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ARTICLE

The significance of feathers in early and medieval China

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Abstract

This article opens with a mystery: why was Zizang 子臧 assassinated in the seventh century BCE, and why was his assassination justified in the *Zuozhuan* by his fondness of snipe-feather caps? It is well established that feathers were a common item of clothing in early and medieval China, used to confer status, to flaunt wealth, to embellish rituals. This article argues that there may also have been accompanying beliefs surrounding their use; beliefs that feathers might bestow upon the wearer certain imagined characteristics of the birds from which they came. It uses case studies of soldiers and their relationship to brown-eared pheasants, dancers and their relationship to long-tailed pheasants, and immortals and their relationship to cranes and egrets. Finally, it returns to Zizang's snipe-feather cap, and suggests reasons for his fate.

Keywords: Early China; medieval China; birds; feathers; animals

> Zizang 子臧 (*c.* seventh century BCE), the younger brother of Zihua 子華 (*c.* seventh century BCE) of Zheng departed and fled for Song. He was fond of collecting snipe-feather caps. Lord Wen of Zheng 鄭文公 (*c.* seventh century BCE) heard of this and hated him for it, he sent bandits to trap him, and in the eighth month, they killed him in the land between Chen and Song. The gentleman says, "if clothing is not appropriate, it spells disaster for the body", the *Shijing* says, "that man yonder, does not consider his clothing". Zizang's clothing was not fitting. The *Shijing* says, "I made my own misery!", surely this is speaking of Zizang! The Xia *Documents* says, "the earth is tranquil and the heavens complete". This is what "fitting" means.
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> 鄭子華之弟子臧出奔宋，好聚鷸冠。鄭伯聞而惡之，使盜誘之。八月， 盜殺之于陳、宋之間。君子曰：「服之不衷，身之災也。《詩》曰： 彼己之子， 不稱其服。 子臧之服，不稱也夫！《詩》曰：『自詒伊慼』，其子臧之謂矣。夏書曰： 『地平天成』，稱也。」[1]

We know from elsewhere in the *Zuozhuan* that Zizang was guilty of some unnamed offence (子臧得罪而出).[2] His brother, Zihua, had been executed for treason by Lord Wen of

[1] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, 2007, 15.23/258a.

[2] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 21.17/368a; Wai-yee Li has suggested that there appears to be a kind of "guilt by association". She notes that Zihua had brought about his father's anger by attempting to draw the state of Qi 齊 (eleventh century–221 BCE) into the state of Zheng's 鄭 (806–375 BCE) factional struggles (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*,

Zheng,[3] and presumably Zizang thought he was next in line. In this passage, however, the crime that justifies the Count of Zheng's loathing is Zizang's penchant for snipe-feather caps. Commentators have been confused by this line as early as the Han: Du Yu 杜預 (*c.* 222–285 CE) thought that "snipe" should be read as "kingfisher" (*cui* 翠),[4] and that kingfisher-feather garments were illegal (*feifa zhi fu* 非法之服). Kingfisher caps were doubtless lavish accessories and perhaps the Lord thought these ought only be under his own purview. Hui Dong 惠棟 (*c.* 1697–1758) cited Yan Shigu 顏師古 (*c.* 581–645 CE) and argued that snipe-feather caps are worn by astronomers (*zhi tianwen zhe* 知天文者),[5] whom perhaps the Count considered charlatans. Wai-yee Li suggested that the cap might indicate astrological knowledge and foresight that Zizang lacks, or that it may incriminate him since rebels often seek knowledge of the heavens.[6] Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (1909–92) thought that, whatever the feather, Zizang was condemned and had fled, but still failed to lie low and sought out curiosities 蓋謂其得罪出奔，猶不自韜晦且好奇耳.[7] In any case, the cap-collecting crime was sufficient to warrant his assassination, and the compiler of the *Zuozhuan* judged that it was Zizang who had dug his own grave with his inappropriate clothing.[8] The commentators apparently agree that the feathers were of importance, but the precise nature of that importance remains mysterious.

Demands of propriety in clothing are ubiquitous if not timeless; we would not now wear T-shirts with coarse slogans to meet a king any more than vassals would have worn coarse cloth to meet their lords in early China. In the context of early China, therefore, it is well established that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to animal imagery, skins, furs and feathers. Derk Bodde noted that the *Houhanshu* 後漢書 records dove-shaped staffs being given to the elderly with the justification that since doves

13.4/215b). This was why his father had him killed in 664 BCE (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 14.16/236b). Li also points out that both Zihua and Zizang were children of Lord Wen's illicit union with his uncle's wife (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 21.17/368a). Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (London, 2007), 95–6.

[3] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 14.16/236b.

[4] As Schafer has noted, when we discuss "kingfishers" in China, we do not mean only the familiar blue and orange common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis bengalensis*), though it also resides in China. There are also populations of the pied kingfisher (*Ceryle varia* or *Ceryle rudis*), the spotted kingfisher (*Ceryle lugubris*) and a number of others. Schafer writes that the most sought after was the white-breasted kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), with its maroon head and belly, and an iridescent cobalt and glinting turquoise back. In Tang literature, he writes, this is the bird known as *feicui* 翡翠 or "halcyon": Edward H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird; T'ang Images of the South* (Berkeley, 1967), 238.

[5] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan gu* 春秋左傳詁, 1987, 8.320.

[6] Li, *The Readability of the Past*, p. 96.

[7] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, 1990, 1.426.

[8] In Li, *The Readability of the Past*, the author explains this passage in the context of several others. She calls it an example of "sign and causality", a technique that recurs throughout the *Zuozhuan*, in which two lines appear to have a causal relation that is unclear to the reader. She argues that this technique in the text shows an awareness of how "opposite forces are inextricably intertwined in the flux of the moment" (p. 91), and that these signs are actually assumed to be readable since causality is supposed to be realized through a recurrent pattern, some small, apparently inconsequential gesture, action or event that comes to have momentous consequences (p. 92). For Li, this is the case because there is a vision among the composers of the *Zuozhuan* of a world poised in delicate balance, intricately ordered and, therefore, infractions, however slight, give rise to great havoc and threaten the whole system (p. 93). In the context of Zizang, therefore, she argues that his sartorial transgression is an opportunity for the composer to ruminate on universal correspondences. She also includes two other instances in which feathers obliquely lead to momentous political events: one in which Jin decorates flagpoles with feathers borrowed from Zheng and loses the allegiance of the princes (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 54.13–14/946a–b), and one in which the Jin minister Fan Xuanzi 范宣子 (Shi Gai 士匄 [d. *c.* 548 BCE]) fails to return borrowed feathers from Qi and so loses Qi's support (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 32.8/557b) (p. 97).

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have no trouble swallowing their food, neither ought the recipient.[9] Roel Sterckx has discussed several passages that fit this theme: he writes of targets made of animal skin that allowed the archer to appropriate the power of the animal;[10] he noticed that when gifts of pheasants, lambs, tame ducks or geese are given in the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Bohutong* 白虎通 and the *Liji* 禮記,[11] the texts justify the choices of specific animals "by linking their natural behaviour to the social conduct desired of the human officer in question";[12] he noticed that adopting animal postures or wearing masks was believed to tackle demonic illness, generate apotropaic effects[13] and have general therapeutic effects on the body;[14] elsewhere, he suggested that the use of reptile skin and animal hide drums was inspired by the belief that animal skin may have been endowed with metamorphosing powers, and could thus perhaps induce changes in climate or movement among addressed creatures or spirits in ritual.[15] Though it cannot be taken as normative, the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 also contains many suggestive comments about the effects of eating flora or fauna, wearing them on one's body or hanging them from the belt.[16] Olivia Milburn, in her recent study of featherwork in early and medieval China, makes a couple of suggestive remarks about the importance of feathers. For instance, she includes a passage on the possibility that feathers might have been used in religious practices due to the belief that birds could communicate between the human realm and the land of immortals, because of their association with the *yuren* 羽人, or "feathered immortals", who were ubiquitous in early art. She also notes that in bronze sculptures of kingfishers from the Han dynasty they are often found on money trees or with coins and other symbols of financial success,[17] and writes that the significance of this may be greater than has been appreciated hitherto.

Such observations rarely occur in traditional commentaries.[18] The key reference to such phenomena when it comes to feathers is a short section in Edward H. Schafer's *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*. Schafer is generally discussing the trade of exotica, and as someone who clearly has a general interest in birds, when writing on feathers he makes a number of insightful comments:

[9] Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances during the Han Dynasty, 206 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Princeton, 1975), 343: *Houhanshu* 90.5.3124.

[10] Roel Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China* (Albany, 2002), 23: *Bohutong shuzheng* 白虎通疏證, 5.244.

[11] Roel Sterckx, "Ritual, mimesis, and the nonhuman animal world in early China", *Society and Animals* 24, 2016, 275: *Chunqiu fanlu*, 16.394; *Shuoyuan*, 19.485; *Bohutong zhengshu*, 8.356-57; *Liji zhushu*, 5.25a.

[12] Sterckx, "Ritual, mimesis", 275.

[13] Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, 187–9.

[14] Sterckx, "Ritual, mimesis", 279.

[15] Roel Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts: animals and music in early China", *T'oung Pao* 86/1–3, 2000, 13–14.

[16] There are things one may wear from the belt to get rid of: stomach illness (1.1), confusion (1.1), deafness (1.4), fear (1.6), deception (1.7), illness (2.30) or to have many descendants (1.4). There are things one may wear to alleviate fear of lightning (2.31, 5.153, 5.175) or to ward off the inauspicious (2.48), nightmares (2.67), the terrible (2.67), forgetfulness (5.142), affliction (5.144), war (5.153, 5.164), blindness (5.165, 5.177), fainting (5.164), choking (5.173), anger (5.176), jealousy (5.177), the cold (5.180), poison (5.170), tumours (5.172), deception (5.173), calamity (5.180), stomach sickness (5.180) and heart ailments (10.331). There are also some plants that one can wear to beautify oneself (5.151) or to charm others (5.171). *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* 山海經校注, collated and annotated by Yuan Ke 袁珂 (1916–2001) (Chengdu, 1992).

[17] Olivia Milburn, "Featherwork in early and medieval China", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140/3, 2020, 553, following Ma Xiaoling 馬曉亮, "Handai cuiniao tongshi yanjiu" 漢代翠鳥銅飾研究, *Kaogu* 9, 2011, 82–8.

[18] "Feathered goblets" (*yu shang* 羽觴) are mentioned in "summoning the Soul" in the *Chuci*, Wang Yi 王逸 explains that the feathers are "kingfisher plumes" and Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 says the feathers were attached to the goblets in order to accelerate the drinking (i.e. to symbolize "flight") (*Chuci buzhu*, 9.10b).

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> Our modern stoles of maribou feathers and capes of ostrich feathers are vestigial and perhaps impotent. But the magical power of feathers was once abundantly obtained by dressing in them completely; a cloak or a suit of feathers brought one closer to the bird-spirits, or to birds in their spiritual form, or to birds conceived of as ideal forms.[19]

Furthermore, he writes:

> To be like a bird is, in some ways, more desirable than to share the attributes of any other kind of animal. The freedom of the body, the flight of the soul, the soaring of the imagination, were equally ancient and important ideas, and still living ideals in T'ang … the plumage of birds could be used to adorn, and simultaneously to transform, the persons of the medieval Chinese, or at the very least to beautify the body and, at the same time, to stimulate the fancy.[20]

In these quotes, Schafer has noticed the same beliefs that Bodde and Sterckx saw in staffs and skins. Schafer calls this a closeness to bird spirits, or to their spiritual form or to their "ideal forms". His key period of focus is the Tang,[21] but it is quite clear, particularly from Milburn's article, and from a range of other textual sources (including some from notes in Schafer's *Golden Peaches*),[22] that wearing feathers was widely practised in earlier periods. Therefore, it is worthwhile to infer the cultural importance of feather wearing in these earlier times, especially with reference to aspects unique to China.[23] I will refer to these aspects as the mimicry and appropriation of the avian world. I contend that not only were feathers often used as signifiers of different states: the willing subject, the ferocious warrior, the devoted or ravishing romantic partner or the worthy in touch with the

[19] Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics* (Berkeley, 1963), 112.

[20] Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 110.

[21] Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 110–15.

[22] To her summary I would add: pheasant-feather chariot shades (*Zhouli zhushu*, 27.6/415b; *Maoshi zhengyi*, 32.18/130a; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, 32.21–2/564a–b), canopies (*Zhouli zhushu*, 27.6/415b), decoration (*Hanshu*, 87.3536–7, 51.2328–9) and handlebar ornaments (*Zhouli zhushu*, 27.16/420b); feather covers for coffins (*Zhouli zhushu*, 27.13/417a; *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 272; *Huainanzi jishi*, 13.918); feather standards (*Zhouli zhushu*, 27.16/420b; *Liji zhushu*, 37.1/662a, 38.10/681b; *Huainanzi jishi*, 11.12b); feather bannerets (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 271), screens (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 271), streamers (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 271–2; *Hanshu*, 76.3214–15), shades (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 272; Liji *zhushu*, 43.4/749b); single pheasant feathers used for dances (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 268; Liji *zhushu*, 49.16/837b; *Maoshi zhengyi*, 23.1/99a–23.5/101a; *Wenxuan* 文選, 3.17/59b; *Huainanzi jishi*, 5.399–400; *Zhuangzi jishi*, 24.850); vassal's pheasant feather sleeve ornaments (*Yiwen leiju*, 90.1571); caps made from the feathers of egrets (*Zhouli zhushu*, 21.6/323b) and of ducks (*Huainanzi jishi*, 12.908–10); pheasant feather patterned robes (*Maoshi zhengyi*, 31.6/111b; *Zhouli zhushu*, 21.6/323b); dangling ornaments (*Yiwen leiju*, 334; *Taiping yulan*, 387); kingfisher headdresses (*Wenxuan*, 7.21/121a; *Tongdian*, 1735–6; *Hanshu*, 63.2754; *Zhuangzi jishi*, 5a.453); and feather ornamented goblets (*Chuci buzhu*, 9.10b).

[23] In terms of the more timeless cultural importance of feather wearing, Milburn has already written about the use of feathers to inspire awe in one's subjects (Milburn, "Featherwork", 551), to connote decadence (Milburn, "Featherwork", 553–5), to serve as markers of rank in the military (Milburn, "Featherwork", 555–6) or to present as valuable gifts (Milburn, "Featherwork", 556–9). It is also worth noting that references to rearing birds are well attested: geese in Cao Pi's 曹毗 (fl. Jin) preface to a poem on a pair of geese (*Yiwen leiju*, 90.1563); rearing swans in Niu Taomu's 鈕滔母 (fl. Jin) letter to his nephew Xiao Zheng 孝徵 (n.d.) *Jin Niu Taomu yu cong di Xiao Zheng shu* 晉鈕滔母與從弟孝徵書 (*Yiwen leiju*, 90.1569); raising cranes (David Knechtges, "Cranes at ancient and early medieval Chinese courts", *Early Medieval China* 27, 2021, 45–58); Shen Fanghseng 湛方生 (n.d.) of Jin's preface to the *yin* 吟 (generally "chant") about the bridled crane *Jin Shen Fangsheng ji he yin xu* 晉湛方生羈鶴吟序 (*Yiwen leiju*, 90.1569); raise *di* 翟 and *zhi* 雉 pheasants Wang Shu 王叔 (n.d.) of Jin's *fu* about the *di* pheasant *Jin Wang Shu zhi di zhi fu* 晉王叔之翟雉賦 (*Yiwen leiju*, 90.1571–2); Sun Chu's 孫楚 (d. *c.* 293 CE) *fu* on the *di* pheasant *Jin Sun Chu di fu* 晉孫楚翟賦 (*Yiwen leiju*, 90.1572).

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otherworldly; they were also believed to themselves contain power that lent aspects of the bird to the wearer. The birds were perceived as ferocious, romantic, ethereal and their wearers procured their abilities by wearing them. To demonstrate this argument, I will draw parallels between textual commentary about the character of brown-eared pheasants, and the use of pheasant feathers in the military; I will discuss the use of pheasant feathers in dance as depicted in early poetry; I will explore the significance of feathers in early ritual and music; and then I will describe the relationship between feather garments and magic. Through these examples, a general sketch of the beliefs surrounding feather wearing may be drawn up, and thereby the *Zuozhuan* story may be rendered clearer. Though the article draws on texts from a great timescale, it focuses most prominently on the Han period. Texts from earlier periods are often used for their Han dynasty commentaries, and texts from later periods are generally used simply to affirm other earlier examples.

Feathers, military

"We say that they have the swiftness of birds (the character is *yu* 羽 'feather', which can act as a synecdoche for birds), and they are as numerous as [trees in the] forest. Some say they are the feathered wings of the Emperor."[24] This is how Yan Shigu explains "*yulin*" 羽林 (feathered-forest), the name of a branch of the military from the Han until the Ming.[25] Yan is punning on common military metaphors of flight, perhaps evoking skeins of geese in a V-formation, or descending together in a racket. But while Yan's highlighting of this symbolic meaning is doubtless accurate in one sense, the prevalence of physical feathers in military garb and ceremony is of equal, if not more, relevance to the name.

The *Liji* records that battle carts and horses have flying geese upon them, and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (*c.* 127–200 CE) justifies this by saying that it is to emulate the order of their flight.[26] Though this could be understood as suggesting that the formation takes inspiration from the flight order of geese, it seems that Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (*c.* 574–648 CE) understood it to mean that the soldiers literally appropriate the flight order, since he writes this alongside a parallel statement that by naming them "tigers" they appropriate the animals' awe-inspiring bravery (鴻 "取飛有行列也 … 虎" 取其有威勇也).[27] As Sterckx has noted, it is a common occurrence in texts that formations of flying birds were used to name army formations,[28] and he further suggests that the symbolism of geese had another resonance since they fly at higher altitudes than common birds, just as the morally accomplished person "stands above the people".[29] It is also significant

[24] *Hanshu*, 19a.728.

[25] It is curious that famous fighters also have "feather" as part of their name, for instance Xiang Yu 項羽 (*c.* 232–202 BCE), the prominent warlord sometimes called the Hegemon King (*ba wang*) 霸王; Hou Yi 后羿 the mythical archer; and Guan Yu 關羽 (*c.* 160–220 CE), a brutal general and then a deity associated with war. Others had names associated with birds and flight, for instance, Yue Fei 岳飛 (*c.* 1103–42 CE), whose names means "high peak" and "flying", and whose courtesy name was Pengju 鵬舉, which the *peng* (a mythical bird similar to a Roc) takes off. Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (*c.* 181–234 CE) is frequently depicted as holding a white-feather fan, for instance, Du Fu's 杜甫 (*c.* 712–70 CE) poem about Zhu (*Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注, 17.1506), but this is not attested in early texts.

[26] *Liji zhushu*, 3.8/56b. It should be noted as well that the *Liezi* 列子 writes that when the mythical Yellow Emperor (*Huang di* 黃帝) and the Flame Emperor (*Yan di* 炎帝) went into battle, they were supposed to have black bears, brown bears, wolves, leopards, leopard cats and tigers as their vanguard, and eagles, brown-eared pheasants, goshawks and black-kites as their standard-bearers (*Liezi jishi*, 2.24–5).

[27] *Liji zhushu*, 3.8/56b.

[28] Sterckx, "Ritual, mimesis", 275: *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1429; *Mozi jiaozhu* 墨子校注, 31.342; and *Han Feizi jishi* 韓非子集釋, 1.43.

[29] Sterckx, "Ritual, mimesis", 275.

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that in other areas the movements of attacking chariots seem to be spoken of in terms of flight, for instance, in the *Liutao* 六韜, Lord Tai of Qi 齊太公 (i.e. Jiang Ziya 姜子牙, d. *c.* eleventh century BCE) described chariots as the feathers and wings of the army and depicts their purpose as to "cut off the formations" of the enemy, drawing a link between the formation of geese and of the military.[30]

Most important in explaining the literal understanding of the term *yulin*, is that in military headgear it was proper to have feathers attached on either side. In the *Han Feizi*, the process of becoming a general is depicted as bowing one's head and wearing feathers on it (*dunshou dai yu wei jiangjun* 頓首戴羽為將軍).[31] The "feathered forest" would be what would be seen when the emperor looked over his army, with the many feathers sticking up from either side of each cap. It was often important that the feathers should be a specific colour, or even species. The *Weiliaozi* 尉繚子[32] indicated that the "armies of the left" should wear green feathers, that the "army of the right" should wear white feathers and the "central army" should wear yellow feathers.[33] In the *Wu Yue Chunqiu* 吳越春秋,[34] troops of the central formation (in the army of the state of Wu 吳 [eleventh century–473 BCE]) wear white clothes, have white pennants, white armour and arrows with white feathers, and they "look like sowthistle"; the armies of the left all wear red, have red pennants, red armour and arrows with red feathers, and they "look like fire"; the troops of the right all wear black clothes, have black chariots, black armour and crow-feather arrows, and they "look like ink".[35] Wearing feathers in the military was common throughout China's history. In the much later *Xintangshu* 新唐書,[36] one can see an example taken even further: the first line of the military carry six-colour feather coats; the metropolitan guards wear red-feather coats; awe-inspiring palace guards wear blue/green-feather coats; martial palace guards wear wild duck-feather coats; gallant palace guards wear white-feather coats; left and right palace guards wear yellow-feather coats; the third line wear little peacock-feather coats; the fifth and seventh lines wear parrot-feather coats; the ninth line wear chicken-feather coats; the eleventh line carry halberds with white plumes.[37] In this case, the colours corresponded to *wuxing* 五行 thought, and could therefore perhaps be taken to signify that the army covered all corners of the world, or so that there might be troops for every occasion and every season. In other cases, the feathers can simply be generic, for instance, when Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (*c.* 156–87 BCE) named Luan Da 欒大 (d. *c.* 112 BCE) General of the Way of Heaven (*Tiandao jiangjun* 天道將軍), he adorned him in a feather cloak.[38] First, this could be a pun (the way of heaven can mean both the correct path of all things, but also the path to the sky, which birds can take), and, secondly, Yan Shigu comments on the *Hanshu* version of the story that the clothes are intended to take the meaning of its spirit flight (取其神僊飛翔之意也).[39] It is telling that in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, when Lord Tai of Qi depicts the correct route to peace in King Wu of Zhou's 周武王 (*c.* eleventh century BCE) kingdom, after defeating

[30] *Liutao*, 6.46a.

[31] *Han Feizi jijie*, 1.2.

[32] This text was probably compiled during the Warring States period 戰國 (fifth century–221 BCE). Fragments were discovered in 1972 inside a Han-period 漢 (206 BCE –220 CE) tomb library in Yinqueshan 銀雀山 near Linyi 臨沂, Shandong.

[33] *Weiliaozi*, 4.1b.

[34] The compilation of this text is attributed to Zhao Ye 趙曄 (*c.* first century CE).

[35] *Wu Yue Chunqiu jiaozheng zhushu* 吳越春秋校證注疏, 2014, 5.23/160–1.

[36] This text was compiled under the supervision of Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (*c.* 1007–72) and Song Qi 宋祁 (*c.* 998–1061).

[37] *Xintangshu*, 1975, 20a.483.

[38] *Shiji* 史記, 12.12.462–6, 28.6.1390–1; *Hanshu* 漢書, 25.5.1223–4.

[39] *Hanshu*, 25.5.1225.

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King Zhou of Shang 商紂王 (*c.* eleventh century BCE), the first action that betokens demilitarization is the disposal of helmets and the adornment of duck-feather caps. This may be partially a pun due to the visual similarity of the characters *mao* 瞀 and *wu* 鶩,[40] but it also further affirms the fact that the species of feather is significant in a militaristic context.[41]

The most common feather noted specifically is doubtless that of the brown-eared pheasant.[42] In the *Houhanshu*, Sima Biao 司馬彪 (d. *c.* 306 CE) writes that the five offices, the left and right brave-as-tigers, the feathered-forest, the general of the five organs, the inspector of the left and right feathered-forest and the brave-as-tigers cavalry all wear brown-eared pheasant caps.[43] Sima wrote that a feather each is attached to the left and to the right of a hat, which mimics the bird itself, who also has feathers jutting up from either side of its face. The reason that Sima gave for this decoration is that when brown-eared pheasants fight, only death stops them. These comments are echoed in the preface to Cao Cao's 曹操 (*c.* 155–220 CE) *fu* 賦 (usually "rhapsody") on the brown-eared pheasant, where he claimed that these pheasants have fierce temperaments and that there is no losing when they fight.[44] Cao writes slightly more explicitly than Sima that when people adorn their caps with these feathers, they are symbolizing, resembling or modelling themselves on the bird (all possible translations of *xiang* 像). These images of the bloodthirsty bird appear in a number of texts, always with common themes. In the *Qinjing* 禽經,[45] it is referred to as a "staunch bird",[46] a depiction reflected in Cao Zhi's 曹植 (*c.* 192–232 CE), rhapsody, in which he wrote of the bird's ferocious *qi* 氣, its unyielding determination, its fear of dishonour, its tunnel vision for death or victory and its

[40] It should be noted that the character for "duck-feather cap" in the passage is *mu* 木, but the commentaries identify it as a duck-feather cap, and one which an astronomer would wear 知天文者. They justify this since *shu* 术 better fits the rhyme scheme than *mu* 木. They thus consider a *shu* 术 cap to be a duck-feather cap. Interestingly, the commentaries here cite the *Shuowen jiezi* (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 294) and the *Liji* (the cited passage is no longer in the transmitted text) to justify the fact that since the snipe (*yu* 鷸, here apparently considered the same species as a wild duck, perhaps better translated as "waterbird") is a bird that knows when it will rain, thus those who read the patterns of the heavens wear snipe caps.

[41] *Huainanzi jishi*, 12.908–10.

[42] Two points are necessary to make here. The first is that the idea of species is perhaps misleading. The same character is used continuously to describe the feathers on military caps, but there is no guarantee that the same bird is being referred to. Even if it is the same bird, it should not be considered equivalent to contemporary or Linnean species. The character for *he* 鶡 could simply refer to any feathers that were used in such a way, for example. There are some depictions of the brown-eared pheasant, using the character *he*, which leave little doubt that the author is observing the bird itself. For the great majority, however, there is no way of verifying this, nor indeed any way of suggesting that the character refers to a single species that corresponds to our modern understanding of the brown-eared pheasant. This is the case with any specific species mentioned in a text from so long ago. Furthermore, in this specific case, it is perhaps worth noting that there is another character, *hui* 翬, now generally translated as the Koklass pheasant, which appears to be made up of two feathers *yu* 羽 on top of soldiers *jun* 軍, fitting exactly the description of *he* caps. Furthermore, the male Koklass pheasant has dark feathers that stick up from either side of their head. Despite these cautions, we might understand the species of *he* as existing as a conceptual bird, since the character is always used in this specific situation, and in this case, it is distinct from other types of bird. For these reasons, we cannot speak conclusively of species, but from time to time, cautious exploration can be productive.

[43] *Houhanshu*, 3670.

[44] *Cao Cao ji* 曹操集, 13.

[45] The *Qinjing* is attributed to Shi Kuang 師曠 (n.d.) of the Spring and Autumn period 春秋 (770–fifth century BCE). He was a blind musician in the court of Lord Dao 悼公 (r. *c.* 572–558 BCE) in the state of Jin 晉 (eleventh century–376 BCE). Given his circumstances, his authorship is unlikely. The text contains a number of names of places and regions that suggest it was composed after the Tang period 唐 (618–907 CE), and it was first mentioned in the Song period 宋 (907–1279 CE) dictionary *Piya* 埤雅, attributed to Lu Dian 陸佃 (*c.* 1042–1102) (*Piya*, 1935–40, 1171–2: 131–235). Given this information, it is likely that the text was composed during the early Song period.

[46] *Qinjing*, 9.

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measured and gallant regulated behaviour. This bird, according to Cao, "considers sweet the plunge into death".[47] Guo Pu's 郭璞 (*c.* 276–324 CE) *zan* 贊 (usually "appraisal") on the bird writes of its preference for death over flight, and writes that its feathers adorn the martial officers, "both sharp and right-principled".[48] There is something of a causality dilemma and an interpretation dilemma here when describing the place of the brown-eared pheasant caps in culture. On the one hand, it appears that they wear the feathers of a bird that they consider shares the virtues that they seek in martial officers. On the other hand, they could be depicting the bird *ex post facto*, and assume that the bird will have these qualities since martial officers wear the feathers. It should perhaps be noted that the brown-eared pheasants are no more violent or indeed "right-principled" than other members of their family, and indeed they have close relatives in the blue-eared and white-eared pheasants, neither of whose feathers were used in the same way. Nevertheless, it remains the case that depictions of other birds in these terms are rare,[49] and indeed it is far commoner for the brown-eared pheasant to be portrayed in these terms rather than raptors, for instance.

Feathers, women, dance

While the brown-eared pheasant was considered staunch and violent despite its real behaviour, another member of its family was given the opposite treatment. Prominent in early poetic depictions of dance and beauty are the long tail feathers of the Reeve's pheasant (*di* 翟).[50] Unlike the brown-eared pheasant, modern ornithologists regard the Reeve's pheasant as one of the most vicious of its kind, but in early Chinese texts it was lauded for its beauty and vanity. According to an apparently now-lost section of the *Bowuzhi* 博物志,[51] cited in the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚,[52] they have long tails which they take great care of when it rains and snows, perching on lofty branch tips, and not daring to come down to eat. As a result, many die.[53] The *Qinjing* repeats a similar trope, but about a *shanji* 山鷄 (apparently another type of pheasant, or perhaps the same kind): "they do not enter into the deepest and darkest forests because they are afraid of losing their tails, when it rains they hide beneath rocky outcrops because they fear

[47] *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 1.151.

[48] *Yiwen leiju*, 90.1571.

[49] There is a song by Emperor Jianwen of Liang 梁簡文 (*c.* 503–51 CE) that is apparently about ring-necked pheasants flying in the morning. It mentions their propensity to dodge raptors and fight with rancour and disobedience when young, but it also mentions that they thrust their horns up at the raptors. Since ring-necked pheasants do not have horns, it is probable that the emperor was not intending to write about them, and perhaps got them mixed up with the brown-eared pheasants. *Yiwen leiju*, 90.1571.

[50] Schafer provides a list of the various beautiful pheasants and other galliform birds on offer to feather gatherers. He writes of the David's blood pheasant in the Qinling Mountains 秦嶺, with a crimson tail; of Temminck's tragopan in west China, with horns, white-spotted plumage and blue face; of the silver pheasant of Lingnan 嶺南, with blue-black crest, red cheeks and long white tail; of the blue-eared pheasant Gansu and Kokonor, with white horns, red cheeks and bluish grey body plumage, glossed with iridescent green and purple; of the golden pheasant of the west and northwest, golden-crested, with a green and yellow back and scarlet belly; and of Lady Amherst's pheasant of Tibet and southwest China, glowing in red, white, blue, yellow and black, and especially in scintillant green. He notes that there were many others, and describes the Reeves's pheasant as "a handsome golden-brown bird, spotted and striped with white and black, with a black-masked white head and an extremely long tail. The fowl is indigenous to north China and since the dim and glorious past has lent its flaunting plumes to ceremonial and military artists for wands, standards, and hats." Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 111.

[51] Attributed to the Western Jin 西晉 (265–316 CE) writer Zhang Hua 張華 (*c.* 232–300 CE).

[52] Compiled under the supervision of Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (*c.* 557–641 CE), Linghu Defen 令狐德芬 (*c.* 583–666), Yuan Lang 袁朗 (fl. Tang) and Zhao Hongzhi 趙宏智 (fl. Tang).

[53] *Yiwen leiju*, 90.1571.

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getting wet, when it rains for a long time they dare not come out to procure food, so many die".[54]

Feathers of certain birds appear prominently in depictions of feminine beauty. Milburn has studied kingfisher feathers in a number of textual sources: Cao Zhi's portrayal of the goddess of the Luo River,[55] and Ding Yi's 丁廙 (d. *c.* 220 CE) *fu* about the daughter of Cai Bojie 蔡伯喈 (*c.* 132–192 CE).[56] In both of these cases Milburn argues that the kingfisher "head jewels" are intended to connote wealth, beauty and power. Similar portrayals are easily found in other sources,[57] and some modern examples may also be found. Besides the kingfisher, there are a smattering of other birds: golden pheasant,[58] egret,[59] duck[60] and peacock-pheasant,[61] for instance. But certainly, the most prominent is the Reeve's. "How precious and splendid! Her Reeve's feather!" declares the song "Junzi xie lao" 君子偕老 of the *Shijing* 詩經. It speaks, most probably, of a feather dancer, and notes her feather,[62] her deep black hair like clouds, her jade earrings and her ivory hairpin.[63] Another song ("shuo ren" 碩人) lauds the pheasant feather screens on the carriage of the majestic person (who was later generally thought to be Zhuang Jiang 莊姜 [d. *c.* seventh century BCE], daughter of Lord Zhuang I of Qi 齊前莊公 [d. *c.* 731 BCE] on her way to be married), along with her strong horses and rich red ornaments.[64] This feathered clothing and carriage covering was later regarded as clothing for marriage, and in the *Zhouli* 周禮 parallels are drawn between a set of six outfits for queens, and six caps for kings. The six *di* 翟 for queens are the *huiyi* 褕衣 (ceremonial robe, the *Shiming* 釋名,[65] suggesting that it is ornamented with the colours of pheasants),[66] *yaodi* 揄翟 (sometimes written *di* 狄, but generally also understood to be ornamented with pheasants due to the later character), *quedi* 闕翟 (Zheng Xuan argues that it is patterned like a pheasant, rather than woven with its feathers), *quyi* 鞠衣 (according to Zheng Sinong 鄭司農 [d. *c.* 83 CE] this is a yellow silk robe like unfurling mulberry leaves, to be worn in spring), *zhanyi* 展衣 (white, according to Zheng Sinong), *yuanyi* 緣衣 (in the *Yili* 儀禮 Zheng Xuan suggests that this is a black

[54] *Qinjing*, 5.

[55] Milburn, "Featherwork", 561: *Wenxuan*, 19.256.

[56] Milburn, "Featherwork", 561: *Yiwen leiju*, 30.452.

[57] For example, *Tongdian* 通典, 1735–6. Schafer collects a number of examples from the Tang period, along with many associations of feathers and feminine beauty: Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 113–14.

[58] *Wang Can jizhu* 王粲集注, 53–4.

[59] *Zhouli zhushu*, 21.6/323b.

[60] *Huainanzi jishi*, 12.908–10.

[61] *Qinjing*, 6.

[62] The commentaries, in particular Kong Yingda's corrected meanings commentary, appear to think that here the "*di*" refers to the patterning on the sleeves, but he does not give evidence, so it is difficult to know (*Maoshi zhengyi*, 31.5/111a). The Mao commentary on the line "how precious and splendid" writes of two types of clothing – *yudi* 褕翟, *quedi* 闕翟, *Maoshi zhengyi*, 31.6/111b) – which might be either ornamented or patterned with feathers (*yushi yi ye* 羽飾衣也), but this was still a later addition to the base text. Zheng Xuan argues that the "three *di*" in the *Zhouli* are all the names of clothes, named after the feather, but not themselves the feathers. He contrasts this to the dancing feather mentioned in other songs (also *di*) which he says is the real feather (*zhen diyu* 真翟羽). The *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (a later compilation attributed to Yu Shinan 虞世南 [*c.* 558–638 CE]) cites the earlier *Sanlitu* 三禮圖 and suggests that when the emperor made sacrifices to the ancestors the empress would wear the *yudi*, which was carved from the blue-green shape of the Reeve's pheasant, with the colours of the ring-necked pheasant (*zhi* 雉) and woven into clothes (*Beitang shuchao*, 127.1). Regardless of specifics, there is certainly a link between the feathers and patterns of these pheasants and feminine beauty.

[63] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 31.6/111b.

[64] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 32.18/130a.

[65] The compilation of this text is attributed to Kong Xi 孔熙 (fl. Han) at the end of the Later Han period 後漢 (25–220 CE).

[66] *Shiming shuzhengbu*, 5.83.

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robe with a red hem)[67] and *susha* 素沙 (the name implies that this is plain, white silk).[68] The Six Caps are the "great fur" (*da qiu* 大裘) and cap (*mian* 冕) (worn when the king makes sacrifices to heaven), the *gunmian* 袞冕 (the auspicious clothes of the king, which the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 suggests has dragons on it),[69] *bimian* 鷩冕 (apparently from a type of pheasant, worn when the king makes sacrifices to former kings and when conducting the ceremonies of the shooting banquet), *cuimian* 毳冕 (fur clothes and cap according to Zheng Xuan, worn when the king makes sacrifices to the mountains and rivers), *zhimian* 絺冕 (the name suggests linen cloth and cap, worn when the king makes sacrifices to the gods of grain and soil) and *xuanmiao* 玄冕 (the name suggests dark clothes and cap, worn during sacrifices to the gods of grain and soil).[70] There appears to be a gendered emphasis in this parallelism: the queen's garments are generally patterned with pheasants while the king's are generally furs, evoking his power and prowess in the hunt. The exception is the *bimian*, but it is interesting that this pheasant is not the same as the *di* 翟 or *zhi* 雉 pheasants that pattern the queen's robes. Likewise, in the case of carriages, the queen's carriage is layered with pheasant feathers,[71] while the king's coaches include one (*mulu* 木路) ornamented with swan feathers.[72] Applying the same logic to the queen's feather patterning that was applied to the brown-eared pheasant here, it seems that there is a resemblance. The vicious thuggery of the brown-eared pheasant was believed to be appropriated by its wearer. The fact that the queen's clothes are both matched, and also embroidered with pheasants, could well be implying that the queen has taken on the nature of the beautiful pheasant, to balance with the king's powerful furs.

It could be that the reason that the *di* feather in particular came to be either attached to or metonymic for female clothing was its association with feminine feather dances. I write "feminine" feather dance because there were also feather dances performed by men (for instance, in martial dances, feathers are often spoken of in the same breath as daggers, halberds, axes and shields).[73] Furthermore, the dance appears to have a certain coquettish, seductive quality, which mimics the avian world (though the male pheasants are the dancers among the birds) and was perhaps not quite appreciated by early commentators. Women famous for their beauty, such as Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (*c.* first century BCE) and Wang Wengxu 王翁須 (*c.* second century BCE) of the Han, became imperial favourites on the basis of their dancing as well as with their beauty. Feiyan's name means "flying swallow" and the "Weng" of "Wengxu" contains the feather radical. Feiyan was given her name by the emperor, who apparently likened his romantic affections to the flight of the swallow.[74] The song "Jian xi" 簡兮 from the *Shijing* contains the lines, "in my left hand I hold a flute, and in my right I clasp a (*di*) feather, I blush as if I am wearing rouge, the Lord says he will offer me a cup".[75] The cup is presumably full of alcohol, and the song presumably portrays a scene of flirtation, if not of seduction. This raises the question of whether this was an isolated incident, or whether the feather dance was linked to sex on a more regular basis. If this was the case in the *Shijing* song, then it was certainly overlooked by the Confucius of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), who famously declared that there is no impropriety to be found in the ideas of the *Shijing*.[76] Early

[67] *Yili zhushu*, 35.13/414a.
[68] *Zhouli zhushu* 周禮注疏, 8.7/125a–8.10/126b.
[69] *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 699.
[70] *Zhouli zhushu*, 21.6/323b.
[71] *Zhouli zhushu*, 27.6/415b–27.8/416b.
[72] *Zhouli zhushu*, 27.1/413a–27.5/415a.
[73] *Liji zhushu*, 37.1, 662a–38.10, 681b; *Huainanzi jishi* 5.399–400, 8.598–9; *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 5.1b–2a.
[74] Swallows are also related to having a great progeny (Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China*, 245–6).
[75] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 23.1/99a–23.5/101a.
[76] *Lunyu jishi*, 3.65.

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composers of these poems, and feather dancers, cannot have failed to notice the same courtship displays of pheasants that Charles Darwin (1809–82) observed in the argus pheasant, the success in love that appeared to depend on the great size of the plumes and the "elaboration of the most elegant patterns"[77] or the "flaming mass of feathers" that the Norfolk osteologist and zoologist William Plane Pycraft (1868–1942) observed in the related golden pheasant, resident in China: it runs up to its mate, expanding the frill or ruff to display its charms.[78] Some parallels might be drawn, for instance, between long-tailed pheasants that cover their faces with feathers and the *huang* 翟 dance, mentioned in the *Shuowen jiezi*, in which dancers use feathers to cover their faces and dress in kingfisher feathers. The *Shuowen jiezi* quotes Zheng Xuan, who believes that this is also known as the *huang* 皇, or the female phoenix, dance.[79] Since pheasants have a high degree of sexual dimorphism, cover their faces with feathers when courting (males) and are often linked to phoenixes, it is hard not to imagine the dance to be inspired by their behaviour. Furthermore, since the *huang* phoenix implies the male *feng* 鳳, it would also imply that the partner of the dance shared the attributes of the male phoenix. The romantic pairing of the two is a poetic trope[80] just as it is for the pheasants. The *Shijing* depicts pheasants seeking, calling after or pining for their mates.[81] Since this is a trope in poetry, why should it not have similar connotations when worn?

Perhaps this is too speculative, but it is certainly accurate that among the long-tailed pheasants who provided the dancing feathers, many wave their tails in courting displays, and it seems very possible that the feminine dances were, to some extent, mimicry. It is not inconceivable to imagine that these dances might also have preceded activities similar to those of their natural counterparts. It is also clear that there are paired elements in the wearing of feathered clothing between king and queen, and that these are clearly parallel to romantic poetic tropes in early China. Furthermore, it is striking that pheasants should be chosen, since they are birds that exhibit such high degrees of sexual dimorphism. Thus, if the wearing and use of feathers here would be simply described as a luxury, or to signify beauty or wealth, it would be overlooking what is clearly quite a pointed appropriation of gendered distinction between the birds. It would be better to say that they are wearing the feathers in order to be like the birds in their relationships, either to mimic their romance or to avail themselves of this example in nature.

Feathers, ritual, music, dance

There are far fewer references to these "feminine" feather dances than what might be better classed as "ritual"[82] feather dances. In this section, the themes of mimicry and appropriation are present, but less prominent. Nonetheless, it is necessary to show in a broader sense how feathers were involved in religious practice, and how they were considered objects of import and power. Sometimes the long *di* feathers are used, for instance, in religious poetry such as the *fu* on the Western Capital (*Xi jing fu* 西京賦) from the

[77] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton, 1981), 93.

[78] William Plane Pycraft, *A History of Birds* (London, 1910), 344.

[79] *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 271. In the *Zhouli* this dance is described as having the function of "controlling droughts". *Wu hanhan zhi shi* 舞旱暵之事 (*Zhouli zhushu*, 23.2/350b). The more commonly used character for the female phoenix is *huang* 凰, but at times it can also be written as *huang* 皇.

[80] See, for example, "*Feng qiu huang*" 鳳求凰 ("The Phoenix Searches for his Mate"), attributed to Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (*c.* 179–117 BCE) (*Yutai xinyong jianzhu*, 9.389).

[81] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 22.3–22.5/86a–87a; 22.5–22.9/87a–89a; 123.7/422a.

[82] Ritual is a problematical translation. It replaces the word *li* 禮 and, as Robert Chard has noted, though *li* generally covers the activities we would consider ritualistic, it also includes "other aspects of individual behaviour and social institutions that we would be likely to describe in different terms". Robert Chard, *Creating Confucian Authority: The Field of Ritual Learning in Early China to 9 C.E.* (Boston, 2021), 6.

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Wenxuan 文選. The poet writes of a row of dancers performing in flowery caps and grasping *di* feather plumes. In this poem, unlike the sensuality of the *Shijing* poem, the discussion is predominantly about honouring sacrifices, ordering mountain rites, flames from burning pyres and smoke sacrifices. The spirits, enjoying the fragrance and the virtue of the occasion, bless the numinous lord.[83] Similar depictions of the use of feathered streamers in one of the 19 *ge* 歌 (usually "hymns") of the *Hanshu*, in which they are part of the descent of the "numinous" (*ling* 靈) (who has an azure dragon to its left, a white tiger to its right and rides on the wind) in response to ritual burning of fat and southernwood. Here, along with smoke, rain, wind and light, feathers seem to have the ability to connote the otherworldly.[84] There are obvious reasons why feathers might be used together with such abstract objects: they catch the wind, they remind the user of flight, of things out of reach and out of control. But also, they can be brought under control and used, light can be created from fire just as it comes from the sun, smoke can fill the landscape in the morning as fog just as it can be diffused from boiled water. Feathers can be waved to catch the wind just as they do when propelling birds through the air. These hymns form part of the "Records of Ritual and Music" ("Li Yue zhi" 禮樂志) chapter of the *Hanshu*, and therefore suggest that feathers form part of a ritual, and part of "music" or its equivalent *yue* 樂. *Yue* is another word that perhaps is done a disservice when translated directly, most often as music.[85] As Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) argued, however, *yue* is inextricably linked to poetry, dance and to the whole performance (even hunting and feasting).[86] Passages about music in early texts rarely fail to mention other objects, for instance, in the *Liji* the sons of kings and princes are taught feather, shield and spear in summer, and feather and pipes in winter; the lesser director of "music" (*xiao yuezheng* 小樂正) taught them how to use a shield, and the pipe teachers (*Yueshi* 籥師) taught them how to use spears. So, even if in the *Liji* the feather wavers are described as the "lowest of the music officials" (*Yueli zhi jian zhe ye* 樂吏之賤者也),[87] they are considered close to, if not a part of *yue*.

Birds and music were often spoken of in the same breath in early texts. This is most prominent in depictions of the *fenghuang* 鳳凰 or "phoenix", which was said to be the inspiration of the musical tones,[88] but is also reflected in material practice, for instance, in the prominence of *luan* 鸞 or "simurgh" bells on carriages in the *Shijing*.[89] According to Zheng Xuan, when these eight bells sound (onomatopoeia, pronunciation **ts^{hs}aŋ*ts^{hs}aŋ* 鶬鶬),[90] it represented the sound of elegant virtue (*yan wende zhi you sheng ye* 言文德之有聲也).[91] The *luan* is a fantastical bird, and so its image seems to indicate that a fantastical

[83] *Wenxuan*, 3.17/59b–3.18/60a.

[84] *Hanshu*, 22.1052.

[85] Avital Rom, "Echoing rulership – understanding music references in the *Huainanzi*", *Early China* 40, 2017, 129–31.

[86] Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Guo Moruo quanji: wenxue bian* 郭沫若全集：文学编 (Beijing, 1990), 15.342–2. Guo points to the Mao preface as evidence: "songs are where one's intentions are led. When in the heart-mind, they are intention, when they emerge in words, they are songs. Feelings stir within and take form in words, when words do not suffice, it is expressed in sighs; if sighs are not enough, then one sings it, if singing is not enough, then unknowingly one's hands dance it, and one's feet tap it. Feelings emerge in sounds, when the sounds become patterns, then we call them 'tones'." Guo, *Guo Moruo quanji: wenxue*, 15.349: *Maoshi zhengyi*, 1.1.5/13a–1.1.6/13b.

[87] *Liji zhushu*, 49.16/837b.

[88] *Shuoyuan*, 19.460a–b; *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 風俗通義校注, 2.642a; *Lüshi Chunqiu*, 5.52–3; *Hanshu*, 21.959.

[89] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 183.16/676b, 183.17/677a, 184.8/682b, 213.10/791b. James M. Hargett has written an article introducing the *luan*: James M. Hargett, "Playing second fiddle: The Luan-bird in early and medieval Chinese literature", *T'oung Pao* 75/4, 1989, 235–62.

[90] William Hubbard Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction* (New York, 2014), 330.

[91] *Maoshi zhengyi*, 213.10/791b.

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prince or marquis is approaching. Ordinary feathers (and in this context, no specific species is mentioned, with an exception in the song "Wan qiu" 宛丘, which mentions egret plumes) could be used to "ornament joy" along with bells, drums, pipes, shields, halberds and yak-tail banners, or to "ornament anger" along with weapons, armour, yak-tail banners and battle axes,[92] all noisy.

On more solemn occasions, feather coverings could be used to lead funerary processions[93] or laid on coffins. Several texts note that it was a Zhou innovation to use partitions around coffins and arrange feathers on them,[94] but there are also feathers woven into the satin of the innermost coffin of Mawangdui 馬王堆.[95] Yu Xingwu 于省吾 writes that these were found only on female coffins,[96] which is probably linked to the gendered divisions referred to in the previous section. A number of texts make reference to the *sha* 翣, a kind of coffin feather covering apparently used throughout the Zhou and Warring States period.[97] The *Zhouli* writes that this covering was used to cover a corpse, and thereby avoid a feeling of disgust.[98] The *Zhuangzi* 莊子 satirizes the practice, since when someone has died they have no use for it so it is "like giving shoes to one with no feet".[99] Developing the association between feathers and funerary rituals, the *Xunzi* 荀子 describes feathers as part of the ritual that one uses to "ornament sorrow" (*shi ai* 飾哀) when one sends off the dead[100] and makes the claim that a tomb is made equivalent to a home, the coffin to a chariot, and then implies that the feather accords with the feather canopies of chariots discussed in the previous section. The *Liji* shows that the specific number of feather coverings in a tomb was of note: there is a passage in the "sangdaji" 喪大記 chapter that depicts the tomb of a ruler (*jun* 君) (six feather ornaments, four suspended from two axe heads and two patterned), a grand officer (*daifu* 大夫) (four feather ornaments from two axe heads) and an official (*shi* 士) (two feather ornaments, patterned).[101] Similarly, a passage in the "Liqi" 禮器 chapter notes that the Son of Heaven's coffin should have eight feather ornaments, the feudal lords' coffins should have six feather ornaments and the grand officers should have four feather ornaments.[102]

The emphasis on numbers, and rankings, were also seen in terms of feathers in other types of ritual dance. The *Chunqiu fanlu* shows feather dancers being exchanged for the explicit purpose of ranking states,[103] and the gravity of such exchanges is shown in Confucius's fears of the Ji family 季氏 in the *Analects*. According to Liu Baonan 劉寶楠 (1791–1855),[104] and mirroring the numbers of coffin feather ornaments prescribed in the *Liji*, the Son of Heaven was permitted eight rows of dancers, feudal lords were permitted six, grand officers were permitted four and officials were permitted two. Although at the time Jisun Yiru 季孫意如 (d. *c.* sixth century BCE) the patriarch was ruling Lu 魯, his

[92] *Huainanzi jishi*, 8.598–99.

[93] *Liji zhushu*, 43.4/749b.

[94] *Huainanzi jishi*, 13.918; *Bohutong zhengshu*, 11.555; *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語, 40.453.

[95] Wu Hung, "Art in a ritual context: Rethinking Mawangdui", *Early China* 17, 1992, 118.

[96] Yu Xingwu 于省吾, "Guanyu Changsha Mawangdui yihao Han mu neiguan guanshi de jieshuo" 關於長沙馬王堆一號漢墓內棺棺飾的解說, *Kaogu* 2, 1973, 126–37.

[97] In the *Huainanzi*, the term seems to mean a feather fan to rid oneself of dust, but this usage is an exception. *Huainanzi jishi*, 2.148, 17.1204.

[98] *Zhouli zhushu*, 9.26/175b; also in the *Lüshu Chunqiu*, 10.4a–b.

[99] *Zhuangzi jishi*, 5.209. Guo Xiang 郭象 (*c.* 252–312 CE) believed that in this instance *sha* refers to feathers conferred to deceased soldiers 5.211.

[100] *Xunzi jijie*, 19.370.

[101] *Liji zhushu*, 15.17/787b.

[102] *Liji zhushu*, 23.6/451b.

[103] *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, 130, 234.

[104] Liu cites the *Guliangzhuan* 穀梁傳 and *Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳 (*Lunyu jishi*, 5.136): *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan zhushu*, 3.3–4 /35a–b; *Chunqiu Guliangjingzhuan buzhu*, 2.44.

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title was still that of a minister. Thus, in the opening to the fifth chapter of the *Analects*, Confucius exclaims that they have eight dancers (or perhaps lines of dancers) in their courtyard, and if they can bear to do such a thing, what could they not bear to do?[105] Commentators have understood this as meaning that since they were happy to transgress propriety in terms of the numbers of dancers, they had outed themselves as willing usurpers. However, it should be noted here that all the texts cited by commentators to justify the idea that Confucius was referring to ranking by number are probably later than the *Analects* (depending on where one would like to situate the received *Analects*) so they could well be incorrect, and the dances might have outraged Confucius in another way. Nonetheless, certainly in later years, numbers and ranks were closely bonded in this way.

These ranked dances in the *Analects* did not explicitly involve feathers (though in the *Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳 and the *Guliangzhuan* 穀梁傳 passages in the last paragraph they are spoken of side by side with feathers, and in the *Wenxuan* these *yi* 佾 dancers are depicted clasping *di* feathers),[106] but some texts are very prescriptive about the use of feathers in ritual dances, and some explain or allude to the reasons for their use. Zheng Sinong comments to the *Zhouli*, for instance, that for the *fa* 发 dance one uses a complete feather (*quanyu* 全羽) to sacrifice to the gods of grain and soil; in the feather dance (*yu wu* 羽舞) one uses cut feathers (*xiyu* 析羽) at the temple of ancestors; for the female phoenix dance, one covers one's head with feathers, wears kingfisher feathers (as mentioned earlier) and sacrifices to the four directions; for the yak-tail-streamer dance (*mao* 旄), for the central royal academy, one uses yak tails; for the military, one uses the stick dance (*gan wu* 幹舞); and for the stars, one uses the people dance (*renwu* 人舞), which is a hand dance (*shouwu* 手舞).[107] Zheng Xuan differs on some of these points. He writes that in the *fa* dance, a banner woven with the five colours is used, while the female phoenix dance uses mixed-colour five feathers like those of the phoenix and in the people dance, one carries nothing and dances with one's sleeves. He also contends that one sacrifices to the four directions with the feather dance; and one performs the people dance to the temple of ancestors, the stick dance to the mountains and waters and the female phoenix dance to the droughts and weather.[108] These differences are useful to us since they show that neither of them is clear about what the dances were for, but, on the other hand, both agree that the type and style of the dances are important when it comes to their effects. Further pursuing the question of effects, Sterckx has discussed the use of bird-dances to affect weather: there is the dance of the Shangyang 商羊 bird, mentioned by Confucius in several texts, related to rainfall;[109] Liu Xi's 劉熙 (d. *c.* 219 CE) suggestive glossing of *yu* 雨 ("rain") as *yu* 羽 ("feather") implies that when bird feathers are in motion, they will disperse like rain;[110] the relationship between pheasants flapping their wings and thunder is linked to the pheasant dance by Marcel Granet (1884–1940).[111] He has also connected these to the wider themes of imitative performances by which performers use imagery or materials of animals in order to appropriate power: beating drums and wearing skins of animals to induce changes in the climate;[112]

[105] *Lunyu jishi*, 5.136.
[106] *Wenxuan*, 3.17/59b–3.18/60a.
[107] According to Zheng Xuan, this is a dance in which nothing is held in hand. *Zhouli zhushu*, 23.2/350b.
[108] *Zhouli zhushu*, 23.1–23.2/350a–b.
[109] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 128.
[110] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 129.
[111] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 14: Marcel Granet, *Danses et legendes de la Chine ancienne* (Paris, 1926), 570–2; Marcel Granet, *La Pensée chinoise* (Paris, 1934), 135.
[112] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 13–14, following Jean-Louis Durand's discussion of animal skins as the "vital wrapping" of an animal: Jean-Louis Durand, "Greek animals: Towards a topology of edible bodies", in

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dragon dances and the invocation of rain;[113] and finally the exorcismal rites at the *nuo* 儺 festival performed by a *fangxiangshi* 方相氏 (a "spirit medium" or "functionary") who wore animal masks and bear skins, and was accompanied by twelve attendants wearing fur, feathers and horns, perhaps to "reinforce the officiant's power to deter malign influences" through "monstrous facial expression".[114] In line with these depictions, it seems clear that when no species is mentioned, feathers were still linked to evocation and control over the weather and of seasons and over elements beyond the reach of humans. The rituals that brought them into use were dealing with the otherworldly, death, chance, the rain. In these events, the feathers served as a material sign that the uncontrollable was being brought into reach of humans, and so their use was intimately related to power. Figures of great power and authority in early China are always depicted with power beyond what is actually possible. This is why transgression of the number of feathers could become so controversial.

Feathers, magic, immortals, flight

These powers alluded to in ritual practice could also be obtained by individuals; magical abilities of flight and communion with the otherworldly could be derived from wearing feathers. Immortals often sprouted or wore white feathers. When species were mentioned, it was most prominently the crane, and less prominently the egret. These birds, when portrayed, had character attributes similar to the immortals: ethereality, longevity, purity. By the end of the fifth century, the wearing of these white feathers by those understood to have powers of immortals seems to have become something of a tradition, part of the ordinary regalia worn by such people. But before these developments, it is striking that the birds and their wearers are spoken of in much the same terms, and it is clear that wearing feathers signified the appropriation of imagined characteristics of the birds. There is an interesting dynamic here since qualities of both bird (save flight) and immortals were imagined, and yet each was appropriated and applied to the other.

> Meng Chang 孟昶 (d. *c.* 410 CE) had not yet reached his time [of renown], he and his family lived in Jingkou 京口, once he saw Wang Gong 王恭 (*c.* 350–398 CE) riding a high carriage, covered in a crane feather cloak. At the time it was snowing lightly, and Meng peeked at him through a hole in the fence, he sighed and said, "this is truly a man among the spirits and immortals".
>
> 孟昶未達時，家在京口。嘗見王恭乘高輿，被鶴氅裘。于時微雪，昶於籬間窺之，歎曰：「此真神仙中人！」[115]

In this passage, it is Wang Gong's feather cloak that signifies that he is one among the spirits and immortals. The real power of flight, the inferred power of purity (perhaps related to the white of the feathers) and the imagined powers of longevity are all transferred from the feather to the wearer. Milburn noted the prevalence of feathers in the immortals' clothing, which can take the names "feather robes" (*yuyi* 羽衣) and "feather garments" (*yufu* 羽服 or *yuchang* 羽氅), or, more specifically, "crane garments" (*hechang* 鶴氅) and "crane cloaks" (*heqiu* 鶴裘). She implies that the prevalence of such clothing

M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant (eds), Paula Wissing (trans.),*The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks* (Chicago, 1989), 104.

[113] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 21: *Chunqiu fanlu jinzhu jinyi* 春秋繁露今註今譯 16.399–407.

[114] Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, 188: *Zhouli zhushu*, 31.12a; *Duduan* 獨斷, 1.13b; *Hou Hanshu*, "zhi", 5.3127–8; "Li ji ming zheng", in *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成, 512.

[115] Milburn, "Featherwork", 556: *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian xiudingben* 世說新語校箋修訂本, 16.6.541.

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probably draws on the belief that birds were considered to be communicants between immortals and humans, and also that feathered immortals are ubiquitous in early Chinese religious art. I would argue that these feathers are more likely to signify the wearer's identification with the character traits of the immortals and the immortal birds. This is, after all, Meng's first reaction to Wang's cloak. It is also interesting that the belief that feathered immortals are able to fly translated into the practice of wearing feather cloaks. This could imply that the wearer identified with immortals, but in light of the earlier sections of the article, it seems more likely that the cloaks were used in order to literally procure the powers, or at least to imply to others that the wearer was imbued with such powers.

Immortals were most often associated with the feathers of the crane, and less commonly those of the egret; when the egret is mentioned, it is discussed in much the same way as the crane. Both are white birds, and superficially resemble one another. David Knechtges has discussed cultural beliefs surrounding the crane in ancient and early medieval China. He writes that the whiteness of the crane is associated with purity, cleanliness, sanctity, rectitude and straightforwardness; the bird is a symbol of longevity, with some sources claiming that they live for a thousand years.[116] The *Xianghejing* 相鶴經 claims that the crane can live for 1,600 years, whereafter it drinks but no longer eats, and they can be the "transcendental vehicles for other celestial beings". Here Knechtges borrows Schafer's term, and also cites the story of Wangzi Qiao's 王子喬 (*c.* sixth century BCE) flight to transcendency).[117] For these reasons, the bird was commonly called the "steed of the immortals" (*xianren zhi ji* 仙人之驥) and the "immortal avian" (*xianqin* 仙禽).[118] What is curious here is that the birds and the immortals are spoken about in much the same terms. A connection has been drawn between the nature, character and abilities of the birds, and the nature, character and ability of the immortals. When this translates into a physical practice, wearing feathers blurs the gaps between the clear physical differences between these people and the birds, and perhaps is intended to highlight the actual relations between these immortal birds and their immortal wearers.

This actual relation is alluded to in poetry depicting immortals, in which they are blended with birds. There are immortals on Penglai mountain depicted in Mu Hua's 木華 (fl. *c.* 290 CE) *fu* on the sea, covered in plumes and pinions dangling and drooping.[119] Cao Zhi dons a feather robe and mounts a flying dragon to meet the immortals, climbs Mount Penglai 蓬萊 and picks numinous fungus (*lingzhi* 靈芝) in "East of Pingling" 平陵東.[120] Zhang Hua 張華 (*c.* 232–300 CE) roams into the immortal realm where clouds and rainbows hang from jewels and pendants and feathered robes billow, before discussing the Dao in the Divine Sovereign's (*shenhuang* 神皇) lodge.[121] Lady Youying (*Youying furen* 右英夫人) of Yunlin Palace (*Yunlin gong* 雲林宮) (the thirteenth daughter of Xiwangmu 西王母) bounds upwards in a chariot of cloud and light, surveys the void above the auroras, where purple canopies tarry in numinous realms, and vermillion haze envelops banners and pennants, where feathered cloaks fan the scented breeze.[122] In her study Kirkova points to a gradual shift during the fifth and sixth centuries in which poetic depictions of immortals underwent a convergence of novel religious notions

[116] He cites *Huainanzi jishi*, 17.1222; and the *Xianghejing* 相鶴經, in *Bencao gangmu tongshi* 本草綱目通釋, 1992, 47.2030. The *Xianghejing* is generally accepted to have been composed during the Song dynasty.

[117] *Liexianzhuan jiaojian* 列仙傳校箋, 65

[118] Knechtges, "Cranes", 51: *Bencao gangmu tongshi*, 47.2030.

[119] Zornica Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse* (Leiden, 2016), 95: *Wenxuan* 12.551.

[120] *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 400.

[121] Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 311: *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, 621.

[122] Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 134: *Zhen'gao jiaozhu* 真誥校註, 90.

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and features and aesthetic concerns of southern court poetry. She describes how the immortals who had, during the third century, discarded ears and eyes (*yi ermu* 遺耳目), now indulged in the pastimes of song and dance. She argues that this meant that the southern court poems no longer emphasized aspects of immortality such as omnipresence and unrestrained freedom and tended towards emphasizing the splendour and grandeur of celestial processions. In terms of feathers, this means that immortals were less likely to be depicted as hybrid, birdlike creatures, but instead they were inclined to wear feathered robes instead. She also writes that at this time, the robes and ornaments became identified with elements of the cosmic domain, such as stars, mists and auroras.[123] It is clear from Milburn's, and my own, study that feathers were indeed frequently worn before this point. Therefore, the cultural changes in the literature that Kirkova writes about could possibly signify changing beliefs surrounding the purposes of feathers; perhaps with the rise in the institutionalization of these events, feathers became more associated with regalia, with tradition and the sense of their providing power was lost.

Before these changes occurred, it was more common to see depictions of magical journeys in which poets or worthies literally sprouted feathers from their body. Kirkova cites Shen Yue's 沈約 (*c.* 441–513 CE) wish for sprouting feathered wings after drinking the golden fluid recipe;[124] Xi Kang's 嵇康 (*c.* 224–263 CE) fresh and glossy feathers, helped by a wondrous drug given by Heng E 恒娥;[125] and Cao Zhi's portrayal of the Yellow Emperor eating the aurorae, rinsing his mouth with the Drifting Flow (*hang xie* 沆瀣), before fur and feathers cover his body, and he lights up and treads on the outskirts of the void.[126] When characters from before the sixth century, such as Wang Gong or Luan Da, wore feather robes, it was with this earlier kind of literature that they were in dialogue.

Interestingly, the feathered immortals were linked by Max Kaltenmark to ancient religious concepts about the Eastern *yi* 夷 barbarians, who were considered to look like birds.[127] He indicates a generally held belief during the Han that bird people, feathered barbarians and immortals all came from the east of the empire.[128] He argues that a consequence was that in the Han there was a great mystical effervescence exploited by magicians (*fangshi* 方士). This then forms an interesting dialogue with some of Sterckx's works on animalistic traits and "barbarians" who, according to the *Guoyu* 國語, resemble wild animals "because their 'blood and *qi*' is not regulated",[129] or perhaps have some "coarse *qi*", which forms animals, as opposed to refined *qi* which forms humans.[130] Sterckx argues that the beasts at the periphery of society may be "skinned" to serve the development of the civilized centre, just as their closely related barbarians will submit to the civilizing control of the centre.[131] As Sterckx notes elsewhere, there is a moment in which, while arguing about the origins of avian features such as feathers and wings associated with immortals, Wang Chong 王充 (*c.* 27–97 CE) writes that "the hairy and feathered people are the produce of the shape of the soil".[132] Wang here is in the midst of arguing that

[123] Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 147.
[124] Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 257: *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 1639.
[125] Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 273: *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 489,
[126] Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 204: *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 404.
[127] Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan* (Paris, 1987), 13–17, also highlighted in Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 94; and Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 185.
[128] Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*: *Dadai Liji jiegu* 大戴禮記解詁 62.121; *Shanhaijing jiaozhu*, 6.227–6.241.
[129] *Guoyu*, 2.62.
[130] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 74 for all the quotes: *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 7.218; and *Wenzi shuyi* 文子疏義, 3.111.
[131] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 118.
[132] Sterckx, "Transforming the beasts", 104: *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, 7.67.

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while there are furry and feathered people, and there are immortals, immortals are not necessarily feathered or furry. He writes that the images that one sees of winged and feathered immortals are fake, because one who belongs to the same category of cicadas and moths is not truly a person. He argues that there are people in the 35 overseas lands, some with feathers and wings, but this is due to the soil, not because they have grown them because of the Dao. He points out that when Yu 禹 and Yi 益 visited Xiwangmu they did not mention that she had feathers. He says that there are indeed immortals in distant lands, but that it is not said that they have fur and feathers. He says that those with fur and feather are not said to be immortal, thus feather and fur cannot be used to verify that one is immortal, and that if an immortal (*xianren* 仙人) has wings, how can it be used to prove that they are immortal (*changshou* 長壽)?

While different social spheres have all worn feathers at different moments in this article, it is striking that they wear different species from one another. Immortals would generally be associated with the crane or sometimes with the egret, but no such feathers were worn by the court, where generally pheasant, kingfisher, duck or goose were preferred. Between the court and the military, it is striking that the species of pheasant (at least, the name used to describe the feathers) is different. The way that the birds are discussed, and the way that their wearers are discussed, are often strikingly similar, for example the violence of the military pheasants, the vanity of the long-tailed pheasants, the ethereality of the cranes. Perhaps these are retrospective understandings of the birds, following pre-existing cultural practices of feather wearing, but we have also seen that mimicry and appropriation are common cultural characteristics when it comes to animal products. From this basis, we may return to discuss the story of the snipe.

The snipe, conclusion

The snipe's feathers are plain compared to other feathers mentioned in this article. The snipe was best known in early China for its appearance in Su Dai's 蘇代 (n.d.) entreaty to King Hui of Zhao 趙惠王 (*c.* 310–266 BCE), recounted in the *Zhanguoce* 戰國策. Su feared that Zhao was on the verge of attacking the state of Yan 燕 (eleventh century–222 BCE), and that if they did so both Yan and Zhao would be defeated and annexed by Qin 秦. He was able to intercede and stop the attack by means of the following fable:

> Zhao was about to attack Yan, Su Dai went to speak to King Hui on behalf of the King of Yan. He said: today as I came I crossed the Yi river 易水. I saw a clam opening its shell to the sun, but a snipe flew out and pecked at its meat. The clam closed and clamped the snipe's beak. The snipe said: "If it does not rain today, and if tomorrow it does not rain, then there will be a dead clam! The clam replied, "If you cannot pull your mouth out today, and if tomorrow you cannot still, then there will be a dead snipe! Neither were willing to budge, and a fisherman caught them both.
>
> 趙且伐燕，蘇代為燕王謂惠王曰：「今者臣來，過易水，蚌方出曝，而鷸啄其肉，蚌合而鉗其喙。鷸曰：『今日不雨，明日不雨，即有死蚌。』蚌亦謂鷸曰：『今日不出，明日不出，即有死鷸。』兩者不肯舍，漁者得而并禽之。[133]

In the story, it is the greed of the snipe and the clam that leads to their downfall. It is not impossible that in the story of Zizang, greed was implied by his collection of feather caps. After all, he was listed as being "fond of collecting" (*hao ju* 好聚) in a way that is apparently superfluous to the story. If, as Hui Dong argued, he had fallen in with the

[133] *Zhanguoce*, 30.10a–b.

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astronomers, would he not have worn just one? It has also been shown throughout this article that people believed that one could mimic or appropriate the character of a bird by wearing their feathers, and so, in the story, the snipe feathers could have served to imply a negative development in Zizang's moral character. However, we have seen also several reasons why the snipe cap might have been considered to be clothing that was "not fitting" and wearing it thus spelt disaster for his body. We have seen that in many spheres of society, the correct feathers presented one's rank, or one's occupation or even the way that one wished to behave in one's occupation. It is hard to imagine a commoner having the bravery to wear the Lord's feather garments, or to transgress the right number of feathers in a ritual, or to wear a *di* feather into battle. And if one did not wear a *he* pheasant feather into battle, was one truly willing to behave with the staunch, unrelenting bravery of the bird? Zizang, as a member of the court, was supposed to wear pheasant, or goose, feathers, which suggested his loyalty and that indicated his belonging. When these were cast aside and the feathers of the waterbird appended, perhaps this could be taken as a symbol of betrayal, of abandonment of courtly life. Perhaps any one of these single explanations is correct, or maybe they were all playing a part in the Count's loathing of Zizang. All that we know is what the text shows to us, and it shows that wearing the wrong feathers was a grave offence. Now, in the context of a deeper study of the cultural importance of feathers, we learn that, rather, it could have been one of any number of grave offences.

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