Theories of Genre and Style in China in the Late 20th Century

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In Chinese literary theories, since ancient times up to the late 20th century, the term wenti (originally just ti) has been used to denote both what we may roughly translate as “style” and “genre”.¹ The concepts of “genre” and “style” were hence not clearly separated. In the abundant literary theories up to the late Qing dynasty, much effort was made to separate and describe the characteristics of genres and to create functionalist genre systems to be used by writers/bureaucrats. Discussions of the concept of wenti itself, however, were scarce in these theories. In many literary theories up to the late 19th century the traditional, didactic view of the function of literature as a vehicle for the Confucian way, moral instruction,² and maintaining the social order prevailed; hence content was often stressed at the expense of form and aesthetic qualities. The period around the May Fourth Era in the 1920s offered relative freedom for the individual artist, influence by Western literary theories, experimentation, and “art for art’s sake”.³ But the dominant feature of the modern literary theories from the 1940s up to the late 1980s was their emphasis on evaluating the content of literary works based on political and moral values, rather than analysing form, style, language, and aesthetic features. This was a result of the interference of politics in literature and literary research, which severely obstructed literary creation, especially during the Cultural Revolution, and led to almost complete stagnation in the fields of genre theory and stylistics.

¹ Ciyouan, vol. 4, p 3475. Ciyouan lists eleven meanings of ti. The first meaning is: “body (shenti)” of human beings or animals. It may refer to the whole body or parts of the body. The earliest listed example is from “The Book of Rites”: “When the heart is big the body (ti) is fat”. Bernhard Karlgren lists the following meanings: “[…] t’i body (Tso); limb (Shï); embody (Yi); form, shape (Shï); embody; category, class (Li); indication in divination (Shî).”, Grammata Serica Recensa (Goteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri, 1964; reprint, from BMFEA 29, (1957)), p 160. For a thorough discussion of the concept of ti/wenti see L. Rydholm, “The theory of ancient Chinese genres”, in Literary History: Towards a global perspective, vol. 2: Literary genres: An intercultural approach, Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (ed.), (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), pp 53–110. The term wenti is clearly not the equivalent of either the modern Western term “style” or ”genre”, but can refer to concepts similar to these Western concepts, hence I use these rough translations and in each instance wenti appears choose the translation most suitable to the context. The more recent term ticai is always translated as ”genre” and fengge as “style”. All translations from Chinese sources in this paper are my own unless otherwise stated.


³ Many writers, poets, and critics such as Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Mu Mutian, Hong Shen, and others then expressed thoughts on style and language in literature, see Tong Qingbing, Wenti yu wenti de chuangzao (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1994), pp 3–4.
The lessening influence of politics on literary theory in the past three decades has allowed for new developments in these fields. The renewed influence of Western philosophy, genre theory, linguistics, stylistics, etc. (in the works of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Saussure, Chomsky, and many others) has reawakened the interest in these issues. This has led to language, form, style, and aesthetic features once again being recognized as important in the analysis of genre and style, and an urgent need to discuss the concept of wenti being acknowledged. In the 1990s, a number of scholars published books and articles on the subject of wenti, for instance Chu Binjie, Feng Guanglian, Tao Dongfeng, Tong Qingbing, Yang Zhongyi, and Zhang Yi. These Mainland Chinese literary scholars face a formidable challenge. They are attempting to introduce Western genre theory and stylistics in China, re-evaluate ancient Chinese theories of style and genre, and create new concepts of wenti. In this paper, I discuss a few of these new theories by contemporary scholars Chu Binjie, Tao Dongfeng, Tong Qingbing, Wang Meng, and Zhang Yi with the purpose to draw attention to some current trends in this dynamic field.

Wang Meng’s thoughts on wenti and the development of wentilun

Famous writer and critic Wang Meng expressed his views on wenti in a short preface to a series of studies of genre and style, Wentixue congshu, published in 1994. The renewed interest in literary style and genre in China is important not only for the development of literary theory, but also for the development of Chinese literature as a whole, according to Wang. For Wang, style is closely connected with the aesthetic purpose of literature, and he and many other Chinese writers have suffered (both professionally and in their private lives) as a direct result of their literary works being judged by non-literary (i.e. political) criteria. The recent creative and scholarly freedom to develop of literature and literary theory stirs emotions within writers who have experienced the earlier oppression, as can be seen in Wang’s following statements.

I thank heaven and earth that it is finally acceptable to study wenti. At last, there are many scholars and specialists doing research within this field, and it is now possible for the publishers to publish such books.

Writers need to be understood and appreciated. This understanding and appreciation mainly concerns style. When a reader or critic admits that style exists in this world, it already

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4 Writers like Wang Zengqi, Wang Meng, A Cheng, Zhang Chengzhi, Mo Yan, Deng Youmei, Chen Jian, Wang Shuo started to experiment with literary language to create aesthetic effects. This brought changes in literary theory, evident through a change in terminology, words like imagery, symbolism, metaphors etc. started to appear in discussions of literature and analysis of style flourished, see Tong, pp 6–7.

5 For instance Chu Binjie’s Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), Feng Guanglian’s Zhongguo jinbainian wenxue tishi liubianshi (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1999), Tao Dongfeng’s Wentixue congshu ji qì wenhua yiwei (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1994), Tong Qingbing’s Wentixue congshu ji qì wenhua yiwei (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1994), Yang Zhongyi’s Zhongguo gudai shiti jianlun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), and Zhang Yi’s Wenxue wentilun (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1993).


7 Wang, p 1.

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makes one feel warm inside; if they also recognize the stylistic features of an author’s work, then this simply makes one’s eyes fill with tears.8

In Wang Meng’s view, style mainly concerns the aesthetic form of literary works.9 He claims that observing the style of a literary text is the same as looking at a person’s body, seeing if the person is thin or fat, tall or short, checking out posture, the expression in the eyes, etc. Though Wang concedes that judging people by their outward appearance is not always reliable, he claims that it still often is, and regardless of whether this method is reliable or not, almost everybody does it and takes great pleasure in it. Now, this may seem a rather naive statement, but Wang consciously connects the meaning of style in literary texts with the original interpretation of the meaning of the character ti, namely “body”.10 This line of thought is present in many literary theories through the ages, in for instance Liu Xie’s Wenxin diaolong. And when Wang explains what he means by “style” he draws on the influential discourse developed in Wenxin diaolong on the relationship between the author’s character and his style: “the style [text] is like the person” (wen ru qi ren). This line of thought became a paradigm in Chinese literary theories and obviously has survived up to the present. Wang claims, in line with Liu Xie’s theory, that “Style is the externalization of individual character.”11 But literary style also has deeper implications. For Wang, style is the very core of literature.

Style is what makes literature become literature. Style is what separates literature from non-literary forms. [...] Changes in the concept of literature are manifest in the evolution of style. Experiments in literary creativity are expressed by reforming style.12

Zhang Yi’s “Introduction to literary style” Wenxue wenti gaishuo

The term wenti, according to Zhang, should be translated into English as “style”,13 but has its roots in ancient Chinese literary theories discussing ti, a term that denoted two “threads of thought”.14 Firstly, ti “is used to separate kinds of literature”, which, according to Zhang, is the equivalent of the modern Chinese word ticai “types or forms of literature”, i.e. tishi “form of literary works”.15 The second interpretation of ti is: “to express the features of an author’s individual style, a school, or the style of an era”.16 Here Zhang uses the term fengge for style. To Zhang, ticai and fengge are obviously not two separate concepts, but are closely related. However, he does not explain why he chooses to translate wenti as “style”, and not as “genre”, and wenxue wentixue as “literary stylistics”.17 Zhang appears to consider wenxixue to concern stylistics rather than genre theory, yet the aspect of genre is still included in this con-

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8 Ibid., p 2.
9 Ibid., p 1.
10 See f. 1.
11 Wang, p 1.
12 Ibid., p 1.
14 Ibid., p 4.
15 Ibid., p 4.
16 Ibid., p 4.
17 Wenxixue should be translated as “stylistics” according to Zhang, p 5.
cept. This is, in my opinion, because Zhang considers genre and style to be merely two levels of literary style.

Zhang discusses Western philosophy of language and linguistics in the works of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Saussure, Chomsky, and Jakobson, among others. He appreciates the importance attached to the language in literature and that modern quantitative studies of language in literary texts are more objective than earlier research methods. But he is critical of studies that focus exclusively on analysis of language and lack analysis of the thoughts and emotions expressed, and of the impact of culture and society. According to Zhang, the latter kind of analysis can be found in the traditional Chinese studies of wenti. But the ancient Chinese scholars in turn failed to recognize the importance of the literary language, and the studies are, according to Zhang: “rather inattentive descriptions of general impressions”. Instead of attaching too little, or exclusive importance to the literary language, there is another solution, says Zhang. “Literary stylistics” can combine modern Western scientific linguistic research methods with traditional analysis of content and the impact of culture and society.

To Zhang “literary style” (wenxue wenti) has three levels. On the first level, it is “a form/mode of cultural existence”, just like philosophy, religion, science, etc. Literary style is a cultural product with certain features within a certain cultural system. What separates literature from other art forms or modes of cultural existence, according to Zhang, is “literary style”; so in fact literary style is the essence of literature. The world described in literature is not a mirror of the real world, but a world of a special pleasing quality, created by the author, that reflects his/her attitude, emotions, and experience of human existence and the natural world. Zhang explains: “It is because of the special grasp and expression of the essence of existence that literary style constitutes a mode of cultural expression of its own.” Literary style is the product of a certain culture, society, and historical time, and changes continuously. It is also a product of the creativity of authors of different times.

On the second level: literary style is “a linguistic form/mode of existence” (yuyan cunzaiti). Literary style, and literature itself, differ from other art forms by being manifested in language, and furthermore, in a special kind of language. The difference between literary style and other styles (as for instance legal or scientific texts), as Zhang explains in accordance with Roman Jakobson’s communication model, is that literary style is not simply meant to transmit a message, but involves reorganizing existing language for aesthetic purposes. The basic character of “literary style” and of literature itself, is the transformation of language, the creation of a special literary language for aesthetic purposes, which makes it possible for the author to fully

18 Ibid., p 2.
19 Ibid., p 3.
20 Ibid., pp 4–5.
21 Ibid., pp 4–5 and 9–11.
22 Ibid., pp 43–45.
23 Ibid., p 8.
24 Ibid., pp 22–23.
25 Ibid., p 121.
26 Ibid., p 20.
express a multitude of thoughts, emotions, and values. Literature and literary style are cultural products of the mind, expressed through a special use of language. Literature is the aesthetic union of language and thought in literary texts.

Finally on the third level, we have what Zhang labels the two “concrete forms” of literary style, namely ticai “literary form/genre” and the author’s fengge “style”. The first form, according to Zhang is the two basic literary modes: narrative form (novels, theatre, etc.) and lyrical form (poetry and prose). The four basic “genres” (ticai) are poetry, prose, drama, and novels. These forms combine to create new literary styles like “poetic novels”, etc. To Zhang the development of new genres is a sign that mankind moves towards a higher degree of civilization. The second concrete form of “literary style” is the author’s creative style (fengge), the “subjective” part of literary style. The author’s creative style depends on his cultural education, talent, values, etc., and is limited by the rules of common language. But the author also enjoys a degree of artistic freedom. The spirit of free aesthetic creativity is a main feature of literary style, according to Zhang, and reflects the author’s choice of linguistic elements. But earlier in his book, Zhang claims that literary style is mainly the result of what is perceived as beautiful language by people in certain culture, that linguistic patterns first and foremost bear the impressions of national culture. Zhang claims that literary style is a cultural product that shows the level of maturity of human civilization. Both the intellectual content of literary texts and the literary language are products of a particular society, culture, and historical time that are evolving towards higher levels of human civilization.

Zhang is progressive compared to many of his predecessors who saw the development of new genres and styles as a process of degeneration from the ancient pure literature. So many anthologists through the ages were reluctant to include new literary genres in their anthologies (e.g. recent-style verse and ci-poetry both faced this problem in the beginning). Given the rapid modernization in China today in every field, also affecting the humanities, it is perhaps not surprising that Zhang would adopt an evolutionary perspective on literary development. But development itself is not necessarily a sign of improvement, or of a society reaching a higher level of civilization. In China today, as in the West, there is a large market for books of rather poor literary quality, books filled with gratuitous sex and violence, just like in the West, and written for the purpose of making money.

It may be seen as an inconsistency in Zhang’s theory that he also claims that the ultimate purpose of “literary style” is to give expression to universal human thoughts and emotions (to create works that can be appreciated by people of different cultures and times), yet he also strongly emphasizes cultural differences in both thought content, emotions, and language. He claims that the basic feature of literary style is that it contains the “features of national culture”.

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27 Ibid., p 24.
28 Ibid., p 5.
29 Ibid., p 35.
30 Ibid., pp 23–24.
31 Ibid., p 23.
32 Ibid., p 41.
The evolution of literary style is limited by the whole cultural spirit of a certain age. It deeply reflects the representative traces of the spiritual civilization of a particular age. Different national cultures create different kinds of languages, which naturally leads to the creation of literary styles with different aesthetic features. Zhang compares English, French, and Chinese poetry and claims that because of the difference between these languages, authors will use different techniques to create certain aesthetic effects, different “literary styles”. In ancient Chinese poetry the use of parallelism is especially important, as is the use of the four speech-tones to express and enhance moods and emotions. Zhang attempts to create a theory of “Literary stylistics” that combines the modern (Western) theories and the traditional (Chinese) theories, but the aim is not to create a universal concept of literary style or “literary stylistics”.

Now we will establish a theory of literary stylistics with special Chinese features. On the one hand we shall incorporate the excellent parts of traditional [Chinese] literary theory and modern Western theories of literary stylistics, on the other hand we shall struggle to overcome all kinds of shortcomings in both (...). Zhang raises an important issue here: since the languages created in different cultures differ, can we really use identical ways of analysing literary style, the same methods and criteria to analyse texts written in different languages? Well, parallelism has also been important in, for instance, ancient biblical poetry. A more challenging point is the importance of the four speech-tones in Chinese poetry, but speech-tones do appear in other languages in Asia as well. And how different are the linguistic techniques used in poetry written in different languages? Is it a question of using different means to achieve the same effect, or of using different means to create effects not obtainable in poetry written in another language? Are the techniques and the effects created in poetry written in different languages different enough to require completely different concepts of “literary style”? Zhang seems to imply that it is a question both of using different methods and of creating different effects. But that may actually be said of two poets writing in the same language, or even one and the same poet when writing different poems, and do we then require a special concept of literary style for each poet or even poem? The answer, of course, is no. We can discuss and define differences in “individual style”, but when it comes to a broad concept like the literary language/style of a certain culture at a certain time (or of a concept like “world literature”), we need a broad concept based on a high degree of generalization. Though we may use different linguistic markers in our investigations of literary styles in literature written in different languages, this does not necessarily mean that the broad concept of “literary style” must be different in different cultures. We could, for instance, simply claim that the literary style in

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33 Ibid., p 42.
34 Ibid., p 40.
35 The four speech-tones have by some been regarded as creating a kind of “intrinsic music” in poetry, for instance by Shuen-fu Lin, “The formation of a Distinct Generic Identity for Tz’u”, in Voices of the Song Lyric in China, Pauline Yu (ed.), (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and Oxford, England: University of California Press, 1994.).
36 Zhang, p 329.
any given culture “involves linguistic techniques used for an aesthetic purpose”. This is not unlike what Zhang actually says when defining the “concept of style with special Chinese features” as a mode of cultural existence, manifested in a literary language created for aesthetic purposes that simultaneously contains a certain intellectual content, and that both language and the content are themselves products of a national culture. Now this description, if we agree with Zhang, could actually be applied to the literary style of any culture, not only the Chinese.

In a period of economic and cultural globalization, which many people view as “westernization”, national identity has become increasingly important in China. Some scholars wish to stress the difference between Chinese and Western culture, rather than search for universal principles. Zhang’s synthesis of Western linguistic research methods to uncover the cultural spirit in texts, such as in Chinese literary theory, brings to mind the attitude expressed towards Western knowledge by 19th century official Zhang Zhidong in a famous slogan based on a neo-Confucian concept: “Chinese knowledge constitutes the essence, Western learning provides the means” (zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong).

Zhang then moves on to discuss what literature is really about. Literature, for Zhang, involves the author’s creation and the reader’s reading process, and literary style is the only thing that can bridge the gap between these two and, it is the prerequisite for their existence. Through the aesthetic transformation of language, literary style creates a realm of a special pleasing quality, which gives literature a unique “spiritual cultural meaning”, i.e. “the meaning of literature”. Literary style is thereby the essence of literature.

Since it is literary style that makes literature become a special form of cultural existence, it is not difficult to come to another conclusion: literary style makes literature independent, or makes literature become literature in the true sense of the word.

Zhang tries to explain what it is exactly that makes literature be literature. In some Western literary theories the word “literariness” is used to denote this quality. Zhang comes to the conclusion that it is literary style that makes literature become literature and explains that “in people’s minds and impressions ‘literature’ mostly refers to literary style”. In doing so he makes these concepts more or less synonymous.

Many Western scholars would object to Zhang’s statements and claim that this is a gross simplification, that there is much more to literature than literary style. But then again, Zhang’s definition of “literary style” is probably rather different from that of many of the scholars who would object to his statements. Zhang’s definition of literary style is indeed broad, including aesthetic use of language, the author’s thoughts and emotions, a cultural content reflecting the spirit of society and culture at a certain time, etc. So having included most of what he obviously considers to be the major elements that may characterize “literature” within his concept of “literary style”, it is not so far fetched for Zhang to claim that literature and literary style are more or less synonymous.

37 Ibid., p 31.
38 Ibid., p 25.
39 Ibid., p 34.
Presumably, when dealing with a concept with multiple meanings like *wenti*, we might try to cut it into pieces, to separate and clearly define the concepts of style and genre, and use different terms to denote these concepts. Or we might, like Zhang, choose to keep the multiple meanings of *wenti* and try to explain how these concepts are related and united. The advantage of an all-inclusive definition is that it can incorporate minor deviations and thereby allow for flexibility, the ability to adapt and change over the course of time. Perhaps it also reveals the true complexity of things. It counters problems like one-sidedness and the ruling out of the possibility of mutual existence. On the other hand, if we do not distinguish between certain concepts in literary theory, we cannot clearly delimit our object of study and we then will not know what our conclusions are based on or what they actually apply to. Not separating the concepts of style and genre easily leads to a circular argument, and while Zhang’s predecessors only equated genre and style, Zhang goes one step further and in practice also equates these two concepts with the concept of literature, and thereby further enlarges the frame of reference of the concept of *wenti*. It seems to me that, in Zhang’s view, the concept of “literary style” (*wenti*) encompasses all the following concepts: mode of cultural existence, linguistic form, style, individual style, group style, style of the era, genre, genre style, and literature.

Unlike in many earlier Chinese theories of *wenti*, Zhang emphasizes the importance of the analysis of language and wants to include it in the study of literary style. But Zhang also believes that language and thought are simultaneous and inseparable.

If we are to sum up in one sentence the object (of study) and the task of literary stylistics, it is: through stylistic analysis of the literary texts to interpret and explain the particular thought content inside it, while not ripping apart the quality of unity in literature, contributing some technical methods and techniques for analysing literary texts. [---] The process of analysing style is simultaneous with the process of interpreting and explaining the particular thought content of a literary work. It (the process of interpreting and explaining the thought content) and the analysis of linguistic elements are united and should never be separated.

Zhang’s view of the concept of style represents, in my opinion, what Nils Erik Enkvist labels a “monistic view of the concept of style”, i.e. the idea that content and utterance are inseparable and that the poet’s choice is not of linguistic elements but rather of content. Zhang claims that modern literary theory “finally” has brought about the abolition of the separation of form and content, language and thought. But in my opinion, this has been the mainstream view in Chinese theories of style since ancient times, and is particularly evident in Liu Xie’s *Wenxin diaolong*. In the opposite, “dualistic view of the concept of style”, the content and expression are separable; the

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40 Zhang, p 7.
43 See Rydholm, “The theory of ancient Chinese genres”. 

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same content may be expressed in different ways. The choice of linguistic expression results in different styles. Though Zhang advocates using “modern scientific research methods” in linguistic analysis, a monistic view of style is not always reconcilable with such methods. A dualistic view of style is the foundation of the stylistic research methods in many modern linguistic analyses of style. Zhang’s view of stylistic analysis, in my opinion, amounts to what Enkvist describes as a “mentalistic monism”, and thereby risks turning stylistic analysis into content analysis.

It [mentalistic monism] makes the stylistic researcher into a contents, concepts, and ideas researcher. What happens on the surface of the text becomes secondary since it is determined by the content, even while the content only becomes available through examination of the text surface. The problem then, of course, is how to describe in a sufficiently concrete manner the abstract content that determines what the text will look like on the surface.\textsuperscript{44}

Tong Qingbing’s “Style and the creation of style” \textit{Wenti yu wenti de chuangzao}

In Tong Qingbing’s view, \textit{wenti} is an essential part of what we consider to be literature; in fact “a literary theory neglecting the issue of \textit{wenti} is no more than a half-measure”.\textsuperscript{45} According to Tong, \textit{wenti} has in the past mainly concerned genre and genre research, though the term \textit{wenti} has multiple meanings and should preferably be translated as “style”.\textsuperscript{46} This tendency among mainland Chinese scholars in the 1990s to translate \textit{wenti} into English as “style” rather than “genre”, might in some cases, be due to their having read more Western linguistic and stylistic works (which are frequently quoted), than Western genre theories. But the main reason, in my opinion, is that the concepts of “style” and “genre” are not clearly separated, and that genre theory as a field is still not distinct from stylistics.\textsuperscript{47} The reason for the reluctance to distinguish these concepts is, in my view, that “genre” is in general regarded as a level of style, and that genre theory is therefore included in the field of stylistics. In traditional Mainland Chinese literary theory using one term, \textit{wenti}, to denote what can be seen as two concepts, style and genre, has led to some theoretical confusion. Instead of separating the two concepts and giving each one a specific term, some 20\textsuperscript{th} century scholars have tried to bridge the gap between genre and style with the aid of auxiliary concepts and terms. Tong Qingbing explains:

Some scholars doing research feel that the meanings of “\textit{ti}” and “\textit{wenti}” quickly leap from genre to style and that the span between them is too wide. What is missing is an intermediary concept, and since it is difficult to clearly explain “\textit{ti}” and “\textit{wenti}”, they suggest putting the concept “genre style” (\textit{wenti fengge}) in between genre (\textit{ticai}) and style (\textit{fengge}). [---] These scholars think “\textit{wenti fengge}” implies that different genres, because they condense different aspects of life, each contain a special subject matter suitable to it. This results in different styles, and thus genre serves the function of restricting style.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} Enkvist, p 98.
\textsuperscript{45} Tong, p 7.
\textsuperscript{46} Tong Qingbing, \textit{Wenti yu wenti de chuangzao} (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1999), p 1.
\textsuperscript{47} Though in Western literary theories stylistics and genre theory are generally separated, these concepts are also highly complex and far from clear.
\textsuperscript{48} Tong, p 22.

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Tong Qingbing is very critical of the concept of “wenti fengge”, which “some scholars” (alluding mainly to Wang Yuanhua) have imposed on the ancient theories of, for instance, Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Liu Xie.\textsuperscript{49} Wang Yuanhua, an expert on Wenxin diaolong, introduces the concept “genre style” (ticiai fengge) when interpreting the chapter on “Deciding Style” (“Ding shi”) where Liu Xie describes styles inherent in genres.\textsuperscript{50} In Tong’s view, the genre can only set a general standard for content and form of expression, but can not control the highest aesthetic level of the work, the style, since style mainly consists of the author’s individual creativity, his personality, inner thoughts, and emotions, manifest in an aesthetic union of content and form. Therefore the concept of wenti fengge is unscientific.\textsuperscript{51} In my view, however, the use of a concept like “genre style” is not unscientific, but it would clearly be an anachronistic interpretation to claim to find this modern concept in Liu Xie’s work, even though Liu Xie’s line of thought reminds one of this concept.

In Tong’s view, the ancient scholars discussing wenti have not referred to the concept of wenti fengge, but rather to a deeper level of ti/wenti, namely that of “yuti”, a term which can be translated into English in several ways such as “linguistic form”, “linguistic structure”, “linguistic pattern”, “linguistic mode of expression”, “type of writing”, and even “style”. Tong’s description mainly seems to refer to linguistic properties; hence I translate it as “linguistic form”. Tong claims that: “In ancient China, ‘ti’ and ‘wenti’ meant not only literary kind (wenlei), but also linguistic form (yuti), style (fengge), etc.”\textsuperscript{52} According to Tong, each genre requires a certain linguistic form, and the connection between genre and linguistic form is evident in the “six meanings of poetry” listed in “The Great Preface” of Shijing. The three manners of expression: “fu”, “bi”, and “xing”, all concern yuti; they are: “different linguistic forms constructed by different rhetorical means”.\textsuperscript{53} The intermediate concept that bridges the gap between genre and style, in Tong’s view, is therefore “linguistic form”. According to Tong, the use of “linguistic form” (yuti) as an intermediate concept was initiated by Cao Pi (187?-226?) when he listed the genre requirements for four kinds of literature.

In fact memorials and interpellations (zou yi) should be refined, letters and treatises (shu lun) must contain reason, inscriptions and parentations [over the dead] (ming lei) should be factual, and shi-poetry and fu-poetry (shi fu) should be beautiful. These four categories are different; therefore the writers able to achieve this are partial [to one form]; only a universal genius would master all these forms (ti)\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{49} Tong, p 22.
\textsuperscript{51} Tong, p 23.
\textsuperscript{52} Tong, p 1.
\textsuperscript{53} Tong, p 24. Based on his reading of Zhu Xi’s explanations of these concepts in Chuici jizhu, Tong claims that “fu” should be seen as “the linguistic form of narration”, “bi” as “the linguistic form of simile”, and “xing” as “the linguistic form of metaphors and symbols”. For a more thorough and enlightening discussion of the meanings of these terms, see Haun Saussy’s The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp 129–150.
\textsuperscript{54} Cao Pi, “Lun wen” in Dian lun, in Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan, Guo Shaoyu (ed.), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), p 158. The genre names can be translated in different ways. Siu-kit Wong used “reports to the throne” (zou), “discourses on state matters” (yi), “essays” (lun), and “elegiac and other inscriptions” (ming, lei), in Early Chinese Literary Criticism (Hong Kong: Joint publishing Co., 1983), p 20.
According to Tong this last “ti” and the qualities of “refined”, “reason”, “factual”, and “beautiful” refer not to wenti fengge as some scholars believe, but rather to the different linguistic forms (yuti) suited for each pair of genres. Tong also claims that Lu Ji (261-303) referred to yuti, and not to wenti fengge, when describing what to write about and how to write in ten genres.

The lyric (shih), born of pure emotion, is gossamer fibre woven into the finest fabric; The expository essay (fu), being true to the objects, is vividness incarnate; In monumental inscriptions (bei) rhetoric must be a foil to facts; The elegy (lei) tenderly spins out ceaseless heartfelt grief. The mnemonic (ming) is a smooth flow of genial phrases, succinct but pregnant; The staccato cadences of the epigram (zhen) are all transparent force. While eulogy (sung) enjoys the full abandon of grand style. The expository (lun) must in exactitude and clarity excel. The memorial (zou), balanced and lucid, must be worthy of the dignity of its royal audience. The argument (shuo) with glowing words and cunning parables persuades.

In Tong’s view, Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Shen Yue (441-513) all perceived two levels of ti/wenti, namely genre and yuti, and managed to connect these two levels by showing that a certain genre required a certain linguistic form. But, if a certain genre requires a certain linguistic form of expression, the author must still enjoy some freedom of creation, a problem that according to Tong was resolved by Liu Xie (d. ca. 520) in Wenxin diaolong. Liu Xie wrote: “Understanding the genre (ti), you can be innovative without causing chaos; knowing the transformations, you can use strange words without being vulgar.” In Tong’s view, this means that Liu Xie recognized two levels of language, of linguistic form. The first one comprises some basic principles, the fixed linguistic form required by the genre, that must be adhered to to avoid disorder, and the second is the fluctuating linguistic form used by the authors that is based on their aesthetic ideals and individual artistic creativity. Tong claims that Liu referred to the yuti of each genre in his genre requirements.

In memorials illuminative (zhang), memorials manifestative (biao), reports to the throne (zou), debates (yi) the appropriate standard is classic elegance; in fu-poems (fu), laudes (song), songs (ge), and shi-poetry (shi), the appropriate principle to follow is pure beauty; Compliments to the sovereign (fu), war declarations (xi), letters (shu), and declaration of disquiet (yi) are modelled on clarity and resolution; in history (shi), treatises (lun), prefaces (xu), and commentaries (zhu) the principle is to focus on the central issue [object of study]; in cautions (zhen), inscriptions (ming), epitaphs (bei), and parentations (lei), the composition (tizhi) is deep and impressive; string of pearls (lianzhu) and words in sevens (qici) are suited for witty and colourful [language].

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55 Tong, p 24.
58 Tong, p 26.
60 Tong, p 28.
61 Liu Xie, “Ding shi”, in Wenxin diaolong, Zhou (ed.), p 280. I have used Siu-kit Wong’s translations of the genre names of zhang, biao, zou, yi, bei, fu (compliments to the sovereign), and yi (declaration of disquiet). Wong translates song as “panegyric poems”, zhen as “puncturing pieces” and lei as “laudations”, Wong, Allan Chung-hang, Lo and Kwong-tai, Lam, The Book of Literary Design (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1999), p 115.
But were Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Liu Xie in each case in fact referring to linguistic form, *yu-ti*? The features listed in their genre requirements can, in many cases, be associated with linguistic features, or at least with stylistic features, but did these ancient scholars really refer to such a concept or is this an attempt to adapt their thoughts to the knowledge of linguistic science of the 20th century and, perhaps, at the same time justify Tong’s theory of *wenti*? Are the features Tong labels *yuti* in these ancient sources, for instance “reason”, “resolution”, “factual”, etc., really linguistic features? The answer to this final question perhaps gives a hint to the answer to the preceding question. *Yuti* is a modern concept that started to be used in Chinese literary theory in the 20th century, and that furthermore is given a particular interpretation by Tong Qingbing in his book (see below). While Tong is critical of the concept of *wenti fengge* being imposed on ancient texts by other scholars, he does not hesitate to make an anachronistic interpretation of these ancient texts, and claim to find the modern concept of *yuti* in these theories. In my view, ancient scholars and critics like Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Liu Xie cannot be said to have used single, specific, and unified criterion for style/genre but rather a combination of features concerning different aspects of literary creation. (The apparent lack of unified criteria for genres has constituted one of the major criticisms of these ancient theories put forward by modern critics.) It was hardly the goal of Cao Pi, Lu Ji, and Liu Xie to set up a perfectly coherent genre system based on the single criterion of the modern concept of *yuti*.

Tong Qingbing seeks evidence for *yuti* being the intermediate concept between genre and style in the ancient sources mentioned above, however, we cannot re-create the original historical context and identify the “true” meaning of these ancient sources. We can certainly do close readings and try to understand what they meant and see what we can learn, what may be useful in them for developing modern genre theory and stylistics. But our theories will suit our present goals and intentions, which differ quite a lot from those of the ancient critics (who often created functionalistic genre systems for utilitarian purposes in bureaucracy). Nor is there any absolute truth to be found about the nature of literary style in the texts by the ancient writers.

Tong states that the meaning of *wenti* is complex and contains three components: “the norm of the genre”, “the creation of linguistic form”, and finally “the pursuit of style”. *Wenti* manifests itself through these three separate but interrelated categories of genre, linguistic form, and style, and the relationship between these three levels is as follows: “The genre conditions a special linguistic form, and the linguistic form, developed to the utmost point, turns into style”. In Tong’s view, genre, linguistic form and style (the part created by the author’s individual creativity) melt together creating an overall impression of the work for the reader to appreciate. Tong explains his view of *wenti* as a system.

A certain genre (*ticai*) must have its conventionally set up aesthetic standard, and the aesthetic standard of the genre must be perfectly manifested through a linguistic form. The lin-

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63 Ibid., pp 102–103.
64 Ibid., p 39.
guistic form united with some other features of literature, when developed to the ultimate point, turns into style (fenge). Literary form is the external form of appearance; linguistic form is the kernel level of appearance; while style is the highest condition of appearance. These three are different, but also closely related. Wenti is a system created by the organic union of the three essentials of genre, linguistic form, and style.65

Tong describes these three levels of wenti, beginning with the first level, the genre concept: “Ticai is the basic essential elements of the text as they function together creating a harmonious and relatively stable special relationship. It is precisely the perfect union of the several essential elements of the text that constitutes the special aesthetic standard of a certain ticai.”66 The essential elements are the products of a long period of literary creation by several authors. Authors should respect the boundaries and aesthetic standards of genres and not “wilfully” destroy these standards, since this would lead to “chaos” (a statement resembling Tong’s quotations from Wenxin diaolong, see above). However, authors may change the aesthetic standards of the genres in response to the demands made by the subject matter, “a deep reflection on life” or “a touching expression of emotion”.67 Authors may not only change the standards, but also mix genres creating new ones 68 says Tong, just as human beings “understand how to use all kinds of different means of production”, according to Marx.69 Literary scholars quoting Marx for support of their theories is something far from new in Chinese literary theory since 1949. In spite of the recent reduced influence of politics on science and art, many literary scholars presenting literary theories evidently still find such quotations necessary.

The second level in the wenti system is the “linguistic form” (yuti i.e. yuyan de tishi), the intermediate concept that bridges the gap between genre and the author’s style. The problem for Tong here, it seems to me, is how to explain the difference between linguistic form and the author’s style, and yuti is often translated as “style” even in dictionaries. Tong’s solution to the problem is to divide linguistic form into two parts: “standard linguistic form” (guifan yuti) and “free linguistic form” (ziyou yuti).70 The “standard linguistic form” is the literary language by which genres are manifested. Different genres require different linguistic forms: poetry requires lyrical linguistic form, etc. According to Tong, authors must follow the standards of the genre, but should also express their special linguistic sensitivity, preferences, and creativity through a “free linguistic form”. 71

Free linguistic form refers to how, in an extremely relaxed state of mind, the author’s individual mindset achieves complete revelation and expression, thereby bestowing on language a unique tone, style, and vitality. [---] free linguistic form is the expression of the author’s individuality.72

65 Ibid., p 182.
66 Ibid., p 105.
67 Ibid., p 110.
70 Ibid., pp 119–160.
71 Ibid., pp 153–159.
72 Ibid., p 152.
According to Tong, “free linguistic form” is the most important linguistic feature that manifests the style. Tong discusses at length how the author’s individuality is created by biology and environment and how individuality turns into individual creativity. In Tong’s view, when it comes to theme and content the author can use “fictive” ones, but when it comes to how he writes he cannot fake it. This is because language and mental activity are simultaneous; every change in individual character finds full expression in language.\textsuperscript{73} This happens subconsciously. The linguistic form is coloured by individuality, and hence the language in a literary text will be individualized. A basic requirement of \textit{wen ti} is original creativity. Therefore, the author and his work must become one; the author’s personality must melt into the free linguistic form. So according to Tong, “free linguistic form” is actually “individual linguistic form”\textsuperscript{74}. It seems to me that Tong adheres to a rather naive tradition in ancient Chinese literary theory (which can also be found in some Western literary theories) that considers the author to be a genius who freely expresses his thoughts and emotions in language without ever having to think, work on the language, or intentionally create aesthetic effects. Tong’s view obviously originates in the traditional, monistic view of style in ancient Chinese literary theory, in the belief that language and content are inseparable, and that literary style is a direct expression of the author’s personal character (\textit{wen ru qi ren}). When discussing the standard language of lyrical linguistic form, Tong claims that the author can create aesthetic effects by breaking the common rules for grammar and syntax, etc. But this is not a conscious effort on the part of the poet, but rather a consequence of different people having different experiences.

What then is the relationship between this “free linguistic form” and “style” (\textit{fengge})? According to Tong the “free linguistic form” is the intermediate concept unifying “standard linguistic form” with style. There are no clear dividing lines between these three. In fact they can only be separated theoretically, says Tong, not in the actual works of writers, since they melt together into one corpus (standard language contains free linguistic form and in turn changes standard linguistic form). But style, “standard linguistic form”, and “free linguistic form” are three different aspects of a literary text. “Standard linguistic form” is needed by the genre to distinguish types of literature; “free linguistic form” is the expression of the author’s personality and character. “Free linguistic form” is not equivalent to style, because style is the union of “free linguistic form” and other aspects of the work. However, “free linguistic form” may, according to Tong, be called “quasi-style”, since developed to the fullest and in combination with other features, it turns into style.\textsuperscript{75}

So, in short, in Tong’s view, “linguistic form” is the intermediate concept between genre and style. “Linguistic form” is further divided into two parts, “free linguistic form” and “standard linguistic form”, of which the “free linguistic form” in turn is the intermediate level between “standard linguistic form” and style. One may

\textsuperscript{73} It is quite remarkable that Tong here claims language and thought to be simultaneous, since at the beginning of his book he claimed that an author can choose between different ways of expressing the same content, p 2. But his theoretical system of an “organic whole” obviously demands a monistic view of style.

\textsuperscript{74} Tong, p 154.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p 30.
wonder if introducing more and more intermediate concepts really clarifies the situation. Furthermore, since these “levels” can only be theoretically separated, the author saves himself the trouble of having to prove the existence of these levels in concrete analysis of literary texts. But on the other hand, Western scholars have yet to prove the exact difference between, for instance, literary language, genre style, and individual style in every aspect of a literary work, though Western scholars in general also accept, in theory, the existence of different levels in texts (since they use these concepts in their discussions of literary style).

The third part of wenti according to Tong, is “style”, fengge, the highest level of manifestation of the concept of wenti. According to Tong, a literary work without style has no wenti and is a failure.

Literary style refers to the basic characteristics of the author’s creative individuality that are manifest in the organic whole of the work and that are able to initiate a lasting aesthetic enjoyment in the reader.76

In Tong’s view, the “free linguistic form” can be explained by the author’s personality, but style is more complex and refers to the author’s “creative individuality”, which in turn is a conglomerate of his personality, education, aesthetic ideals, and preferences. The author’s “creative individuality” can be transformed into literary style through the subjective, aesthetic grasp of existence, based on subjective experience, emotion, and imagination, which transforms life and the world and creates an aesthetic world unique to the author and manifested throughout the content, form, and aesthetic effects. In Tong’s view, style is an organic whole of content and form, language. Tong’s description of style is very similar to Liu Xie’s view of the relationship between the author’s character and style in the “Style and Personality” chapter (“Ti xing”) of Wenxin diaolong, where individual creativity originates in the author’s “talent”, “disposition”, “learning”, and “habits”.77 In his book, Tong also claims that in Liu Xie’s view “the author’s individual creativity is manifested in the union of content and form in literary texts” and thereby “turned into the aesthetic style” of the author in question.78 Tong claims that Sikong Tu (837-908) also shared his opinion of an organic whole in styles.79 This is because in the description of the 24 poetic styles, Sikong did not describe particular features, but rather grasped the organic whole of styles and gave them overall descriptions in poetic form, using verse and metaphors to imitate these styles, rather than making a thorough analysis of their parts. According to Tong, this shows that Sikong treated style as an organic whole that could not be expressed through words, but rather through experience, i.e. through poetic description. But what Tong here sees as a scientific analysis of style based on a certain concept of style being an organic whole, is in my view rather experiential literary criticism. It seems to me that Tong is again “imposing” modern concepts and thinking on an earlier theory to justify his particular concept of style.

In his book, Tong also discusses stylistic divisions, typologies of style, claiming

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76 Ibid., p 164.
77 Liu Xie, “Ti xing”, in Wenxin diaolong, pp 256–257.
78 Tong, p 34.
79 Ibid., p 170.
that there are two major kinds, the subjective and the objective. The “not too numerous nor too simplified” subjective view is represented by Liu Xie in Wenxin diaolong. In the “Style and Personality” chapter of Wenxin diaolong, the word “ti” does not simply imply genre, but has acquired a meaning that, in my view, may be roughly translated as style. Although Liu Xie expressed the opinion that the author’s styles are inexhaustible, they all still fit into eight basic styles expressed by Liu as dualities, as fours pairs of mutually opposing styles.

Thus, the stylish (dianya) stands against the peculiar (xinqi), the profound (yuan’ao) is separate from the manifest (xianfu), the extravagant (fanru) is opposed to the frugal (jingyue), the vigorous (zhuangli) is different from the elegant (qingmi). This is what makes up the roots and the leaves in the garden of letters.

Liu Xie’s typology of eight styles in four pairs of opposites that can combine in different ways to generate more styles, fits the scheme of the “Eight diagram” (bagua, eight combinations of three whole or broken lines used in divination with four pairs of opposites that can be combined into 64 divinatory symbols). In Tong Qingbing’s book Liu Xie’s eight styles in Wenxin diaolong are illustrated in the shape of a regular octagon with the opposing styles placed in mutually opposite corners of the octagon, and with lines drawn between the corners of the octagon marking the different, possible combinations of these eight styles. Tong Qingbing claims that Liu, who was greatly influenced by “The Classic of Changes” Yijing, simply transferred the system of ancient divination into the realm of literary creation and theory. Tong sees many advantages in Liu Xie’s division of styles. Not only is Liu “systematic” and uses “simple dialectical thinking”, but he “reflects the reality of the division of styles into types”. Tong, however, criticizes Liu for being intolerant and letting his emotions affect his arguments when judging two of these styles to be decadent. Furthermore, he accuses Li Xie of not being objective and scientific.

Liu’s division is still the result of subjective enumeration. Since he has not clearly stated the reason why the basic stylistic types only include these eight kinds, this (division) is not very scientific.

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80 The term "ti" appears no less than 191 times in Wenxin diaolong according to a count by professor Gu Guorui (professor at Yanjing yanjiuyuan in Beijing, personal communication in Stockholm, September, 2000). The meaning of this central term is determined by the context, it can easily shift frames of reference, and translations into modern Chinese or English often differ in their interpretations. For an interesting discussion of the term "ti" in “Ti xing”, see Stephen Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp 210–211. The term “ti” occurs seven times in the “Ti xing” chapter, and only in one instance, when it occurs as a disyllable “tishi”, is it reasonable to translate it as something other than “style”, e.g. “literary form”.

81 Liu Xie claimed that the author’s character influenced the style and that there is both an innate component of the author’s creativity, talent (cai), and disposition (qi) and a part that can be acquired through studies (xue) and habits (xi). Since everyone is different, the authors’ literary works are “as different as are their faces.” Zhou (ed.), p 257. The influential discourse equating the style with the author’s personality (wen ru qi ren), has flourished up to the late 20th century.


84 Liu Xie, p 260.

85 Tong, p 37.

86 Ibid., p 37.

87 Ibid., p 173.

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In Tong’s view, Yao Nai’s (1732-1815) division into two styles, “masculine strength” (yanggang) and “feminine softness” (yinrou), from the Qing dynasty, is simple, logical, and more scientific. This is because Yao unites mankind, the psychology of mankind, and the order of nature, and then separates these into these two major categories in a way that surprisingly “happens to coincide” with 18th century Swedish botanist Carl von Linné’s (Carolus Linnaeus) divisions in the sexual system of plants.88 In Tong’s view, masculine strength is an ascending structure, and feminine softness a descending structure of mankind and nature, and these “two different kinds of forces decide the direction of style”.89

These final statements by Tong show that he too is greatly influenced by the Yi-jing and the discourses on cosmology and the two forces of yin and yang. But the thought that these qualities of “masculine strength” and “feminine softness” in literature, literary styles, and genres, constructed by writers and critics in China could find verification and justification in the reproductive organs of plants seems to me to be quite absurd. These “styles” concern the traditional gender marking of themes and diction related to these themes.90 For instance, ci-poetry basically dealt with the “private” love and boudoir-theme that was associated with feminine qualities, while shi-poetry dealt with “masculine”, “public” themes such as politics, and morals.91 There is no botanic or biological evidence for these aesthetic qualities; they are man-made constructions of femininity and masculinity exploited by writers to achieve certain effects and impressions. Furthermore, Tong’s statements show that from an ontological viewpoint, he believes that these styles objectively exist, that they are evident in the order of nature and mankind, and are not simply intellectual constructs.

Apart from the subjective typology represented by Liu Xie, there are, according to Tong, “objective” categorizations. Chen Wangdao created a typology of eight styles, four pairs of opposing styles: “concise versus elaborate” (based on the balance between content and form), “vigorous versus delicate” (based on atmosphere), “pedestrian versus colourful” (based on amount of ornate diction) and finally, “precise versus scattered” (based on the level of caution).92 Chen Wangdao has, according to Tong, used “objective criteria”, since the language in literary texts is the basis for his model, and therefore the model is “scientific”. These eight styles, and the possible combinations of these eight styles, are also illustrated in the shape of an Eight-diagram (a regular octagon with lines drawn between possible combinations of styles).93

Tong’s own typology of styles is an attempt at a synthesis. From the “subjective

88 Tong, pp 38–39.
89 Ibid., p 39.
90 For a discussion of these styles and their origins, see my In Search of the Generic Identity of Ci Poetry, vol. 2, pp 204–220.
92 Chen Wangdao in Xiucixue fafan (Shanghai: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976), p 228 quoted by Tong, p 175.
93 Tong, p 177.
“viewpoint” it aims to unite the aesthetic experience of the reader with “objective linguistic analysis” by studying both impressions of atmosphere or mood in the work and the use of language. Tong creates eight pairs of dualities, altogether 16 styles that, except for the opposites, can be combined in all kinds of ways (1. simplified versus sumptuous, 2. vigorous versus delicate, 3. pedestrian versus colourful, 4. precise versus unrestrained, 5. forceful versus meaningful, 6. solemn versus humorous, 7. refined versus absurd, 8. obscure versus clear), which he illustrates with two Eight-diagrams (two regular octagons with lines drawn between possible combinations of styles). Tong’s typology of styles is obviously a mixture of Liu Xie’s and Chen Wangdao’s typologies, but one can hardly say that it unites the “subjective” and the “objective” (nor that Chen Wangdao’s typology is completely objective). There is no description of how we could analyse and distinguish these sixteen basic styles in literary works. One hopes for a definition of each style using Tong’s criteria of subjective impression of atmosphere and objective linguistic analysis of the use of language, but he says it is “unrealistic” to expect this and concedesthat to fully explain each style in terms of his criteria, much further research must be done.

In his book, Tong explains literature mainly from the viewpoint of social science, aesthetics, and psychology, not linguistics. There are detailed explanations of how a person’s individuality is created and then turned into creative individuality, and of the underlying social-economic and cultural reasons for wenti. The actual linguistic aspects of wenti and the central concept in this theory, yuti, are accorded little space and lack concrete examples. In creating his typology of styles, Tong does not explain why he uses exactly 16 styles or why he chooses precisely these sixteen styles. Tong thereby makes the same mistake he accuses Liu Xie of, namely being subjective and arbitrary in his selection of styles.

In his book, Tong attempts to create a new genre system. In Mainland China, after the May Fourth movement, two views of the Chinese generic system have prevailed. These are a division into three categories of literature: narrative, lyrical and dramatic, inspired by Western literary theories; and a later appearing division based on four categories: poetry, prose, novels, and drama (which in Tong’s view suits Chinese literary tradition and reality). The problem with this latter division is its lack of a unified criterion of division and its inability to deal with categories such as poetic prose. Tong aims to create a new genre system that is based on unified criteria of division and makes it possible to include future genres. Inspired by Kant’s

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94 Tong, pp 178–179.
95 Tong briefly describes only four of these styles with names that feel modern to Chinese readers, such as “humour” (younmo, a transliteration from English). In these four descriptions, Tong explains only the “atmosphere/mood”, for instance what humour is, but when it comes to the linguistic part, he merely says it uses quick-witted punch lines.
96 Tong claims that the underlying reasons for wenti consist of both objective reasons, the external environment, society, history, and culture (historical time, ethnic background, class, cultural and literary tradition, the literary spirit of the era) and subjective reasons, the author’s subjectivity, the expression of his thoughts and emotions (originating in his character, both the innate natural gift and disposition and as shaped by education and environment), and finally the author’s aesthetic endowments (form of aesthetic experience and aesthetic ideals), Ibid., pp 182–219.
97 Ibid., pp 110–114.
“asthetische idee” and theories of art of Gu Zujian,98 he introduces a system based on the “pattern of artistic imagery” in literary works.99 Tong divides literary art into three kinds: “reproductive”, “expressionistic”, and “conceptualistic” art, according to their separate functions, i.e. to reproduce reality, to express emotions, and to express ideas, each kind using its distinct pattern of imagery: “representative”, “artistically conceived”, and “illustrating” ideas.100 This division according to Tong, corresponds perfectly with the structure of the human mind and its three basic needs: to understand the world, and to express emotions, and to express ideas. In a table, Tong places the three literary types and their respective patterns of artistic imagery on the highest level. On the next level he lists the actual genres (wenti). For each of the three kinds of literature, Tong lists five genres: poetry, novels, prose, dramatic literature, and film literature. Each of these genres can be divided into sub-genres and the sub-genres can be further divided into categories.101

Tong’s division into three patterns of artistic imagery is obviously based on the traditional idea in Chinese literary theory of not only separating objective from subjective expressions, but also dividing subjective expressions into the two categories of emotion (qing) and ideas/thoughts (zhi), the former mostly being equated with “private” emotions such as love, and with much lower status than the latter, which is mainly associated with intellectual activity, morals, philosophy, and politics, etc. So if Tong did not use this tripartite division, it would seem like literary works with “subjective expressions” could only deal with the love theme. But it might not be so easy to strictly separate emotions from ideas in literary works,102 and this problems obviously applies to the different “patterns of imagery” as well.

Chu Bingjie’s “Introduction to ancient Chinese genre theory” Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun

When Tong Qingbing and Zhang Yi discuss wenti, they discuss both genre and style, but to them wentixue, as a field, means “stylistics”, while Chu, fully aware of this meaning of wenti, moves in the opposite direction. Chu Binjie breaks off from the main body of contemporary scholars discussing wenti by disregarding the aspect of “style” in the meaning of wenti. According to Chu, wenti is simply an abbreviation of “literary genres, forms” (wenxue ticai, tizhi)103 and the Western term “genre” can be translated as “wenlei” (literary kind), which in turn is equivalent to wenti. But

99 Ibid., pp 114–118.
100 Tong’s genre system is based on the three patterns of artistic imagery in Gu Zujian’s article “Lun yishu zhi jingguan” in Wenyi zhengming, No 2, 1992, see Tong, p 116.
101 See table, Tong, p 220.
102 James Liu discusses this division of emotion (qing) and ideas (zhi) in The Art of Chinese poetry, pp 72–73. Liu claims that this is an artificial division constructed by the Song Dynasty didactic/moralist critics of literature. Halvor Eifring, however, shows that this division is of much earlier date and can not be seen as artificial in Liu’s sense, see Eifring, “Introduction: Emotions and the conceptual history of qíng”, in Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature, Halvor Eifring (ed.), (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
103 Chu Bingjie, Zhongguo gudai wenti gailun (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997) p 1. Chu’s book is a good introduction to pre-modern Chinese genre theory, but unfortunately, there are many misprints in it.
in my view, we cannot simply equate the ancient Chinese term wenti, with the modern Western concept of “genre”, nor discuss the ancient term wenti without reference to its inherent meaning of “style”.

Chu discusses Western “genre theory” as a field of its own, and translates this term as wenleixue. His description of the field of “wenleixue” is in principal identical to his description of “wentixue”, which in turn is equivalent to what in ancient times was called “wenzhang liubie lun”, i.e. the study of the features and divisions of literary types and their appearance and development. At first glance Chu appears to make an attempt to separate the concepts and terms used for style and genre and to advocate using the term “wenti” for genre. But it turns out that this is not his intention. In Chu’s view, “genre” and “style” are still both wenti; it is merely a question of a broad or a narrow definition of the term. Because of this close relationship between genre and style, the ancient scholars mixed them up, says Chu, and used both at the same time.

Chu’s book, however, is clearly a work on genre theory, though most scholars now equate wentixue with “stylistics”. Chu discusses the faults and merits of genre theories in pre-modern times, and describes a large number of pre-modern genre systems. He also describes the ancient genres, providing each conventional genre’s name, origins, major features, development, and sub-categories.

In Chu’s book, a genre system for literary genres in pre-modern times is outlined. He thoroughly discusses the major poetry genres of pre-modern times in chronological order, followed by shorter summaries of the prose categories: “Primitive shi-poetry in two to four characters per line”, “The Songs of Chu”, “Fu-poetry”, “Yuefu-style poems”, “Ancient-style shi-poetry” (5 and 7 characters per line), “Parallel prose”, “Recent-style regulated shi-poetry”, “Other kinds of ancient-style shi-poetry” (3, 6, or mixed numbers of characters per line), “Ci-poetry”, “Qu-drama”, “Ancient essays of all kinds” (documents used in politics and administration), “Ancient essays of other kinds” (short notes, speeches). In Chu’s view 12 major genres obviously suffice to cover ancient literature, which is a substantial simplification (or improvement considering the number of genres listed in ancient anthologies such as Ming dynasty scholar Xu Shizeng’s “Genre division Wenti mingbian with its 121 genres”). Unlike many of the ancient anthologists and scholars, Chu does not include the Classics, the historical and philosophical works, in his genre system. These works are presumably not regarded as “literary” genres. But in spite of not being regarded as “pure” literary genres by Chu, many of the works in these categories undeniably contain literary qualities.

104 Chu, p 1.
105 Ibid., p 14.
106 Ibid., p 1.
107 Chu, pp 38–496.
108 For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see Rydholm, “The theory of ancient Chinese genres”. 

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Tao Dongfeng’s “Stylistic evolution and its cultural significance”

Wenti yanbian ji qi wenhua yiwei

A large part of Tao’s book comprises an introduction to Western literary theories, genre theories, linguistics, and stylistics. Tao refers to a wide range of Western works by Saussure, Barthes, Spitzer, Todorov, Goldmann, Fowler, and many others. Tao seems to imply that Western literary theories can be applied to Chinese literature without modification, and that this goes for the definition of the concept of wenti as well. The concept of wenti, which he translates as “style”, is traced back not to Ancient Chinese sources, but to Ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians.109 Wentixue, “stylistics” is a scholarly field that according to Tao, emerged in the West in the 20th century. According to Tao, “style” in English can be translated into Chinese either as “wenti” or as “fengge” (the former used mainly in literary theory, the latter more used in contemporary Chinese). Tao claims that wenti and fengge basically have the same meaning and in his book they are used as “synonyms”.110 In my view, however, the Western term “style” should not simply be equated with wenti, since this ancient Chinese term denotes a concept that differs quite a lot from the common understanding of the Western concept of “style”. In one instance, Tao translates “stylistics” as “fengexue”,111 a rather new term which perhaps is a better choice for discussing Western stylistic theories, since it does not carry with it the whole history of ancient Chinese theories of wenti.112

Tao presents a definition of wenti that is largely based on the definitions of “style” in J. Cuddon’s A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory and H. Shaw’s A Dictionary of Literary Terms.

Wenti is the verbal structure (huayu tishi) of literary works. It is the structural pattern of the text. If we say that texts are a special kind of structures of symbols, then wenti is the coding pattern of these symbols. The word “structure” (tishi) is used here to imply and reinforce that these kinds of structures and coding patterns involve a sense of pattern or a model. Thus, wenti is a concept that reveals the formal features of literary works.113

The term huayu tishi could be translated in different ways such as “verbal expression/structure”, linguistic form/structure/pattern”, “discourse”, etc., but “verbal structure” seems to be suitable in this context. It is perfectly acceptable to use the above definition of style in a stylistic study, but the problem is that in Chinese literary theory wenti does not simply mean “style”, but also denotes what can be referred to as “genre”. Tao does not account for this aspect of the Chinese term wenti in this definition. Instead he uses the term wenlei for “genre”114 and defines this term as well in accordance with H. Shaw’s A Dictionary of Literary Terms.

109 Tao Dongfeng, Wenti yanbian ji qi wenhua yiwei (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1999), p 1.
110 Ibid., p 2, f 2.
111 Tao, p 2.
112 The concept of “wenti” can be traced back as far as Shijing and Shangshu, and the term appeared at least as early as in “Xie Lingyun zhuannun” in the Songshu, written by Shen Yue (441–513), Ciyuan, vol. 2, p 1363. For an introduction to the origins of the concept and term wenti see Rydholm, “The theory of ancient Chinese genres”.
113 Tao, p 2. Unfortunately there are two misprints in these lines: wenben “text” is misprinted as wenti in both places in this quote.

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The word *wenlei* is “genre” in French. Originally it refers to class, sort, kind, and used in literature it is a category used in the division of literary works. It places a group of similar works in the same category.\textsuperscript{115}

This, however, does not mean that Tao attempts to completely separate the concepts of style and genre, since genres, according to Tao, are defined by stylistic features. Tao (rightly) claims the Western term “genre” to be complex and unclear. He traces the reason for the confusion about the definition of the concept of genre in the West to the multitude of genre theories and different criteria for the division of literary genres. Tao lists nine kinds of divisions, but points out that the main criterion for division is either the theme, content, subject matter, and object of description, or formal standards and structural patterns. The former, according to Tao, neglects the aesthetic qualities of literature and is basically a “vulgar” sociological division of genres by non-literary criteria which display “changes in political interests”.\textsuperscript{116} Tao’s statement displays an implicit criticism of the traditional view of literature as a vehicle for moral/political education advocated both in early Chinese didactic (Confucian) literary theories and later by the Chinese Communist Party. The latter divides genres based on linguistic structures, moves the concept of genre closer to the concept of style, and directs genre studies towards formalism, structuralism, and stylistics. Tao claims formal and stylistic features to be most important in genre division, but holds that content also is important. The solution, in Tao’s view, is to combine these major criteria by regarding form and content as inseparable. Form and content are simultaneous; form incorporates content, and content is manifested by form.\textsuperscript{117} According to Tao, no formal features exist that are separate from content.\textsuperscript{118} A certain way of expression, a certain linguistic structure, corresponds to a certain mood, flavour, and mental construct; so in using formal criteria to separate genres, one is simultaneously including features related to content and mood.

The most important criterion for genre division should be the verbal structure (*huayu tishi*), that is, similarities in style (*wenli*). This is because the content of a literary work relies on form to become established; the content is the level of meaning of the expression, and is determined by the structural pattern of the expression. A specific way of expression creates a specific structure of meaning, genre features are basically decided by the text, and stylistic features are the basic features of genre. True literary genres are always marked by specific stylistic features, and genres based purely on theme are not true literary genres. Therefore, genre division always has stylistic implications; literary genre is the sum of stylistic features of a kind of (not one single) literary work.\textsuperscript{119}

Tao claims that Wang Guowei (1877–1927) in *Renjian cihua* expresses the same opinion when discussing the difference between recent-style verse and *ci*-poetry. In my view, Tao represents a monistic view of style (discussed above). It is quite possible to divide genres based on both language and theme/content without believing that content and form are inseparable, i.e. without adhering to a monistic view of

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\textsuperscript{115} Tao, p 9. It should perhaps be noted that the term “genre” originates from the Latin word “genus”.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p 10.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p 49.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p 45.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p 48–49.
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Style. In my opinion, several options are available to express the same content, and writers do choose between different ways of expressing a certain content. Especially in such strictly regulated forms as recent-style verse and ci-poetry, there were so many formal demands on line-length, speech-tone pattern, rhyme scheme, etc. that had to be satisfied, that the author had to be really flexible when putting his thoughts into words. Tao is right in claiming that theme/content alone does not suffice to divide genres, but if content and language really are inseparable, we would not have different genres treating the same theme/subject matter in different ways.

To sum up, in Tao’s theory genres are defined by their stylistic features, which in turn consist of linguistic/verbal structures, which in its turn consist of both content and form. To further strengthen the relationship between the concepts of genre and style, Tao introduces an intermediate concept uniting the two, namely “genre style” wenlei wenti. The relationship between “genre” (wenlei/wenxue leixing) and “genre style” (wenlei wenti), according to Tao, is as follows:

We may say that genre in fact is a generalization of a kind of literary works with similar stylistic features, while genre style refers to these verbal structures and structural norms of a specific kind of literary works.120

In Tao’s view, since every genre has its specific stylistic features, the main criterion for genre division is stylistic features,121 and hence each genre has its “genre style”. In Tao’s opinion, Cao Pi, Lu Ji, Zhi Yu, and Liu Xie all divided genres by their stylistic features. But as previously mentioned, the genre requirements proposed by the authors mentioned do not simply refer to what could be labelled stylistic features, even by our current or by Tao’s standards (mainly by verbal structure).

Tao describes the nature of style in more detail. In Tao’s view style, wenti, refers to the manner of putting thoughts into words. It is a verbal structure (huayu tishi), involving all the linguistic devices used by authors to create a specific textual structure.122 The verbal structures in styles evolve, and Tao’s main interest is to study manifestations and principles of the evolution of style through the methods of diachronic structuralism.123 Tao is critical of traditional histories of literature, since they focus on the subject matter in literature rather than on the manner of description/expression; in essence they are “thematic histories” meaningful for studies of history, philosophy, and social sciences rather than for history of literature.124 In Tao’s view stylistic history (wentishi) is the core of the history of literature, since it deals with the evolution of forms of literary language and structural patterns of texts, with aesthetic experience, and with the ability of art to reflect the world.125 In other words, for Tao, style is the core and substance of literary history, and linguistic evolution is the core and substance of the evolution of style. But simply using linguistic research methods to study linguistic structures does not suffice to understand style, according to Tao, since style is also inseparable from psychology and culture.

120 Ibid, p 10.
121 Ibid., p 8.
122 Ibid., p 4.
123 Ibid., p 6.
124 Ibid., p 5.
125 Ibid., p 5.

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Tao, like Tong Qingbing, is critical of scholars (i.e. structuralists) who use solely linguistic methods, “juggling with terms” (thinking that “everything can be counted” and lacks spirit). Changes in style are not simply linguistic phenomena, but reflect changes in living circumstances, intellectual needs, values, aesthetic perceptions, and ways of experiencing the world. Social history and cultural environment are important, according to Tao, since literature and language are parts of culture, and the literary style of a certain period reflects the features of the culture of that time. Tao is also critical of traditional Chinese “psychological” studies of styles that connect the author’s personal character with his style (wen ru qi ren). In my opinion, this is truly a problem in many traditional Chinese studies of style; not only the author’s individual style, but group and genre styles are sometimes attributed to one author in the same way. Biographical data on the poet are used for autobiographical interpretations of the literary texts and become stylistic evidence.

Tao instead advocates a method of stylistic study that combines linguistic analysis, reception aesthetics, and socio-cultural context. He purposes to investigate the evolution of styles from three main perspectives: linguistics, psychology (the author’s intellectual constructs and stylistic consciousness, and the reader’s stylistic expectations), and culture. Style is made up of verbal constructs, and language is culture in itself. In Tao’s view, as in that of Zhang Yi, the symbols of language are a mode of cultural existence. Tao claims that culture and symbols – language – are inseparable, therefore linguistic studies should also involve cultural analysis. Tao describes the relationship between language, style, and culture as follows:

Symbols and the organization of symbols are in fact exactly what we understand to be style. Style is the text’s structural pattern; it is the structural pattern of the relationships of the symbols, and this pattern has a rich cultural connotations. Cultural standards govern linguistic and stylistic standards, and at the same time condition our understanding of style.

Literary texts and stylistic patterns (linguistic patterns of texts) reflect socio-cultural patterns (a broad concept referring to politics, form of consciousness, values, spirit of the era, moral education, etc.), and not only the individual writer’s personality. Stylistic/linguistic patterns represent a way of experiencing, interpreting, and understanding the world. They represent intellectual constructs of people in a certain culture and society at a certain time. Tao therefore wants stylistics to return to the field of anthropology and through linguistic analysis uncover “mental structures and cultural connotations”. The purpose of stylistic studies is to decode the symbolic structures in literature to find the deeper connotations.

Literary texts are symbols, but not ordinary symbols, not scientific texts. They are a form of manifestation of human emotions, a concrete form of the experience of living, the aesthetic manifestation of the circumstances of human existence. The decoding activity in-

126 Ibid., p 20.
127 Tao, p 24.
128 Here Tao refers to the theories of L. A. White, Roland Barthes, and others, Tao, p 129.
129 Tao, p 130.
130 Ibid., p 174.
131 Ibid., p 131.
132 Ibid., p 23.
involved in literary research should uncover the text’s emotional and existential connotations. The emotional and existential connotations are embodied in the language; therefore they are impossible to decode without linguistic analysis.\textsuperscript{133}

In Tao’s view, stylistic evolution consists of changes in the structural patterns of literary language, which in turn correspond with and are inseparable from changes in cultural patterns and patterns of consciousness.

The whole culture of mankind can be seen as a meaningful, functional form. Or, rather than saying that culture is the content of our beliefs, we can say that it is the shape or pattern that conforms to our beliefs and actions. This way, style and culture obtain a correspondence on the level of form and structure, and it is completely possible for us to find their internal relations by analysing and comparing them.\textsuperscript{134}

In my opinion, Tao thereby represents a “mentalistic monistic view of style” (discussed above) that attempts to uncover the “cultural content” through studies of the language in texts. The problem for scholars representing this view is how to define this abstract content in order to be able to study it, and Tao does not provide us with any concrete examples of analysis.

Tao discusses different levels of style: “individual style”, “national style”, “period style”, and “genre style” (\textit{wenlei wenti}), but claims that the main focus of diachronic stylistics is the evolution of genre styles (\textit{wenlei wenti}),\textsuperscript{135} using stylistics to construct a genre history. The evolution of literature is often the result of genres replacing one another, and every important period in literary history corresponds to a dominant genre in that era;\textsuperscript{136} therefore the evolution of literature basically depends on the evolution of genre styles.\textsuperscript{137} But Tao does not want to simplify to the point of claiming that literary history is the same as evolution of styles, nor does he think that in a certain period/dynasty there was basically one dominant genre in use. Genres consist of literary works sharing certain, but not all, features. Genre constructs are based on generalizations, and since genres are in constant change, it is hard to verify the genre descriptions by referring to individual literary works with many dissimilar features. The solution, according to Tao, is a combination of theoretical and historical genre studies using temporary genre definitions, constantly redefining genres based on empirical studies of literary works, and to use these theoretical frameworks, these generalizations, to understand individual works – a hermeneutic cycle process. Genre definitions rely on the features of individual works, says Tao, and genre is the most important tool for recognizing what is special and individual about an author’s work. In my view, it is true that genre constructs or genre expectations sometimes make it easier to see what is individual in an author’s work, but stylistic features of genres are not always so easily separated from the features of individual style.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., p 23.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., pp 134–135.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p 41.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p 11.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p 56.
Tao also provides a brief description of how he thinks styles evolve, and how genres evolve, but because genres are defined by stylistic features in Tao’s theory, it turns out that his two separate descriptions of these two evolutionary processes coincide to a large extent. Both these two processes involve changes in the same “dominant” features.

Every specific kind of genre (wenlei) has its standard pattern, its dominant stylistic norm (wenti guifan), and is both subjective and objective; it is both a structure for emotional and experiential structure and also an organized linguistic structure, that is, a stylistic structure (wenti jiegou). A kind of literary genre represents a specific way of experiencing the world and its linguistic structures. In a certain age it prospers or fades, and that all reflects a change in the mental structures of the authors and cultural psychology, as well as a change in the structure of linguistic constructs.

Styles/genres do not completely vanish, nor do they emerge out of nothing, but they rather preserve and/or develop features from earlier styles. Thus it is impossible to draw clear-cut lines between them. In this context, he also takes the opportunity to implicitly criticize earlier literary policies of the Chinese Communist Party, when he states: “To completely break with traditional culture can only be a slogan (axiom), and can not become reality.” Styles and genres can influence each other or merge into new styles or genres. Tao emphasizes that the phenomenon of popular styles/genres replacing or giving new life to styles/genres in literary literature, is an important factor in the evolution of Chinese literature.

Evidently, one consequence of defining genre by stylistic features, but still keeping the terms separate, is that there will be have to be (more or less identical) double accounts for each phenomenon concerning style and genre, such as evolutionary processes, etc. in Tao’s theory. And this seems to me to be rather uneconomical.

140 Ibid., p 61.
141 Ibid., p 16.
142 There are many examples of ancient scholars adverse to the idea of cross-mixing genres, such as Hu Yinglin, Li Dongyang, and Chen Shidao, see Tao, pp 69–71. According to Tao, this phenomenon is connected to the political arena. In the feudal era, there were strict rules for relationships in politics and culture and therefore genres had strict boundaries, and it was in general not accepted to cross-mix genres. Chen Shidao was critical of Su Shi’s way of “writing shi-poetry in the ci-poetry form” which he considered was “not the essential character (fei bense)” of ci-poetry. Chen Shidao, Houshan shihua, quoted by Tao, pp 70–71. According to Tao, what Chen meant was that Su Shi’s ci-poetry was using the style of “heroic abandon” (haofang), as opposed to the general standard of ci-poetry, “delicate restraint” (wanyue). But in my view, Chen Shidao could also have been referring to Su Shi breaking the speech-tonal rules, for which Su was criticized by some other contemporary critics. See my In Search of the Generic identity of Ci Poetry, vol. 2, p 206–209. Some scholars, especially in the Song dynasty, held a different opinion on the relationships between genres, like Chen Shan, Jiang Kui, and Wang Zhuo, see Tao, pp 72–73. Wang Zhuo stated the following: “The ancient songs developed into yuefu; the ancient yuefu developed into present day qu[ci]. They all have the same origins”, Wang Zhuo, “Geci zhi bian”, Bi ji manzhi, juan 1, in Cihua conghian, Tang Guizhang (ed.), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), vol. 1, p 74, and quoted by Tao, p 73. Wang Zhuo seems reluctant to separate shi-poetry and yuefu, since they have the same origins. According to Tao, this opinion is too extreme and eliminates the need for the concepts of shi-poetry and ci-poetry: “The stylistic norm and differences between literary genres are not definite, but genre divisions are in fact not purely artificial and without foundation. The works listed under the name of a certain genre have elementary similarities. In addition, if there were no existing differences, then one could not even discuss the issue of interaction and infiltration”, Tao, p 74.
143 Ibid., p 18.

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Tao also describes the development of theories concerning the relationship between style and culture in China. Firstly, the theories from ancient times up to the late Qing dynasty were based on “vulgar sociology”. The function of literature was moral education, and stratification and stylistic features of shi-poetry were seen as direct reflections of politics, of the state of the country. These theories, in Tao’s view, served the purposes of the feudal rulers and represent political interference in the development of literature and a failure to recognize the importance of the literary language. After 1949 the histories of Chinese literature inspired by Marxist criticism were, according to Tao, based on “vulgar sociology”, and (also) explained literary/stylistic evolution as a direct result of changes in socio-cultural environment. They completely neglected form, language, and sound. In the West, on the contrary, in the 20th century, stylistics developed rapidly due to Saussure’s structural linguistics, inspiring Russian formalism and New criticism to focus on the analysis of linguistic structures and features in the text, while, according to Tao, society, culture, and the author’s psyche were seen as external factors of no importance to style. These scholars, according to Tao, failed to see that texts and formal structures possess socio-cultural significance, that language and style are manifestations of culture.

Finally, says Tao, in the middle of the 20th century, in the theories of Marxist critics Lucien Goldmann, Terry Eagleton, Raymond Williams, and Fredric Jameson, the solution is sought in a dialectical unity of language/style and culture. The cultural implications of literary works are uncovered through analysis of the texts’ formal structures and through explanations of the relationship between the literary text and socio-historical reality. Tao concludes: “Genuine literary sociology must be a sociology of a kind of form or style, or a cultural science of form (wenti), and regard style as a manifestation of culture, while not failing to recognize its special aesthetic quality.”

Tao supports Goldmann’s theories of the sociology of form versus the traditional sociology of content. As stated above, Tao advocates the idea of text structures being analysed in the context of socio-cultural mental constructs. Tao supports Eagleton’s theory that the development of literary form is conditioned by changes in the dominant way of perceiving sociological reality, the form of consciousness; by changes in the relationship between author and reader; and by the history of literary form in itself. Eagleton explains, for instance, the change in the style of novels in the 18th century towards being concerned with the individual mind and ordinary life experiences, as a product of the increasing confidence of the capitalist class. But this solution to the problem of the relationship between style and culture that Tao hopes will now prosper in contemporary Chinese stylistics has not been so success-

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144 Ibid., pp 160–163.
145 Ibid., p 15.
146 Ibid., pp 164–165.
147 Ibid., pp 166–171.
148 Ibid., p 172.
149 Ibid., p 182.
150 Tao discussing Eagleton’s Marxism and literary criticism, ibid., p 181.
151 Tao discussing Eagleton’s Marxism and literary criticism, ibid., p 181.
ful in the West. Many Western literary scholars today agree that the theories of these Marxist critics are based on gross simplifications.

To sum up Tao’s theory: the core of the evolution of literature is the evolution of genre; the core of the evolution of genre is the evolution of style/genre style; the core of stylistic evolution is linguistic evolution; and the core of linguistic evolution consists in changes in the socio-cultural mental constructs (since form and content are inseparable). This way of reasoning displays a mentalistic monistic view of style with its inherent problem of describing these socio-cultural mental constructs, and combines “modern Western” linguistics, traditional Chinese literary theory, and Marxist criticism. It also maintains the close relationship between genre and style in traditional Chinese studies of style and genre by defining genre in terms of stylistic features, and by using the intermediate concept of genre style in which the two melt together. The advantage of this model is that it explains why it is so hard to separate the concepts of genre and style in Chinese literary theory, and perhaps also that it leads one to question the basis for separating the concepts of genre and style in many Western literary theories. The Western concepts of genre and style are equally complex and unclear, and maybe these two concepts are simply two sides of the same coin.

Conclusions

The complete theories of wenti developed in the works of Zhang Yi, Tong Qing-bing, and Tao Dongfeng share many similar traits that in my opinion reflect some general tendencies in the discourse on wenti (genre and style) in China in the 1990s. A larger study would of course be necessary to confirm these observations. These three scholars are all trying to create a new concept of wenti based on a feasible combination of concepts used in Western linguistics and Chinese literary theories and emphasize the aspect of “style” in wenti (as opposed to Chu Binjie’s study, which is basically a work solely devoted to genre theory (wenleixue).) The similarities in these three major stylistic theories are as follows:

1. In these studies, the term wenti refers to and is generally translated into English as “style”, and wentixue is “stylistics” (Zhang, Tong, Tao). The term fengge is seldom used, though it is more or less synonymous to style according to Tao, and in his study it only appears in the context of the author’s individual style. In Zhang’s and Tong’s studies wenti is also a level of wenti concerned with the author’s individual style. While the term wenxue wenti is used for “literary style”, these scholars mainly use the terms ticai or wenlei to denote “genre”. But this does not mean that the concepts of genre and style are clearly distinguished in these theories. On the contrary, genre and style are seen as merely two levels of wenti (Zhang, Tong, Tao), connected by the intermediate concept of “linguistic form”; “linguistic form/mode of existence” (yuyan cunzaiti) (Zhang,) “verbal structure” (huayu tishi) (Tao), and “linguistic form” (yuyan tishi) (Tong). These terms can be translated in slightly different ways, but they all basically refer to the same thing, to language structure, the manner of expression, linguistic form or pattern. The aim of these studies is not to separate the concepts of genre and style, but rather to explain how they are related and fit to-
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1. The concept of “linguistic form”, developed from Western linguistics, is intended to provide the key to connecting the concepts of genre and style.

2. In these studies, both modern Western theories of linguistics, genre, and style, and ancient Chinese theories of styles and genres are discussed, and their respective advantages and shortcomings compared. The general tendency is that these scholars are working towards a kind of synthesis of Western and Chinese literary theories (Zhang, Tong, Tao). They claim that while the literary language and Western linguistic research methods are important in studies of genre and style, language alone does not suffice to explain literary style or genre. The content of literary texts is also important, as in the ancient Chinese theories of genre and style (Zhang, Tong, Tao), based on “vulgar sociology” (Tao) (seeing literature as a direct reflection of a good or bad government, society, etc.), or psychology (equating the author’s personality with his style: “wen ru qi ren”).

3. Both the problem of how to combine modern Western research methods and ancient Chinese theories, and the problem of how to combine form/language and content, are solved by claiming that language and thought content are simultaneous and inseparable (Zhang Tong, Tao, and also Wang). Consequently, analysing language also amounts to studying the content, and Western linguistic research methods can be used to uncover the cultural spirit in texts, as in Chinese literary theory. (“Chinese knowledge constitutes the essence, Western learning provides the means” zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong, see Zhang above.)

Although the idea of content and form/language being simultaneous and inseparable is presented as an innovation, this line of thought is far from new, and in my opinion, it constitutes the main stream of Chinese theories of style since ancient times, and is evident in Liu Xie’s Wenxin diaolong. Basically, these scholars create their theories of style and genre based on a combination of concepts used in Western linguistics and in Liu Xie’s Wenxin diaolong. These three scholars may be said to represent what Nils Erik Enkvist labels a monistic view of style (perhaps even a mentalistic monism, as discussed above).

4. These scholars try to create a “scientific” (Tong) definition of style/genre, based on unified criteria and obviously a monistic view of style. They all seem to presume that genres and styles objectively exist and that evidence of the nature of these concepts can be found in Western literary theories and/or in ancient Chinese literary theories. While Zhang, and especially Tao, refer mainly to Western sources, neither

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153 For instance in Liu Xie’s following lines: “When the emotions are stirred they take on the shape of language; when principals are expressed they are manifest in writings. This is how the concealed becomes manifest, how the internal turns into the external.” Liu Xie, “Ti xing”, in Wenxin diaolong, in Zhou Zhenfu’s edition, Wenxin diaolong jinyi (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), p 256. See also Stephen Owen’s discussion of the subject in Readings in Chinese literary thought (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp 234–235.
Tao nor Tong hesitate to make anachronistic interpretations of ancient Chinese sources and claim that their concepts of *wenti* are evident in, for instance, *Shijing* and *Yijing* (Tong), and in the theories of, for instance, Cao Pi (Tong, Tao), Zhi Yu (Tao), Lu Ji (Tao, Tong), and Liu Xie (Tong, Tao).

There are, of course, different opinions concerning the ontological question of genre and style. I share Anders Pettersson’s view that genres do not have a mind-independent existence because all concepts are human intellectual constructs. Reality does not come in pre-set divisions, but rather these divisions are created for a certain purpose. Reality, just like literary genres, can be divided up in any kind of way. In my opinion this line of reasoning applies not only to genres, but also to styles. Since genres and styles do not objectively exist, the ontological “truth” about them cannot be found in the texts by the ancient writer/scholar sages. Genres and styles can be defined/distinguished in any number of ways, and we cannot really say that one definition is “right” and another is completely “wrong”. We can only create definitions of style or genre suitable for the purposes of a certain study, or to be applied to a certain body of material. Any particular definition should instead be evaluated according to how well it serves the purposes of a certain study.

5. These three scholars all stress the cultural implications of style. Language, the intermediate concept between genre and style in these three theories, also functions as an intermediate concept between culture and style, since style consists of linguistic form/language, and language is part of culture. Therefore, in *wenti*, content, language, and culture constitute an inseparable union. Thus, according to Tao, the literary styles reflect and are limited by the society of a certain culture at a certain time, and are constantly changing in response to socio-cultural changes. Thus Tao’s theories amount to a sociology of form, more or less in line with the view of Marxist critics like Goldmann and Eagleton. But while Tao is eager to apply these Western Marxist theories directly to Chinese literature, genre, and style, Zhang takes the cultural implications of style one step further by wanting to establish a theory of literary stylistics with “special Chinese features”.

6. These three scholars all emphasize the author’s artistic freedom and ability to express his own personality or individual creativity through literary style. In the view of all these scholars this is achieved not through the content, but rather through language, linguistic form (but thought content is inseparable from language). In traditional studies, style is, in general, described as the manifestation of the author’s character and there is a kind of organic union of the two. This line of thought, which was developed by Liu Xie in *Wenxin diaolong*, originates from the original interpretation of *ti* as “body” (also Wang Meng continues the tradition of connecting style with the human body). The author’s mental disposition and character are manifested through language. In these three studies, the idea of a kind of organic union between the author and his style continues, though style is now basically defined as a kind of

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“linguistic form”. Hence, in my view, we can say that the traditional expression equating the author with his style: “the style [text] is like the person” (wen ru qi ren), has been transformed into “the linguistic form is like the person” (yutì ru qi ren).

7. These scholars all create their own division of wentì into three levels one of which is linguistic form/structure/pattern. Zhang: mode of cultural existence, linguistic form/mode of existence, and the two concrete forms of genre and style; Tong: genre, linguistic form, and style; Tao: verbal structure (in genres and styles), but also the perspectives of psychology and culture. Though these systems appear different, they are essentially the same. They are, in my opinion, all based on a monistic view of style and involve the concepts of genre and style, which are connected by the intermediate concept of “linguistic form”, which in turn incorporates culture.

8. These scholars (Zhang, Tao, Tong, and also Wang Meng) claim that wentì, literary style, is the core of literature (though Tong does not emphasize this aspect as much as the others), that style, wentì, is that which gives literature its value and independence, that it is that which makes literature become “literature”. In Zhang’s words: “literary style makes literature independent, or makes literature become literature in the true sense of the word”.155 Zhang claims that “in people’s minds and impressions ‘literature’ mostly refers to literary style”.156 In other words, these concepts are more or less synonymous. The general tendency in these theories is therefore, in my opinion, not only to preserve the senses both of genre and style in the concept of wentì, but to further enlarge the frame of reference of the concept of wentì also by more or less including “literature”, and what is in some Western studies labelled “literariness”.

9. What seems to often have happened in Chinese literary theory through the ages is that when new literary theories develop, the traditional terms are retained, but their frame of reference expands to accommodate new ideas and concepts. This is certainly the case with the concept of wentì in these studies. Not only does wentì preserve its original connotations, e.g. genre and style, but it can now also refer to, for instance, linguistic form, literature, and culture, etc.

10. Though we today are witnessing a reduced influence of politics on literary research, these late 20th century scholars/studies still stay within certain political boundaries. It is obviously still a bit controversial to promote formal and aesthetic features, since these issues are closely related to the author’s individual aesthetic creativity, to individuality, the freedom of creation, and the freedom of the individual. Tong quotes Marx and Engels157 on the importance of formal features of texts (not only political content) and includes a chapter on “The relationship between wentì and class”.158 Tao’s conclusions are based on Marxist critics’ theories of soci-

155 Zhang, p 25.
156 Ibid., p 34.
157 Tong quotes Engels’ claim that in writings not only political content is important but also the form, ibid., p 7.

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ology of form, and Zhang’s goal of developing a “theory of literary stylistics with special Chinese features” (you Zhongguo tesede wenxue wentixue lilun) calls to mind the Chinese Communist Party’s efforts to build a “socialism with special Chinese features” (you Zhongguo tesede shehuizhuyi), i.e. one that is adapted to Chinese culture, and politics. This field of research is still influenced by contemporary politics, but these studies show noteworthy progress in this regard compared to the literary and stylistic studies between the 1940s and 1980s. We are now witnessing a true development in the field of literary theory, genre studies, and stylistics. I would like to conclude with the words of Wang Meng expressing hope for the future.

Chinese literature, Chinese stylistics, will surely achieve a healthy and vigorous development, and nobody will be able to stop this.159

159 Wang Meng, “‘Wentixue zongshu’ xuyan”, in Wenti yu wenti de chuangzao, p 3.