



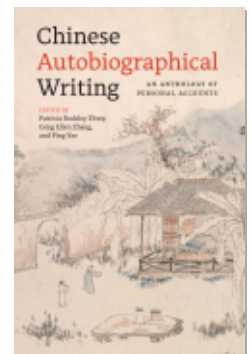
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14. Records of Things Seen and Heard: Prefaces to five Song  
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## RECORDS OF THINGS SEEN AND HEARD

Prefaces to five Song miscellanies (11th–13th c.)

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*In these prefaces to their collections of miscellaneous notes, Song writers reminisce about the long trips they had taken, what they had learned over a lifetime, and their encounters with interesting people, natural conditions, and social customs.*

In the history of Chinese literature, *biji* referred to a variety of collections of miscellaneous writing about things “seen and heard.” First appearing in the Six Dynasties, *biji* production reached a high point in the Song dynasty due to three major factors: the expansion of the publishing industry, the growing size of the scholar-official class, and the rising level of literacy among the general population. About five hundred *biji* collections have survived from the Song. The sizes of these works vary greatly. Some contain only a few dozen short entries. Others include lengthier episodes and dozens, even hundreds, of chapters. Equally diverse are the backgrounds of *biji* authors. While towering scholarly and literary figures such as Su Zhe (1039–1112) and Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) composed *biji*, the majority of *biji* authors, such as Wang Dechen (1036–1116) and Zhang Shinan (fl. 1228), achieved neither high office

nor literary fame. Their *biji* collections were often their only surviving works, bearing witness to these men's travel records, social connections, scholarly and artistic inclinations, and everyday concerns.

A prominent feature of *biji* writing is that many items in them can be loosely categorized as autobiographical in nature. In fact, Song writers routinely stated in *biji* prefaces that their writing was the result of years of record-keeping of items acquired through hands-on investigation and personal experience. As a result, a typical *biji* would include direct observations about natural conditions and local customs as well as notes on encounters with interesting personalities and unusual occurrences. In keeping track of and compiling this miscellaneous information into books, Song *biji* authors elevated the importance of the empirical knowledge that they had gained over time.

The five *biji* prefaces below were written by four authors. Wang Dechen expressed the wish to record all the important things that he had learned over a long life. Su Zhe stressed that it was not until living in exile that he had the free time to recollect and write down his life experience. As an admirer and follower of Huang Tingjian, Fan Xinzong (fl. 1104–1105) traveled long distances to meet Huang in exile in southern China, took care of Huang in his last year of life, and played a key role in preserving Huang's journal. Zhang Shinan not only presented himself as a knowledgeable person but also stressed that the things he had seen and heard should not be forgotten. Read together, these brief accounts give us glimpses of Song society and culture and the lives of Song scholar-officials.

### Preface to *Zhusi*, by Wang Dechen 王得臣

When I was a boy, my father ordered me to accompany him and study in the capital. Ten years passed before I earned a degree. After that, pressed by official appointments, I traveled north and south for almost three decades. Whenever I learned something from the comments of teachers and friends, the pleasant conversation of my guests and colleagues, or my own eyes and ears, I would write it down without fail. In old age, after I reached sixty, I retired from the Ministry of Revenue and returned home. Living in reclusion to recover from an illness, with little to do, I took out what I had recorded, by then quite voluminous, and reedited it, ending up with 284 items.

My records touch on affairs in the capital and outside it in the prefectures and towns. To make the entries more convenient for careful study, I classified

them into forty-four categories and assembled them into three chapters. I named the collection *The History of Zbu* (Zhushi), using “history” because its content is based on reliable records, not exaggerations, embellishments, or deceptions.<sup>1</sup> Although my writing belongs to the Lesser Way, it has items that make it worth leafing through. I hope those who read it do not laugh at me.

At age eighty, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the *yiwei* year in the Zhenghe reign period [1115] of the Great Song dynasty, I, Wang Dechen (master of Fengtai, courtesy name Yanfu) added this preface to my compilation.

SOURCE: Wang Dechen, *Zhushi* 塵史, ed. Huang Chunyan 黃純艷, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, ed. Zhu Yi'an 朱易安 and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, series 1, vol. 10 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, 2006), 5.

### Preface to *Brief Record at Longchuan*, by Su Zhe 蘇轍

From Yunzhou [Jiangxi], I was exiled to Leizhou [Guangdong], and from Leizhou to Xunzhou [also Guangdong]. Over the course of two years, a few dozen of us, young and old, traveled by land and water for tens of thousands of *li*, always needing to find ways to feed and clothe ourselves. My whole life my family never accumulated any rare things. I had several hundred volumes of books but had given them away beforehand.

Upon our arrival at Longchuan, the government did not even allow us to live in a Buddhist temple or Daoist shrine. Using our last fifty strings of cash, I purchased a ten-room house. Once we repaired the leaks and damage, it just barely protected us from wind and rain.

Past the north wall was an empty lot that could be used to grow vegetables and a well for irrigation. My son Yuan and I did the hoeing. After a few months with rainfall, chives, green onions, cluster mallow, and mustard sprouted up. They could be eaten fresh or pickled for later use. Once the field was clear, I no longer had anything to do there.

Given the small size of the prefecture's population, I had no one to talk to. There was an old man named Huang whose ancestors had been officials. His family had books, but he himself could not read. From time to time, I would borrow one or two of their books to entertain my eyes. But I was old and my eyesight fading so could not read for long. My alternative was to close my door and shut my eyes and think about past events, as if recalling dreams. I

might only remember one or two out of ten incidents. My recollections vary in detail and are probably not all worth recording. I had Yuan sit next to me and write the incidents down on paper. Altogether, we recorded forty items, filling ten chapters. I titled the book *Brief Record at Longchuan*.

SOURCE: Su Zhe, *Longchuan luezhi* 龍川略誌, ed. Kong Fanli 孔繁禮, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, ed. Zhu Yi'an 朱易安 and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, series 1, vol. 9 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, 2006), 255.

### Preface to *Separate Record at Longchuan*, by Su Zhe 蘇轍

When I lived in Longchuan, I compiled the *Brief Record [at Longchuan]* to record a small fraction of what I experienced over the course of my life. I hadn't had time to also include what I had learned from others. But I should—given that I am almost fifty, have traveled far, and have met some of the dynasty's senior figures. Ouyang Yongshu [Ouyang Xiu, 1007–1072] and Zhang Andao [Zhang Fangping, 1007–1091] were eminences of their day. Su Zirong [Su Song, 1020–1101] and Liu Gongfu [Liu Ban, 1023–1089] were erudite and famous. I was lucky to have associated with them and heard them talk. Younger generations will never have such opportunities.

Once, when Liu Gongfu and I were on duty at the Central Drafting Office, he sighed and said, “When the last of us dies, what we said and did will be lost. If you can write some of it down, it could be passed on.” I had too many things to deal with at the time, so was too lazy to make a record.

I have now lived in exile for six years, with little to fill my days. I wanted to do research on what I had heard earlier, but there were no scholar-officials to consult in this hot and desolate place. Since I am old and feeble, I must have forgotten nine out of ten things. Recollecting Gongfu's words, I feel chastened. Therefore, I have written down what I heard and compiled it into *Separate Record at Longchuan*. Altogether, it includes forty-seven episodes, filling four chapters. The twenty-second day of the seventh month of the second year of the Yuanfu reign period [1099].

SOURCE: Su Zhe, *Longchuan biezhi* 龍川別誌, ed. Kong Fanli 孔繁禮, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, ed. Zhu Yi'an 朱易安 and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, series 1, vol. 9 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, 2006), 313.

Preface to *Family Journal at Yizhou*,  
by Fan Xinzong 范信中

In the fall of the *jiasben* year during the Chongning reign period [1104], I was sojourning in Jiankang [Jiangsu] when I heard that Mr. Shangu [Huang Tingjian, 1045–1105] was exiled to Lingbiao [south of the ridges, referring to Guangdong and Guangxi]. Regretting that I had never met him, I traveled upstream on the Yangzi River, sailed on the Pen River, and left my boat at the Dongting Lake before proceeding to Jingxiang [Hunan], then heading to Bagui [Guangxi]. I arrived in Yizhou [Guangxi] on the fourteenth day of the third month of the *yiyou* year [1105] and lodged at the Chongning Monastery.

The next day, I called on Mr. Huang at his rented house. Seeing him was truly like seeing an exiled immortal. I promptly forgot the hardships of the road and the dangers of catching tropical diseases. From that day on, I kept him company. On the seventh day of the fifth month, we both moved in to the South Tower. There we played Go, recited books, chatted at night while lying in bed, and raised our wine cups to sing loudly. He and I were inseparable.

Mr. Huang kept a journal recording guests' visits, the receipt of letters from family and friends, the weather, and daily routines and itineraries. He titled it *Family Journal of the Yiyou Year*. His calligraphy was marvelous. He once said to me, "When I return north someday, I will give this to you."

In the ninth month, Mr. Huang suddenly fell ill and passed away without any family members by his side. By myself I managed his final affairs. When his coffin was sealed at the South Tower, I was overwhelmed with grief. In the confusion, someone took the *Family Journal*, which still pains me when I think of it.

In the *guichou* year of the Shaoxing reign period [1133], an old friend unexpectedly sent me a copy of the journal. I had no idea that it had survived! Reading it was like being back in a former time. I therefore had blocks carved to print it and circulated it among interested parties. I also wanted people to see that, even though Mr. Huang was in exile and suffered hardships, he never gave in to despair. In this respect, he was different from Han Tuizhi [Han Yu] and Liu Zihou [Liu Zongyuan]. Dongpo [Su Shi] aptly described him as "driving the wind and riding on *qi*, roaming with the Creator."

On the fifteenth day in the fourth month of the *jiayin* year [1134], Fan Liao, courtesy name Xinzong, of Shu Prefecture authored this preface.

SOURCE: Fan Xinzong, preface to *Yizhou jiacheng* 宜州家乘, ed. Huang Baohua 黃寶華, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, ed. Zhu Yi'an 朱易安 and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, series 2, vol. 9 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, 2006), 5.

### Preface to *Records of Official Travel*, by Zhang Shinan 張世南

From the time I was a boy, I accompanied [my father] on official trips. We climbed up high into the sky, as we traveled ten thousand *li* to Shu [Sichuan]. In my prime, no year went by when I did not travel by river or lake. I learned a lot, but since I am not especially smart, I forget things quickly. In the first year of the Shaoding reign period [1228], I was in mourning for my brother. I closed my door and declined to see guests. I started to write down what I recalled and filled many scrolls before realizing it. I named my book *Records of Official Travel*. My purpose was to record the facts lest I forget. If I remember anything else, I will add it to the collection. Zhang Shinan (courtesy name Guangshu) of Boyang [Jiangxi].

SOURCE: Zhang Shinan, *Youhuan jiwen* 游宦紀聞, ed. Li Weiguo 李偉國, in *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記, ed. Zhu Yi'an 朱易安 and Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, series 7, vol. 8 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang Chubanshe, 2006), 31.

### Notes

1. Zhu is an animal in the deer family whose tail hair was used to make writing brushes.

### Further Reading

Fu Daiwie. "The Flourishing of *Biji* or Pen-Notes Texts and Its Relations to History of Knowledge in Song China (960–1279)." *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* No. 1 (2007): 103–30. doi:10.3406/oroc.2007.1071.

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