, along with the superiority of its meat despite its unprepossessing appearance, added up to a general disregard for the ostentation of power and position and a dedication to unwavering straightness that equated with the ideals of loyal criticism, even if it should result in banishment or obscurity.

Crane and hill partridge form a dyad, corresponding to the division *chao-ye* 朝野 (‘at court and in the wilds’), the modern term for ruling party and opposition party. The government, and politics, is built out of those occupying the seat of power and their critics, those in exile in the wilds, the home of the hill partridge. The minister who remonstrates is the one who faces disfavour and banishment—but in the bird government such figures have a permanent office, forming a regular part of the political order.

The Kingfisher, by contrast, was known for its showy feathers, an important and valued ornament. It too had an association with the south, where it was remarked that local people showed no awareness of the worth of its plumage. At one level there was a powerful linkage between government and glittering plumage, a sense that government was a dazzling, brilliant presentation; the imperial state had the capacity to draw into itself exotic, famous birds. The court’s consumption of feathers made the kingfisher

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Figure 7

Qing encoding of avian order—the kingfisher (Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 518, p. 52a)

Halcyon plumes adorning the hair of palace women attested to the extractive capacities of the imperial state and its power over the southern periphery, the prime site for the production of kingfisher feathers in Tang times. However, literati writers from the Tang and earlier attacked the state’s feathery lusts. Poetic discussions of kingfishers stressed the violence that underlay the trade in feathers, as well as its wasteful ostentation. Power and vanity killed kingfishers for their own ends (unlike parrots and peacocks, which were brought live as tribute, kingfishers served ornamental power posthumously). It is perhaps also significant of the bird state articulated a particular political structuring of geography. Embodying the warm south rather than the frozen north, they incarnated brightness and light, always threatened by darkness and cold. In the bird state, these creatures are where they should be: in charge. The identification of the south with civil administration reflects the conceptual and factual divisions of imperial space: southern birds, innocent creatures distinguished by their brilliance or steadfastness, control the domain of civilian affairs (which are themselves concentrated in the southern hinterland), while the north is a zone of martial power. By accepting and disseminating this structure of avian government, independent Dunhuang adopted a political geography that reproduced the order of the world in the empires of Central China.

The relationship between beautiful birds from the distant periphery and the ornamental power of the centre is a violent one. Adornment conceals abuse: the social appropriation of the brilliance of kingfishers involves the heartless destruction of the bodies of innocent birds. Written into this criticism of the feather trade was an analogy between the cruelty of the state towards birds and the fate of talented officials who ran foul of the corrupt and venal at court. In poetry the kingfisher was constantly described as an object of attack, snared and netted, shot at by children with pellets and preyed on by other birds. The essential contradiction lay between the complete innocence of its life and the dangers that resulted from its splendour. In contrast to other birds which came to grief because of their own folly, the kingfisher lived far from the human world, in fact on the periphery of the empire.

The material connection between kingfishers and the Tang state was thus associated with a description of human political power as vicious and exploitative. The bird state, however, secured the brilliance of the kingfisher without violence. Its talents were successfully incorporated into government service: the kingfisher carried out the task of supervising the morality of bureaucratic functionaries without fearing the attacks that befell its human equivalents.

The presence of two southern birds—kingfisher and hill partridge—at the top of the civil government is perhaps also significant.
The three birds at the top of the avian bureaucracy (crane, hill partridge and kingfisher) embodied literati ideals. Pure, plain, straightforward, brilliant—these virtues of character and of language that were the privileged social capital of the scholarly élites marked the birds off from the vulgar and the commonplace, whether in the form of shallow ostentation or simple mediocrity. Incarnated as unchanging, fixed natures in the bodies and habits of crane, hill partridge/francolin and kingfisher, these attributes were by analogy the characteristics required of the officials who ruled the state. The hierarchy of birds, like the social hierarchy of humans, was founded on the principle that those at the top were distinguished not only by their innate qualities but also by being few in number. Cranes, large and generally uncommon (in north China at least),^58 supplied an image of the distinction appropriate to the head of the bureaucracy: old, and of unimpeachable purity. A territorial dimension was also involved. Rare birds came from far

/a that kingfisher feathers were primarily a feminine ornament, leading an austere male élite to condemn their use as cruel frivolity. A poem on the subject by Chen Zi’ang 陈子昂 (661–702) was particularly trenchant:

Their bodies are broken in those lands of burning sun
That their feathers may be strewn in the shadows of jade halls ...
Even though they reside in the most distant reaches
How could the fowler’s net not find them of a sudden?
To have many qualities truly makes for misery; sadly I sigh for these precious birds.”


^54 In addition, the habits of the kingfisher suited it to the work of surveying and checking. It remained at its post despite the assaults of wind and rain (a common Chinese metaphor for political storms), swooping down from its vantage point on high to catch its quarry. The fish that it caught might be wrongdoers, or they might be people of talent (plucked from the waters of obscurity by the kingfisher, which was able to detect the flash of brilliance amongst the murk). This tenacity and vigilance, as well as its position of elevation above the hurly-burly of bureaucratic life, made the king-

/isher a perfect candidate for the job of policing bureaucratic morals. A poem by Qian Qi 錢起 (722–80), “Xianyu cuiniao 雉魚翠鳥 [The kingfisher holding the fish]” (quoted in Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 518, p.53b), describes it thus:

Suddenly descending from the tall tree,
Breaking the waves it catches the submerged fish,
A flash of emerald light going by.
(Fish, both a glittering prize and an elusive target that must be caught, are open to different symbolic appropriations. They can constitute what the bureaucratic state wants to have or what it wants to drive out.)

^55 Injustice in the north produced victims in the south, exiled officials who heard the cries of hill partridges and francolins in the wilderness and of kingfishers ripped apart to satisfy vanity in the capital. This was also an articulation of separation, the sadness of lives divided by the forces of imperial politics: kingfishers were wrenched from their homes, while the francolin’s call reminded the exiles who heard it of their distance from the pleasures of family life (and the pleasures of holding political office at the centre of power). Bai Juyi, listening to the mournful cries of the francolin in the north, wonders how these birds can be so sad when they are at home, surrounded by their fellows—unlike himself, as he endures the pains of a life in provincial obscurity (see “Shan zhegu 山鹧鸪 [The hill partridge], Bai Juyi ji, juan 12, p.231).

^56 “Shan zhegu ci” 山鹧鸪詞 [Song of the hill partridge] by Li Bai 李白 (701–62) expres-

/see this ideology:

On top of the peak of bitter bamboo the autumn moon glitters,
On the southern branch of the bitter bamboo the hill partridge flies,
It takes in marriage a Hun goose groom from the mountains of Yan.
Wishing to take me back to the ‘Goose Gate’,
‘Mountain fowl’ Pheasant and Tartar Pheasant come to offer encouragement.
Southern fowl are often cheated by northern fowl.
The severe frost of the purple forts is like swords and spears,
Wanting to nest in the blue pawlonia, it is hard to break trust.
Today I swear to die rather than go,
Mournful cries call with alarm, and tears stain the robes.

See Quan Tang shi [Complete Tang poetry], juan 167 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960) [hereafter ‘Zhonghua Shuju edition’], p.1729. This poem is replete with southern and northern images: the peaks of bitter bamboo (Pteroblastus amarus) in the south, and the purple forts of the north, reached through the Yanmen 羽門 [Goose Gate] in Shanxi, through which migrating geese were said to pass on their seasonal journeys.

^57 At the root of this geographic structure is the social placement of hill partridge/ francolin and kingfisher as birds associated with the cultural production of the bureaucratic élites. These birds served as high-level officials because they were the birds that those at the top of the civil administration wrote about to dramatise their own situation. If the allegories that lay behind the deployment of kingfishers and hill partridges/francolins in literati poetry were perhaps unclear to people living in an isolated Central Asian oasis in the tenth century because the birds themselves were only names, the fact of their connection with the writings of ruling bureaucrats (and thus with ruling bureaucrats themselves) did register, as the structure of the bird government attests.

^58 In the present the common crane (Grus grus; see De Schauensee, The birds of China, p. 200) is distributed throughout Gansu. See Wang Xiangting, ed., Gansu jizhi tongzhi zhi [Vertebrate fauna of Gansu] (Lanzhou: Gansu Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 1991), pp. 429–30.
59 Worthy men could, like the hill partridge, remain unknown, hidden in the depths of the hills. Alternatively, like the kingfisher in the south, they could go unrecognised by those around them despite their brilliance. In the bird empire, however, worthies did not languish in remote obscurity, nor were they persecuted. The state was ruled by the most distinguished species, drawn forth by the radiant power of the phoenix. A perfect fit existed between official responsibilities and the qualities of those who fulfilled them. The cultural fantasy of distinguished birds appearing in vast numbers, the fantasy represented by images of the thousand cranes, hinges on an essential contradiction—the abundance of the valuable, uncommon thing. The corollary of this in the fantasy of bureaucratic government is a surfeit of talented people, embarrassing the state with their riches.59

**Figure 8**

*Qing encoding of avian order—the goshawk (Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 516, p.1a)*

60 This is the name used in the present for the northern goshawk (*Accipter gentilis*). See Wang, *Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi*, p.351, and de Schauensee, *The birds of China*, p. 162.

61 'Inspired Strategist' refers to the eunuch-dominated Army of Inspired Strategy (Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles in imperial China*, p.419). The 'Six Armies' was in the 800s a specific reference to the 'Forest of Plumes Army' (*yulin jun* 羽林軍), the 'Militant as Dragons Army' (*longwu jun* 龍武軍) and the 'Army of Inspired Strategy' (*shence jun* 神策軍), each of which was divided into two sections (Left and Right), making six in all. These were the principal military forces in the capital after the An Lushan rebellion; the eunuch-controlled 'Inspired Strategy Army' dominated the other two (Hucker, pp.317, 325). The rank of Inspired Strategist of the Left was held by Zhang Anzuo 張安左 during the brief period when the Jinshan guo was established at Dunhuang. See the eulogy for him in P.3653(3), transcription in *Dunhuang maozhenzan jiaolu bing yanjiu* [Dunhuang eulogies, annotated and transcribed, with accompanying research], ed. Rao Zongyi (Taipei: Hsin-wen Feng, 1994), p.217.

62 This name is used for a variety of birds of prey, including the western marsh harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*—see De Schauensee, *The birds of China*, p.159); *yaozi* is given as an alternative vernacular name for this bird, which is normally called *baiou yaozi* 白頭鷲子. See Wang ed., *Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi*, p.354. *Yaozi* most commonly refers to the northern sparrowhawk (*Accipter nisus*—see Hoffmann, *Glossar*, p.140, and De Schauensee, *The birds of China*, p.163), which is distributed throughout Gansu (see Wang, *Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi*, p.351).
Roving Scouts—*youyi jiangjun* 遊奕將軍). The Inspired Strategist controls the armies at the palace, while the General of the Roving Scouts commands detachments of soldiers recruited for their bravery which act as a strike force on the borderlands. This accords with the organisation of hawks in the Tang state: the armies of Inspired Strategy had their own mews. The goshawk (as the more exalted hunting bird, able to strike down larger prey) is located at the centre, while the sparrowhawk (favoured for the pursuit of smaller quarry in the thickets and bushes) patrols the periphery. Defense of the avian realm has the same division between the heartland of the palace and the distant border as the human empire (in the traditional ordering of space, hawks were associated with the North and the West, its zones of the nomadic pastoral peoples and of Dunhuang itself. The Guiyi jun is thus positioned in this avian geography as part of the territory of hawks). Thus the northern warriors complement the southern scholars.

The ferocity of birds of prey is identified with a military function, which duplicated the position of hunting birds in human society. Hunting-bird

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63 The *youyi jiangjun* is the *youyi shi* 遊奕使, or Roving Scout Legate, a military official from the Tang. An entry in the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive mirror for aid in government) cites the selection of Lun Gongren 論弓仁 in 708 as a Roving Scout Legate for Shufang jun 朔方軍. This was in connection with campaigns against the Turks in the area north of the bend in the Yellow River. The commentary on the text says that the Roving Scout Legate commanded mobile troops to patrol and scout. A further quotation from the *Tongdian* 通典 by Du You 杜佑 states that “those serving as Roving Scouts were selected from amongst the army's bravest men, familiar with mountains and rivers and springs and wells, to scout beyond the border fortifications day and night and capture prisoners for interrogation.” *Zizhi tongjian*,juan 209 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1956), p.6621. The office of Legate of Roving Scouts was also held by military officers of the Guiyi jun. A discussion of the position appears in Feng Peihong, "Wan Tang Wudai Song chu Guiyijun wuzhi junjiang yanjiu," pp.162–4. Its key function was scouting and intelligence, especially guarding against marauders. The rank appears in the "Zhang Yichao bianwen" 張義潮變文 (P.2962) and in the "Zhang Huaishe bianwen" 張淮深變文 (P.3451); see the transcriptions in Zhou Shaoliang, Zhang Yongquan and Huang Zheng, *led.*, Dunhuang bianwen jiangjingwen yinyuan jijiao [Dunhuang transformation texts, Sutra lecture texts, and Nidānas, collected and annotated] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Chubanshe, 1998), vol.1, pp.137, 148. Mair translates the term as 'border guard', explaining the rank in a note on his translation of the "Wu Zixu bianwen" 伍子胥變文. See Victor Mair, *Tun-huang popular narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.170, 295. The *youyi shi* Bai Yongji 白永吉 appears in a report regarding the regional political situation in the Gansu corridor from 884 (S.25889), transcribed in Rong, *Guiyi jun shi yanjiu*, p.303; the 881 funerary text for Kang Tongxin 康通信 lists *youyi* among his titles (P.4660/5—transcription in Rao, *Dunhuang maozhenzan jiaolu bing yanjiu*, p.192). In both cases these officials were involved with border problems in the eastern part of Guiyi jun territory.


65 An archetypal reference is that in the *Shijing* 詩經: “Swift flies the falcon to the thickly-wooded forest of the north,” a poem which is part of the Odes of Qin, the kingdom of the west (poem 132, “Chenfeng” 晨風 [Dawn wind], in Qinfeng 晋風, *Mao shi zhengyi* [Orthodox meaning of the Mao commentary on the Classic of Poetry], juan 6–4, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.105 [reprint ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980 (hereafter 'Zhonghua Zhushu reprint')], vol.1, p.373, translated by James Legge in *The Chinese classics*, vol.4: *The Shue Kung* [Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960], p.200. Interestingly, though, the ode’s name for falcon (or merlin)—the standard commentary says that the ‘dawn wind’ is a *zi* 翼, which Schafer identifies as a merlin; see Falconry in Tang Times,” *Toung Pao* 46 (1958), p.308 is *chenfeng*, ‘Dawn wind’, which is obviously connected with the east and beginnings, rather than with the west and death. Indeed, in the early schemes of correspondence between birds and the five cardinal points and five phases, hawks were associated with the east and with the colour green (or glaucous)—this is set forth in the putative Zhou 周 dynasty work *Qin jing* 秦經 [Classic of avifauna], where the west is associated with the heron. See Edward H. Schafer, “The auspices of T’ang,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83 (1963): 198. Of course, this association of hawks with the east would concur with the Korean and Manchurian origins of hawks given as tribute. The name *haidong qing* 海東青 “East of the Sea Green” for a kind of Manchurian gerfalcon (the kind that Jurchen tribes were obliged to give to the Liao 遼 as tribute, the burden of which led them to rebel and establish their own dynasty) reproduces this correspondence with the east and greenness. On *haidong qing* see Schafer, “Falconry in T’ang times,” p.309. ‘Haidong’ was a literary name for the Korean peninsula. In an extensive meditation on the word family *chen*, Scott Davis has outlined the complex linkages between clams, sacrificial meat, the east and the beginning of spring. See Scott Davis, “Originating instrumentality and the *chen* family,” *East Asian History* 10 (Dec. 1995): 19–52. For comments on *chen* (dawn), see pp.48–9. Davis notes that in the *Li jì* 禮記 [The book of rites] in late autumn, wild geese enter the great waters to become clams. Ibid., p.49.
violence is only unleashed when it has been officially permitted. As generals, the goshawk and sparrowhawk serve as guardians of order, defending state and society against internal revolt or outside attack, not as violent oppressors of their fellow birds. Their potentially disruptive force is given a discipline and a logic which equates with that of falconry. This control and discipline over authorised violence was, of course, what the state aspired to with its own military forces. Hawk and hawker are thus a paradigm for emperor and general.

66 Zhang Xiaobiao (active in the 820s) explicitly states this in the following poem on a hunting hawk:

She imagines the level plain afar, where the hares are plump just now;
She turns her honed bill a thousand times — and shakes her feather coat;
Just let her peck loose this knot in her silken cord ...!
But unless she got the call of a man she would not dare to fly.

See Quan Tang shi, juan 506 (Zhonghua Shuju edition, p.5752). This translation is by Edward Schafer, who considers that it shows "the trained hawk as an emblem of a bold

Peacock

Next in the array is the Peacock (kongque wang 孔雀王), bird of royalty and its restricted inner space, the palace. "King Peacock has exclusive command of the forbidden gate" (the gate of the palace). A king himself, the peacock serves as the palace's guardian, controlling its entrance and exit. The peacock constitutes a kind of subordinate royalty; although not the phoenix (emperor), he nonetheless stands for the palace and its splendour. Of course, the peacock was literally a part of the palace environment: live birds sent as tribute dwelt in its grounds.

As doorkeeper of the Forbidden City, the peacock is Janus-headed. It belongs to the domain of privacy and restriction, the enclosed inner garden—the hidden world of the royal household, a world of women, a spectacle offered to the emperor alone. But it is also the external projection of that unseen world, like the palace gate, an imposing outer perimeter which suggests the magnificence concealed within. Peacock feathers, seen so widely on the grandest state occasions, particularly receptions for foreign dignitaries, made royalty visible. As a decorative item, they were deployed in the complex manoeuvres of court ceremonial, where the geography of the palace, a matrix of open spaces and closed doors (forbidden gates), was both setting and object of display. Peacock feathers helped to create the glittering surface of royal authority.

In a sense the peacock was a captured foreign king. It originated in the peripheries of the empire, either the far west or the south. Peacocks arrived at the palace through the symbolic domination of distant regions, whether as gifts from neighbouring states or as compulsory tribute products submitted by frontier prefectures. Their presence at the centre quite literally resulted from the acquiescence of potentially restive peoples to imperial power, an acquiescence registered in the sending of the birds or their feathers to the capital. Peacocks came from places dominated symbolically rather than
administratively, ruled by leaders fully or partly outside the bureaucratic imperial system—kings or chieftains, royalty in their own right like the peacock himself. In another respect, the peacock was an appropriation of non-Chinese traditions of royalty. Indic and Persian political cultures gave a prominent place to peacocks both in the decoration of royal power and in its mythologies.\textsuperscript{71} This web of foreign traditions enveloped the peacock, defining it as both royal and alien. Its presence in the palace of the bird state invoked these regal associations while confirming its subordination to the imperial authority of the phoenix, much as Tang emperors and their successors appropriated the royal charisma of the rulers of peacock-producing lands by their supposed acknowledgment of imperial superiority. The invisible splendour of Emperor Phoenix was invoked in the lesser majesty of a foreign king.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{Guardian of the Marshes}

The Guardian of the Marshes (\textit{buze niao} 護澤鳥)\textsuperscript{73} (literally, 'the bird which guards the swamps') acts as sentinel, guarding the portals of the palace, in charge of 'divisions and obstacles'.\textsuperscript{74} Clearly a wetland bird, its name conveys its defining attribute—protection. Classical exegesis described it thus:

Called the guardian of the marshes, it resembles the 'water owl' [said to be the gull in some accounts]. Grey and black in colour, it habitually dwells in the marshes. When it sees people it always calls out and does not depart, resembling an official in charge of guarding and protection, hence its name.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{71} In a legend of the former lives of the Buddha popular in Tang China, the peacock king performed miracles of charity which brought succour to the common people. See Schafer, \textit{The golden peaches of Samarkand}, p.98.

\textsuperscript{72} See for example:
The peacock knows kindness and has no intention of flying.
The cage opened, it resides willingly in the palace quarters.
The tailor too sees the light gauze brocade, And wishes to take the golden feathers to embroider dancing robes.

\textsuperscript{73} This bird is identified with the \textit{zeyu} 澤虞 mentioned in the \textit{Erya zhushu} 爾雅注疏 (Notes and commentary on the \textit{Erya}, juan 10, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.83 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.2649), commentary by Guo Pu 郭璞). See Xiang, \textit{Dunhuang bianwen xuanzhu}, p.776.

\textsuperscript{74} Literally 'The Bird which Guards the Marshes is in charge of Divisions and Obstacles.' 'Divisions and Obstacles' (\textit{bie dang} 別當) are mentioned in connection with the detachments of sentries that look after the five outer gates of the palace. \textit{Xin Tang shi, juan} 23a, \textit{yiweizhi (shang)} [Monograph on parades and guards, pt 11, p.483].

\textsuperscript{67} The exhibitions of the peacock were implicitly a display of resplendent masculinity, analogous perhaps to the virility that the emperor in his palace was supposed to incarnate. The miraculous fertility of peacocks, which were said to produce offspring without sexual contact (see Schafer, \textit{Golden peaches of Samarkand}, p.98), bore some resemblance to the emperor's supposed embodiment of potent male energies. King Peacock's dominion over the palace evoked royal maleness, witnessed privately but known publicly, a sovereignty over the inner world of the imperial harem.

\textsuperscript{68} For instance soldiers in the guard of honour at imperial audiences for foreign kings and at the new year and winter solstice festivals wore peacock feather cloaks. \textit{Xin Tang shi, juan} 23a, \textit{yiweizhi (shang)} [Monograph on parades and guards, pt 11, p.483].

\textsuperscript{69} For example: soldiers in the guard of honour (see Schafer, \textit{Golden peaches of Samarkand}, p.98).

\textsuperscript{70} Indeed, in the third century the excessive demands of a compulsory peacock levy on the people of Annam was said to have been the cause of a revolt. Two peacocks were also sent to Zhuangzong 莊宗 (r.923–26) of the Latter Tang 後唐 in 923 by the Wuyue 吳越 (see \textit{Erya zhushu}, juan 10, Shisanjing zhushu edition (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.2649), commentary by Guo Pu 郭璞).
In pre-Tang times the bird also had the name Supervisor of the Marshes (zeyu), the title of an official in the Zhou li 周禮, the canonical text on the ceremonial order of government in the Zhou dynasty and the definitive guide to the ritualistic organisation of political authority. This official protected royal rights over marshes, lands that in antiquity were the ruler’s special property. The correspondence between the bird’s aggressive territoriality and the work of appointed guardians of restricted places was evidently of long standing.

Like the peacock controlling the gate of the forbidden inner sanctum, the Guardian of the Marshes is responsible for policing entrances and exits, maintaining through armed force the boundaries between the palace and the outside world. The bird state required its guards and sentries. The palace had to be protected: saying no to those without the qualifications to enter maintained the rightful order of things. By organising the movements of officials, gates preserved and enacted the official hierarchy. Moreover, gates and their guards showed the hierarchy of authority for what it really was—a system of exclusion, in which social privilege rested on an aggressive, forbidding force—guards that ‘divide and obstruct’, a low-level policing which performed the unattractive business of keeping the line between rulers and ruled. The evanescent magnificence of phoenix and peacock required just such shrill and fierce guardians. Their radiant splendour could only display itself in its disinterested magnanimity if the mottled black and grey sentinel, the denizen of the swamp, stood at the palace’s outermost perimeter refusing entry to those not authorised to come in. The order of birds in space was not spontaneous; trespass remained an ever-present threat which sentries had to guard against.

The correspondence between the bird’s aggressive territoriality and the work of appointed guardians of restricted places was evidently of long standing.

As the palace obstructs the external gaze, it restricts the view of the eye of power. The political architecture of the walled, guarded palace is the reverse of the panoptic prison in which the all-seeing centre keeps the enclosed periphery under constant surveillance: the centre of the palace is not a vantage point from which everything can be seen, but a site of concealment. The concentric walls of the palace constitute a succession of limitations around the central enclosure, which offer seclusion and privacy to the exalted body they contain, but place it in a position of dependence on its own guardians, cutting it
Marshes (an ancient royal monopoly), prisons and palaces share an identity as guarded places where ordinary beings will be challenged. Fearlessness distinguishes the Guardian of the Marshes: it overturns the normal relationship between birds and people, refusing to take flight when confronted with a human presence. This territoriality shows boundaries to be part of the fundamental order of the world. Everywhere has its guardians. Protection, which presupposes legitimate access (and legitimate occupancy), is a crucial component of the operation of authority at all levels; the palace is simply the most exalted form of it. The cry of the wetland bird, protesting against those who trespass where they do not belong, and the challenges of the guards at palace gates, declaring verbally who may enter and who may not, reproduce each other. The restriction of access to the corridors of power is as natural and inevitable as the intransigent resistance of the Guardian of the Marshes to intruders in its swampy domain.

Lesser Runner

The vigilant restrictive power of sentries coexists with a more subtle spatial co-ordination of the political hierarchy. After the guardian of the marshes comes the ‘Lesser Runner’ (xi chizi 細塹子) which holds the post of Secretarial Receptionist. This official oversaw the introduction of visitors and official business at court audiences, presenting them to the emperor in the throne room.80 Choreographing the vital business of arrivals and departures in formal meetings, the Receptionists oversaw the movement of people and paper that constituted the order of government. The orchestration of comings and goings on official gatherings required an acute knowledge of rank and hierarchy, which the meetings themselves enacted physically. The question of who should be admitted and in what order, lay at the heart of royal ceremony, which was in effect a ballet of restriction and permission.81

\[\text{off from what it rules. By contrast, the confined, restricted space of the modern prison makes it a place where power can be exerted in an intense and pervasive form, where the doings of inmates are under constant observation, a level of power which the imperial order can only dream of. (To a great extent the fortified palace gates, declaring verbally who may enter and who may not, reproduce each other. The restriction of access to the corridors of power is as natural and inevitable as the intransigent resistance of the Guardian of the Marshes to intruders in its swampy domain.)}\]

80 Tongshi shiben 通事舍人. See des Rotours, Traité des Fonctionaires et Traité de l’Armée, p.188.

81 If the bird’s official duties are clearly of profound significance to the whole order of the state, its identity is not ‘Lesser runner’ is a literal translation of the name as it appears in the main version of the text. The editors of the Hanyu dacidian 漢語大詞典 have decreed that the name refers to a kind of sparrowhawk (see vol.10, p.769), their argument being that it is the same as the word ‘chi’ written with the bird radical—i.e. 鸟 (see vol.12, pp.1081 and 1090), a bird they identify with the yaoying 鶡鷥 or sparrowhawk (Accipiter nisus—see Hoffmann, Glossar, p.140, for yaoying). Chen Zuolong contends that the word is the same as ‘zhi’ 鳥, a rare word for a small predatory bird, perhaps a variant of the more common zhi 鳥. See Chen Zuolong, “Guanyu Dunhuang guchao Baimiao ming,” pp.648, 654. The entries in the Hanyu dacidian also identify chi 鳥 with the kite (yuán 鳥), particularly the black kite, Milvus migrans. See Hoffmann, Glossar, pp.146, 284, De Schauensee, The birds of China, pp.155–6). The main problem is that the standard way for writing chi in the sense of ‘kite’ appears elsewhere in The Names of the Hundred Birds in the compound laochi. The words ‘xi chizi’ are written clearly in the manuscript, so there is no ambiguity of transcription. The ‘chi’ 鳥 of xi chizi is an extremely obscure word meaning to move quickly, translated here as ‘runner’. However, in the fragmentary version of the text in the Pelliot collection it is written with another character: 跳, also pronounced ‘chi’, that means the viscera of birds and animals. Clearly, the name’s transliteration was unstable and there was no agreed way of writing it. Furthermore, it cannot be reconciled with the names found in authoritative works. The bird’s identity is thus either absolutely circumscribed—it is native only to this text—or enormously extended, identified through a range of different possible correspondences and resemblances (phonetic, semantic, graphic and social) with a great variety of other ‘known’ birds. The bird in question could have been one with a local name that had no ‘orthodox’ transcription, or else an unfamiliar creature (a bird from outside whose name had never been seen in its authoritative form) with a name Dunhuang people did not know how to write—that is, that they wrote in ‘error’. In the latter case, identification becomes a consideration of the possible horizons of error, of what it was that the copyists were ‘trying’ to write.

The only thing that ‘describes’ the bird is its performance of the duties of the Receptionist; its only linkage to an external frame of reference is its place in the hierarchy. In other words, the social meaning of the lesser runner is perfectly clear within the context of the text. The name could have been deployed in other pieces of writing, its position in the order of things spelled out by its function in the bird government.
Preserving the order of the palace—the defense of its gates, the policing of access, the preservation of an orderly sequence of movements and a proper division of space (in which who could go where was a function of who was who)—was thus a defining feature of the bird government. The salience of these activities marks the centrality of the palace in political life. Guiyi jun contacts with imperial power, which were overwhelmingly in the context of official audiences given (or denied) to its visiting emissaries, ought to have left it with a powerful impression of royal politics as a presentation, carefully stage-managed by the officials mentioned in the text. The peacock, the Guardian of the Marshes, and the Lesser Runner enact the cultural mystique and cultural authority of the palace—unseen, restricted and remote, but omnipresent, essential to the imagining of royal power.

**Swan Goose**

The head of the Board of Rites is, fittingly, the Swan Goose (bongyan 鴻雁),\(^{82}\) the quintessential bird of ritual. Swan geese were one of the preeminent incarnations of order in the world, an example of the perfection of disciplined hierarchy espoused by the ideology of the rites (li 禮). This order was both temporal and social,\(^{83}\) punctuating both rising and falling, the beginnings of things and their ends. The wild goose was also a yang creature, coming north with the ascent of the warmth and moving south with the onset of cold. In the time of a regulated calendar the movement of migrating wild geese marked the visible and organic temporal order that the socially produced abstract and objectified time of the calendar set forth in a systematic format.

This ritual order referred not only to the smoothness of appointment and retirement in officialdom, assumed to have a rhythmic rising and falling as regular as the movement of the seasons,\(^{84}\) and to the acceptance of a place in the order of precedence as complete as that of geese knowing their

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82 *Anser cygnoides*. See also Hoffmann, *Glossar*, p.58, and De Schauensee, *The birds of China*, p.140. It too is a bird of the marshes, which migrates from breeding grounds in Manchuria and Mongolia to south China. The swan goose is not listed in Wang Xiangting’s work on the vertebrate fauna of Gansu, although the bean goose (*Anser fabillus*—see De Schauensee, *ibid.*, p.141) and the greylag goose (*Anser anser*, *ibid.*, p.140) are both noted as present. See Wang, *Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi*, pp.316-18. De Schauensee says that the swan goose migrates through Eastern Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang. See *ibid.*, p.140.

83 In the *Li ji* the appearance of wild geese was the marking of mengchun 孟春, zhongqiu 中秋 and jidong 季冬—the beginning of spring, the middle of autumn and the end of winter. See *Yueling 月令* in *Li ji zhengyi* (Orthodox meaning of the Book of Rites), mengchun, juan 14; zhongqiu, juan 16; jidong, juan 17, Shisanjing zhushu edition, pp.127, 145, 155 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, pp.1355, 1373, 1383). See James Legge, trans., *Li Chi: the book of rites* (edited with introduction and study guide by Chu Chai and Winberg Chai) (New York: University Books, 1967), vol.1, pp.251, 291, 306.
place in the flight pattern, but also to the family. Geese were prescribed gifts in marriage, their supposed fidelity to each other and perfect responsiveness to the movement of jin and yang seen in seasonal migration, supplying an ideal (but real, in the sense of physically existing) model of the roles of husband and wife. Geese were also an object on which the ethics of the relationship between brothers was inscribed, the harmony of the flight formation expressing the perfection of the bond between male siblings, untroubled by property disputes or fratricidal struggles for political power.\textsuperscript{85}

Dunhuang songs and poems are filled with depictions of geese flying past, just as those of central China are.\textsuperscript{86} The swan goose was a polyvalent symbol, but one whose meanings were systematically interrelated to form a self-reinforcing network. It constituted one of the very building blocks of the social vision of how things were. \textit{The Names of the Hundred Birds} partakes of the stability of the social identity of wild geese, a stability formed from cultural reproduction.\textsuperscript{87} The order of the family and the state, the general sense that things were in their rightful place, were read from and inscribed on the order of geese in flight. But the presence of flocks of geese migrating south in autumn and north in spring made this figure in the sky visible to all,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{84} The commentary on the chunguan 春官 [Spring officials] section of the Zhouli says that dafu 大夫 held wild geese in ceremonies because the coming and going of geese accorded with the seasonal periods and their ranked formations maintained order. Those who held the rank of dafu were to be appointed and retired in accord with the Way and be selected or dismissed according to Morality. It was desired that they should be like geese in knowing the proper time, and that in their actions and movements they should not lose order. For this reason they would hold a goose in their hands. See chunguan in Zhouli zhushu 周禮注疏 \cite{S7} p.124 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.762).
\item \textsuperscript{85} As in the term yanxu 雁序 (wild goose order). See the preface to the poem "Chou mishu di jian ji muxia zhugong" 酬秘書弟兼寄下諸公 [To my younger brother, the secretary, and to the gentlemen of the office] by Gao Shi 老渾 (716–65): “Our clan’s younger brother (zudi 族弟) is a secretary (mishu 秘書): the whitened eyebrowed ones of the wild goose order once parted as the wind-blown dust, all become people of north, south, east and west” \cite{16,19}. Wild goose are also guests (see zhonggu in the Yueling Liji—Liji zhengyi, juan 16, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.145) (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.1373). Legge translates this as: “In the last month of autumn ... The wild geese come (and abide) like guests.” He comments in a footnote, “The addition of guests here is a difficulty. It is said on the previous month that ‘the wild geese come’: are these here the same as those, or are they others, the younger birds, as some suppose, which had waited after the former, and still found it necessary to remain on their passage to recruit their strength?” \cite{29}. As guests, they are thus associated with all of the ceremonies due to those who are not part of the regular order of domination, who come from outside. The wild goose was both sojourner, passing guest, and constituent of the permanent household.
\item \textsuperscript{86} For example:
At the gauze window the solitary goose calls
Tears fall in thousands of rows.
\cite{26}, in Ren, Dunhuang gezi zongbian, vol.3, p.1289, “Shi’er shi” 十二時 [Songs on the twelve periods, apparently a comment on failure to attain office].
\item \textsuperscript{87} Wild geese were the very essence of an ordered world in which the movement of time (conceived of as an oscillation of male and female principles) and the hierarchies of governmental, marital and fraternal relationships overlapped onto each other. The instinctive and automatic grasp of ritual correctness—conceived of as proper position in a ranked formation—that wild geese displayed was one of the central images in discourse about social order in Chinese tradition. Wild geese were marker buoys, something by which society took its bearings. Geese flew past on their migrations with an unvarying regularity, providing a sense of the absolute fixity of things. This fixity was created and made socially intelligible by the endless reproduction of the image of wild geese and the constant reiteration of its meaning in commentary and exegesis.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
and not just existing in the domain of pure representation constituted by poetic language. It connected spaces, just as the order of ritual aspired to a common code of practice and morality across territory. The migration of geese created a link between places, a linkage that structurally resembled poetic unity. In poetry, people watching geese fly by thought of absent friends and lovers; geese in flight engendered a consciousness of spatial position (by creating a sense of unified time through the movement of the seasons) and thus of a consciousness of other places with which one was somehow joined. In showing separation, it conveyed an underlying unity. Wild geese were seen everywhere, but they remained aloof. Flying overhead, they were suspended above the world of common birds; as wetland creatures they belonged to a different universe from swallows and sparrows. Supremely ideological, the wild goose engendered both identity and hierarchy, a sense of commonality and of distinction that founded the social order of Guiyi jun Dunhuang on the same basis as that of central China. Wild geese were one of the great figures of symbolic unity.

Swan

Migrating geese and swans also fused ritual with writing: “Grand Scribe Swan (bonghe 鴻鶴) prepares documents.” Swans, herons, storks and cranes share size and whiteness, manifesting the purity of uncorrupted bright yang qualities in the damp and turbid yin world of the wetlands. The salient aspect of these birds is not the features which distinguish them but the common qualities that they share, by which means they represent an equivalent set of values. Like swan geese (bongyan), swans (bonghu 鴻鶴) were migratory birds, which flew in formation. A semantic link joins the name with writing: ‘bong’ 鴻, meaning wild goose is a common metaphor for a letter. Migrating geese and swans were co-opted into the symbolisation of information and news.

The bong of wild goose and wild swan also meant dignity of intent, elevation of purpose. This was founded on a hierarchy of birds in which physical differences connoted moral differences. It was also a sign of order and propriety. Both swan and goose connoted the ordered formations of officials at court.

The order of swans in flight and the order of writing share pattern, sequence and regularity: both are governed by protocols of form. The draft-
The order of birds in Guiyi Jun Dunhuang

The grandeur and order of migrating birds is joined to the practices and ideologies of formal documents, particularly letters: the word *hong* 鴻, wild goose, which distinguished the larger varieties of wild geese and swans, denoted greatness in general (that is greatness of intention or reputation) as well as the surging flood-like quality that great pieces of writing were supposed to have. Writing was supposed to be majestic, sweeping across space, taking in everything. The pure whiteness of swans, the order of their flight, its triumph over distances and its temporal regularity (as regular as the processing of documents by an ideal chancellery, composed and sent out on time, creating the endlessly renewed link between court and province that constituted properly co-ordinated government) was located in this great written order, a spatial and temporal totality in which the operations of bureaucratic government, the almost magical figure of the master writer and the individual piece of writing (both as a sequence of thoughts and as a physical object) and the order of the universe were fused into a whole.

Flying swans and geese formed part of the pattern of the world (*wen* 文). Their flight was regulated and linear, possessing the defining attributes of correctly formed writing and correctly practised ceremonies (composed of straight movements, where status and position were expressed in ranks, that is by lining up—in sum, rectitude), the line translated into a moral quality as well as the quality that the line expressed. Ceremonies and writing were instruments for the realisation of regularity in the patterning of the world, a regularity of which the flights of geese and swans partook. These migrating birds revealed the great structural oppositions in the world—cold and warmth, north and south—enacted in space as a moving line, the same pattern exhibited in the physically and morally perfected movements of the writer’s brush, a product of the discipline of the moral and physical forces within his body, a discipline that writing and ritual could effect in the bodies of others.

In drawing up pieces of writing, Grand Scribe Swan is integrated with the patterns written in the world. Above all, these are the patterns of the sky, where the order of geese and swans in flight manifests itself. Although Grand Scribe meant literally ‘Grand Historian’ (*taishi* 太史, a title used for an official in the government history office for a brief time in the seventh century), this term was, for most of the Tang period, the title of the court astronomer. Astrology requires historical records—they record and codify astral phenomena, both building up a body of knowledge and providing a foundation to which astrology can refer. Mastery of time and its movements is also offered by the study of the stars, which is why the functions of astronomer and historian were linked in the person of the Grand Scribe. A structure of resemblances and interlinkages joins writing and astral phenomena.

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89 Literally ‘goose crane’ or ‘great crane’, this seems to equate with *honghu* 鴻鶴 for ‘swan’. *He* (crane) and *bu* (swan) were often used interchangeably, as both were white, migratory, wetland birds. In numerous literary works *honghe* appears as a pairing to mean wild geese and cranes, but in this case it would seem that a single bird is referred to. Bernard Read identifies the *bu* (which he romanises as *ku* (gu in Hanyu pinyin) as Jankowski’s ‘swan’ (*Cygnus bewickii jankowskii*). See *Chinese materia medica: avian drugs* (reprinted from *Peking Natural History Bulletin* 6.4, Peking: Peking Natural History Bulletin, 1932), p.14 (again reprinted in Bernard E. Read, *Chinese materia medica: turtle and shellfish drugs, avian drugs, a compendium of minerals and stones* [Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1982]). On historical references to Chinese swans and to the modern species, see Zhou, *Niao yu shiliao*, pp.64–7. Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*) are found in the Dunhuang area and throughout most of the rest of Gansu. See Wang, *Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi*, p.319.

90 The word has a multitude of associations. It refers to wild geese in general, but generally denotes larger varieties, appended to other bird names as a prefix, as in *hongyan* (swan goose).
The celestial writing/patterning in the heavens (tianwen 文)\(^92\)—the word for astronomy as a form of knowledge and for the arrangement of the stars—and the writing of government documents partake of the shared substance of order. Ideally, the written order, the ritual order and the heavenly order constitute an interconnected series. The systems of writing and of regulated conduct, culturally constructed things whose forms are decided and administered by authorities (government officials in the case of the bird state), thus seek to ally themselves to the ascendant structure of the stars in the sky, the heavens above, which like social power and flying swans always exist over here.

**Sun-and-Moon Bird, Red-billed Chough, and Crow**

Knowing the workings of the sky was central to the activities of government. The Sun-and-Moon Bird (riyue niao 月鳥) and the Red-billed Chough (chizui ya 赤觜鴟)\(^93\) divide between them the scrutinizing of the heavens: the former watches the stars and ‘counterparts’\(^94\) at night, while the latter examines the clouds and vapours in daytime. Day and night each has its mandated official. Watching the movements of the heavens was a specialised task. The skies presented a panorama of constant change which had to be officially monitored; the shifting positions of stars and the ceaselessly fluctuating configurations of aerial moisture constituted both a domain of uncertainty and a key which, if properly understood, would unlock the inscrutable future. The heavens involve a fusion of regularity and structure with the confusing opacity of events, a synthesis of order and flux. Power wished to understand these things in order not to be threatened by them. Bureaucracy managed the heavens with a cadre of specialised personnel and a corpus of codified knowledge—books that explained the meanings of the ebbs and flows of the heavenly tides. The bird state’s concern with celestial phenomena mirrors that of the human one: the Guiyi jun not only pursued astronomy and astrology, it also studied the appearance and movements of clouds and other others. These things had political meanings: the colours, shapes, sizes and positions of clouds, rain and mists provided a guide for battle, revealing the dispositions of the military forces (including their morale and the strength of their fighting resolve) and the advisability of attack.\(^95\) The uncertainties of war (the opposite of the regularities of assured domination) could be mastered by the systematic scrutiny of the ever-changing vapours. A great general was distinguished by his grasp of these signs: before launching his revolt, Zhang Yichao knew that the fortunes of the Tibetans were at an end because he understood the ‘counterparts’ in the masculine sky above, together with the forms of the feminine earth below.\(^96\)

If weather had to be understood for its ‘practical’ effect on military affairs, its constant variety and unpredictability and its position outside of political control made it analogous to warfare. The movements in the heavens mirrored the political structure of war: military power was like clouds, the appearance of solidity masking the possibility of dispersal. Armies were...
fragile, vaporous masses, the relations of authority holding them together despite the fact that they were constantly buffeted by the winds of circumstance, forces that always threatened to dissolve them into air. Commanders had to keep watch over the slightest breezes.

Thus if the weather had an obvious structuring effect on political activity, which meant that the state needed to know about it in order to manage things as diverse as agriculture and excursions, it was also a paradigm of the inscrutable workings of fate, all of those things that were beyond the reach of power and politics. The social logic of astrology was that the stars existed entirely independently of any form of human action. They were placed completely in the domain of the symbolic, like birds in flight, removed from human power, except in the area of language and images. Things found in the sky—stars, clouds, flying birds—revealed things on land which could not be deliberately put in order: the future, enemies, unconsolidated relations of authority (marriages not yet formed, guests who were still to come) and, of course, death. These were things that could only be organised symbolically. If the bird state mandated its officials to watch the stars and to watch the clouds and vapours in order to claim power over the unexpected, human power watched birds for exactly the same reason. These forces (both objects of divination, and the things about which divination was sought) that seemingly lay outside of all authority in fact formed the ground for a structure of authority. A system of knowledge, and hence an order of social power, founded its sovereignty on the capacity to watch and decode events in the sky. The sun-and-moon bird and red-billed chough were mandated (ordered) to survey the heavens. Their knowledge was instituted knowledge, something officially sanctioned which, like the divinatory knowledge of the Chinese state, was also a monopoly. The power to make prognostications was invested in specified personnel and strictly guarded because, like the threatening winds of insubordination, it had the potential to blow apart the entire order of power, to reveal it as a temporary accretion of vapours, not the sun and moon in the sky hanging eternally in the heavens, but a passing assemblage of clouds.

If the objects of divination—birds, clouds, stars—were distinguished by their shared position beyond the direct control of social power, the decision about which things had divinatory value and the messages that they communicated obviously constituted a specific social act of instituting and preserving an order of knowledge (which means an order of knowledge holders). This division was instituted in the bird world: particular birds were established as having divinatory value, or as having an association with other objects of divination. The bird government’s selection of the sun-and-moon bird and the red-billed chough to perform the duties of watching the sky is an analogous act of division, which seems to have had some connection with the overall structures of divinatory practice. The sun-and-moon bird is unknown outside of the text yet its name encapsulates a relationship with the two complementary components of the heavens, day and night, empress
Figure 12

Qing encoding of avian order— the crow (Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 518, p. 49a)

99 See, for example, Yin chushi bei 陰處士碑 [Monument to the retired gentleman Yin] (P. 4640), transcribed in Zheng Binglin, Dunhuang bei ming zan jishi [Dunhuang inscriptions, eulogies and epitaphs: an annotated collection] (Lanzhou: Gansu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1992), p. 35.

100 A well-known depiction of the crow-in-the-sun is found in the silk painting from the Western Han-dynasty tomb no. 1 in Mawangdui 馬王堆, dating from c. 168 BC. A drawing taken from this painting is found in Michael Loewe’s Ways to paradise: the Chinese quest for immortality (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), p. 36. This book gives other examples of the crow-in-the-sun image, and discusses literary references (see especially pp. 127–31). Loewe states that the concept of the sun being inhabited by a three-legged crow was firmly established by the time of the standard commentary of the Huainanzi 淮南子, p. 128. According to Loewe the and emperor, the great manifestations of the utter predictability of things, the stable structures on which not only astrology but also time and spatial placement are based. The red-billed chough might also have had an affiliation with the heavenly bodies. The sun was often referred to poetically as a golden crow,99 and a Crow (ya 鴦, closely related to the chough) inhabited or stood for the sun in cosmological schemes as far back as the Han dynasty.100 The crow also served as an object of divination at Dunhuang,101 and the responsibility of the red-billed chough for watching the clouds and vapours may reflect the importance of crows to the examination of the unseen. Crow divination focused on the cries of the birds, not their behaviour in flight. It was aural rather than visual and, in this respect, quite unlike the scrutiny of clouds or stars. However, crow divination was spatially and temporally organised. What direction the crows called from, and when they did so, determined the message about the future that they communicated, whether they foretold success in hunting or the possibility of bandit attack.102 In this respect, divining the cries of crows resembled astrology, in which both time and the directional position of the stars was the structure that organised prognostication. In Chinese antiquity crows had been styled a bird of ill-omen,103 but divinatory guides took them much more equivocally, their different places in space and time dictating whether their calls presaged something bad or good. The unpredictable things which divinatory power sought to take command of covered a broad spectrum: it was not possible to divide the random elements in social experience into a simple opposition of favourable and unfavourable.

The red-billed chough was also a domestic pet, whose ability to speak made it, along with the parrot, a creature worthy of a funerary commemoration after its death:

In the event of the death of a red-billed chough: because of being a bird able to speak, it has been raised for many years, its body covered in respectable dark robes and its mouth lustrously holding the colour of cinnabar. Suddenly, it withered and died, its clever knowledge of secrets thus sub-
merged. It moved human pity, and a heart of longing and remembrance thus arose. Therefore we have set up a feast on this day, and send forth our wish that it will today be reborn, forever leaving the birding arrows of the human world.\textsuperscript{104}

The chough is thus a creature of prescient intelligence, kept for its knowledge and for its powers of speech. Its adornment of the household, and the concern that arose about its rebirth which motivated this funeral service and feast, makes it a life whose destiny is bound up with that of the family which kept it, a household destiny governed by inscrutable forces, which the heavens and the flights and cries of crows explained.\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{Sandgrouse}

The uncertainties of the sky and fate, which had to be managed bureaucratically, resembled the management of foreigners, whose movements and actions were, like the stars and the clouds, outside direct political control. The bird state’s authority is not universal: there are foreigners, those that it does not rule in the way it rules its own subjects. The Sandgrouse (tujue niao 突厥鳥)—the ‘Turkish Bird’—is acting head of the hall for the reception of foreigners (fengguan 蕃館).\textsuperscript{106} The reception of foreigners is a ceremonial activity which must observe the principles of host and guest etiquette. The proper order of the state is measured by the regular arrival of ‘outsiders’ who conduct themselves as courteous and peaceable guests. These guests (fanke 蕃客)\textsuperscript{107} must be housed and fêted, for which purpose a hall (guan 館) is required. Outsiders, as guests, belong to the domain of ritual and unpredictability: they can only be ruled symbolically. Proper ritual governance will produce regularity in their movements, but this in turn depends on the ability


\textsuperscript{102} P. 3988. See Morgan, "Divination," pp. 69–76.

\textsuperscript{103} "In Chinese omens, the crow is generally an inauspicious bird, as it is in many parts of the Old World. An old classical poem has the lines, ‘Nothing red if not a fox; nothing black if not a crow,’ which is to say that everywhere one looked were red foxes and black crows, equally baleful, presaging disaster for the country.” Schafer, "The auspices of T’ang," p. 209; see also pp. 208–9 for a general account of crows and omens. The “old classical poem” to which Schafer refers is poem 41 in the \textit{Shijing} (Beifeng 北風 section), \textit{Maozhibenzi yuanjuan} (juan 2), Shisanjing zhushu edition, p. 42 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, vol. ??, p. 310). Translation in Legge, \textit{The Shu King}, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{104} P. 2547. Transcribed by Danielle Eliasberg, "Pratiques funéraires animales en Chine ancienne et médiévale," \textit{Journal Asiatique} 280:1–2 (1992). The world that these birds are leaving through death is one of suffering; they escape the arrows of humanity (specifically birding arrows—those with cords attached used in shooting birds). Moreover, in an alternative version of the text written above the main line, they are said to be escaping the sufferings of the world of birds as well.

\textsuperscript{105} The capacity to speak endowed the parrot and the red-billed chough with human qualities that make them part of the life of the family. The family’s life, involving an ongoing engagement with non-human lives of various kinds—trees, flowers, wheat, oxen, horses, dogs—placed in and around the home, contains a bird life, defining that life by its incorporation with ornamental relations. The bird’s distinguishing feature is its ability to talk, its intelligence, which means a relation to the knowledge life of the family. The family is a recipient and manager of knowledge and language coming to it from outside and generated within itself.

\textsuperscript{106} "The seed-eating Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, or Pallas’s Sandgrouse, are dappled pigeon-like, gregarious birds, which flock in the Mongolian deserts. Crying like pratincoles, they move into Hopei in severe winters. One of their best qualities was their succulence. Consider the elegant viands admired by Liu Chun (AD 462–521). Teal and wild goose, to fill to satiety; spring mul­turtles, a delicious viand; Indigo fowl, and winter mushroom; jewel of taste—the frosted sandgrouse." Schafer, "The auspices of T’ang," p. 207.

\textsuperscript{107} See the entry on the bonglu si 鴻論寺, Court for the Reception of Foreigners \textit{Xin Tang shu, juan 48, baiguan} [Monograph on officials] 3 (Zhonghua Shuju edition, pp. 1257–8). See also Des Rotours, \textit{Treaté des Fonctionnaires et Traité de l’Armée}, pp. 408–15; the section on the reception of guests is on pp. 414–15. The name bonglu contains the word for wild goose, which Des Rotours glosses as meaning a call or a voice; the name for the court as a whole means “court for the transmission of the voice,” referring to the announcement of foreign guests at receptions (see note on p. 408). When the price of goshawks and falcons brought as gifts by foreign visitors could not be fixed, the court had the responsibility of estimating the gifts to be given in return (See \textit{Xin Tang shu}, ibid., p. 1258; Des Rotours, \textit{Treaté des Fonctionnaires et Traité de l’Armée}, p. 412).
The word meant an autonomous but dependent state. A prototypical reference is that in the *Daxing ren* 大行人 section of the *Qiuguan* 秋官 part of the *Zhouli*: “Beyond the Nine Prefectures [an archaic term for the territory of China] is called the *fan* states.” See *Zhouli zhushu*, juan 37, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.254 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.892).


93 *Chi* is doubtless an alternative transcription for 鸚.

94 The correspondence between *chi* and *juan* (kite) is made in Guo Pu’s commentary on the *Erya*. See *Erya zhushu*, juan 10, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.84 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.2650). The identification of these birds as kites is given by Bernard Read, *Chinese materia medica: avian drugs*, p.8. The kite species *Miletus korschun* is found throughout Gansu. See Wang, *Gansu jizhiu dongwu zhi*, p.348.

95 The kite may hold this post solely because of the demands of poetry: it is paired with the chough in a rhyming couplet, and it may be the case that the originator of the text could find no original rhyme and simply chose to use the same wording as in the preceding line about the chough.

96 In one of his poems, Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) tells of rescuing an injured kite and nursing it back to health, exhibiting compassion and concern for a reviled creature which children had been pelting with stones. He ultimately releases the bird into the wilds, ending its sojourn amongst people. In other contexts, kites were primarily birds of ill omen, part of the same cultural category as owls, creatures whose presence signalled to connect with the entire order of space and time, the order in the stars and clouds, in the compilation of documents, the parades of officials in the palace, the migrations of birds, the changes in the seasons, and so on.

The importance of producing a stable temporal and spatial order amongst outsiders stemmed from the possibilities for disruption that they represented. For the dynastic states of central China this was most profoundly so on the northern and western borders, where the fluid movements of nomadic peoples could presage violence and disorder. Indeed, Inner Asians were the definitive foreigners; those the sandgrouse has responsibility for are *fan* 蘧, a term which applied broadly to those outside the regular authority of the Chinese state, but which in Tang and Song times referred especially to the Tibetans and other groups on the western frontier. The sandgrouse was itself part of the world of sudden and massive cross-border movement, identified in the structures of Tang avian knowledge with instability and brigandage: “These irregular migrants from the north were ... called ‘Turkish Sparrows’, libellously, but for obvious reasons, even more ancient was the name ‘Border-raiding Pheasants’, and an old etymology equated *t"udär* ‘sandgrouse’ with *d"uđär* ‘theft’.” The management of those from beyond the borders is best entrusted to a resident of the border lands, even one of dubious credentials. It is, however, perhaps significant that this authority is identified as provisional: the sandgrouse is acting head (*quanzbi 權知*) of the hall for the reception of foreigners—it does not have a permanent position. The bird government could delegate this responsibility but it did not wish to regularise the sandgrouse’s position. It was thus marked as an ambiguous member of the avian bureaucracy. Its services could be co-opted, but its status as an outsider is never fully relinquished.

The sandgrouse participated in the history of border defence: a large flight of the birds in the winter of 679–80 alerted a Tang border post of an imminent attack from the Turks, allowing the garrison to save itself and in fact win a victory over its enemies. Thus the sandgrouse’s role was originally that of a loyal ally, the classic ‘cooked barbarian’, buffer against the ‘raw barbarians’ further out. Flights of sandgrouse presaged enemy attack. The bird acted as a barometer of border stability: if the weather on the frontier is disturbed it will rise, warning of the approaching storm.

The beating wings of huge flocks of sandgrouse reproduced the form of the invading nomads whose advent had threatened them to flight. The warning signal reproduced what it warned of: appearing from the empty wastes in vast numbers, they descended like the archetypal barbarian hordes. Sandgrouse are found throughout the arid lands of north and west China, and in the present, at least, inhabit the Dunhuang area. In the avian government, the bird life of Dunhuang belongs to the imperial periphery, associated with outsiders, serving as host and mediator for them but also as a defence against them.

The bird government has a full complement of officials whose functions
extend in all directions, from the heart of the palace to the distant periphery, from the scrutiny of the skies to the examination of official conduct, from day to night, from the preparation of documents to the defence of the realm. In this neat and precisely defined order, birds and official posts are paired discretely, suggesting a structure of perfect order.

**Kite**

Yet, like the Chinese imperial bureaucracy itself, there were ambiguities and reduplications of function. Just like the red-billed chough, the Kite (*laochi* 老鷹) has responsibility for watching the clouds and vapours. Different birds do the same job; the species do not each have a distinct and separate function, and their purposes can overlap. This responsibility for a seemingly important function sits ill with the kite's status as a predator in later parts of the text. In the end, the constitution of the bird government is neither one of perfect symmetry nor one of tidy and coherent order. Coming at the end of the list of officials (though this is not the end of the first verse section of the text), the kite occupies the ambivalent position of the supernumerary bureaucrat, between the administration and the rest of the bird world.

This ambivalent placement in the avian hierarchy correlates with an ambivalent positioning of birds like the kite in cultural production and thus in structures of human valuation. Kites could be the object of ethical attention and thus involved in programs of moral production in literature; but this action was in part an overturning of the revulsion commonly felt towards the birds.  

**Hen Harrier**

The ambiguous figure of the kite is juxtaposed with that of the Hen Harrier (*yinwei niao* 印尾鳥). another predator prone to feed on carrion. “The hen harrier is a talentless clown; with fixated mind it dances madly in the villages and hamlets.” The bird life of the village is right next to the government. The hen harrier is without distinction. Its lack of talent (that is, its lack of socially significant abilities) means a lack of dignity. The madcap dance that it performs in the humble, everyday world marks it as a lowly creature. A structural opposition exists between it and the sparrowhawk and goshawk. The hen harrier’s lack of “talent or skill” perhaps refers to its not being able to be trained for hunting, which identifies it not as an associate of elite power but as a village clown, whose frantic movements contrast with the discipline of the trained hawk, much as the bearing of the army commander differs from the antics of the local fool. Carrion feeding and the catching of small game are activities which have not been co-opted by the dominant social forces. They constitute predatory behaviour which has not been ennobled by the discipline of hawking.
Paradise Flycatcher

Outside the avian government is a world of common birds who do not enjoy the distinction of official rank. This world has a structure of relations which is not the product of administrative ordering. Paradise Flycatchers (bailiandai 白練帶),\(^{118}\) "coloured like silver ... have long formed their own flocks in the midst of the mountains. Hearing that the phoenix had appeared in the forest, they all arrive, carrying their sons and bringing their daughters." Flycatchers lead a completely autonomous existence: they constitute separate communities, forming flocks in the mountains, far from the main theatres of human action. They are grouped in families, whose fundamental structure is that of parents and children—more precisely, sons and daughters (offspring distinguished by gender). Moved by the news of Emperor Phoenix's arrival, they come scurrying to see their ruler. The spectacle of power is a family affair, which adults bring their children to observe. If gender and family life go unmentioned in the bird government (except by implication in the case of the peacock), amongst commoner birds the pairing of male and female and the relation of parents and children are of profound importance. The implications of this for the gendering of political life are obvious: governance does not mark gender identity explicitly because it is assumed to be a masculine arena; but in the lives of the governed, the roles of husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters are of foremost importance. Official functionaries are male and solitary; those who flock to watch their parade of power are pairs of both sexes.\(^{119}\)

Other common birds join the flycatchers in flocking to see the phoenix: owls (xunbuniao 薫胡鳥),\(^{120}\) swans (hubushi 鴬鶴師), geese (bongniangzi 鴻娘子), shrikes (baoliao'er 鴉鶉兒),\(^{121}\) red-billed ducks (chizui ya 赤觜鴨), green-jade fowl (biyu ji 碧玉雞) and mandarin ducks (yuanyang 鴛鴦). These birds are a list of names, a catalogue of profusion but also, by implication, a list of familiar birds which need no introduction, names with a vernacular ring—'Old Mother Goose', 'Master Swan', and so on. This is the common bird order, outside the world of official position. It is structured by the order of everyday authority, the familiar world of family members, and low-level respect: old mothers and masters, those whose title is conferred by peers rather than bestowed by government.\(^{122}\)

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\(^{118}\) For the Asian paradise flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) see De Schauensee, The birds of China, p.420. The modern vernacular name is sboudai niao 絲織帶鳥 (see Hoffmann, Glossar, p.115). The connection of the bailiandai of the text with the flycatcher is based on the sources quoted in Zhou, Niao yu sbiliao, pp.246-7.

\(^{119}\) The flycatcher's appeal is visual; coloured like silver (the valued metal, sign of wealth and rarity), the birds are distinguished by their appearance. Colour establishes an affinity between birds and things of value. Authority has the capacity to draw such distinction to itself: the flycatchers are drawn automatically to the phoenix, recognising the nobility of their ruler, whose presence their own brilliance adorns. Yet the flycatcher's connection with the structures of material culture and social practice in the human world is more direct than a general association with glittering colour and a proximity to royalty. Its name—"white silk belt"—connects with costly items of human manufacture and with mourning, which the white belt represented. The flycatcher is a reminder of the cultural centrality of mourning codes: even amongst birds there are signs which recall the obligations of post-mortem observance. Thus the structure of social analogy has not been transcended, merely transformed. The intelligibility of the bird world rests on the number of correspondences that exist between it and the order of human life.

\(^{120}\) This is undoubtedly an alternative way of writing xunhu 轉鳴, an onomatopoeic name for owls based on their call. The identification of xunhu as an owl was made in Bernard Read, Chinese materia medica: avian drugs, p.88. Han Yu has a poem about shooting an owl that was roosting on his house; see "She xunhu," Dongya tang Changli jizhu, juan 5, p.117.

\(^{121}\) I believe that the baoliao of the text is a local transcription of bolao 伯勞, the usual word for a shrike. (The name bolao is given as boliao 伯鶉 in the Taiping yulan, juan 923 [Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.4098], and it seems likely that the character 鳥 renders a sound like 'bao' or 'bo'). The great grey shrike (Lanius excubitor—De Schauensee, The birds of China, p.336), is common throughout the Hexi corridor. See Wang, Gansu jizhu dongwu zhi, pp.628-9. See also Zhao Ji, Zheng Guangmei, Wang Huadong and Xu Jialin, The natural history of China (London: Collins, 1990), p.185. The shrike appears in the Li ji in the 2nd summer month (zhongxia 仲夏). The word used is ju 鶉, identified as bolao, 'shrike', in Zheng Xuan's commentary. See Yueling, zhongxia, in Li ji zengyi, juan 16, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.141 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.1369). See also Legge, Li Chi, p.272: "the shrike begins to give its notes."

\(^{122}\) Most of the bird names in this list cannot easily be found in standard reference works. This marks their position within the domain of vernacular knowledge. The major exception is the mandarin duck, the endlessly reproduced archetype of the faithful couple. The social universal of married life transcended social boundaries: the mandarin duck inhabited both elite literature and vernacular culture.
Mandarin Ducks

The bird world outside the government involves couples: “Mandarin Ducks joined as mates, pair after pair they fly together.” Through their exemplary devotion, mandarin ducks were made a fundamental reference point for human marriage, helping to constitute its ornamental order. They were co-opted into the symbolic structures of the marital bond. In the avian hierarchy, this spouse loyalty, the indivisibility of male and female pairs, is situated as an object of the apparatus of administrative domination rather than a constituent of it. Couples are subjects of the bird government. They uphold and obey its order as do the other common birds with whom they are grouped.

“Bearing their instructions and following their commands they do not dare to tarry or delay.” Mandarin ducks and their peers have been ordered to come, and they hasten to do their duty; the devoted couple are also obedient subjects. Punctual attendance is the hallmark and mechanism of subordination: ordinary birds (couples) acknowledge and constitute their position in the avian hierarchy by their submission to the rule of prompt arrival. Not to hasten would be to resist authority, to deny its compulsion. “After this all the birds arrive, not one of them infringing upon the position of the others.” It is a vision of the perfect gathering: the birds arrive on time and find their proper places without incident or struggle. There is no competition for precedence; each bird knows its place, the divisions between their bodies being translated into a perfect ordered sequence. There is complete and automatic respect for position and distance. Social relations are enacted as separations, perfectly and easily accomplished. Common birds uphold this regularity completely, a world of respectful old mother geese, upstanding master swans, and dutiful mandarin duck couples all adhering to the systems of timing and positioning through which honour and order are maintained, an honour and order ordained by sovereign and government, but which sovereign and government have produced merely by appearing.

The world of unranked birds is only partially structured by the parallels between it and human society. It has an autonomous logic and distinctive features. The order of bird life is defined by regularities of diet, by relations with other birds, by the colour and...
For its identification as a pelican see Read, *Chinese materia medica: avian drugs*, p.10.

The removal of the pelican from the human social realm is in part a function of the separateness of the world which it inhabits. While the eating of fish identifies it at some level with human appetites (fish being one of the few foods that birds and people share, other than the game caught by birds of prey, be it other birds or hares, etc.), its watery domain is, from a human point of view, a marginal space. The pelican is at home there in a way that people will be

splendour of plumage, by modes of locomotion, by habitat, by the appropriations that humans make of them, by the times of day when they are active, by their bodies, their calls and their size, by the predators to whom they are vulnerable, by their role as auguries and the response this induces amongst people, by their beauty, by the human areas they frequent, by their flight and colour, by their solitude and by their flocking.

This diversity of condition, this plurality of distinguishing marks, and of relations to human power (relations of imprisonment, of honour and awe, of delight, amusement, dislike, ridicule and curiosity, relations of observation, appraisal and comparison) marks the wide distribution of birds across social space, and the variety of their relations to human power. That is they record the diversity of ways in which birds constituted human power: as models for it, as objects for its interventions, as material on which to enact strategies of analogy production, as indices of its fate, and as incarnations of the divisions of colour, sound and quality through which its categories and judgements were organised.

**Pelican**

“The Pelican (taobe niao 潭河鳥), its feet bare, habitually searches along the waters for fish to eat.” The pelican is defined by its diet, by the watery world it inhabits and by its feet. There is no reference to the pelican’s position in relations of power, whether within the bird world, or in connection to humans. The pelican was an exotic bird for Dunhuang people. It did not have a powerful structure of literary references and allusions built around it: the explication of pelican life situates the bird as a constituent in a catalogue of avian diversity. This is a function of the effects of empire: the pelican is a marginal creature (compared to the crane or the swan goose) whose presence in the register of birds marks the expansionism of imperial power and knowledge, bringing even peripheral bird life into its purview. The interests of empire extended to those birds who patrolled the waters unshod in search of fish, who were brought into conjunction with peacocks, francolins, sandgrouse, silver pheasants, sparrowhawks and wrens as a result.124

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123 For its identification as a pelican see Read, *Chinese materia medica: avian drugs*, p.10.

124 The removal of the pelican from the human social realm is in part a function of the separateness of the world which it inhabits. While the eating of fish identifies it at some level with human appetites (fish being one of the few foods that birds and people share, other than the game caught by birds of prey, be it other birds or hares, etc.), its watery domain is, from a human point of view, a marginal space. The pelican is at home there in a way that people will be

Figure 14

*Qing* encoding of avian order—*the pelican* (Gujin tushu jicheng, ce 518, p.25a)
Wild Duck and Horned Owl

The pelican's searches for fish are not the only patrols undertaken in the world of wetlands where birds reign supreme. "From afar the Wild Duck (yeya 野鴨) sees the Horned Owl (or Horned Kite) (jiaooci 角鵺) coming; it hides its head in the depths of the water, and cannot be searched out." The wild duck skilfully eludes its opponents, both through its carefully observant habits and by its mastery of self-concealment. These birds are involved in games of hunting and evasion; ducks must always be on their guard against distant attackers. The wild duck is defined in terms of the horned owl (or kite) which preys upon it. Thus the relations in the bird world are not solely those of scrupulous separation and careful preservation of distance between avian varieties to uphold the hierarchies of position; there is also violent contest and the strategies of avoidance to which it gives rise.

Cockatoo and Red Tufted Duck

The bird world also contains spectacles of visual magnificence. "The Cockatoo (bai yingwu 白鵺鶻) and the Red Tufted Duck (chi xichi 赤鴨鶻), their bodies clad in multi-coloured feather garments, in twos and threes beside the waves, facing the sun, with wings of genuine brocade, are seen from far away." Brilliant feathers and the innocent pleasure of birds sporting in the water define a domain of pure enjoyment, a spectacle of sunlight, colour, moving water and happy, stable sociability (pairs and couples), offered up to the appreciative gaze. All is brightness and contentment, a social ideal defined by its distance from the struggles of growing grain or fighting wars.

But this picture of a self-sufficient beauty conceals the social appropriations which incorporated cockatoo and tufted duck into the order of social power as icons of brilliance. Both birds were species whose privileged social status had been fixed by an extensive body of cultural production. Literary and visual representation stressed the beauty of the tufted duck, and it even appeared on the doublets of officials of the seventh rank in the Ming and Qing dynasties. The cockatoo was a foreign tribute bird which had been brought to China from Southeast Asia as early as the fifth century. The beauties of its pure white body and coloured crest were widely celebrated, turning it into an archetype of visual magnificence.

The text is thus replaying and strengthening an identification of these two birds as the epitome of chromatic brilliance. This beauty was not recruited by the bird government as was that of the peacock and the kingfisher, but it did give the tufted duck and the cockatoo a privileged position in the order of birds, a privilege which concurred with the attempt of social power to assimilate the brilliance of feathers to itself. In practice, only wealth and power could acquire the magnificence of these birds from far away, whether directly or in surrogate form through the glittering surface of as for their apparent freedom of movement and their command over an element outside the power of most people (for which reason they often function as a symbol or associate of the political outcast).


Human artistry, whose products are the monopoly of those with the means to afford them, links itself by association with the naturally occurring brilliance of colourful birds, a brilliance that requires no labour. Unseen birds contribute to the power and legitimacy of the apparel of the powerful. By a further paradox, the brilliance of the birds themselves could only be conveyed by likening it to the products of human craft: the wings of the tufted duck and the cockatoo are 'genuine brocade'. Birds were the subject of embroidered pictures (in words or silk), the manufactured splendour that power commanded through its privileged access to bright colour (and the words to describe it), the result and reflection of social dominance.

The remoteness of these birds from life in Dunhuang may be glimpsed in the error in the name of the red tufted duck, written as 'scarlet fowl scarlet'. The bird remained an exotic dream of luxury, whose name survived only in garbled form, written phonetically, a distorted echo of the effect of shimmering purple feathers on cultural production.

**Wren**

Paired with and opposed to this splendour, the wren (called *qiaonüzi* 巧姪子, 'skilful woman')\(^{130}\) gave a powerful display of disciplined domesticity. It built a tightly woven nest (so well knitted together that one could not extract a gold needle from it) and raised its children safely in the tops of trees. Their skilful labour, directed at the creation of a secure and tidy home, constituted exemplary female conduct—in the diligence of their work, their dexterity, and their unfailing devotion to home and children. Just as faithful bird pairs like the mandarin ducks formed an ideal of conjugal fidelity, the wren's instinctive and unfailing devotion to its responsibilities incarnated perfection in the roles of mother and homemaker. The wren was completely absorbed by the structures of familial power, offering no resistance to them. Moreover, the work of homemaking and caring for young is entirely female: the wren is constituted as a female creature, its name excluding masculinity from its semantic domain. The work of building a nest and raising chicks was identified as definitively female. Furthermore, in the performance of these duties it was not enough simply to obey. Work had to be invested with love. The wren was not only a scrupulously tidy housewife and unfailingly attentive mother, but it also enhanced the performance of its domestic labours with a decorative softness, bringing home flowers and willow catkins to build its nest, creating an ideal hearth and home.

**Parrot**

In contrast with the nesting domesticity of the wren, the parrot (*yingwu 昭雀*) is defined by its relationship to human empire and its systems of value. "Longyou 隆右 province [Eastern Gansu] produces parrots; they can be taught to distinguish and understand human speech. None amongst humans can equal them; they are taken in cages as offerings to the brilliant sovereign."\(^ {131}\) The governing and defining forces in the lives of parrots are relations of tributary contribution. The imperial geography and history of parrots in medieval China is the basis for their position in the bird world. In Tang times, the extractive mechanisms of empire were exerted in Longyou parrots,\(^ {132}\) inciting poetic critique.

Parrots are distinguished, set apart from the other members of the avian
realm appearing in The Names of the Hundred Birds through their ornamental imprisonment. They are literally detained by the structures of ornamental power; the reason for their capture and confinement in decorated cages is their intelligence and capacity to speak, a capacity which places them above people. This made parrots a major object of poetic investment: the relations of power that transported parrots from their homelands into political centres and kept them in detention on account of miraculous abilities with language were part of the matrix of forces and interests structuring the symbolic market that included poetic activity and poetic careers. Poets too were moved by the gravitational pull of empire on account of their word skills. The predicament of the gilded cage and the life of simultaneous social exaltation and constraint it involved conformed to the same logic of the market of symbolic goods as poetic production. This was directly translated into poetic content: the sufferings of parrots as constrained beings (longing for home; their wings clipped; sitting gloomily in their cages; disturbed in their sleep; their feathers plucked out, thus shorn of their emerald splendour; dreaming of flight and escape) were narrated in many works by Tang poets.133

Parrots thus exemplified the acquisition, concentration and dispersal of ornamental objects by political interests in imperial space. Their movement from Longyou134 made them at once objects and media for a shared system of geographic knowledge and system of vision. Parrots were taught to speak; that is they were recipients of instruction. This instruction depended on the

"are ignorant of the rites. See Lijj zhengyi, juan 1, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.3 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, p.1231). Legge's translation is: "The parrot can speak, and yet is nothing more than a bird . . . Here now is a man who observes no rules of propriety; is not his heart that of a beast?" (Li Chi, p.64).

132 Longyou (or Longxi 龍西) was the most famous site for the capture of parrots in Tang times. A lament for the effects of the demand for parrots on the local people of Longyou was made by the late-Tang poet Pi Rixiu 皮日休 (c.834-83). See Schafer, "Parrots in medieval China," pp.273-4, or The golden peaches of Samarkand, p.99, for a translation.

133 In Bai Juyi’s “Shuang yingwu” 雙鸚鵡 [A pair of parrots] (Bai Juyi ji, juan 26, p.585), the ability of two parrots to intone poetry stands with and surpasses the knowledge of characters possessed by the ox of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (the author of classical commentaries in the Eastern Han, whose family ox was said to be able to write the character for ‘eight’), and the singing ability of the crane into which the Daoist adept Ding Lingwei 丁令威 had transformed himself. For the sorrows of the parrot, see the Li Bai poem:

With feathers falling it farewells the gilded palace;
A lonely cry sets off its embroidered robes.
Skilled in speech, it is finally cast aside;
Returning, it flies towards Longshan.
Abandoned by its master, it bids goodbye to the cage/gilded hall.

(Quan Tang shi, juan 183 [Zhonghua Shuju edition, p.1869].)

For the talking bird as an emblem of the poet, see the commentary on the Li Bai poem in Huaniao shige jianshang cidian [A dictionary for the appreciation of flower-and-bird poetry], ed. Zhang Bingshu and Zhang Guochen (Beijing: Zhongguo Liyoun Chubanshe, 1990), p.820, in which the parrot is co-opted into a politics of poetic speech, the talents of speaking beings muzzled by the operations of power. The same approach is taken by Du Fu, who also focuses on the parrot’s displacement by imperial forces and its unhappy fate:

The parrot harbours gloomy thoughts;
Intelligent, it recalls parting (from home).

us emerald garment is all short and gone,
Its red beak unbridled in its bounty of knowledge.
There will never be a day for the cage to open.
The old perching branch is an empty remnant.
People of the world pity its injuring itself again.
What use is the exoticism of its feathers?
(Quan Tang shi, juan 230 [Zhonghua Shuju edition, p.2521]).

Another exemplar of this approach is Bai Juyi:

At end of day its words return to silence,
Roosting at midnight it again awakes,
Its body imprisoned by its emerald splendour,
Its mind suffering for its cleverness.
Dusk rouses thoughts of return to the nest;
In spring it often pines for the cry of its mate.
Who can smash open the cage,
Releasing it to fly swiftly and call?
(“Yingwu” 鴉鵑 [The parrot], Bai Juyi ji, juan 18, p.380).

134 The transportation of parrots was a major object of poetic attention. Parrots were taken from one end of the empire to another; Bai Juyi dwells on this in his poem on Longxi parrots being moved to Jiangdong (the mouth of the Yangtze):
The parrot of Longxi reaches Jiangdong,
Raised over the years, its beak reddens more and more.
Always in fear of its longing to return, its wings are clipped in advance; Each time for feeding, its cage is opened but momentarily.
People pity its clever speech—although their sentiments are deep, the bird pines for flying high; its thoughts differ.
It resembles a singing and dancing courtesy of the Vermilion Gate;
Stored deep, locked fast in the midst of the rear quarters.
(“Yingwu” [The parrot], Bai Juyi ji, juan 24, p.555). The political and economic geography of empire effects these movements and thus produces the parrot’s predicament and its poetic articulation.

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technology of the cage; it could only be effected through detention. The obviously forcible nature of the incorporation of parrots into relations of symbolic power was constantly dwelt upon in poetry. For poets the sufferings of the caged parrot were a powerful weapon in their own symbolic struggles, and so the ambivalent nature of the cage and the whole project of keeping parrots was something that was constantly exploited. The oscillation in poetic accounts of parrots between praise of their gifts and pity for their sufferings enacts the logic of poetic production itself, in that poets are at once dependent on the imperial apparatus for the production and ratification of their poetic credentials and victims of its vagaries. Poetic investments in parrots find in their situation the paradox of 'the dominated dominant', the exalted ornamental being whose life is constrained by the very systems which produce its exalted status.

The bird kingdom exists inside the human state, to which it willingly offers its own subjects, thereby acknowledging its subordination to the demands of human politics.\textsuperscript{135} Parrots, like red-billed choughs, were also part of the structures of household life at Dunhuang, where they became (after death) an object of ethical concern. The funeral text for the chough given above is a standard formula which can be used for either bird, although the parrot's robes are emerald and crimson. In this way, the parrot culture of Dunhuang paralleled that of central China, placing the parrot in a sequestered domain of ornamental privilege, with care and concern lavished upon it for its beauty and talents.\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{Bat}

The foundation for the parrot's detention by imperial power is its speech, which bridges the gap between the avian and the human empires. The paradox of the talking bird, a kind of violation of categories, is placed next to the paradox of the flying creature without feathers. The bat (\textit{zefu 翅}) stands between the worlds of mice and birds, covered with fur and skin, its contradictory character further emphasised by its nocturnal habits. Like other night creatures, such as owls, it cannot be appropriated by social power, which generally surrenders its organising projects in the face of darkness. The bat is an object of knowledge. Like the pelican, it exemplifies the diversity of the bird world, illustrating basic divisions of the world by crossing them—never exposed to scrutiny by the light of day, and active when people are asleep, it exists permanently outside the regularities of social action.

\textbf{Buddhist Chanter and Gourd Carrier}

"The Buddhist Chanter (\textit{nianfoniao 念佛鳥}),\textsuperscript{137} and the Gourd Carrier (\textit{ti hulu 提胡盧}),\textsuperscript{138} habitually saying 'I've never dealt in wine'.\textsuperscript{139} Both these birds are distinguished by their mimicry of human speech, albeit in contrasting domains of life: one recites the holy words of Buddhism while the other speaks of drinking, the carrying of the gourd referring to alcohol

\textsuperscript{135} Other accounts of the parrot tribute system were much less charitable about the qualities of the bird. But as with goshawks sent as tribute to the Tang court by Zhang Yichao, the ability to acquire such birds was in itself a testimony to the extractive capacities of power, its authority over people in remote places who could capture and imprison birds for its amusement. It would seem that this admiring view of bird tribute was the ideology that the text accepted and promoted, seeing only positive things in the emperor's possession of birds endowed with these peerless characteristics.


\textsuperscript{137} So named because its call sounds like the chanting of Buddhist scriptures, it may be the Indian roller (\textit{yofa song} 佛法僧—see Hoffmann, \textit{Glossar}, p.35; De Schauensee, \textit{The birds of China}, p.282), or dollar bird (\textit{sanbao niao 土豪鳥} [\textit{Eurystomus orientalis}—he see Hoffman, p. 108; De Schauensee, p.283). The latter is found in Eastern Gansu. See Wang Xiangting, ed., \textit{Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi}, p 534. The European or blue roller (\textit{Coracias garrulus}), is a common desert bird. See Zhao Ji, Zheng Guangmei, Wang Huadong and Xu Jialin, \textit{The natural history of China} (London: Collins, 1990), p 184.

\textsuperscript{138} The Gourd Carrier's name is thought to be based on the similarity between its call and the words 'carrying the gourd'. Modern commentators do not venture an opinion on the identity of this bird. See the commentary on a poem about the Gourd Carrier by Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–60) in Zhang Chengmao and Zhang Guocheng, \textit{Huamiao shige jianshang cidian}.

\textsuperscript{139} The transcription by Xiang Chu has the verb \textit{tian 調} ('to season, or to alter flavour') rather than \textit{gu 酒} 'to buy or sell wine', although Wang Zhongmin's transcription in \textit{Dunhuang bianwen ji} uses the latter word. The word Suo Buzi has written in the manuscript appears to be \textit{gu} (See S.3835).
and its consumption. This juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane typifies the ways in which bird calls are assimilated into human social structures: bird voices provide a literal echo of the social world, but this echo is often ironic—they are as likely to be saying things that ridicule people as things that provide a comforting reflection of ‘proper’ values. Birds may seem to be repeating the incantations of Buddhism or they may be making irreverent reference to the sale and consumption of alcohol. The claim never to have dealt in wine, moreover, draws attention to the contradiction between the religious restrictions on drinking, and the practical involvement of Buddhist institutions with revenues from brewing—alcohol was an important source of monastery income in Guiyi jun Dunhuang.140 The lack of human control over bird language gives it the potential to supply an alternative commentary on the inconsistencies and moral lapses in human institutions: placed next to the Buddhist Chanter, the bird which says it has never dealt in wine mocks the religious disavowal of interest in both alcohol and material gain.

**Pheasant and Quail**

Whether the calls of these birds ridicule these speech acts by making them seem empty and laughable, or bolster them by providing an echo in non-human language, they establish yet another relation of similitude between the bird world and the human world, suggesting their comparability and interpenetration. Comparison is one of the defining forms of relationship between birds. The Pheasant of the Marshes (*cezhi* 澤雉) and the Quail (*anchun* 鶏鶩) constitute a pair whose bodies may be directly contrasted. The former is multi-coloured, spectacular, while the latter has “nothing at all behind.” The tiny tailless quail may be compared with the magnificence of the pheasant; this purely physical comparison announces a division between birds founded on appearance. Yet this difference has consequences for the place of these birds in human society. The pheasant’s feathers provide an important adornment, especially for ceremonial dress for court officials, while the quail is food. In both cases, the social appropriation of the birds involves death, although one lives on as preserved plumes, while the other disappears, recorded only in poems and paintings, an icon of all that is small and humble. The hierarchical contrast between quail and pheasant was built into

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Social distinction is also conferred on those who live in isolation, marked by their distance from ordinary patterns of communal existence. This isolation is often phrased as elevation above mundane affairs, a superiority expressed in a vocabulary focusing on height—elevated concerns, lofty goals, high-minded purposes. “The Solitary Husker (ducbong niao 独春鳥),” avoiding all trouble, by nature enjoys the branches of tall trees.” Aloofness, the avoidance of trouble, means distance from social struggles. Tall trees transcend everyday battles in more than a metaphorical sense: their height is the product of distance from the destructive forces of social action. Trees grow tall either because they are physically isolated or else because social power intervenes against the forces that seek to cut them down. Thus the apparently separate natural landscape of the tree tops is in fact the product of a specific institutional formation. The alliance between a life of isolation and elevation and social superiority has a

141 Shanghai Shi etc., Zhongguo lidai jushi, p.238. The quail is on the surcoat panel of the 9th ranked civil official.

142 See Xiang, Dunhuang bianwen xuanzhu, p.777. This is a direct translation of the name, which supposedly derived from the resemblance between its call and the sound of someone husking grain. The Han-dynasty dialect dictionary Fangyan says that ‘solitary husker’ was one of the names for the be/handan 鷹鶻. It was used in the areas of the central valley of the Yellow River, east as far as Shandong and also extending into the middle reaches of the Yangtze. (See Qian Yi 錄譔, ed. and ann., Fangyan jianshu 方言箋疏 [Dialects, with commentaries], jian 8, p.7a (reprint ed., Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chuhanshe, 1984), vol.2, p.469. Read identifies the bedan as a kind of nightingale, and cites ducbong as a synonym, though these are both given in his entry on banbao chong 寒號蟲, the flying fox (Pteropus psephilus). See Read, Chinese materia medic: avian drugs, p.57. Mathews states that it is “a sort of nightingale which is said to sing for the dawn: also the name for a large bat hanhao chong with a wing-spread of two feet” (Mathews’ Chinese-English dictionary, p.318). The bedan appears in the Liji where it is noted in the second month of winter: “The night bird ceases to sing”; the footnote states that “the night bird” sings during the night till dawn; ‘a hill bird, like a fowl.’” The ‘be’ 萬 of bedan is “a variety of the long-tailed pheasant very fond of fighting and of great courage—thus it is used as an emblem of courage” (Legge, Li chi, p.302). See also Herbert Giles, A Chinese English dictionary, p.490, which links one of its alternative names with the nightingale. Chen Zuolong suggests it is a cuckoo. See Chen, “Guanyu Dunhuang guchao Bai niao ming,” p.656.

143 The translation “avoiding all trouble” is based on the reading of the words xibibi 楚非 were given by Chen Zuolong. Other commentators have suggested that the line is unintelligible. It is also possible that xibibi is simply an onomatopoeia for the bird’s call. Another, but more remote, possibility is that it refers to a kind of bulbul: bi 鳥 could be a phonetic equivalent for bei 鰵, the bulbul.
clear material foundation. Peace in the tree tops is bought either by the weakness of social power, which leaves the bird's world untouched, or by its strength, which enables it to defeat its rivals who, driven by material necessity, wish to fell the trees for personal gain. Social isolation, the privilege of a life of contemplation and elevation, of distancing oneself from prosaic concerns, involves a freedom from the elemental demands for food and fuel. Tall trees represent this distance symbolically and literally. The cultural elite which assigns special value to a life lived 'above', and the solitary bird whose existence is deployed by those same elites as an object of emulation and as a metaphor for their own values, are joined by a common logic, connected with material relations.

**Sparrow**

Relationships between bird bodies do not only involve comparisons of size and form. There is also violence. "Lord Sparrow's (quegong 雀公) body is only as big as a seed, and he hates Old Kite (laocihi) robbing him of his feather clothing." As with the duck and the horned owl, predation is a basic condition of the avian social order. The weak fall victim to the strong and ruthless. Powerlessness and fear define the life of the sparrow, while the hawk is a bully, robbing those smaller than itself even of the clothes on their backs. The weak must endure oppression as a fact of life, even though it arouses their fear and resentment. Smallness means vulnerability: little birds are forced to contend with the attacks of bigger rivals. Is it perhaps also of note that the kite is a functionary of the bird government, that the sparrow suffers at the hands of someone 'in charge'.

**Bird of Good Fortune**

The creatures locked in these relations of everyday violence are in radical contrast to the birds that are omens of auspiciousness, venerated by humans. Auspicious birds constitute a special category within the hierarchies of avian life. Pre-eminent amongst these is the the Bird of Good Fortune (jixiang niao 吉祥鳥). The most magically felicitous, it comes out in the long cliffs on the terraced mountain (the holy peak of Wutai Shan 五台山 in present day Shanxi). Its sudden appearance in the midst of coloured clouds causes everyone to bow down in respect.

This bird and those similar to it are organised and categorised by the structures of 'happiness' or felicity (xi 喜) and 'efficacy' (ling 靈), in relation to Wutai Shan zan 五臺山讚 [Paean to Wutai Shan] notes that "the holy Bird of Good Fortune appears time after time; night after night it flies to come and light the holy lamp." See Ren, *Dunhuang gei zongbian* (ling 18). See also "Good fortune calls, the lion roars" (P.3360, S.467, S.4429, S.4039, S.5487, S.5473, S.5456, D.1269, Beitu xian 18. See also "Good fortune calls, the lion roars" (P.3360, S.467, S.2080, S.2985 and S.4012) in ibid., p.1719.

145 Present in the idea of an auspicious bird is the notion of exceptional power. This power involves its own constituency, a group of people who accept it. This constituency can only be generated by cultural authority which enables such power to be recognised. The capacity to recognise such a sign, which involves knowing what is out of the ordinary, requires an act of inculcation. This depends on a shared understanding of everyday life (and everyday birds), with which an auspicious bird contrasts, together with an act of promulgation, by which such miraculous happenings are made known; publicity is the essential quality of auspicious events. In both cases a particular social unity is generated, galvanised by this exceptional happening, a community made up of those who acknowledge the significance of the event. Auspicious birds are as much the product of cultural labour as any other social understanding of the bird world. By describing the reverence accorded to the Auspicious Bird of Wutai Shan, and asserting that it is the most magically felicitous, The Names of the Hundred Birds participates in the creation of this social understanding and thus in the consolidation of the forms of authority which bring it into existence.
Auspicious birds consolidated relations of authority both by the generation of a community of people who believed in their value and by the relation of power involved in confirming and announcing their auspiciousness, a relation of power between those who controlled interpretation and those who were its audience. It was this capacity to make and destroy social alliances, to confer and remove support, that caused auspicious birds to be of such essential importance to politics. For this reason, the state maintained a monopoly on the interpretation of such events to ensure that the intensity of social bonding that resulted from the appearance of auspicious birds remained within its grasp. Indeed, the importance of bird omens at times of political disturbance encapsulates how auspicious birds could bring into existence a new order of power by engendering commonality. Identification is the essence of auspiciousness—the act of identifying a bird as an omen produces a social identification, a sense of identity, amongst those who acknowledge it. This relationship is the fundamental ground of symbolic power: the social acceptance of the shared code in which symbols have meaning. This code assumes a group of interpreters. The political restriction of this group, of the authority to make divination, was an essential feature of the Tang state, exemplified in the codification of auspicious bird signs seen in the Five Elements monograph in the official history of the Tang. As will be outlined below, the Guiyi jun’s own appropriation of auspicious birds and their encoding of them in literary form marks critical transitions in the structures of symbolic power at the end of the ninth century. The Bird of Good Fortune is set apart from the rest of the avian hierarchy because auspicious birds are organised by the movements of happiness and efficacy, of which they are cast as manifestations. Happiness has varying degrees of spatial and historical intensity; it concentrates itself on particular occasions. These birds are organised by the movements of happiness and efficacy, of which their presence is a sign.

What unfolds upon the birds is also the problem of human destinies. The Bird of Good Fortune is inherently connected with the fate of people and institutions, and with the uncertainties that are fundamental constituents of social time. Birds are thus inscribed with the differences in social trajectories, the defeats and the victories of ambitions and expectations, the loss or gain of position, and of course all of the limits and possibilities for happiness produced by the physical conditions of bodies, their health or sickness. Divisions between birds—those that are produced directly in the act of a group of people bowing down before a bird which constitutes Good Fortune—are instituted by the instabilities of human lives within a structure of social division.

If the articulation of divisions between birds is a product of human social division in that the account of the hierarchies of avian life are produced within a series of struggles over the reproduction of hierarchical divisions between people, the categories of auspicious and inauspicious birds mark the limits of predictability of human fates inside that field of hierarchical relations. The Bird of Good Fortune is set apart from the rest of the avian hierarchy because happiness is not entirely under the control of the institutions which reproduce the realities of everyday life. Good fortune has a specific temporality; it is fundamentally discontinuous. Felicitous birds are ruled by its discontinuities, of which they are literally embodiments.

As a function of this, auspicious birds have a history, a history of appearances. They are a surface which makes visible or audible the ineffable structures of fate, and the moments when they appear constitute historical events. These events are constituted by their encounters with humans, and thus by their involvement with the trajectories of people and institutions. If the falterings and weaknesses of institutions in producing a predictable world are central to the constitution of auspicious birds, it is also the case that the recognition of auspicious birds involves institutional and institutionalising forces. The intense concern of dominant forces (most notably the powers in the political field) with auguries of fate arises from the competition between established institutions (governments, families, fraternities, businesses etc.) which are plagued with doubts about their capacity to remake themselves, and forces not yet institutionalised, who are struggling to displace them (rebels, rising families, new enterprises and so on) for whom the misfortunes of the dominant create a space for consolidation of their own position.

The Bird of Good Fortune exists within a precise institutional framework, and hence within a particular history and a particular series of anxieties and
hopes that make up that history, whose unfolding sequence is registered in a succession of auspicious or inauspicious bird-events. This is because different auspicious birds are constituted by different institutional interests in relation to different fates. The differences in the happiness of a neighbourhood and the happiness of a ruling dynasty enact themselves in different birds, which have different systems of recognition and commemoration. The auspicious and inauspicious birds of the Tang dynasty whose history is contained in the official histories were an artefact of a bureaucratic apparatus charged with recording, investigating and ranking them. It was also founded on the past: the auspices in the official history of the Tang follow those in the history of the Han dynasty. The crows appearing on the Basilica of the Great Ultimate (Taiji dian 太極殿), the magpies nesting in carriage wheels, the yellow sparrows coming and going in the nests of drongos, together form a history of avian lives structured by the fears of dynastic power about its own reproduction. These events in the lives of birds are incorporated into the history of the state. They are at once a commentary upon it, and an autonomous history deciphered by the fortunes of imperium.

This is also a geographical organisation of auspicious birds. The uncertainties of the ruling house

149 “The wise men of [the T’ang] clung persistently to the prognostic birds displayed long ago in the Han shu, birds typical of the original habitat of the civilized Chinese of the Yellow River valley, and therefore important in ancient religion and superstition—that is to say, the inland birds, resident in or migrant through the northlands, predominantly birds of open fields and settled regions.” Schafer, “The auspices of T’ang,” p.199.

150 The rebellions of the late Tang that coincide with the early decades of the Guiyi jun have a precise group of avian correlates, in which the order of birds is disrupted: crows change into magpies, common birds chase night-jars; a tame pheasant brought within the household of an official fights the chickens it had hitherto lived with peacefully; pheasants and hawks cry out at night in the wilds. A stork nesting in the imperial palace was killed by the last Tang emperor: bird death is here the direct result of the process of dynastic enfeeblement and the fears it entails. Human political authority recorded, analysed and tried to intervene in all of these events in avian life, its own fortunes structuring and co-ordinating the order of relations between birds—in short, producing a bird politics. These bird events are compiled, translated and annotated by Schafer in “The auspices of T’ang,” pp.220–5 (materials in the Xin Tang shu, juan 24, wuxing zhi (shang), [Zhonghua Shuju edition, pp.891–2]).

The Tibetans asked the Tang court for charts of Wutai Shan in the 820s. See Jiu Tangshu, juan 17a (Zhonghua Shuju edition, p 512). See also Du Doucheng 杜斗升, “Dunhuang suojian 'Wutai Shan tu' yu 'Wutai Shan zan'” [The “paean to Wutai Shan” and the “Wuta Shan diagram” seen at Dunhuang], in Dunhuang Tutu/an wenxian yanjiu [Studies of Dunhuang and Turpan documents], ed. Zheng Binglin (Lanzhou Lanzhou Daxue Chubanshe, 1995), p.394. I thank Zheng Binglin for giving me a copy of this book. There were also visits from Silla monks, and those from Parhae and Japan; Ennin (699–763) leaves an account of his trip there in his record of his travels in Tang China. Rong Xinjiang gives an account of these various references in his Guiyi jun shi yanjiu, p.248. This was continued in the Five Dynasties: the emperor Zhuangzong of the Latter Tang, whose Shatuo 沙陀 Turk rulers were based in Shanxi and thus near to Wutai Shan, also had a strong involvement with the site, which perhaps facilitated the development of the cult of Wutai Shan at Dunhuang. Documents directly relating to this include the poem in celebration of Zhuangzong’s destruction of the Latter Liang 後梁 which mentions Wutai Shan, in S.373 (ibid., p.249). The investments by central dynasties in Wutai Shan were thus crucial to the site’s presentation in Dunhuang culture. Significantly, this document relates to the timing of the Guiyi jun’s first official mission to the Latter Tang, and the official investiture of Cao Yijin 曹薦金 as Governor (jiedushi 警度使). This argument is Rong Xinjiang’s; he also suggests that the sojourn of the monk Zhiyan 智嚴 at Dunhuang during a western pilgrimage established a direct link to Wutai Shan. This happened before the arrival of the Guiyi jun’s emissaries at the Latter Tang court and, he contends, was the first formal contact between Dunhuang and central China in the Five Dynasties. The journey of the monk Guwen 郭文 to Dunhuang had similar effects in promoting the Wutai Shan cult (ibid., p.250). The high point of the Wutai Shan cult at Dunhuang about its present and future drew together distinguished birds from throughout the imperial territory. These birds are set apart from the undistinguished avian lives of their locality by the imperial fears which, through the bureaucracy of augury investigation and collection, invested these birds with a privileged status. Like tribute birds, they are a medium for the creation of avian empire; birds widely separated in time and space are pulled together by political forces.

The Bird of Good Fortune from Wutai Shan is both a part of this imperial geography of exceptional birds and something which is distinguished from it. In a religious geography of places ranked by their efficacy and holiness Wutai Shan had a pre-eminent position. It was the focus of numerous songs, poems and other writings extolling its virtues, and a major mural of it was painted in the late tenth century. The birds to which it was home were also pre-eminent in the efficacy which they could produce, far more powerful than the local auspicious birds of Dunhuang which, except in extraordinary political moments, did not compare with the exalted creatures of the great holy mountain to the east. In one sense the cult of Wutai Shan at Guiyi jun Dunhuang is a matter of the longing for the privileged geographies and histories of the centre in a peripheral settler colony; Guiyi jun people were active producers of their own geography of exaltation ranking Dunhuang above other sites, but they also constantly wrote, sang or spoke of their longings for central China. The praise for Wutai Shan and its auspicious birds effected local subordination, enacting the cultural hierarchies of empire.

But Wutai Shan also involved a geography of spaces, birds and systems of efficacy which was not the same as that of the imperial state. The Bird of Good Fortune does not connect with a ruling house and its history whose trajectories it indicates. It is part of an autonomous history and a separate set of institutions—those of the Buddhist faith and its deities—which no imperial regime could monopolise, no matter how much they were able to co-opt them.151 Interest in Wutai Shan spread throughout East and Central Asia, drawing pilgrims from Japan, Korea and India, and inspiring interest in Tibet, Khotan and amongst the Uighurs of the Tarim basin.152 Moreover, the magical efficacy (ling) of the site which in part compelled this attention, the efficacy which distinguishes the Bird of Good Fortune (whose powers have effects beyond the boundaries of Chinese empire), is something which imperial history cannot fully possess.

The difficulties that the dominant systems of knowledge in the present encounter in relation to the category of magical efficacy153 relate to the struggles of interpretation and authority that are central to efficacy. The auspicious
bird and the force of magical responsiveness are both objects of recognition:
the Bird of Good Fortune is set apart from other birds by people, who bow
down in awe before it. Their recognition is an act of historical activisation:
a knowledge of birds, accumulated in the past, is applied in a specific present
to set the auspicious bird apart. In other words, the bird is situated at a particu-
lar point in historical development, within a particular matrix of rivalries: the
auspiciousness of the Bird of Good Fortune locates Wutai Shan and its birds
(not those of the capital or some other site) as the source of Good Fortune.

The domain of the auspicious and the institutions which preside over it,
institutions of judgement and interpretation (that is of symbolic power), is an
autonomous field in relation to other social structures, especially the political
field. This autonomy is intimately related to space: the separation of Wutai
Shan and its auspicious birds from the empire is a function of its distance from
the capital. The Bird of Good Fortune can bring everyone to their knees, but
it does not rule, except as a sign that translates the condensed spirit forces
(ling) of political history.154 In the bird world, it is set apart—the object of
reverence, before which humans bow down, but a different authority from
the avian ruler, the phoenix.

The world of birds, like the human world, is divided between the religious
and secular domains, between sacred and profane beings. Moreover, there
is a hierarchy of spiritual attainments, between those who are distinguished
by exceptional—supernatural—qualities and capacities, and those who
perform a more mundane religious role, part of the everyday life of the faith.
This is also a hierarchy of ling: there is the great Bird of Good Fortune of
Wutai Shan (the definitive miraculous place) whose appearance brings
people to their knees, and there are more local, even domestic manifestations
of auspiciousness, a good fortune that is part of family history (and the
familial living and dead) rather than that of ‘public’ history (whether it be the
history of the empire, of the Buddhist church, or the local history of the Guiyi
jun). Exceptional birds are distinguished by being only rarely seen, not part
of ordinary existence, and thus noteworthy for their appearances, which are
recorded by the imperial archival mechanism.

Pigeon

The linkage between birds and places of spiritual power was not all a
matter of the force of efficacy and omen. "The ‘flowery’ Pigeon (buamo ge
花沒鴿),155 how beautiful its colour; it loves to spend its life in the grounds
of monasteries." A special affinity exists between this bird and Buddhist
temples. The specialness of the monastery is marked by its capacity to draw

154 Here Stephen Feuchtwang's arguments
about ling have a powerful resonance, even
though they are articulated in terms of funerary
practice, the division of the soul (linghun 靈
魂), the relationship of dead to living, and the

155 One possibility is the speckled wood
pigeon (Columba hodgsonii) which is found
in forests in Eastern Gansu and has suitably
varied plumage. Its modern Chinese name
is dianban ling 點斑林鴿, its name
being ge 鴿 'pigeon', like that in the text,
rather than jiu 鳥 'dove' like many of the
more spectacular doves and pigeons. As a
forest bird it seems not inappropriate as an
inhabitant of monasteries, often located in
the mountains. See De Schauensee, The
birds of China, pp.249–50. Bernard Read
identifies ge with domestic pigeons. See
Chinese materia medica: avian drugs, p.47.
The editors of the text, recognizing the pervasive status of the magpie as a good omen in Chinese societies, have corrected the original manuscript which says ‘wild falcon’ yehu 野鷹, assuming that the latter is a graphic error for ‘magpie’, which the word for falcon resembles. This correction precludes the chance that for Dunhuang people the falcon had the status of a bird of good omen. The logic of cultural consistency suggests that the text must be in error, excluding the possibility of an autonomous local system. In the editing of the text, the dominant structure of bird knowledge constructs the identity of the bird hierarchy.

“The common Chinese magpie is a variety of Pica pica, of Eurasian distribution. There is also a ‘blue magpie’ (Urocissa erythrorhynca), which the Chinese call ‘mountain magpie’. Both are members of a widespread, jaunty

forth beautiful birds that delight in its surroundings. The temple is adorned by avian beauty, offering a non-human spectacle to complement the manufactured images of religious perfection that it contains. The transforming power of monastic space extends beyond humans; it also compels avian adherence.

Magpie

“The Wild Magpie (yeque 野鷹),” for people the most magically responsive; when good things are in the future it comes to offer happiness.” This communication of favourable events is on a far more domestic scale than that of the Bird of Good Fortune. The magpie is a creature loved by people (renjia 人家), a bearer of good tidings in everyday life, a force of magical responsiveness which can be found within the bounds of ordinary homes, whose histories it foretells:

The magpie was above all a bearer of happy tidings. A book about the reign of Hsüan Tsung of T’ang [r. 712–56] says, “When in the homes of men of this time, they hear the voice of a magpie, all take it as a joyful omen, and that is why it is said that ‘the numinous magpie reports joy’.” The holy bird was a messenger bringing good news to sufferers, a blessed angel announcing relief from misfortune.

Dunhuang cultural production reinscribes magpies with the authority relations that surround familial happiness. It affirms the incorporation of magpies into the domain of the familiar, that is into the arena of everyday fortunes and everyday uncertainties. The magpie is often the vehicle foretelling news of the return of a husband away on official business. It is thus part of the solidification of the relations of symbolic authority in the

family of motley habit, rich in turquoise blues, greens, and chestnut reds. The handsome bird and its cry had been regarded as good omened since antiquity. ‘The numinous magpie is a presage of joy’ says the ancient ‘Canon of Avifauna’ (Schafer, “The auspices of T’ang,” p.203). The magpie (Pica pica) is distributed throughout Gansu. See Wang, Gansu jizhui dongwu zhi, pp.652–4.

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relationships between couples at their most vulnerable point, the separation of wife and husband, so often mandated by the demands of governmental institution on the household unit, the requisition of adult males for war or labour service.159

The Black Pheasant (beidisong 黑鶉)160 the Yellow Flowerhall (huang- bua lou 黃花樓),161 fly back and forth along the mountain side. The Mountain Magpie (shanque 山鷋),162 its red beak earns people's love; the 'Crowd of Gods' (gunben 群神)163 flies alone. The Winter Caller (banhao chong 寒號蟲)164 calls every night. The Green Sparrow (qing que'er 青雀兒), how green in colour! Bright its multi-hued garment of feathers.165 Hearing that the phoenix has appeared in the forest they all come to dance in the heavenly court. The end.

At the end of the bird hierarchy there is colour, noise and movement. Relations of authority, the preservation of distance, the observation of position and systems of rank are displaced by those who dance for the heavenly sovereign, constituting a field of aural and visual density. The scrupulous preservation of order is supplanted by a colourful and noisy display. These birds are defined in terms of the textures they present to eye and ear. Thus in the absence of any explicit relational structure (any system of comparison

159 See for example:
The willow branches hang everywhere, the magpie calls 'ting ting'.
With lighted incense and bowed head I think of my beloved and his love of the mortal sphere.
He has been campaigning for many years, bound for the field of battle, Carrying his jewelled sword, steadying his spear. As times pass the flowers will fade; how many times will the leaves again be green ... The days of Shun are clear and peaceful, awaiting the day of success. Paint a picture on the unicorn hall.
(S.2607, in Ren, Dunhuang geci zongbian, vol.1, p.315). See also the song quoted in “Dunhuang lingshi” 敦煌零拾, (ibid., pp.315–16). Also transcribed in Jao, Aits de Touen-bouang, p.295/ 111, it is translated thus by Arthur Waley:
"Lucky magpie, holy bird, what hateful lies you tell!
Prove, if you can, that ever once your coming brought good luck.
Once too often you have come, and this time I have caught you and shut you in a golden cage, and will not let you talk."
"Lady, I came with kind intent and truly bring you joy,
/ Little did I think you would hold me fast and lock me in a golden cage.
If you really want that far-off man to come quickly home,
Set me free; I will bear him word, flying through the grey clouds."
(Arthur Waley, Chinese poems (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), p.193.) The 'far-off man' of Waley's translation is the man on campaign (zhengfu 征夫), and the situation referred to is clearly a separation wrought by war.

160 Di 雀 appears in the compound dizhi 雀雉, the name for Elliot's pheasant (Syrmaticus ellioti—see Zhou Zhen, Niao yu shiliao, pp.103–4), while song 鴻 is glossed by the editors of Hanyu da cidian, p.186. See De Schauensee, The birds of China, p.510; Schafer, “The auspices of T'ang,” p.203; and Zhou Zhen, Niao yu shiliao, pp. 288–9. This bird is apparently not found in Gansu.

161 References to “the Crowd of Gods” are religious, but some affirm a connection to mountains and forests, so perhaps a deliberate allusion is being made. See Hanyu da cidian, vol.9, p.186.

162 As noted above, this is an old name for a creature described in Guo Pu's commentary on the Erya as the same as the bedan, the bird mentioned in the Li Ji as ceasing to call in the second month of winter, discussed in the note on the 'Solitary Husker' above.

163 According to Guo Pu's commentary on the Erya (Erya zhushu, juan 10, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.82 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, vol.2, p.2648)), the 'green sparrow' (qingque) is a vernacular name for the sangbu 桑鳩, which Zhou Zhen identifies as the masked hawfinch (Eophona parsonata). Bernard Read also gives qingque as an alternative name for Eophona parsonata, but gives 'the Chinese masked gros-beak' as its English name. See Chinese materia medica: avian drugs, p.63. Guo Pu and other classical commentators drew attention to the carnivorous habits of the bird, and its fondness for stealing fat. Commentary on poem 215 of the Shi jing (xiaoyuan 小宛 in the xiaoyan 小雅 section): "They flit about, the green beaks, with their variegated wings." Legge (The She King, p.386) states that the masked hawfinch's loss of its normal diet of meat leads it to raid the grain threshing fields, taken as a sign of political disorder in which carnivores at the top are driven by disequilibrium in their habits to impinge on the livelihood of those below. See Maoshi zhengyi, juan 12, Shisanjing zhushu edition, p.84 (Zhonghua Shuju reprint, vol.1, p.452). A picture of these birds attributed to Castiglione in the collection of the Palace Museum in Taipei which is printed in his book shows that they are not green, but rather have striking blue wings, illustrating the broad chromatic scale covered by the word qing靘 (see Zhou, Niao yu shiliao, pp.253–5). There is no entry for this bird in De Schauensee, The birds of China.
Sound was part of the central power of the imperial institution in the production of order in the world, the order of time through the pitch pipes which were linked to the calendrical structure. But no articulation of sound and colour can be without reference to authority or to empire, especially where the political field is a colour field, in which the struggle for power is a struggle for monopoly of authoritative and pleasing colours (imperial yellow, Roman purple), where divisions of rank are divisions of colour, and where victory in political struggles is constituted in the power to define harmonious sounds. Concern with the cries of birds, with their movements and their plumage, is thus involved with the whole imperial project, which not only prescribes the relations of the visual and aural field through which birds are socially organised, but also contributes to its own recognition through their articulation.

These colourful, noisy flying birds seem beyond the effects of the historical and political relations through which their names are set out on the page (appearing in their disorder to defy all acts of collection and ranking) and thus outside of history—the impossibility of any 'satisfactory identification' looks like a mark of their distance from the organising dreams of power, whose reproduction they have apparently slipped past. But in their rounding out of the list, their completion of the system of relations that extends upwards from themselves to the swan geese and cranes at the top of the government, they too are enlisted in the production of order and ornament, and thus in the production and reproduction of imperial histories and poetic unities in the avian and human lives that was effected by the labours of the officer Suo Buzi, copying out the names of birds late in the winter of 990.

**Avian History, 'Texts' and Systems of Power**

The difficulty that surrounds the project of producing a history of birds (a difficulty that is concretely registered in the great unhappiness that writing this article has caused me, and in the inconvenience and suffering this personal unhappiness has produced for other people associated with its publication) arises from an historical transformation in the relationships between birds and power occurring in the course of the last two centuries or so. The essence of this was the placement of birds outside of any conception of politics, except in the residual form of the avian emblems for nation-states. This is closely interlinked with both the decline of falconry as...
a major practice of ruling élites and the related rise of ornithology, in which
the principal relation of power in which birds are involved is that of
observation. Birds have come to appear outside of the social world, as an
autonomous kingdom with which humans co-exist. An avian history
correspondingly becomes a difficult thing to imagine. Not only is its object
non-human (which challenges long-standing conventions that people and
human intention are the primary domain of historical enquiry), it also
challenges the notion that avian reality is autonomous, independent of
human intervention, and thus only fully accessible through direct observation.
The central distinction is that between bird biology and bird lore. A radical
split is established between human perceptions of birds, ‘bird imagery’ and
‘bird symbols’, and avian life. Academic history may study the former, as part
of the history of human knowledge, belief and systems of representation, but
the latter is essentially beyond its ken. Avian pasts are basically human pasts.

This situation is closely linked with everything that surrounds the notion
of the text in academic institutions. While the category of the text was clearly
of enormous value in displacing naïve realist accounts of the world, which
fail to account for the schemes of perception through which the world is
known, and which treat all statements as evidence, one consequence of
identifying the object of research as a text is to break the relations of concrete
practice out of which ‘texts’ emanate. This is particularly the case with
manuscripts, like those from Dunhuang. Protocols of research usually insist
that a study must begin with a description of the manuscript, and a history
of its affiliations. One effect of this is to make it harder to think of the piece
of writing as an event, something that takes place within an overall frame­
work of social struggles. Where the subject matter of the ‘text’ is ornamental,
as in writing about birds, the drive towards objectifying the text is almost
unstoppable. The relationship between an avian history and a writing event
becomes difficult to conceptualise. It is displaced by the succession of texts.

The effort to find a way around the problems of avian history, and past
the structuring opposition of bird biology and bird text, is what has made this
article hard to write, and, no doubt, to read. Rather than starting with the text,
it launches into a generalised account of birds and power in the Guiyi jun,
one which has very few direct citations. The aim was to consider the order
of power affecting Guiyi jun birds, and to address the general problem of
symbolic power, before taking up the analysis of a piece of writing, an activity
which is usually affiliated to a mode of reading founded on the analysis of
allegory (in literary history) or the interrogation of classical sources with
reference to the findings of observational science. Particularly because of the
potential confusion between the problem of how birds are located in
relations of symbolic power and the idea of birds as ‘symbols of power’, or
‘powerful symbols’, these generalities were raised first. No doubt this is
typical of the dispositions formed by a certain kind of institutional socialisation
as an historian, which differs from the socialisation of the philologist or the
literary scholar; but the concern throughout was to address the problem of
a history of birds structured as a history of power. The focus on the text—
text as a thing (its size, condition and so on), rather than as part of a history
and an emanation of power relations—paradoxically favours the notion of
an analysis of symbolism because the text is seen as a displaced representation
of an external but unrecoverable reality.

Through this creation of “the text,” the history of birds is rendered as
essentially a history of allegories. Writing ‘about’ birds is held to be simply
symbolic—there is no possibility for understanding writing acts as practices
of power which occur within and help to generate avian histories. Yet these
writings all arise from and help to reproduce institutional relationships
between writing interests and birds. The fundamental distinction between
real birds and writing about birds can be avoided if the social division of the
avian world (which is both the ground for writing about birds and something
which bird-related writings help to produce) is taken as the entity that an
avian history takes as its object. The process through which an avian order
is produced and reproduced in struggles for rank finds its fulfilment here.
Originally written as part of the struggle to complete a doctorate, it is now
being published as part of the struggle to secure a junior-level academic
position. Much like the rank of 雅雅 held by Suo Buzi, it is neither exception­
ally demeaned nor exceptionally exalted. The avian history of the Guiyi jun
once again has a concrete effect on ranking struggles, and it is through the
drives and anxieties of the struggle for rank that a history of birds and power
is offered here in the public domain.