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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Perspectives of Regional Aesthetics and the Historical Formation of the Image of Jiangnan in Six Dynasties Literature

Abstract The reason why Jiangnan 江南 becomes a specialized and widely accepted concept, rich in both concrete and symbolic meaning in Chinese culture, lies not only in its prominent economic and cultural status but also in the continuous efforts of generations of literati to associate the concept with literature and imagery. The tribute system that originated in the pre-Qin period underscores the power center's desire for and appropriation of local products, which brought the specialties of the Jiangnan region to greater public attention. This marks the historical precondition for Jiangnan's transformation into a cultural image rather than merely a geographical designation. As these local products increasingly appeared in literary texts, an imagery process of Jiangnan specialties took shape within the literary field. Two successive waves of southern literati migrating northward during the Six Dynasties continually emphasized and reinforced an aesthetic perspective centered on Jiangnan. This led to two major changes in the aesthetic image of Jiangnan. Firstly, the patterns of aesthetic activities have transformed into a more positive one. Secondly, it is the landscape rather than local products that becomes the main aesthetic object. The southward migration of the Jin court, which triggered the southward shift of the cultural center, marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the Jiangnan image, bringing about dual transformations in both patterns of aesthetics and cultural psychology. The continuous reinforcement of the regional aesthetic perspective and the gradual formation of a shared cultural concept of Jiangnan constitute two decisive factors in the historical formation of the image of Jiangnan.

Keywords perspectives of regional aesthetics; literature of the Six Dynasties; the image of Jiangnan; historical formation

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The political, cultural, and military centers throughout Chinese history have mostly been located in the north. The reason why Jiangnan 江南[1] (south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River)—as a regionally attributed concept—has become an aesthetic image rich in connotation, distinctly recognizable, and widely accepted in Chinese culture, lies precisely in the ongoing literary shaping by generations of literati. What it ultimately corresponds to is a multidimensional and composite image composed of scenery, local specialties, and human activities marked by specific regional characteristics. Specifically, the formation of the image of Jiangnan is a historical process shaped by the interaction between subjective and objective factors. Its foundation is the uniqueness of the historical-geographical environment, while the aesthetic choices of literati under the constraints of prevailing cultural ideologies of the time constitute the core element. Between the historical-geographical environment and the literati's aesthetic choices lies what Western human geographers refer to as the "affective value of place."[2] Since the pre-Qin period, the tribute system gradually brought the local products of Jiangnan into the public view, with numerous references found in documentary records. In the literary field, this gave rise to a transition from "local products of Jiangnan" to the "image of Jiangnan." Especially during the Six Dynasties, the spatial migration of southern literati to the north embodied this active aesthetic initiative, which led to dual transformations in both patterns of aesthetics and cultural psychology. The southward shift of the cultural center brought about two changes in the image of Jiangnan. Firstly, the patterns of aesthetic activities have transformed into a more positive one. Secondly, it is the landscapes rather than the local products that become the main aesthetic object. The reinforcement of the regional aesthetic perspective and the gradual formation of a shared cultural concept of Jiangnan together contributed to and ensured the historical formation, development, and evolution of the image of Jiangnan.

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[1] The concept of Jiangnan has long been understood in complex and often contradictory ways. In "General Preface" to Jiangnan Cultural Lineage Research Series 江南文化世家研究丛书・总序—a series published by the China Social Sciences Press—Mei Xinlin 梅新林 offered a detailed and systematic distinction between "Greater Jiangnan," "Central Jiangnan," and "Lesser Jiangnan," a framework that stands as a representative interpretation. A review of historical facts reveals that understandings of the Jiangnan concept have shifted continuously with changing eras. Therefore, any discussion of Jiangnan should necessarily be grounded in the specific historical context in which it is situated. Accordingly, the concept of Jiangnan employed in this article generally aligns with the meaning of Jiangnan as understood during the Six Dynasties period, which roughly corresponds to the areas referred to as Jiangdong 江东 and Jiangzuo 江左, i.e., the region south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. However, in the course of specific discussions, the term may occasionally extend to include areas south of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River as well.

[2] The renowned American humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan 段义孚 emphasized the importance of examining the relationship between humans and geographical environments from the perspective of emotional orientation and aesthetic sensibility. He paid particular attention to the "affective value of place," arguing that individuals tend to have aesthetic responses to their environments and that such responses manifest in various ways, ultimately shaping emotionally infused worldviews. This theoretical perspective offers valuable insight into exploring the formation of Jiangnan imagery from the standpoint of regional aesthetics and also broadens our conceptual framework. The establishment of human-place relationships depends on the subject-object dynamic between humans and things in the process of regional aesthetic experience, as well as on the choice of aesthetic pathways. In the case of Jiangnan, this process generally follows a trajectory from emotional resonance with concrete objects to a deeper affective engagement with the region as a whole. Moreover, the shift in the aesthetic standpoint of the literati further reinforced this emotional orientation. For a more detailed discussion, see Yi-Fu Tuan's *Escapism* (2005).

1 The Tribute System and the Imagery Process of Local Products in Jiangnan

1.1 Tribute and *Bowu* 博物 Documents[3]

The earliest connection between Jiangnan and Chinese culture can be traced back to China's long-standing tribute system. As recorded in *The Customs* 风俗通, "The term *jiang* 江 signifies stabilization, because the Jiangnan region was responsible for offering tribute to the court." Early texts providing geographic descriptions of Jiangnan include "Tribute of Yu" 禹贡 and "Zhifangshi" 职方氏[4] in *Rites of Zhou* 周礼. Although both works concern geography, their primary focus is the recording of local products. The "Tribute of Yu," in explaining the meaning of *Yu gong* 禹贡, states, "Yu the Great divided the realm into nine regions, dredging waterways in accordance with the lay of the land and establishing a tribute system based on the characteristics of the terrain" (Kong 2007, 189). Here, *Yu gong* refers to "the system of tribute instituted by Yu the Great when dividing the nine regions" (Kong 2007, 190). The main body of the text follows a structural logic that lists the nine regions in the order of "demarcating the regions, identifying their mountains and rivers, drawing their boundaries, enumerating their products, and specifying their tribute assignments" ("Geography" of "Treatises on Classics" in *History of the Sui Dynasty* 隋书・经籍志・地理). Located in the southeastern part of the realm, Yangzhou roughly corresponds to today's Jiangnan region: "The vast area from the Huaihe River to the sea all belongs to Yangzhou ... The waters of the Three Rivers [Dongjiang River, Wusong River, and Loujiang River] flow smoothly into the sea, and the lake is brought under control. Here grow luxuriant, fine, and large bamboos. Vegetation is abundant, and trees are tall. The land is marshy and muddy. The quality of the fields is rated as 'lower,' and the tribute grade is a mix of 'lower-upper-upper.' The tribute items include gold, silver, and copper of three grades, along with jade of various types, fine and large bamboos, rhinoceros hide, bird feathers, animal furs, and various types of timber. The island-dwelling people wear clothes woven from grasses. They pack shell-embroidered brocades in bamboo baskets, wrap up oranges and pomelos, and wait for the court's order to send their tribute. These tribute items are transported along the Yangtze River and the sea, then up the Huaihe and Sihe Rivers" (Kong 2007, 206–210). The description of Yangzhou centers on its waterways. The note to the phrase "The vast area from the Huaihe River to the sea all belongs to Yangzhou" explains, "Yangzhou is bordered by the Huaihe River to the north and extends to the sea in the south"—this defines the geographical scope of Yangzhou. As for the expression, "The waters of the Three Rivers flow smoothly into the sea, and the Zhenze Lake is brought under control," since the exact identification of the "Three Rivers" has long been debated, it will not be discussed here. The lake into which the Three Rivers flow is Zhenze Lake. The named plant species here are fine and large bamboos; the land is covered in wild grass and towering trees, forming dense forests and slender bamboo groves. "The land is marshy and muddy" indicates that the region is low-lying and damp. "The quality of the fields is rated as 'lower'" means that compared with other regions, the land here was considered the poorest, although later generations often praised it as fertile, which likely reflects the underdevelopment of the area at the time. The tribute items from

[3] *Bowu*, lit. diverse matters.

[4] Zhifangshi, the officials in charge of the territory of the country.

Yangzhou include "gold, silver, and copper of three grades, along with jade of various types, fine and large bamboos, ivory, rhinoceros hide, bird feathers, animal furs, and various types of timber." These items reflect the region's well-known products. The inclusion of "fine and large bamboos" is not merely due to their abundance but also their significance. As for the expression, "The island-dwelling people wear clothes woven from grasses. They pack shell-embroidered brocades in bamboo baskets, wrap up oranges and pomelos, and wait for the court's order to send their tribute." The term *xi gong* 锡贡 should not be interpreted as referring to the metal "tin," but rather, as *Detailed Explanation of The Classic of Documents* 尚书详解 explains, as meaning "waiting for the court's order to send tribute." This distinguishes the item from those regularly presented each year, such as the gold, silver, copper, ivory, and rhinoceros hide.

"Zhifangshi" of "Offices of Summer" in *Rites of Zhou* 周礼・夏官・职方氏 records: "Zhifangshi is in charge of the maps of the realm, and through these maps administers the territories under Heaven. They identify the various feudal states, capital cities, and border regions, as well as the different peoples of ethnic groups around the Central Plains. He is also responsible for knowing the general quantities of their wealth, the nine grains, and the six types of livestock, and for fully understanding the advantages and disadvantages of each region. Thereupon, he distinguishes the states of the nine regions, enabling them to share in mutual benefit. The region in the southeastern direction is called Yangzhou. Within Yangzhou, the famous mountain is called Kuaiji Mountain, the major marshland is Juqu Lake, and the principal rivers are the Three Rivers running into the Five Lakes. The advantageous local products of Yangzhou are gold, tin, and bamboo arrows. The male-to-female population ratio is two to five. The animals suited to raising are birds and beasts, and the crop best suited for cultivation is rice" (Sun 1987, 2636–2640). The duties of Zhifangshi were akin to those of modern geographers: They focused on the physical and cultural geography of various regions, not just on the tribute items they supplied. The town is named after Kuaiji Mountain—according to Zheng Xuan's 郑玄 commentary, "It symbolizes the geographical and cultural characteristics of a certain area" (Sun 1987, 2640). The advantageous products of Yangzhou—"gold, tin, and bamboo arrows"—were not merely for tribute to the court but also commodities transported by merchants and circulated between the north and the south, thereby generating economic benefit. The "reported male-to-female population ratio of two to five" reflects a gender imbalance in Yangzhou, with fewer men than women. This likely echoes the account in "Biographies of Wealthy Merchants" in *Records of the Historian* 史记・货殖列传, which states, "The terrain of Jiangnan is low and damp, and local residents are prone to early death." "The animals suited to raising are birds and beasts, and the crop best suited for cultivation is rice"—this is because the warm and humid climate of Yangzhou is favorable to the proliferation of birds and wild animals and particularly well-suited to the cultivation of rice.

From the above, it is evident that early records of Jiangnan focused primarily on notable local products, while descriptions of its specific natural geography were relatively cursory. The two works provide largely consistent accounts of the scenery and local products of Jiangnan, both referring to the southeast as Yangzhou, listing its mountains, rivers, swamps, and lakes, and recording its products as "gold, tin, and bamboo arrows." Similar records

appear repeatedly in other documents, and they tend to concentrate on a limited selection of notable items rather than offering a comprehensive and detailed account of local products. This mode of recording exerted a subtle influence on the formation of the Jiangnan image: features such as the designation of Yangzhou as Jiangnan, its characterization as a land of waters and marshes, and its advantageous resources of "gold, tin, and bamboo arrows" all reinforced people's impressions of Jiangnan. This mode of documentation, on the one hand, stemmed from Jiangnan's remoteness and sparse population; on the other hand, it revealed that the Central Plains people's understanding of Jiangnan was largely shaped through tribute items and commodities, reflecting that exchanges between Jiangnan and the Central Plains were primarily carried out through tribute and commercial trade. This form of interaction and perception continued to influence the mutual relationship and reciprocal understanding between Jiangnan and the Central Plains in later periods. The historical image of Jiangnan as a region characterized by commodity circulation and imbued with a strong commercial atmosphere was more or less established on this basis.

Since "Tribute of Yu" is a classical text concerning the ancient system by which various regions regularly presented tributes to the central authority based on their local products, it is understandable that most of the items it lists are notable regional specialties. Moreover, the tribute items mentioned are not rare or exotic but largely consist of practical items used in daily life, which aligns with the ancient people's simple and pragmatic concept of tribute. "The Mastiff from Afar" in *The Classic of Documents* 尚书・旅獒 records, "They came to offer products from various regions regardless of distance. The tribute items were mainly clothing, food, and utensils for daily use ... " Kong Yingda 孔颖达 offered an explanatory commentary: "All the states, regardless of how far or near, presented the products of their local lands—mainly items suitable for wearing, eating, or daily use, rather than goods intended merely to indulge the senses or serve as extravagant display." This utilitarian and unadorned notion of tribute, with its emphasis on practical value, objectively promoted the circulation of local products, thereby establishing such products as the most representative items of their respective areas. This practical approach to geographical documentation also influenced later descriptions of the Jiangnan region, as seen in texts such as "Biographies of Wealthy Merchants" in the *Records of the Historian* and "Treatise on Geography" in *History of the [Former] Han Dynasty* 汉书・地理志.

"Tribute of Yu" also exerted an influence on literary creation both of its time and of later periods, primarily manifesting in the composition of rhapsodies (*fu* 赋). Zuo Si 左思, in his "Preface to the Rhapsody on Three Capitals" 三都赋序, emphasized the importance of accuracy in literary content: "However, in Sima Xiangru's 司马相如 'Rhapsody on the Shanglin Park' 上林赋, it is written that 'oranges ripen in summer' 卢橘夏熟; in Yang Xiong's 杨雄 'Rhapsody on the Sweet Springs Palace' 甘泉赋, it is said that 'jade trees flourish green' 玉树青葱; Ban Gu's 班固 'Rhapsody on the Western Capital' 西都赋 mentions flatfish; and Zhang Heng's 张衡 'Rhapsody on the Western Metropolis' 西京赋 mentions the sea god … The plants described do not actually grow in the places named, and the divine beings mentioned do not originate from the regions claimed. Though such writing may serve a rhetorical effect, it deviates from factual accuracy … In composing my 'Rhapsody on Three Capitals,' I sought to emulate "Rhapsody on the Western Metropolis" and 'Rhapsody

on the Eastern Metropolis' 东京赋. The mountains, rivers, and cities depicted were identified by consulting maps; the animals and plants were referenced from local records; the poems and dances were drawn from firsthand field investigations; and the local products and peculiar regional phenomena were likewise based on verifiable facts. Why was this necessary? The essence of poetry lies in expressing one's aspirations; the essence of rhapsody lies in praising actual things. In praising something, one should extol its actual qualities. If these qualities do not truly exist, how can one expect others to believe? *History of Yu* 虞书 records the actual conditions of each region. *Book of Changes* 周易 states, 'The gentleman should carefully distinguish the nature of things and thereby examine their spatial orientation.' In composing this work, I have followed the classics' spirit of factual accuracy, with the hope of redefining the meaning of rhapsody and offering it as a reference for future generations" (Qu 1979, 139–141). This evidence-based attitude and method of composition, along with the principle of collecting poems and observing customs 采诗观风, derive directly from "Tribute of Yu." They also enabled local products to more readily enter the purview of literati, allowing such items to be transformed into literary imagery and even into common poetic diction.

Although geographical works in ancient China are primarily driven by practicality, they also reveal a pronounced consciousness of *bowu* in natural phenomena. When this emphasis on *bowu* manifested in the literary sphere as a pursuit of aesthetic richness and breadth and as an inclination to incorporate regional flora and fauna into poetry. Under the unification of the Han Dynasty, local products from all directions converged in Chang'an. Among the aristocracy, the fashion of collecting rare and exotic items flourished, while literati valued erudition and encyclopedic knowledge. As a result, Han epideictic rhapsody (*dafu* 大赋)—a style of rhapsody characterized by its grand and ornate beauty—emerged. This emphasis on broad knowledge of natural phenomena of ancient Chinese literati can be traced back to Confucius' teachings on poetry. As he stated, "*Book of Songs* stimulates the mind, inspires contemplation, and enables one to understand society, exchange feelings and thoughts with others, and express resentment. The book guides one on how to support and wait on one's parents at home and how to serve one's sovereign in public life. One can also learn about birds, beasts, and plants from the book" ("Yang Huo" in *The Analects* 论语・阳货). During the Han Dynasty, the study of exegetical studies 章句之学 flourished, placing great emphasis on wide learning and extensive knowledge. In "Biography of King Yuan of Chu" of *History of the [Former] Han Dynasty* 汉书・楚元王传, Ban Gu praised, "Since Confucius, many have engaged in literary composition. However, only a few—Meng Ke 孟轲 [Mencius], Sun Kuang 孙况 [Xunzi], Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, Sima Qian 司马迁, Liu Xiang 刘向, and Yang Xiong—were truly erudite and knowledgeable across antiquity and the present, and their ideas were beneficial to society." This ethos of emphasis on broad knowledge persisted into the Six Dynasties period. Authors of that era held even higher standards for broad knowledge, emphasizing not only broad learning but also the verification of factual accuracy. As Zuo Si stated in "Preface to the Rhapsody on Three Capitals," some content required "consulting maps," while others necessitated "verifying local records"—all to ensure that the writing was grounded in the actual conditions of the world.

Due to the high regard for broad knowledge of natural phenomena during the Six Dynasties period, a large number of works related to *bowu* emerged in this era. Among the texts cited

in Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 annotations to the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三国志, there were specialized treatises titled explicitly with *bowu*, such as *Records of Diverse Matters* 博物志. In addition, regional monographs on local products and exotic objects flourished. According to "Treatises on Classics" in *History of the Sui Dynasty* 隋书・经籍志, relevant works included *Records of Extraordinary Things from Nanzhou* 南州异物志 by Wan Zhen 万震, the prefecture chief of Danyang in the State of Wu; *Records of Extraordinary Things from Jiaozhou* 交州异物志 by Yang Fu 杨孚; *Records of Extraordinary Things from Funan* 扶南异物志 by Zhu Ying 朱应; and *Plants of the Southern Regions* 南方草木状 by Ji Han 嵇含. At the same time, the compilation of encyclopedic books was also highly prevalent during the Six Dynasties. Early examples include *Emperor's Mirror* 皇览, compiled during the reign of Emperor Wen of Wei; *Essential Summaries in Four Categories* 四部要略 by Xiao Ziliang 萧子良; and *Collection of Encyclopedic Books* 类苑 by Liu Jun 刘峻. Although these encyclopedic books were compiled in prose form, the underlying diverse matter consciousness—emphasizing novelty and the admiration of vast knowledge—had a profound impact on poetry composition during the time. Due to the relative openness of intellectual thought in the Six Dynasties, the concept of *bowu* was notably broad. It even encompassed supernatural phenomena, such as mysterious forces, monsters, and deities, as part of the domain of *bowu*. Consequently, a vast number of related works were produced during this period, far too many to enumerate here.

1.2 From Classics to Literature: Imagery Process of Jiangnan's Local Products

In the section "The Third Year of Duke Xuan" of *Zuo's Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals* 左传・宣公三年, King Zhuang of Chu 楚庄王 held a military parade at the borders of the Zhou royal domain as a show of force and inquired about the size and weight of the Nine Tripod Cauldrons. Wangsun Man 王孙满 replied, "The size and weight of the tripods depend on virtue, not on the tripods themselves. When the Xia Dynasty had just enthroned a ruler of virtue, people from distant lands drew maps of the strange and extraordinary objects from their mountains and rivers. The regional governors of the nine regions contributed bronze, and the Xia court used this bronze to cast the tripods, inscribing on them the images of various things so that the appearances of all things would be fully represented, enabling the people to distinguish spirits from malevolent beings" (Hong 1987, 401). A particularly noteworthy annotation by Du Yu 杜预 clarifies, "They painted images of the strange and extraordinary features of their mountains and rivers and presented them as tribute." This indicates that drawing depictions of regional landscapes and objects was itself a form of tribute. This act of illustrating local features already implies an abstraction of concrete local products into symbolic images. The statement that "the Xia court used this bronze to cast the tripods, inscribing on them the images of various things, so that the appearances of all things would be fully represented" suggests that the depicted objects must have been related to the natural and cultural products of different regions. Among the tribute items submitted from various regions, many were considered auspicious omens and beneficial to the state's economy and livelihood. These characteristics made such items especially amenable to being transformed into literary imagery. Consequently, it can be inferred that the local products of

Jiangnan, having been recorded in *bowu* documents due to the tribute system, subsequently entered the corpus of literary works.

The products unique to the Yangzhou region as recorded in "Tribute of Yu"—such as *xiao* 篠 (fine bamboo), *dang* 簜 (large bamboo), orange, and pomelo—later became recurring material objects in poetry and prose. Poets' attention to and depiction of these material objects were clearly influenced by the traditional concept of auspicious omens. The previous documentation of these products and their transformation into literary imagery led poets, in selecting imagery, to favor these culturally significant objects. In subsequent literature, bamboo, the most widely distributed plant in the Jiangdong region, is repeatedly mentioned. Among them, the well-known variety referred to as "bamboo arrows"—which corresponds to *xiao* mentioned in "Tribute of Yu"—was praised as a "fine product from the southeast." According to *The Ready Guide* 尔雅, "Among the fine products of the southeast is the bamboo arrow of Kuaiji." Similarly, "Forms of Earth" in *Huainanzi* 淮南子・墜形训 states, "Among the fine products of the southeast is the bamboo arrow of Kuaiji." Orange and pomelo were likewise distinctive local products of Jiangnan. For instance, in Qu Yuan's 屈原 "Ode to the Orange Tree" 橘颂, he wrote, "O noble orange tree between Heaven and Earth, it thrives only in this native soil. Endowed with the mandate of Heaven, it never leaves its homeland, growing only in the southern land" 后皇嘉树,橘徕服兮。受命不迁,生南国兮. Although this poem mainly extols the virtues of the orange tree, its selection as the subject of praise is not unrelated to its status as a tribute product from Jiangnan. Later poems that praise oranges, while largely inheriting the tone and imagery of Qu Yuan's original, can all be traced back to this cultural tradition.

In addition to their practical values, tribute items also possessed specific aesthetic functions—a quality we may provisionally term "local product aesthetics." During the Qin Dynasty, Li Si 李斯, in his "Petition Against the Expulsion of Guest Officers" 上书谏逐客 opposing the expulsion of guest officers, pointed out that the items the Qin king enjoyed and used in daily life largely originated from the various feudal states, acquired either through military conquest or offered as tribute. Among these tribute items were both practical materials, such as gold, tin, cinnabar, and mineral pigments, and an even greater number of luxurious objects—such as luminous jades and ornaments made from rhinoceros horn and ivory—as well as beautiful women from foreign lands. These lavish tribute items satisfied not only the rulers' sensory pleasures but also their aesthetic desires. The "beauties from Yue," emblematic of the Jiangnan region, were also closely tied to this tribute system. In the prolonged conflict between the States of Wu and Yue, King Goujian 勾践 of Yue once offered beauties from Yue to the King of Wu as tribute—a gesture that ultimately contributed to the downfall of Wu.

From the Qin to the Han dynasties, it was during the Han period that the regional concept of Jiangnan began to enter the realm of literary eulogy. It is worth noting that when we consult *Collection of Yuefu Poetry* 乐府诗集, literary depictions of Jiangnan in the Han Dynasty are indeed very scarce. Explicit references to Jiangnan seem to appear only in the famous ancient poem "Gathering Lotus" 江南, which reads, "Jiangnan has again entered the season suitable for gathering lotus. Lotus leaves rise above the water, crowded and layered, swaying gracefully in the wind. Beneath the dense, umbrella-like canopy of leaves, cheerful fish frolic

incessantly. Now here, then suddenly there—who can say whether they are to the east, the west, the south, or the north?" 江南可采莲，莲叶何田田。鱼戏莲叶间。鱼戏莲叶东，鱼戏莲叶西，鱼戏莲叶南，鱼戏莲叶北 The poem "Gathering Lotus by Southern Rivershore" 江南可采莲, titled "Song on Gathering Lotus" 江南曲 in Wu Jing's 吴兢 *Essential Explanations to Yuefu Poetry* 乐府古题要解 from the Tang Dynasty, is stylistically and lexically simple and unadorned. The images it evokes—lotus flowers, lotus leaves, and fish—are among the most emblematic elements of the Jiangnan waterlands. Other implied images also appear in the poem, such as the lotus gatherers, their boats, and the water itself. The poem's opening couplet portrays the scenic beauty of Jiangnan, while the final four lines employ syntactic repetition and shifting spatial orientation to describe the playful movement of fish among the lotus leaves, rendering a vivid and lively picture imbued with the flavor of folk song. The choice of fish and lotus as central images not only carries rich symbolic connotations but also draws upon these elements' status as local products of Jiangnan, making them essential components of the poem's aesthetic vision.

Earlier, we primarily examined how local products of Jiangnan entered poetry as subject matter. Equally noteworthy, however, is that from the perspective of the internal dynamics of literary development, the poetic incorporation of local products is closely tied to the Han Dynasty's tradition of collecting poetry and observing customs. In "Treatise on Literature" of *History of the [Former] Han Dynasty* 汉书・艺文志, Ban Gu wrote, "When human emotions of sorrow and joy are stirred, they naturally give rise to expressions in songs. Reciting such expressions is called a poem, and chanting them is called a song. Thus, in ancient times, officials were appointed to collect the poetry, enabling rulers to observe folk customs and discern the success or failure of their governance, thereby engaging in reflection and correction." In the Han Dynasty, the Music Bureau 乐府 was established to collect popular music. Although this practice inherited the ancient function, its purpose had shifted: Rather than focusing solely on the observation of customs, it increasingly catered to the demands of courtly entertainment. This transformation created favorable conditions for local products to become poetic imagery within popular music. In the Han Dynasty, not only emperors but also wealthy officials and commoners indulged in popular music. As "Treatise on Rites and Music" in *History of the [Former] Han Dynasty* 汉书・礼乐志 notes, "Today, the ritual hymns of the Han court do not record the deeds of ancestors, and the harmonies of the eight tones do not conform to the standard pitch of the bells and chimes. Within the palace, talented performers from the Concubine Palace; outside the palace, entertainers from the Music Bureau of Shanglin—all bring popular music into the court." It continues, "At that time, popular music was particularly prevalent. Renowned performers from the palace service, such as Bingqiang 丙强 and Jingwu 景武, enjoyed great fame among the public. The powerful nobles—such as the Five Marquises [including the Marquis of Dingling, the Marquis of Fuping, etc.]—as well as families of imperial consorts, lived in extravagant excess, even going so far as to compete with the emperor himself for female musicians." Although Emperor Ai of Han eventually abolished the Music Bureau, "wealthy officials and commoners, long immersed in this atmosphere and lacking a system of orthodox music, continued to indulge in popular music without restraint." This clearly demonstrates the widespread popularity of popular music. The shift from the earlier practice of using poetry

to observe customs to a state of indulgence in entertainment reflects how popular music gradually evolved toward an emphasis on aesthetic function—an evolution that also created favorable conditions for the imagery of local products to be incorporated into such music.

It should be noted that *Yuefu* poetry written in the Han Dynasty 汉乐府 primarily consisted of lyrical poems meant to be performed with the accompaniment of music. These poems, having undergone artistic refinement and embellishment by literati and court musicians, differ significantly from street songs and ballads without the accompaniment of music, which were commonly sung in alleyways and marketplaces. In *Mao's Version of Book of Songs* 毛诗, Mao Heng 毛亨 explained, "Words sung with the accompaniment of music are called songs, and mere singing and chanting are called ballads." Among the folk songs recorded in "Treatise on Literature" of *History of the [Former] Han Dynasty*, there are 15 pieces under the title "Songs and Poems of Wu, Chu, and Runan" 吴、楚、汝南歌诗, and when combined with those from other regions, the total number exceeds one hundred. "Chronicle of Music" in *History of the Jin Dynasty* 晋书・乐志 notes, "The ancient musical movements and songs that have been preserved are street songs and ballads from the Han Dynasty, such as 'Gathering Lotus by Southern Rivershore,' 'Song of a Crow' 乌生十五子, and 'Song of the White Hair' 白头吟. Many of the folk songs and miscellaneous melodies 杂曲 originating from the Wu region stem from the Jiangnan area. Since the Eastern Jin, such songs have steadily increased in number and variety." From this, we can see that under the flourishing of popular music since the Han Dynasty, songs portraying the customs and scenery of Jiangnan began to be widely disseminated and performed.

2 Longing for the South after Entering the North: Independent Presentation of Jiangnan Aesthetic Perspective

The local products of Jiangnan initially entered the historical record through the tribute system, becoming documented in *bowu* documents. From these diverse matter classics, they gradually made their way into popular songs and ballads, thereby completing the initial process of their transformation into literary imagery. By the Three Kingdoms period, it was commonly acknowledged that "among the three regimes—Wei, Wu, and Shu—Wei possessed the most notable literary achievements" (Liu 2004, 22). In contrast, the Jiangnan region remained relatively barren in terms of culture and scholarship. Although figures such as Shen You 沈友 and Xue Ying 薛莹 were respected literati of the State of Wu, very few of their works were passed down, and Jiangnan's literary scene at the time had little to commend it. Yet the remarkable nature of cultural development lies precisely in such paradoxes: It was through the migration of a large number of scholars from Wu to the Jin court in the final years of the State of Wu—especially the "two Lu brothers" 二陆, Lu Ji 陆机 and Lu Yun 陆云—that Jiangnan's local products came to feature prominently in literary composition and gained wider recognition. This spatial movement of literati ultimately led to the emergence of "Jiangnan" as a distinct literary concept.

After the Jin Dynasty conquered the State of Wu, many scholars from the Wu region traveled northward in large numbers to take up official positions under the Jin administration. Among them, the brothers Lu Ji 陆机 and Lu Yun 陆云—known collectively as the "two

Lu brothers"—were among the earliest to make the journey. Their move to Luoyang had a significant impact on other scholars from Jiangdong, prompting many to follow in their footsteps. From the late Taikang period to the Tai'an era, spanning approximately 15 years, members of prominent aristocratic families from Wu Commandery, such as the Lu 陆, Gu 顾, and Zhang 张 clans, as well as the He 贺 and Yu 虞 clans from Kuaiji, all made their way northward. This resulted in a major wave of southern elites seeking official posts in the north.

During the Jin Dynasty, the deep longing of those Jiangnan talented scholars who had traveled northward for their native local products is truly remarkable. The most famous story among them is undoubtedly that of Zhang Han 张翰, a native of Wuxian in Wu Commandery. Known for his unrestrained and unconventional personality, he was often referred to by contemporaries as the "Infantryman of Jiangdong" 江东步兵, a nickname evoking the free-spirited demeanor of the famed Wei-Jin scholar Ruan Ji 阮籍. According to "Biographies of Literati" in *History of the Jin Dynasty* 晋书・文苑传, after Zhang Han took office in Luoyang, "one day, upon feeling the autumn wind rise, he was suddenly filled with longing for the Zizania aquatica shoots, Brasenia schreberi soup, and minced perch of his hometown in Wu. He exclaimed, 'The most precious thing in life is to follow one's heart—how can I remain thousands of miles away in pursuit of rank and title?' With that, he immediately ordered his carriage and returned to Jiangnan." The Zizania aquatica shoots, Brasenia schreberi soup, and minced perch he yearned for were all local products of Jiangnan. Zhang Han's decision to resign his post and return home out of longing for these native delicacies illustrates his rejection of political ambition in favor of a life of personal freedom in his beloved homeland.

In his "Letter in Reply to Che Mao'an" 答车茂安书, Lu Yun 陆云 expressed a profound sense of attachment and deep affection for the natural products of his Jiangnan homeland. He wrote, "The seafood of Jiangnan is truly the finest delicacy in the eastern coastal region—unquestionably the pinnacle of all cuisine. As for shellfish such as clams, there are many varieties that are rarely seen or even heard of in daily life, numbering in the hundreds. It is nearly impossible to describe them all in words. Consider this: In former times, Emperor Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, who stood at the apex of imperial power, had the Zhongnan Mountains towering before him, the luxurious Epang Palace behind him, and palaces and pavilions scattered across the land—he could reside wherever he pleased. His carriages crossed the Jingshui and Weishui Rivers, his warhorses drank leisurely at the banks of Kunming Lake, and the rarest treasures and curiosities from all corners of the realm were at his disposal. And yet, even he believed that the enjoyments of Guanzhong could not compare with those of the Wu–Kuaiji regions" (Yan 1958, 2049). Though Lu Yun's comparison—juxtaposing the grandeur of Emperor Qin Shihuang's imperial life in Guanzhong with the abundance of the Wu–Kuaiji regions—might seem hyperbolic at first glance, it is, upon closer examination, not without merit.

However, burdened by the sorrow of their state's downfall, the people of Wu were often marginalized in the Jin Dynasty, and northern aristocrats frequently used the famed products and local items of Jiangnan as topics of mockery to ridicule southerners. For instance, "Speech and Conversation" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・言语 records, "When Lu Ji went to pay a visit to Wang Wuzi 王武子, the latter laid out several *hu* 斛 [the name of

a measuring instrument in ancient China] of sheep's milk curds before him and said, 'What in Jiangdong could possibly compare to this?' Lu Ji replied, 'We have Brasenia schreberi soup from the Qianli Lake 千里湖 [lit. Thousand-*Li* Lake], though it hasn't yet been seasoned with salted black beans.'" Wang Wuzi, a powerful member of the imperial clan with a prominent reputation, had long looked down on southerners. Upon his first meeting with Lu Ji, he deliberately used the sheep's milk curds to provoke him, intending to insult him. Another example is found in "Rudeness and Arrogance" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・简傲: "When the brothers Lu Ji and Lu Yun had just arrived in Luoyang, they asked Zhang Hua 张华 for advice on whom they should visit. One of the names he recommended was Liu Daozhen 刘道真. The brothers went to pay their respects, although Liu was still in mourning. Known for his fondness for alcohol, he said little after the formal courtesies were exchanged. His only question was, 'There are long-stalked gourds in Eastern Wu—did you bring any seeds with you?' The brothers were greatly disappointed and regretted their visit." Though Zhang Hua had recommended the meeting, Liu Daozhen treated these two gifted men from Jiangdong with open disdain, using a trivial inquiry about long-stalked gourds to slight them. The Jiangdong region, being a land of rivers and lakes, abounded in plants like Zizania aquatica and reeds. Since the Han Dynasty, northerners had often used terms like gourds or Zizania aquatica and reeds as metonyms for the Jiangdong area and its people, implying that it was a narrow land with uncultured inhabitants—an expression of disdain. For instance, in Chapter 1000 of *Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era* 太平御览, under the section "Plants" 百卉, the seventh citation from *Coherent Sayings* 通语 records, "Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮, upon meeting Yin Li 殷礼, exclaimed, 'Who would have thought that among the thickets of Zizania aquatica and reeds in Eastern Wu, such a talent could be found!'" Yin Li was an envoy from Sun Wu. Although Zhuge Liang's words appear complimentary, they actually carried a tone of condescension toward the people of Jiangdong. Similarly, West Jin Liu Daozhen's question about "long-stalked gourds" likely had the same implication. Jiang Liangfu 姜亮夫, in *The Chronological Biography of Lu Pingyuan* 陆平原年谱, under "The Tenth Year of Taikang," noted in an annotation: "People of the Central Plains had long despised the scholars of Wu and Chu, seeing them as remnants of a vanquished state." He added, "Liu Daozhen's conduct was wanton, reflecting the prevailing ethos of the time, and it was inevitable that he would look down on the Lu brothers" (qtd. in Wang 2002, 21).

However, the contempt and insults from northern scholars instead stirred a stronger sense of regional consciousness among the people of Wu. Both of the two brothers expressed a marked awareness of regional identity in their writings. In "Discourse on the Fall" 辩亡论, Lu Ji praised the State of Wu: "Its territory spanned tens of thousands of *li*, with a million well-equipped soldiers. The fields were fertile, the troops well trained, the weapons sharp, and resources abundant. To the east it bordered the vast sea, and to the west it was shielded by strategic passes. The Yangtze River marked its domain, and towering mountains encircled its borders. No other state could compare to its advantages. If a man of moderate ability governed uprightly, a virtuous leader employed suitable methods, and they followed the institutions handed down by the forefathers, administered the people diligently, ruled prudently, upheld the established strategy, and safeguarded key strategic points, Wu could have endured for generations without fear of downfall" (Li 1977, 740). He further stated, "Wu

was about to march north to punish the lords of the Central Plains and eliminate those who defied law and order." Here, he cited a line from *Zuo's Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals* 左氏传, as annotated by Li Shan 李善, "Wu was a descendant state of the Zhou royal house. It is only now beginning to grow strong and can stand on equal footing with the feudal lords of the Central Plains." Lu Yun, in "Letter to Lu Dianshu" 与陆典书书, wrote, "Our land of Wu has indeed produced many outstanding talents. Taibo 太伯 [the founding ancestor of Wu] possessed noble virtue, renounced worldly ambition, and cultivated righteousness. Like a loong, he traced the ridges of the Eastern Mountains (referring here to the mountains range surrounding the Wu region). He yielded the throne three times, with his teachings far-reaching and admired for generations. His virtuous deeds surpassed those before him, and his magnificent moral legacy was celebrated from ancient times. Then came Prince Ji of Yanling [Ji Zha 季札, son of the King of Wu and enfeoffed at Yanling], who inherited Taibo's noble reputation and gained renown across lands. Though cast adrift and wandering, he remained at ease among the great states (i.e., the Central Plains). With his ear, he grasped subtle truths; with his wisdom, he surpassed many brilliant minds. He could comprehend the hidden and reach the distant, and his insight was nearly that of a sage. Yan Yan 言偃 [a disciple of Confucius and a native of Wu] distinguished himself among the master's followers, while Wu Yuan 伍员 [Wu Zixu 伍子胥, a great official of Wu] achieved monumental feats among the feudal lords. Since the rise of exceptional talents in Wu, wise men have emerged in continuous succession. When Wu was newly established, heroes and men of valor were especially numerous. Though it has declined somewhat today, it is by no means inferior to the Central Plains. What you mentioned in your letter resonates with people both near and far (Yan 1958, 2049). These two writings—one emphasizing Wu's advantageous geography, the other extolling its remarkable figures—reflect a belief that the State of Wu, though distinct from the Central Plains, was in no way inferior to it. Although people from Wu found themselves in a humiliating and subordinate position, their words were impassioned and full of pride.

As a court official who entered northern service after the fall of his native state, Lu Ji often expressed deep affection for his former homeland in his poetry and prose. This sense of attachment to his lost state was imbued with a strong regional consciousness. A representative example can be found in his poem "A Ballad of the Land of Wu" 吴趋行, where he wrote,

> Let the consort of Chu refrain from sighing for now, and the songstress of Qi cease her singing for a moment. I ask all of you here to quiet your hearts and listen as I sing a ballad of the land of Wu. The songs of Wu have their origin—let me begin from Changmen. Oh, how magnificent and grand Changmen is! Its flying-eaved pavilions stretch across the surging waves. Layer upon layer of roof ridges support the tops of winding verandas. The meandering corridors lead to intricately curved doorways. Auspicious clouds gently enshroud the scene, and a cool breeze softly drifts through. Treasures abound amid the mountains, rivers, lakes, and marshes, and the local customs are upright and virtuous. Taibo brought forth the ethos of benevolence, and Zhongyong carried it further. The dignified and respectful Ji Zha of Yanling shone with brilliance and added luster to the land of the Central Plains. The sovereigns of Wu endured hardship and adversity, and their achievements spread far and wide. Emperor Sun Quan of Wu rose in arms from Fuchun, holding his head

high and casting off worldly fetters. The talented men of Wu emerged in accordance with the times, brilliant as spring blossoms in the forest. Every subordinate city had its worthies, yet Wu itself had them in the greatest number. Even eight great noble clans are not worth boasting about—the Gu, Lu, Zhu 朱, and Zhang families are the true aristocratic lineages. Wu's civil virtues flourished, refined and noble, and its military strength rivaled mountains and rivers. The spirit of courtesy and humility was widespread, and its moral instruction swept forth like a mighty flood. The beautiful things are too many to record in full, so I have carefully composed this poem to sing their praise.

楚妃且勿叹，齐娥且莫讴。四坐并清听，听我歌吴趋。吴趋自有始，请从阊门起。阊门何峨峨，飞阁跨通波。重栾承游极，回轩启曲阿。蔼蔼庆云被，泠泠祥风过。山泽多藏育，土风清且嘉。泰伯导仁风，仲雍扬其波。穆穆延陵子，灼灼光诸华。王迹馈阳九，帝功兴四遐。大皇自富春，矫首顿世罗。邦彦应运兴，粲若春林葩。属城咸有士，吴邑最为多。八族未足侈，四姓实名家。文德熙淳懿，武功侔山河。礼让何济济，流化自滂沱。淑美难穷纪，商榷为此歌。

This enumeration of natural features and outstanding figures—structured in an orderly fashion—bears a clear resemblance to the description of Jiangnan in the "Tribute of Yu," where the excellence of the region's geography and people is similarly listed and praised. Of particular interest is how Lu Ji distilled the defining characteristics of the Jiangnan region within his poetry. In "A Poem in Reply to Zhang Shiran" 答张士然诗, he wrote, "I am, by origin, a man of the water country, Reining in my horse as I face the clear depths" 余固水乡士，揽辔临清渊. Lu Ji was likely the earliest figure to refer to himself as a "man of the water country" 水乡士. Lu Chui 陆倕 of the Liang Dynasty echoed this phrase when he wrote, "I am a man of the water country, Secluded by the rivers and seas" 余本水乡士，闭门江海隅. Later, during the Chen Dynasty, Zhang Zhengjian 张正见, in his "Poem on Accompanying Prince Yongyang to Huqiu Mountain" 从永阳王游虎丘山诗, created the lines: "The vast blue waves encircle the sea-bound isle, And Luoyi's high walls rise in majestic form. But they do not compare to the grace of this mountain, Whose pure beauty alone captures the essence of the water country" 沧波壮郁岛，洛邑镇崇芒。未若兹山丽，苕蛲擅水乡. Here, he contrasted northern Luoyi with Jiangnan once again, highlighting the elegant, watery charm that defines the southern landscape. It can thus be said that "water country"—a term that so poetically encapsulates Jiangnan—was, for Lu Ji, the most poignant and enduring memory of his homeland during his service in the north and remains one of the most fitting descriptors of the region's distinctive character.

Lu Yun, like his elder brother Lu Ji, sought to advance his official career in Luoyang, yet he harbored a profound attachment to his native land, no less intense than that of his brother. In his poetry and prose, one finds both a deep appreciation for the cultivated talents of their homeland and tender recollections of the familiar landscapes and customs. As for the former, in "A Poem in Reply to Lu Pingyuan" 答兄平原诗, Lu Yun wrote, "You, like one bearing a treasure in the morning light, shine brilliantly, as if you were a fine jade from the south. I read your elegant compositions and savor the grace of your diction, feeling that your literary brilliance is like that of a leading figure among the Hanlin scholars [members of the Imperial Academy]" 晞光怀宝，焕若南金。披华玩藻，晔若翰林. The reference to "a fine jade

from the south" clearly alludes to the exceptional talents of men from Jiangnan. Similarly, "Biography of Xue Jian" in *History of the Jin Dynasty* 晋书・薛兼传 records, "Xue Jian, Ji Zhan 纪瞻, Min Hong 闵鸿, Gu Rong 顾荣, and He Xun 贺循 were all renowned literati, collectively known at the time as the 'Five Talents' 五俊." It further states, "When they first arrived in Luoyang, Sikong 司空 [Minister of Works] Zhang Hua was so astonished by their brilliance that he remarked, 'You are all fine jades from the south.'" As for the latter, in "A Poem in Reply to Zhang Shiran," Lu Yun wrote, "The road stretches long, without an end in sight. Cities and villages connect one to the next, each with their own customs. Among the thousands of households, not all are congenial neighbors. Reuniting with old friends is no easy matter, And how could local customs inspire effortless closeness? Yet I think fondly of my homeland in Jiangnan, and it feels as if the people of home were standing right before me" 修路无穷迹，井邑自相循。百城各异俗，千室非良邻。欢旧难假合，风土岂虚亲？感念桑梓域，髣髴眼中人.

Lu Yun's deep affection for his homeland, Jiangnan, remained unwavering, even when he found himself in a foreign land amid unfamiliar customs and landscapes. This steadfast sentiment reveals the profound depth of his attachment to his native region.

As for Lu Ji and Lu Yun—the "two Lu brothers"—on the one hand, their migration from Jiangnan to the north led to a spatial shift that, to a certain extent, strengthened the expression of Jiangnan aesthetic consciousness in their poetry and prose, and their sense of regional identity was also clearly manifested. On the other hand, due to the constraints of their era, much of the poetic output of the "two Lu brothers" was modeled on the works of the ancients, with a considerable portion composed in four-character verse. As a result, their choice and use of poetic language were heavily influenced by the archaic style. Although they had begun to focus on the regional features and landscapes of Jiangnan, the emotions they intended to convey in their poems were ultimately not well integrated with the imagery they employed, and the construction of such imagery lacked fullness and richness. Moreover, although the regional consciousness of the people of Wu was already quite strong in their works, this consciousness was more frequently expressed in their prose and relatively rarely seen in their poetry. Therefore, the "two Lu brothers" had not yet developed a complete poetic consciousness of integrating Jiangnan imagery into their poetry, nor had they produced mature works in this regard.

3 "Expressing Southern Culture through Northern Cultural Forms" and the Second "Longing for the South after Entering the North": The Establishment and Strengthening of the Jiangnan-Centered Aesthetic Perspective

3.1 "Expressing Southern Culture through Northern Cultural Forms" and the Emergence of Jiangnan-Centered Consciousness

In his book *Cultural Geography of China* 中国文化地理, Chen Zhengxiang 陈正祥 put forward the idea of the "southward shift of China's cultural center." He argued that beginning with the Disaster of Yongjia and followed by the Rebellion by An Lushan 安禄山 and Shi Siming 史思明 and the Disorders of the Jingkang period, these three major upheavals were like successive surging waves that drove the large-scale migration of the cultural center to the

south, ultimately establishing Jiangnan as the new cultural heartland (Chen 1983, 3–5). After the Disaster of Yongjia, the imperial family of the Jin Dynasty crossed southward, marking the opening of this epoch-making historical transformation. Objectively speaking, this event provided a significant historical opportunity for the southward movement of the cultural center and led to the nascent emergence of a previously nonexistent concept of the "Jiangnan-centered perspective" 江南本位. The term "Jiangnan-centered perspective" refers to the vantage point adopted by Southern Dynasties literati, who evaluated people, landscapes, and cultural production from a Jiangnan-based standpoint. After the southward migration, a shift occurred: the perspective transitioned from that of northerners observing the south to that of northerners who had entered and now experienced the south from within. In comparing the periods before and after the migration, it becomes evident that perceptions of Jiangnan were always shaped by changes in the aesthetic subject's orientation, standpoint, and object. This was a nuanced and gradual process, rich with meaning. The present discussion focuses primarily on the aesthetic subject as well as the issues of orientation and standpoint.

During the Western Jin period, there was a prevailing interest in the evaluation of figures from the north. In "Appreciation and Praise" of *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・赏誉, numerous entries are devoted specifically to individuals from the Central Plains. For example: "Among the many cultivated gentlemen in Luoyang were the Three Gu 蝈 literati: Liu Cui 刘粹, courtesy named Chungu 纯蝈; Liu Hong 刘宏, courtesy named Zhonggu 终蝈; and Liu Mo 刘漠, courtesy named Chonggu 冲蝈"; "In the Office of the Grand Tutor, there were the three talents: Liu Qingsun 刘庆孙 possessed extended talent, Pan Yangzhong 潘阳仲 had great talent, and Pei Jingsheng 裴景声 had pure talent"; "The famed 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove' 林下诸贤, known for their unrestrained spirit, all raised outstanding sons"; and so forth. What is worth noting is that *A New Account of Tales of the World* began to reflect a tendency toward evaluating figures from both the north and the south, marking the early signs of a cultural shift during the period. At the same time, however, evaluations of figures from Jiangnan were still somewhat tentative and lacked deeper understanding. For instance: "When Zhang Hua saw Chu Tao 褚陶, he said to Lu Pingyuan 陆平原 [Lu Ji], 'You two brothers are like loongs leaping at the cloud, and Gu Yanxian 顾彦先 is like a phoenix singing at the morning sun. I thought I had seen all the outstanding talents of the southeast—yet here I find you younger men as well.' Lu Ji replied, 'You have yet to see those true talents who prefer to remain out of the limelight.'" Another example reads: "Someone asked Cai Hong 蔡洪, 'What about those old aristocratic families in the Wu region?' Cai Hong replied, 'Wu Zhan 吴展 was a minister of kingly assistance under a sagacious sovereign and a loyal and eminent figure in an enlightened era; Zhu Yongchang 朱永长 [Zhu Dan 朱诞] was the most virtuous among the high ministers and the universally respected choice among officials selected through public means; Yan Zhongbi 严仲弼 [Yan Yin 严隐] was like a crane calling in a deep pool, or a white colt galloping through a secluded valley; Gu Yanxian [Gu Rong 顾荣] was like the *qin* 琴 and *se* 瑟 among musical instruments, like the loong motif among all decorative patterns; Zhang Weibo 张威伯 [Zhang Chang 张畅] was like a flourishing pine in the cold of winter, a source of light in the darkness; the brothers Lu Shiheng 陆士衡 [Lu Ji 陆机] and Lu Shilong 陆士龙 [Lu Yun 陆云] were like swans drifting above the clouds, awaiting the striking of the great drum.

These men of distinction wielded great brushes as farming tools, treated paper as fertile fields, took silence and a tranquil mind as their labor, regarded the pursuit of truth as their harvest, and treated speech as blossoms, loyalty and forgiveness as treasures, writings as brocade, the Five Classics as fine silk, modesty as their mat, humility as their canopy, the practice of benevolence and justice as their dwelling, and the cultivation of virtue as the spacious hall of their residence.'" These recorded witty replies and extravagant praises for figures, such as Lu Ji and Cai Hong, were also intended to encourage and bring renown to Jiangnan scholars who had long been marginalized. Moreover, when praising Jiangnan figures, people had already begun to promote them on a national scale. For example, "Speech and Conversation" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* notes, "He Sheng 贺生 of Kuaiji possessed insight and discernment that were lofty, refined, and elegant. His speech and conduct aligned entirely with propriety. He was not only an outstanding talent of the southeast but truly one of the elite under Heaven."

In the early Eastern Jin period, a large number of scholars, represented by renowned aristocrats from the north, gathered in the south, and Jiangnan gradually began to reveal its intellectual advantage. For instance, "Speech and Conversation" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* records, "Wang Tanzhi 王坦之, the commander of the palace guards, was very fond of Zhang Tianxi 张天锡 and asked him, 'What outstanding merits have you observed in those who crossed the river, especially in how they devised laws and institutions for Jiangzuo? And how do the rising talents compare with those from the Central Plains?' Zhang Tianxi replied, 'In their profound and subtle grasp of metaphysical principles, they continue the tradition of Wang Bi 王弼 and He Yan 何晏. In adapting institutions to the times, they follow in the footsteps of renowned northern masters such as Xun Yi 荀颉, Xun Xu 荀勖, and Yue Guang 乐广.'" This dialogue between Wang Tanzhi and Zhang Tianxi, concerning what was unique in the institutional planning of the southward-migrated scholars and how the emerging talents compared to those from the Central Plains, indicates that the scholars of Jiangnan had inherited the intellectual tradition of the north and were no less capable than their northern counterparts. Comparisons between the north and south are frequently recorded in *A New Account of Tales of the World*. One such example states, "When Wen Qiao 温峤 first arrived in Jiangnan as an envoy of Liu Kun 刘琨, the southern regime was only beginning to take shape, and its laws and institutions had yet to be established. Upon his arrival, Wen Qiao was filled with worry. He visited Grand Councilor Wang Dao 王导 and recounted the brutal scenes of the Jin emperor being captured and exiled, the ancestral temples burned, and the imperial tombs desecrated—expressing the sorrow of a fallen state, as conveyed in the poem 'Drooping Millet' 黍离. Loyal and impassioned, Wen Qiao spoke with such intensity that his tears and mucus flowed together. Grand Councilor Wang Dao wept alongside him. After expressing his grief, Wen Qiao earnestly conveyed his desire for camaraderie, which Wang Dao warmly welcomed. Upon leaving, Wen Qiao said joyfully, 'Jiangnan indeed has talents like Guan Zhong 管仲—what is there to worry about!'" This account indirectly praises Wang Dao's leadership and guiding role among Jiangnan literati. This is further corroborated by Wang Dao's local adaptation efforts during the construction of Jiankang. His attention to regional conditions demonstrates his integration with Jiangnan both in practice and in thought. As recorded in "Speech and Conversation" of *A New Account of*

Tales of the World, "When Huan Wen 桓温 relocated his command to Nanzhou, he planned straight and orderly streets. Someone said to Wang Xun 王珣, 'When the Grand Councilor originally planned the construction of Jiankang's streets, there were no existing models to follow, so they turned out winding and irregular. Compared with this, his design seems inferior.' Wang Xun replied, 'That was precisely the Grand Councilor's brilliance. The terrain of Jiangnan is narrow, unlike the expansive Central Plains. If the streets were laid out straight and unobstructed, the entire area would be visible at a glance. By designing them to wind and meander, he created a sense of depth and mystery.'"

The Battle of Feishui 淝水之战, which broke out in 383, was of great significance not only militarily and politically but also culturally. On the one hand, the battle significantly curbed the northern regimes' ambitions to move southward; on the other hand—and more importantly—it afforded the Eastern Jin a kind of psychological advantage. This psychological edge, magnified by the cultural advantage effect, ultimately enabled scholars to speak from the standpoint of Jiangnan when discussing the north. This shift marks an important transformation in the collective mentality of the time. "Speech and Conversation" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* records, "When Zhang Tianxi was serving as Governor of Liangzhou, he held power in the western regions. Later, he was captured by Fu Jian 苻坚, who then appointed him as Director of the Chancellery. Following the defeat at the Battle of Shouyang, he arrived in the Eastern Jin capital with Fu Jian and was highly esteemed by Emperor Xiaowu 孝武帝. Whenever he entered court and conversed with the emperor, their discussions often lasted the entire day. However, there were those who envied him. At a banquet, someone asked him, 'What things from the north are worth cherishing?' Zhang Tianxi replied, 'The mulberries in the north are fragrant and sweet, and even the hoots of the owls become pleasant to the ear; mellow wine nourishes the temperament, and the people there know no jealousy.'" Regardless of Zhang Tianxi's eloquence, what deserves the most attention is the question someone posed about northern things: "What things from the north are worth cherishing?" Such a question would have been unimaginable prior to the Eastern Jin. Its emergence within a specific temporal and spatial context is deeply suggestive. The psychological superiority and Jiangnan-centered perspective implied therein are palpable, subtly indicating a shift in the ethos of the age.

As Jiangnan gradually gained an independent status, its distinctive character began to manifest in various respects, among which the shifting prestige, between northern and southern scholarship, and between northern and southern modes of expression, deserves particular attention. A passage cited in the annotations to "Biography of the Lord of Wu" in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三国志・吴主权传, quoting from "History of the State of Wu" in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* 三国志・吴书, illustrates how, at the time of the founding of the States of Wei and Wu, northerners still looked down on southern scholarship. The text records, "Zhao Zi 赵咨, courtesy name Dedu 德度, was a native of Nanyang. Erudite and well-informed, he was sharp and eloquent in debate. When Sun Quan 孙权 became King of Wu, he appointed Zhao Zi as Grand Master of the Palace and sent him as an envoy to Wei. Emperor Wen of Wei outwardly treated him cordially but, in speech, attempted to take advantage of him and belittle Eastern Wu. One day, in a tone of ridicule, Emperor Wen asked, 'Does your King of Wu possess any learning at all?' Zhao Zi replied, 'The King of Wu

commands ten thousand warships upon the Yangtze River and commands a million armored troops. He appoints the capable and virtuous and harbors the ambition to strategize over all under heaven. Even when he finds moments of leisure amidst state affairs, he reads widely across books, biographies, and historical works, extracting insights of subtle profundity—unlike some who merely collect and excerpt fragments and phrases from writings.'" By the time of the Eastern Jin, the situation had shifted somewhat. "Letters and Scholarship" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・文学 records, "Chu Jiye 褚季野 [Chu Pou 褚裒] said to Sun Anguo 孙安国 [Sun Sheng 孙盛], 'Northern scholarship is comprehensive and expansive, profound and broad.' Sun Anguo replied, 'Southern scholarship is lucid and thorough, concise and refined.' When Zhi Daolin 支道林 [Zhi Dun 支遁] heard their exchange, he commented, 'The realm of sages cannot be fully conveyed in words. For those of less than superior intelligence, the northerners read like viewing the moon in a bright place—they can see it, but not deeply. Southerners study like viewing the sun through a window—though the view is restricted, they can discern the essence.'" In his annotation under the dialogue between Chu Pou and Sun Sheng, Yu Jiaxi 余嘉锡 explained, "This means that northern scholarship is broad but lacks depth, while southern scholarship is deep but not extensive" (Yu 1993, 217). Thus, northern and southern scholarship each possesses its distinctive strengths, standing in balanced rivalry.

Hu Baoguo 胡宝国 argued that Chu Pou and Sun Sheng "had crossed the Yangtze River to the south at a young age, so it is unlikely that they retained much knowledge or memory of the academic situation in the north. Moreover, from the time they crossed the river up to the fifth year of the Yonghe era, the political situation in the north remained unstable, with incessant warfare, and there was almost no communication or exchange between the north and the south." Therefore, Hu believed that "the term 'northerners' used by Chu Pou and Sun Sheng in their discussion does not refer to those still residing in the north at the time, but rather to those northerners who had already crossed the river to the south—that is, their fathers who led the migration as well as themselves" (Hu 2005). With regard to this view, at least two observations are worth summarizing: First, the shift in the commentator's orientation is an important reason for the difference in evaluation. Originally, it was from the north that the south was judged; later, it became a judgment from within the south itself. What was once viewed from afar came to be examined up close; what was once misunderstood gradually came to be understood. Second, after the southward migration, the integration of Central Plains culture with indigenous Jiangnan culture became the principal source through which Jiangnan's cultural superiority was established.

Language underwent a similar process of transformation. Since the Han and Wei dynasties, the capital Luoyang had led the national cultural trends. At the time, it was commonly said that "when discussing metaphysics and philosophy, people naturally thought of the renowned gentlemen of the Zhengshi era; when composing and chanting poetry, one must imitate the intonation of Luoyang scholars" ("Taunting and Teasing" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・排调). Upon reaching Jiangnan, however, the Luoyang dialect coexisted with the local Wu dialect. Northerners widely adopted Jiangnan dialects, while southerners no longer unreservedly upheld northern speech as the sole linguistic standard. "Taunting and Teasing" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* records, "When Liu Zhenchang 刘真长

[Liu Tan 刘惔] first paid a visit to Grand Councilor Wang Dao, it was the height of summer. The grand councilor pressed his belly against a game board and said, 'How cool it is!' After leaving, someone asked Liu Tan how the meeting went, to which he replied, 'I didn't notice anything remarkable—just heard him speak in a Wu dialect.'" Liu Xiaobiao 刘孝标 noted, "The people of Wu have their own regional expression for 'cool.'" This shows that Wang Dao, despite being the grand councilor, was already accustomed to using colloquial Wu expressions. "Contempt and Insults" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・轻诋 records, "Zhi Daolin traveled to Kuaiji and met the brothers of the Wang family [Wang Huizhi 王徽之 and Wang Xianzhi 王献之]. Upon his return, someone asked him, 'What did you think of the Wang brothers?' He replied, 'They were like a flock of white-necked crows, all croaking hoarsely.'" This comment reveals that Zhi Daolin found the Wang brothers' use of Wu dialect rather than refined northern speech displeasing. Nevertheless, this had already become an unavoidable reality. More direct was the resistance from local Jiangnan scholars. "Contempt and Insults" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* records, "Someone once asked Gu Changkang 顾长康 [Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之], 'Why don't you use the Luoyang scholar's tone to chant poetry?' Gu Kaizhi replied, 'Why make one's voice sound like that of an old maid?'" The trend of northern and southern scholarship and speech standing in rivalry was becoming increasingly prominent, and the Jiangnan-centered perspective was particularly pronounced.

In summary, following the southward migration, as the political landscape shifted, the Eastern Jin regime firmly established its footing in the Jiangnan region. Jiangnan's cultural superiority gradually took shape as the legacy of the Central Plains culture was preserved and merged with the region's unique local products, landscapes, and aesthetic traditions—a process we may term "expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms" 在南化北. As the Jiangnan-centered perspective became increasingly established, its psychological advantage in the cultural sphere also began to manifest, chiefly in the shift from passive reception to active participation in cultural endeavors. The "expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms" was a prolonged process of development, and even the act of "longing for the south after entering the north" 入北怀南 of later figures such as Yu Xin 庾信 and Wang Bao 王褒 remained situated within this historical context.

3.2 The Act of "Longing for the South after Entering the North" of Yu Xin and Wang Bao and the Reinforcement of Jiangnan Aesthetic Image

Among Southern Liang scholars who later entered the north, Yu Xin and Wang Bao were the most renowned and had the greatest literary influence. In terms of ancestral origin, Yu Xin hailed from Xinye in Nanyang, and Wang Bao from Linyi in Langya. However, their fathers had already settled in Jiangnan. Yu Xin's father, Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾, was a prominent minister during the Liang Dynasty. Wang Bao's great-grandfather Wang Jian 王俭, grandfather Wang Qian 王骞, and father Wang Gui 王规 all served in official positions under the Southern Dynasties and were held in high regard. Therefore, although Yu Xin and Wang Bao were nominally of northern ancestry, they were raised in the south and nurtured by its land and culture. In actuality, they ought to be considered southerners.

Before Yu Xin entered official service under the Northern Wei regime (later Western Wei and Northern Zhou) following his capture, he had already gained considerable fame in regions north of the Yangtze River. In the 11th year of Datong, Eastern Wei sent envoys to the Liang court, and Yu Xin was dispatched to Eastern Wei as Cavalier Attendant-in-Ordinary for Comprehensive Duty 通直散骑常侍. During the mission, he composed several poems, such as "On Imperial Mission to the North, First Crossing at Guabu River" 将命使北始渡瓜步江, "Arriving at Yecheng on Imperial Mission" 将命至邺, and "Response to Zu Xiaoyin: After Arriving at Yecheng on Imperial Mission" 将命至邺酬祖正员, which already expressed a sense of lament over the regional disparities between the north and the south. As he wrote in "Arriving at Yecheng on Imperial Mission," "Since the customs differ so greatly, There is no need to speak further of rivers and mountains. I have no chance to linger in the southern guesthouse, Only a vain desire to offer libations at my homeland's western gate" 风俗既殊阻,山河不复论。无因旅南馆,空欲祭西门. Later, Yu Xin experienced the fall of Jiangling to Western Wei and was forced to enter the north, serving under Western Wei and Northern Zhou. Though he held high office and enjoyed considerable prestige, he often longed for his homeland, voicing sorrow and resentment. As he lamented in "Rhapsody on a Grief-Stricken Heart" 伤心赋, "How much more so now, as I live in exile in the land of Qinchuan, drifting without rest and wandering from place to place? I serve the new dynasty, yet not as a true official; I wish to return to the fields, yet have no land to till. Facing Yumen Pass, I feel like a wanderer adrift in a foreign land. I sit alone by the Yellow River, having entered old age. My eyes filled with endless regret, and I am sorrowful beyond words at the thought of my departed kin" 况乃流寓秦川,飘飖播迁,从官非官,归田不田。对玉关而羁旅,坐长河而暮年。已触目于万恨,更伤心于九泉. Whenever he bid farewell to friends returning to the south, his sorrow intensified. As he wrote in "Poem on Bidding Farewell Again to Minister Zhou" 重别周尚书诗 (Minister Zhou refers to Zhou Hongzheng 周弘正), "Beyond Yangguan lies a journey of ten thousand *li*, and yet none have returned. Only the wild geese by the riverbank take flight to the south as autumn comes" 阳关万里道,不见一人归。唯有河边雁,秋来南向飞.

The climate of the north was bitterly cold, as Yu Xin described in "Poem in Response to Director of the Chancellery Zhang's Expression of Aspirations" 和张侍中述怀诗, "In autumn, the waters of low-lying lands that stretch to the sky have already dried up. By winter, the chill is so severe that even the sun emits no warmth" 天根秋水涸,冬严日不暖. Fan Yun 范云 also once depicted the wintry landscape of the north in his poetry, "The cold desert lies flat in all directions. Snow falls, and within a thousand *li*, fear fills the heart" 寒沙四面平,飞雪千里惊. These lines reveal that southerners were unaccustomed to snowy weather. When confronted with bitter cold and vast white snowfields, they were filled with unease and dread. When Western Wei attacked Jiangling, southern captives were relocated to Luoyang during the winter. According to "Biography of Yin Buhai" in *History of the Southern Dynasties* 南史・殷不害传: "When Western Wei pacified Jiangling, the weather was frigid and snow was falling—so many people froze to death that the bodies filled the ditches. Yin Buhai 殷不害 and Yu Xin were among those escorted to Chang'an." The suffering endured by Yu Xin and other southerners who entered the north extended beyond the grief of losing their homeland—it also included the sorrow of longing for home. Works, such as "Poem in Response to

Director of the Chancellery Zhang's Expression of Aspirations," "Rhapsody on the Small Garden" 小园赋, "Rhapsody on a Grief-Stricken Heart," and "Rhapsody on Lamenting the South" 哀江南赋, were all composed as expressions of homesickness. Mountains and rivers became barriers, and even the sights he encountered evoked sorrow. Though his yearning for his former country stemmed from the moral integrity expected of a scholar-official, it also resonated with deeply human emotions—hence, the natural imagery of Jiangnan frequently appeared in his writing. For instance, when writing about bamboo, he said, "Its roots are entrusted to Jiangnan, beside a secluded pool. Its joints transmitted to Daxia, growing slowly across the vast plains" 夫寄根江南，森森幽潭。传节大夏，悠悠广野 ("Rhapsody on Qionglai Bamboo Cane" 邛竹杖赋). When longing for the willows of Jiangnan or the cranes of Huating, he wrote, "The transplanted willows of Diaotai are not visible beyond Yumen Pass. The cries of the Huating cranes are not heard by the river bridge" 钓台移柳，非玉关之可望；华亭鹤唳，岂河桥之可闻 ("Rhapsody on Lamenting the South"). In remembrance of past figures, he wrote, "Zhang Han never returned to Wu, and Lu Ji remained in Luoyang" 张翰不归吴，陆机犹在洛 ("Poem in Response to Director of the Chancellery Zhang's Expression of Aspirations"); "In former days, Xie Anshi longed to be a man of Huaihai—He stood by the Xinting bank, Yet still spoke of the Luoshui shore" 昔日谢安石，求为淮海人。仿佛新亭岸，犹言洛水滨 ("Poem Composed Impromptu" 率尔成咏诗); "Meeting Lu Ji on his way to Luoyang and seeing Wang Can 王粲, exiled far from home, all were moved to cover their faces and weep upon hearing the sounds of the Longshui River, and to sigh deeply when facing the mountain passes" 逢赴洛之陆机，见离家之王粲。莫不闻陇水而掩泣，向关山而长叹 ("Rhapsody on Lamenting the South"). And in his longing for friends, he wrote, "The road to Yumen Pass is long, And few messengers come from Jinling. Alone, I shed a thousand lines of tears, Opening the letter you sent from ten thousand miles away" 玉关道路远，金陵信使疏。独下千行泪，开君万里书 ("A Poem to Wang Lin" 寄王琳诗). All these verses reflect his enduring attachment to his homeland and his profound lament over separation.

As a southerner living in exile in the north, Yu Xin constantly longed for his homeland, channeling this sentiment into physical imagery and expressing it through his descriptive writing. For example, in "Poem on Gazing at the Weishui River" 望渭水诗, he wrote, "The trees before my eyes seem like those on the bank at Xinting, And the sandy beach resembles that of Longwei Bay. I seem to be reciting verses at Jiangpu in the evening—Surely there will be a returning sail?" 树似新亭岸，沙如龙尾湾。犹言吟暝浦，应有落帆还 In "Poem on Suddenly Seeing Betel Palms" 忽见槟榔诗, he penned, "A thousand green fruit trees are bearing ripe betel nuts, And a hundred purple flower clusters are blooming in full. Even though I have traveled ten thousand *li*, this betel nut is something I once knew well" 绿房千子熟，紫穗百花开。莫言行万里，曾经相识来. In "Poem on Playing the *Qin*" 弄琴诗, he sang, "I can no longer hear the melodies of Shicheng, Only the cawing of crows in the woods. New music follows the turning of the strings—Perhaps it can stir the heart in spring" 不见石城乐，惟闻乌噪林。新声逐弦转，应得动春心. The "Rhapsody on Lamenting the South" offers a comprehensive portrayal of Jiangnan's natural landscape and local products. The rhapsody recounts,

At that time, the court and the public were filled with joyful singing and laughter. Bells and drums rang in unison throughout ponds and pavilions. In the streets and alleys, nobles and officials came and went without cease, and every household was as steeped in culture as those of Zou and Lu. Gardens of lush flowers and trees and Hailing were connected. Hengtang stretched across the riverbanks. At the eastern gate, divine whips drove stones to build bridges. At the southern pole, bronze columns were cast as markers. In the orange groves grew ten thousand trees, and bamboo groves extended to a thousand households. Treasures from the west arrived like floating jade, while rarities from the south gathered like arrows. Wu songs and Yue chants, the exotic dances of Jing and Chu—all flourished in splendid revelry. Grass and trees flourished in spring's warmth, and fish and loongs leapt joyfully at the coming of wind and rain. For 50 years, Jiangnan remained untouched by war, basking in peace and prosperity. (Qu 213–214)
于时朝野欢娱,池台钟鼓。里为冠盖,门成邹鲁。连茂苑于海陵,跨横塘于江浦。东门则鞭石成桥,南极则铸铜为柱。橘则园植万株,竹则家封千户。西赆浮玉,南琛没羽。吴歈越吟,荆艳楚舞。草木之遇阳春,鱼龙之逢风雨。五十年中,江表无事。

The orange groves and bamboo dwellings, the folk songs of Wu and melodies of Yue, and the vegetation and aquatic life of Jiangnan—these were all common subjects repeatedly celebrated by literati, and Yu Xin listed them not merely to depict the physical features of Jiangnan but to blend poetic language with local products, thereby constructing a rich web of Jiangnan imagery. These clusters of Jiangnan imagery, when embedded in prose, carry the emotional resonance unique to the south. When presented in poetry, they are fresh in imagery and complete in implication, imbued with the distinctive character of Jiangnan.

Wang Bao enjoyed a reputation equal to that of Yu Xin. After the fall of Jiangling, both were taken captive and brought to the Northern court, where they were held in high regard. Emperor Taizu of Zhou compared them to the renowned Jin Dynasty brothers Lu Ji and Lu Yun and treated them with exceptional generosity. According to "Biography of Wang Bao" in *History of the Northern Zhou Dynasty* 周书・王褒传: "Wang Bao, along with dozens of people, such as Wang Ke 王克, Liu Gu 刘毂, Zong Lin 宗懔 and Yin Buhai, arrived together in Chang'an. Emperor Taizu rejoiced and said, 'When Eastern Wu was pacified in the past, it produced only the talents of the two Lu brothers. Now, the merit of conquering Jiangling has brought together so many worthy men—it surpasses that time.' He further told Wang Bao and Wang Ke, 'I am a nephew of the Wang clan, and you are of my uncles' generation. We should treat each other as kin, and do not let the sorrow of leaving your homeland weigh on your heart.' He thus granted Wang Bao, Wang Ke, Yin Buhai, and others the titles of Supreme General of Chariots and Cavalry 车骑大将军 and Yitong Sansi 仪同三司 [an honorary title in ancient China]. They were often permitted to sit in the seats of honor and were richly rewarded with material gifts. Wang Bao and his peers, favored and esteemed, seemed to have forgotten their grief as exiles in a foreign land." However, before entering the Northern court, Wang Bao had already composed "Set Off for the North" 燕歌行, which depicted the bitter cold and hardship of the frontier passes. Emperor Yuan of Liang and many scholars responded to the poem with their own verses, all imbued with deep sorrow, reflecting how strong Wang Bao's sense of regional identity had already become. Though he received

generous treatment in the North, his initial writings after arriving there still express poignant reflections on the difference between the landscapes of the north and the south. In "End of the Year" 岁暮, for instance, he wrote, "At year's end, I grieve the passage of time, And in a foreign land, I long for a life of solitude. Loneliness makes my heart sink, And hardship has left my vitality all but spent" 岁晚悲穷律,他乡念索居。寂寞灰心尽,摧残生意余. His most famous poem is "Poem of Crossing the North of the River" 渡河北诗, which reads, "The autumn wind stirs the leaves of the trees, Like the waves upon Dongting Lake. Changshan is near to Dai Commandery, And the frontier fortresses surround the Yellow River. My heart grieves at the unfamiliar northern melodies, And the songs of the frontier tear my soul apart. As evening falls, I ride my steed of war, But lose my way in the winding northern hills" 秋风吹木叶,还似洞庭波。常山临代郡,亭障绕黄河。心悲异方乐,肠断陇头歌。薄暮临征马,失道北山阿. This poem first appeared in *Notes to First Learning* 初学记. Judging by its content, it was likely composed after the fall of Jiangling, as Wang Bao was forced to head north, which explains its pervasive tone of grief and sorrow. The line "The autumn wind stirs the leaves of the trees, Like the waves upon Dongting Lake" draws upon a motif of *Songs of Chu* 楚辞, "The trees gently sway as the autumn winds grow cool. Waves rise on Dongting Lake as the leaves fall down" 嫋嫋兮秋风,洞庭波兮木叶下. In *Songs of Chu*, the imagery of Dongting Lake's waves and falling leaves was originally used to delight the spirits, yet given their distinctly southern geographical and cultural flavor, poets often adopted them as emblematic of the south. Coupled with the original poem's undertones of longing, such imagery became infused with yearning for the southern homeland.

Literati of the Six Dynasties frequently associated Dongting Lake with Jiangnan. Some believed there were two Dongting Lakes—Wu Dongting Lake and Chu Dongting Lake—each with their own set of mythical associations. For example, Yu Xin wrote in "Poem of the Wild Goose" 咏雁诗, "To the south I long for Dongting's waters, And to the north I recall Yanmen Pass. Both rice fields and millet are worth longing for—The geese fly away and return once more" 南思洞庭水,北想雁门关。稻粱俱可恋,飞去复飞还. Liu Yun 柳恽 in "Song of Jiangnan" 江南曲 wrote, "I gather white duckweed on the shoals, And the setting sun shines upon Jiangnan in spring. A returning traveler from Dongting, Who meets an old friend by the Xiaoshui and Xiangjiang Rivers" 汀洲采白蘋,日落江南春。洞庭有归客,潇湘逢故人. Thus, although Wang Bao's construction of southern imagery was driven by poetic expression, it nevertheless reveals a definite sense of regional consciousness.[5]

[5] Although the regional concept of Jiangnan had gradually come to refer specifically to the lands of Wu and Yue during the Six Dynasties period, in poetic composition, the term "Jiangnan," especially in poetry influenced by the stylistic features of *Songs of Chu*, did not denote a clearly defined geographical boundary within its constructed system of imagery. The imagery structure built around Jiangnan encompassed not only the natural scenery and local customs of the Wu region but also incorporated objects and motifs related to the culture of Chu. This suggests that, within poetry, Jiangnan imagery often blended elements from both Chu and Wu-Yue cultural traditions. For instance, in "Poem on Recalling Life in the Mountains on the Road," Xie Lingyun wrote, "The water chestnut-picking tune is quick and urgent, the Jiangnan melody slow and lingering. In olden times, the people of Chu sang with broken hearts. Now, travelers in Yue, too, are filled with sorrow." Yan Yanzhi 颜延之, in "Poem Composed when Visiting the Qu'a Lake in Jingkou on the Third Day of March" 车驾幸京口三月三日侍游曲阿后湖作诗, wrote, "Jiangnan contributed resplendent performances with the distinctive charm of Jingchu, While the surging waters of the Yellow River offered songs imbued with the style of Zhao" 江南进荆艳,河激献赵讴. Similarly, Xie Tiao 谢朓, in "Song on the River" 江上曲, wrote, "Upon the gently flowing river, it is the perfect season for gathering water chestnuts. Together we sing bright, clear melodies, our voices blending harmoniously with the charm of southern Chu" 江上可采菱,清歌共南楚. Whether in terms of imagery or stylistic tendencies, the cultural images of Chu and Wu together underscore the aesthetic characteristics of the Jiangnan region. The Jiangnan imagery formed during the Six Dynasties was largely constructed in contrast to Jiangbei 江北 (the region north of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River). Spatially, it was centered primarily on the Wu region, but within the poetic context, it did not exclude the integration of objects and motifs from the Chu region.

It is worth noting that from the "longing for the south after entering the north" of the two Lu brothers—Lu Ji and Lu Yun—to the second wave of "longing for the south after entering the north" seen in Yu Xin and Wang Bao, what is revealed is a characteristic cultural activity adopted by representative literati during different historical periods, particularly those of the Western Jin and the Southern Dynasties, as they underwent spatial dislocation. This acute sense of disjunction—between subjective consciousness and spatial perception—gradually came to shape an aesthetic perspective centered on Jiangnan, reinforcing a regional consciousness that privileged the South as the normative locus of identity. In aesthetic terms, the temporal shifts and transformations between these periods manifested both in the changing objects of aesthetic attention and in the construction of aesthetic imagery. The transformation of Jiangnan as an aesthetic object evolved from an initial focus on its local products and specialties to a deeper appreciation of its landscapes and natural scenery. Similarly, the construction of aesthetic imagery followed a parallel trajectory: beginning with perceptual engagement with specific objects and gradually ascending to a more refined aesthetic realm, ultimately attaining a state of profound affective and intellectual apprehension.

4 From Local Products to Landscapes: The Changes in Jiangnan Aesthetic Objects during the Six Dynasties

The preceding discussion, organized chronologically, has examined the manifestation of Jiangnan's aesthetic perspective across the Western Jin, Eastern Jin, and Liang periods of the Southern Dynasties, focusing primarily on the spatial movement of literati. In terms of aesthetic objects, there is a discernible progression from the appreciation of local products to the appreciation of landscape from the Western Jin through the Eastern Jin to the Southern Dynasties.

The regional consciousness found in Six Dynasties literature primarily stemmed from the local literati's heartfelt pride in and affection for the distinctive natural objects of their native region. As noted earlier, the development of Jiangnan lagged behind that of the Central Plains, and remarkable achievements in intellectual and cultural domains were relatively scarce. Therefore, early expressions of praise for Jiangnan were mostly tied to its local products and natural features. It was precisely these Jiangnan-specific objects that first established the connection between "beauty" and "Jiangnan." This perspective persisted into the Eastern Jin period. For instance, the "Virtuous Conduct" in *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世说新语・德行 records, "When Wang Gong 王恭 returned from Kuaiji, Wang Da 王大 went to visit him. Upon seeing Wang Gong seated on a six-foot-long bamboo mat, Wang Da said, 'You've returned from Kuaiji in the east, where such items are abundant—why not spare one for me?'" As Kuaiji was known for its plentiful bamboo, bamboo mats were common there. This anecdote reveals how deeply rooted the concept of local products had become in people's minds by that time.

During the Six Dynasties—particularly in the Jin Dynasty—literati showed an increasing enthusiasm for the study of *bowu*. Figures, such as Zhang Hua and Guo Pu 郭璞, were not only exceptionally talented scholars but also renowned polymaths deeply versed in the knowledge of *bowu*. Within this intellectual context, local products gradually permeated

poetic creation, and poetry came to be heavily influenced by the study of *bowu*, forming a distinctive feature of Jin verse. For example, Sun Chu 孙楚 of the Jin Dynasty composed "Song of Local Product Places" 出歌, a poem that directly praises local products from various regions. The poem states, "Cornelian cherries grow on fragrant treetops, And carp come from the pure springs of the Luoshui River. White salt is produced in Hedong, And delicious fermented soybeans come from the deep pools of Lu. Ginger, cinnamon, and tea originate in Bashu, And Sichuan pepper, oranges, and magnolia grow atop high mountains. Smartweed and perilla thrive by ditches, And rice and barnyard grass grow in the fields" 茱萸出芳树颠，鲤鱼出洛水泉。白盐出河东，美豉出鲁渊。姜桂茶歼出巴蜀，椒橘木兰出高山。蓼苏出沟渠，精稗出中田 (Lu 1983, 600). This prevailing trend of revering *bowu* and focusing on local products integrated closely with the rising regional consciousness in Jiangnan, fueling the aesthetic appreciation and literary portrayal of Jiangnan's distinctive objects. An anonymous poem attributed to Zhang Zai 张载 of the Jin Dynasty offers a representative example. The poem reads, "The pomegranate of Dagu is the finest among fruits. Its peel gleams like congealed balm, and its juice flows clear as a mountain stream. The sugarcane of Jiangnan, the plump persimmons of Zhangye. The golden tangerines of Sanba, and the pale apples of Guazhou—Each of these fruits is supremely delicious. They are longed for by the thirsty, worthy to be remembered, Even embroidered onto garment sashes" 大谷石榴，木滋之最。肤如凝脂，汁如清濑。江南都蔗，张掖丰柿。三巴黄甘，瓜州素柰。凡此数品，殊美绝快。渴者所思，铭之裳带 (Lu 1983, 739). In this poem, the "sugarcane of Jiangnan" already stands out as a regional delicacy on par with the finest specialties from across the empire, drawing particular attention.

During the Jin and Song periods, if Jiangnan literati initially discovered and appreciated the beauty of local products through introspective observation, then the introduction of perspectives from the north or beyond further reinforced this concept of local product aesthetic appreciation. Especially during times of confrontation between northern and southern regimes, the tendency of Jiangnan literati to praise and promote their local products became even more pronounced. For example, Liu Jun 刘峻 of the Liang Dynasty wrote in his "Writing about Offering Oranges" 送橘启, "The oranges of the south are sweet and delicious; even the bluebirds are fond of them. When picked in the early morning after the first frost, their flavor can light up the entire gathering, and when peeled, their aroma rises like a mist. Their skin is thin, their flesh exquisite, and their fibers do not cling to the pulp—leaving no residue behind. Their sweetness surpasses the legendary fruits of antiquity, and their coolness excels that of ice-filled jugs. They can invigorate the mind, serve as a refreshing delicacy, or be preserved in honey. What northern lands have fruits to rival these?" (Xu 1982, 86–87) In the 27th year of Yuanjia, Tuoba Tao 拓跋焘, Emperor Taiwu of Northern Wei, launched a southern campaign and besieged Pengcheng. Amid the standoff, the two sides exchanged local products, and the northern people were particularly greedy in their requests. "Biography of Zhang Chang" in *History of the Liu Song Dynasty* 宋书・张畅传 records, "Tuoba Tao again sent envoys to the two princes [referring to Liu Yigong 刘义恭 and Liu Jun 刘骏] to borrow musical instruments such as *konghou* 箜篌 (arched harp), *pipa* 琵琶 (lute), *zheng* 筝 (zither), and flutes, as well as chess pieces. Liu Yigong replied, 'We are tasked with military duties and did not bring such instruments. However, during our banquet, we invited

court musicians to perform. They can play over a hundred stringed melodies, all of which are exquisite arts of Jiangnan. We now present them to your side.'" At this point, what were praised as products of Jiangnan had expanded from common local products to include music and dance, collectively described as "the beauty of Jiangnan." This reveals an increasingly sophisticated perception of Jiangnan. The account not only illustrates the aesthetic differences between the north and the south but also highlights Jiangnan's steadily awakening aesthetic consciousness.

In the early stages of the Jin Dynasty's migration southward, many were filled with sorrow and lamentation over the loss of their homeland, and an aesthetic consciousness of the Jiangnan region had not yet taken shape. As recorded in "Speech and Conversation" of *A New Account of Tales of the World*, "When Emperor Yuan of Jin first crossed the Yangtze River, he said to General of Agile Cavalry 骠骑 Gu Rong 顾荣, 'Dwelling as a guest in another's land, I constantly feel ashamed in my heart.' Gu Rong knelt and replied, 'I have heard that emperors regard the whole world as their home. Thus, the Shang Dynasty had no fixed capital between Geng and Bo, and the Zhou Dynasty moved the Nine Tripod Cauldrons to Luoyi [Luoyang]. I hope Your Majesty will not take the matter of relocating the capital to heart.'" Gu Rong was a native of Wu and belonged, like the Lu family, to one of Jiangdong's prominent aristocratic clans. Though his words were intended as consolation, they subtly implied a sense of regional consciousness among the people of Jiangnan. Another example is the well-known story of "weeping at Xinting" 新亭对泣, which describes how people who had crossed the Yangtze River were moved by the changes in landscape and the fate of the nation. They were stirred by the scene before them and spoke with deep emotion. The geographical features of Jiangnan had already become intertwined with their sorrow over the loss of their homeland and were deeply imprinted in their hearts. However, as the situation of temporary refuge in Jiangnan persisted over time, the ambition to reclaim the Central Plains and the sorrow of dwelling in a foreign land gradually diminished under the relatively stable circumstances of a southern regime. As Fan Ning 范宁 of the Jin Dynasty observed, "In earlier times, when the Central Plains region was in turmoil, scholars and commoners alike migrated to Jiangdong. Back then, they still hoped to return to their native lands, and so the court allowed them to retain the names of their original commanderies and clans. But as time passed, people became content with the present situation. Family tombs and ancestral grounds had already taken root and expanded. Though in name they still lacked formal local affiliations, in practice they had already developed a true attachment to the land" ("Biography of Fan Ning" in *History of the Jin Dynasty* 晋书・范宁传).

After settling in Jiangnan, the northern people who had crossed the Yangtze River gradually began to develop an aesthetic consciousness of the Jiangnan region. In "Physical Features" in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* 文心雕龙・物色, it is written: "As for mountains, forests, rivers, and lakes, they are truly profound reservoirs of literary inspiration. To describe them briefly would be inadequate; to depict them in detail might seem excessive. Yet Qu Yuan 屈原 was able to capture the emotional essence of "Ballads from the States" 国风 and "Encountering Sorrow" 离骚, most likely because he drew on the spiritual support of the landscape." As a representative of southern literature, *Songs of Chu* differs greatly from northern literary traditions in both content and style. This is particularly evident in

its imagery, which is far richer and more diverse than that found in northern literature. Adjacent to the land of Chu, Jiangnan is abundant in forests, rivers, and lakes. During the Six Dynasties period, people's sentiments toward landscape were also nurtured by this beautiful terrain. According to a citation in *A New Account of Tales of the World* from *Gazetteers of Kuaiji Commandery* 会稽郡志, "Within the territory of Kuaiji there are especially many extraordinary mountains and picturesque waters. The peaks are steep and wreathed in mist. Pines, cypresses, maples, and cedars stand tall with sparse and graceful branches. The pools are as clear as mirrors, and streams flow gently and continuously. When Wang Zijing 王子敬 [Wang Xianzhi 王献之] saw the scene, he said, 'The beauty of this landscape dazzles my eyes.'" At this point, the depiction of Jiangnan's landscape was no longer limited to the ostentatious praise of local products but rather interpreted the elegance of the mountains and rivers through an aesthetic perspective. In "Letter to Chen Bozhi" 与陈伯之书, Qiu Chi 丘迟 evoked the splendor of Jiangnan's scenery to stir Chen Bozhi's 陈伯之 sense of loyalty to his native land. This passage has long been praised by literati. In the text, he wrote, "In the third month of late spring, the flora of Jiangnan bursts forth, blossoms adorn the branches, and flocks of orioles flit through the woods. When you see the banners and war drums of your homeland and recall the days of the past, as you pluck the strings and ascend the city tower, how could you not feel sorrow and regret? Lian Po 廉颇 wept with longing for his generalship in Zhao, and Wu Qi 吴起 shed tears at Xihe—these are the natural feelings of men. Can it be that you, General, remain unmoved?" The landscape imagery portrayed in this letter is rich and colorful, and compared with ordinary local objects, it exudes a unique vitality and aesthetic charm distinctive to the Jiangnan region, thus earning the admiration of literati.

A love for landscapes can be said to be a universal characteristic among Jiangnan literati of the Six Dynasties period. Whether aristocrats, scholars, or monks, they all regarded the act of communing with nature and dwelling at ease among mountains and rivers as a cherished life ideal. The landscape sentiment of the Six Dynasties was not only a discovery and exploration of the aesthetic value of the external world but also a natural expression and projection of one's inner emotions and temperament. These two aspects—outward observation and inward reflection—interacted and merged to reach a state where "the infusion of emotion into the objective scene is like a gift, and the inspiration evoked by the scene is like a response in return" 情往似赠，兴来如答. As such, the Six Dynasties' sentiment for landscape was always closely tied to poetic creation. In terms of integrating the beauty of Jiangnan's natural scenery into poetry, Xie Lingyun 谢灵运, who was born and raised in Jiangnan during the Jin-Song transition, indeed made a pioneering contribution.

Although Xie Lingyun's ancestral home was in Yangxia, Chen Commandery (present-day Taikang, Henan), his grandfather Xie Xuan 谢玄 had already relocated to Shining in Kuaiji and was buried there. Thus, Xie Lingyun's actual native place was Shining, and he never once set foot in his ancestral homeland of Yangxia throughout his life. After his birth, he was fostered in Qiantang, and from the age of 15 to 21, he moved from Qiantang to reside in Wuyi Lane in the capital, Jiankang. At the age of 21, he began his official career, during which he twice returned to his native place to live in seclusion. Looking over the course of his life, his principal sphere of activity was in Jiangnan. According to "Biography of Xie

Lingyun" in *History of the Liu Song Dynasty* 宋书・谢灵运传, "Xie Lingyun's father and grandfather were both buried in Shining County, where the family's ancestral residence and private villa were also located. Thus, Xie Lingyun moved his household registration to Kuaiji, carefully repairing and managing the estate, which was nestled amid mountains and rivers, exuding the serene beauty of reclusion. He indulged himself in the company of recluses like Wang Hongzhi 王弘之 and Kong Chunzhi 孔淳之, wandering freely among nature, even developing the desire to live out his days there. Each time one of his new poems reached the capital, regardless of status or rank, people eagerly transcribed them, and within a short period of time, they were widely circulated among both scholars and commoners. People from near and far admired him, and his fame shook the capital." "Later, he was appointed Prefect of Yongjia. Yongjia Commandery was famed for its magnificent landscapes, and Xie Lingyun, being a lifelong lover of mountains and rivers, found himself unable to realize his aspirations as a prefect. Thus, he roamed and wandered at will, visiting every county, often for ten days or even a month at a time, neglecting administrative affairs such as handling civil disputes. Wherever he went, he composed poems to express his feelings." The fervent admiration for Xie Lingyun's poetry was not merely due to his social status and reputation but, more importantly, because of the refined aesthetic sensibility toward landscape that his poetry embodied.

Although explicit references to Jiangnan are relatively rare in Xie Lingyun's poetry—such as in the following lines—"The water chestnut-picking tune is quick and urgent, The Jiangnan melody slow and lingering. In olden times, the people of Chu sang with broken hearts. Now, travelers in Yue, too, are filled with sorrow" 采菱调易急,江南歌不缓。楚人心昔绝,越客肠今断 ("Poem on Recalling Life in the Mountains on the Road" 道路忆山中诗); "Exhausted from roaming through Jiangnan, I have yet to enjoy the sights of Jiangbei. My heart craves novelty, yet the path ahead grows ever longer. I seek out wondrous landscapes, but time will not wait" 江南倦历览,江北旷周旋。怀新道转迥,寻异景不延 ("Climbing the Solitary Island in the River" 登江中孤屿). His contributions to the figurative rendering of Jiangnan landscapes remain pivotal. As a distinguished figure in the transition of Six Dynasties poetry from impressionistic lyricism to precise and detailed imagery, Xie Lingyun's expertise in landscape depiction played a crucial role in the aesthetic conceptualization of Jiangnan's natural features. His poetry not only introduced Jiangnan's landscapes into literature on a large scale for the first time but also greatly enriched the depth and complexity of Jiangnan's aesthetic imagery. On the writing technical level of landscape poetry, his work laid a solid foundation for later poets of the Qi and Liang dynasties—such as Xiao Yan 萧衍, Xie Tiao 谢朓, Yu Xin, and Wang Bao—in their multilayered poetic expression of Jiangnan imagery.

5 The Formation of Jiangnan Literary Image: Image Construction and Cultural Identity

The term "Jiangnan image," as mentioned at the beginning of this article, refers to a multidimensional and composite literary image centered on the regional concept of "Jiangnan." It encompasses a constellation of representations in literary works, including natural features with distinct regional characteristics, cultural landscapes, and human activities, all of which

collectively evoke and revolve around the image of Jiangnan.

Based on the foregoing discussion, we can identify a critical turning point in the development of the Jiangnan image—namely, the historical event of the Jin court's southward migration. Using this as a dividing line, the evolution of the Jiangnan image can be broadly categorized into two periods. The earlier period, encompassing the Han, Wei, and Western Jin dynasties, marks the nascent stage of the Jiangnan image, with the Western Jin being particularly representative. The later period, beginning with the Eastern Jin and continuing through the four periods of Southern Dynasties—Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen—up to the Sui Dynasty, witnessed the enrichment and maturation of the Jiangnan image, with the Qi and Liang periods especially flourishing. Among the literary figures of the earlier period, notable representatives include Lu Ji and Lu Yun (together known as the "two Lu brothers"), Zhang Zai, and Zhang Han. In the later period, the key figures include Xie Lingyun, Xiao Yan, Xie Tiao, Wang Rong, Xiao Gang 萧纲, Yu Xin, Wang Bao, Yang Jian 杨坚, and Lu Sidao 卢思道. Whether from the earlier or later periods, these literati all exemplify the defining characteristics of their respective eras. A close analysis reveals that the later group of literati achieved more significant breakthroughs and advancements in both the construction of the Jiangnan image and the articulation of cultural identity compared to their predecessors.

5.1 Image Construction

The key differences between the earlier and later periods in the construction of the Jiangnan image are first and foremost reflected in the shaping of literary imagery itself. This refers primarily to how literary communities refined and polished their artistic expressions over time, enabling various natural and cultural elements of Jiangnan to be transformed into enduring literary images and gradually brought to maturity. Broadly speaking, the development of the Jiangnan image from its initial emergence to its later flourishing can be summarized into three general stages.

The first stage emphasizes the perception and emotional resonance evoked by material imagery. The awakening of regional consciousness generally follows a process that begins with an attentiveness to physical objects, which gradually gives rise to emotional responses and ultimately culminates in aesthetic experience. This study refers to this concept as the "theory of emotional response to things" 感物说, meaning that specific regional objects serve as stimuli that evoke emotional connections to the region itself. The origins of this theory can be traced back to Liu Xie's 刘勰 "Physical Features" in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, which states, "When poets are stirred by external things, they are able to associate them endlessly with related sentiments. They linger among myriad phenomena and reflect deeply within the range of sight and sound. In portraying the spirit and appearance of things, the writing must follow the changing forms with subtle adaptation. In using colors and matching sounds, the emotions of the heart must respond in echo and in hesitation." In poetic composition, the concept of emotional response to things initially manifested through poetic language. During the late Han and especially the Wei-Jin periods, poets frequently employed the phrase "emotional response to things" in their verses. Examples include: "Stirred by outward things, I feel sorrow—Tears soak my garments before I am aware" 感物怀所

思，泣涕忽沾裳 (“Folk Songs about Sorrow” in *Ancient Yuefu Poetry* 乐府古辞・伤歌行); “Grieved by things, I clutch my chest and sigh” 感物伤我怀，抚心长太息 (Cao Zhi’s 曹植 “Poem for Baima King Cao Biao” 赠白马王彪); “Grief-touched, I am moved by things—Tears fall with my feelings” 悲怀感物来，泣涕应情陨 (Pan Yue’s 潘岳 “Poem of Mourning” 悼亡诗); “Stirred by things, I give rise to many thoughts—Passionately I remember the men of old” 感物多远念，慷慨怀古人 (Lu Ji’s “Poem Composed During a Journey to Liang and Chen with the King of Wu” 吴王郎中时从梁陈作诗). These examples reflect a strong tendency toward expressing emotion through external imagery. As previously discussed in Lu Ji’s praise of Jiangnan’s local products, such characteristics are already clearly evident.

Lu Ji and Lu Yun lived during a specific historical juncture. As previously discussed, much of their poetic output consisted of four-character poetry, and they favored emulating the works of antiquity. The content, form, and tone of their poetry largely inherited the stylistic traditions of the late Han period. Their expressions of regional sentiment were primarily found in their prose writings. In contrast, their poetic compositions lacked a clear awareness of the deliberate construction of poetic imagery. In a certain sense, Lu Ji and Lu Yun were born at an inopportune time. The Yongming 永明 poetic style had yet to emerge, and poetic forms were still in a phase of traditional inheritance, with no significant innovations having yet taken place. This historical condition inevitably constrained their ability to pursue and explore the development of poetic imagery in their poetry.

We should also fully recognize the significant value of the expression of emotion through the perception of external objects. It is precisely this practice of transforming tangible phenomena into poetic imagery that served as the foundation for the later emergence of landscape poetry in the Song Dynasty, the flourishing of poems on objects in the Qi and Liang periods, and eventually the maturation of court-style 宫体 poetry during the Liang and Chen dynasties. They all proved that “human feeling changes with scenery, with words arising from the bottom of the heart” 情以物迁，辞以情发. What we refer to as an era of heightened aesthetic self-awareness was not merely marked by poets’ mastery of refined verbal technique but, more importantly, by their acute receptivity to being moved by the external world. This capacity to generate abundant emotion from perceptual experience—and to seamlessly integrate that emotion with the form of the object—was what enabled poetry of that era to attain such depth and resonance.

Secondly, emphasis was placed on the aesthetic appreciation. After the Jin court crossed southward, the Jiangnan image evolved from the simple arousal of emotion through external stimuli into a form endowed with distinct aesthetic qualities. What began as a nascent state of development eventually flourished into a thriving trend. The scholars of the Southern Dynasties actively composed poems and rhapsodies, elevating the Jiangnan image into a prominent phenomenon in poetic creation. Within these poems, the geographical reference to “Jiangnan” and the specific local objects and imagery that resonated with and complemented it gradually formed a uniquely characteristic aesthetic system. Southern Dynasties poetry frequently celebrated natural imagery as a medium for expressing pure poetic sentiment. Among these, the mountains, waters, plants, and trees of Jiangnan appeared most frequently as dominant motifs. For example:

The Wujiang area, once a land of flourishing prosperity, has now fallen into desolation and ruin, 吴江泛丘墟，
Though cassia trees still grow in abundance and maple trees remain plentiful. 饶桂复多枫。

(from Jiang Yan's 江淹 "Chitingzhu Poem" 赤亭渚诗)

They played joyfully upon the Five Lakes, returning after freely gathering lotus pods. 游戏五湖采莲归，
The blooming lotuses and broad, layered leaves exuded a rich fragrance that lingered on their garments, clinging to them for a long time. 发花田叶芳袭衣。

(from Xiao Yan's 萧衍 "Picking Lotus Song" 采莲曲)

In Jiangnan, the lotuses bloom in profusion, 江南莲花开，
Their delicate crimson radiance reflecting upon the emerald-green surface of the water. 红光覆碧水。

(from Xiao Yan's "*Ziye* Four Seasons Song: Summer Song" 子夜四时歌・夏歌)

My home is located at the entrance to the Five Lakes, 妾家五湖口，
And I often gather water chestnuts along their shores. 采菱五湖侧。

(from Fei Chang's 费昶 "Water Chestnut Picking" 采菱曲)

Pollia japonica in the mountains is lush and green, 山中工杜绿，
And I imagine the lotus leaves in Jiangnan must have already taken on a shade of violet. 江南莲叶紫。

(from Xie Tiao's "On the Road to Jingting" 往敬亭路中)

The beauties of Chu sing songs of picking water caltrops, 荆姬采菱曲，
While the women of Yue sing the ballads of Jiangnan. 越女江南讴。

(from Wang Rong's 王融 "Song of Picking Water Caltrops" 采菱曲)

The lotus-picking girls ride magnolia boats adorned with golden oars, 金桨木兰船，
Joyfully gathering lotus blossoms in the water towns of Jiangnan. 戏采江南莲。
The fragrance of the flowers drifts across the sandbanks, 莲香隔浦渡，
While the river is filled with tender, emerald-green lotus leaves, presenting a scene full of vibrant life. 荷叶满江鲜。

(from Liu Xiaowei's 刘孝威 "Lotus-Picking Song" 采莲曲)

The autumn wind has scattered the lotus blossoms in the pond, 风碎池中荷，
And the chill of white frost has clipped away the verdant hues of Jiangnan. 霜剪江南蓑。

(from Xie Tiao's "Poem on Managing the House" 治宅诗)

I long to seek the scene beneath the jujube tree, where the leaves rustle gently in the wind— 欲求枣下吹，
Yet a distinct charm lies instead upon the bamboo branches of Jiangnan. 别有江南枝。

(from Xie Tiao's "Autumn Bamboo Song" 秋竹曲)

The waters by the Hanshui River have just begun to show a hint of green, 汉渚水初绿，
Yet the vegetation of Jiangnan has once again turned yellow and withered. 江南草复黄。

(from Xiao Gang's 萧纲 "Poem on Returning to the City from Temporary Rest" 从顿暂还城诗)

Grapes hang in clusters, 别观蒲萄带实垂，
And cardamom blooms in tight bunches along the branches. 江南豆蔻生连枝。
Even these indifferent and unfeeling plants cling together so closely, 无情无意犹如此，
Yet those with feelings and grudges can only part helplessly. 有心有恨徒别离。

(from Xiao Gang's 萧纲 "Farewell Poem to Xiao Zixian" 和萧侍中子显春别诗)

There are also songs extending to the humanistic imagery of Jiangnan:

The water chestnut-picking tune is quick and urgent, 采菱调易急，
The Jiangnan melody is slow and lingering. 江南歌不缓。
In olden times, the people of Chu sang with broken hearts. 楚人心昔绝，
Now, travelers in Yue, too, are filled with sorrow. 越客肠今断。

(from Xie Lingyun's 谢灵运 "Poem on Recalling Life in the Mountains on the Road" 道路忆山中诗)

Raising the wine cup, deeply immersed in the sorrow of longing, 对酒长相思，
The heart's full grief transforms into the mournful and poignant melodies of Jiangnan. 悲发江南调。

(from Liu Shuo 刘铄, King of Nanping, "Poetry of Marching On and On" 拟行行重行行诗)

Only in vain do I recall the melodious tunes of Jiangnan, 徒忆江南声，
Vainly preserving the lingering sounds of the *se* once played by Queen Qi. 空录齐后瑟。

(from Bao Zhao's 鲍照 "Poem on Climbing Jiulidai in Yunyang" 登云阳九里埭诗)

The peach blossoms have just unfurled their bright red hues, 桃花初发红，
And the fragrant grass continues to sprout tender green shoots. 芳草尚抽绿。
I have heard many southern melodies, 南音多有会，
Yet it is the tune of "Yang Pan'er" that I cherish and adore most. 偏重叛儿曲。

(from Xiao Yan's "Yang Pan'er" 杨叛儿)

A single song of Jiangnan's music is worth a thousand taels of gold. 江南音，一唱值千金。

(from the Harmony lyrics of "Longdi Song" 龙笛曲)

In my heart, I long to play a melody of Jiangnan, 欲奏江南曲，
Yet I cannot resist greedily writing letters bound for northern Ji. 贪封冀北书。

(from Shen Manyuan's 沈满愿 "Expressing Sorrow and Resentment through Brilliant Writing" 彩毫怨)

I wish to find a lady from Luoyang, 要取洛阳人，
To listen with her to melodies played on Jiangnan's strings and flutes. 共命江南管。

(from Xie Tiao's "Two Poems Written Upon Hearing the Music Offered by the Female Performer at Night" 夜听妓诗二首)

It is highly contentious to determine whether a specific image belongs to a particular region. Only by linking concrete objects with the aesthetic characteristics of a region can one establish the basis for the existence of that region's imagery. Therefore, we cannot simply assert that motifs such as "lotus," "fish," "birds," "bamboo," "lotus flowers," or "willows" inherently constitute Jiangnan imagery. Only when they manifest the aesthetic qualities unique to the Jiangnan region can they be identified as part of the Jiangnan imagery system. The reason these motifs embody Jiangnan characteristics, as the author speculates, likely lies in the influence of Jiangnan's geographic features and the traditions of Jiangnan folk songs. Why is it said that "Jiangnan is suitable for lotus picking," while the lotus of the northern regions is not emphasized in the same way? Why is there a particular stress on "crossing to the south of the Yangtze to pick lotus flowers"? Perhaps Xiao Yi's 萧绎 "Picking Lotuses by the River at Night" 乌栖曲 offers some insight. The poem reads, "A boat is made of

precious wood, with oars of cassia. At night, one crosses the river to the south to pick lotus leaves. There, one happens upon Xishi just after she has finished rinsing her silk. Together, they gaze at the moonlight from the riverbank" 沙棠作船桂为楫，夜渡江南采莲叶。复值西施新浣沙，共向江干眺月华. Lotus picking and river crossing ultimately become associated with Jiangnan women and the region's particular charm. Just as Liu Huan 刘缓 wrote in "Lotus Picking in Jiangnan" 江南可采莲: "Jiangnan is not a vast land, Yet each year it holds an inexhaustible wealth of sentiment and charm" 江南少许地，年年情不穷. This sentiment perhaps captures the essence of what is meant by Jiangnan imagery.

More importantly, during the Six Dynasties period, a considerable number of poems bore titles, such as "Song of Jiangnan" 江南曲 and "Yearning for Jiangnan" 江南思. Collectively, these works established a distinctly recognizable cultural backdrop. Within such a cultural context, the concept of Jiangnan and the region's natural landscapes and local products formed an almost intertextual relationship—each echoing and illuminating the other. The unique customs and scenery of Jiangnan gradually became internalized as defining characteristics of the region, shaping a distinctive regional identity and aesthetic perspective.

Thirdly, there is an emphasis on the emotional resonance and personal reflection associated with Jiangnan, which can be seen as an extension of the aesthetic appreciation previously discussed. Unlike the literati of the Qi and Liang periods, who primarily expressed poetic sentiments, figures such as Yu Xin and Wang Bao long separated from Jiangnan, conveyed a profound emotional experience shaped by spatial dislocation. From the northern regions, they yearned for the south, their longing compounded by the sense of geographical and cultural estrangement. Dwelling in the north where "Yu Pass Messages cut off at Fortress Pass, And no Southern envoys ever pass through again" 榆关断音信，汉使绝经过 (Yu Xin's "Imitation of Chanting My Thoughts," the Seventh 拟咏怀（其七）), they could not help but lament, "At dusk the journey stretches on—What kind of world has the human realm become?" 日暮途远，人间何世 (Yu Xin's "Preface to Rhapsody on Lamenting the South" 哀江南赋序) Yu Xin's "Rhapsody on Lamenting the South" is suffused with inescapable sorrow, as illustrated by lines such as "The transplanted willows of Diaotai are not visible beyond Yumen Pass. The cries of the Huating cranes are not heard by the river bridge." The idyllic landscape of Jiangnan dissolves into nothing but a mirage of memory. Consequently, they repeatedly evoked Jiangnan's scenery in remembrance, with phrases such as "The trees before my eyes seem like those on the bank at Xinting, and the sandy beach resembles that of Longwei Bay," "He stood by the Xinting bank, yet still spoke of the Luoshui shore," or "I can no longer hear the melodies of Shicheng, only the cawing of crows in the woods." Notably, these poetic images represent a continuation of Jiangnan motifs frequently invoked by Qi-Liang literati, yet they now carry deeper emotional weight. What constitutes their "personal insight" is precisely their heightened sense of contrast and their rich, veiled inner world. Carefully reading lines such as "He stood by the Xinting bank, yet still spoke of the Luoshui shore" or "I can no longer hear the melodies of Shicheng, only the cawing of crows in the woods," one perceives that despite physical separation between north and south, their yearning for Jiangnan remains unwavering. In their verse, we can faintly discern the subtle, enduring emotions and the refined poetic language that would come to characterize Tang poetry. In this way, the Jiangnan imagery, infused with profound life experience, is elevated in both cultural

depth and aesthetic richness.

It is precisely through these circumstances—especially the two aforementioned dimensions that emphasize aesthetic appreciation and emotional introspection—that the Jiangnan imagery has been continuously shaped and reinforced by literati. These Jiangnan images articulate a profound emotional attachment and wholehearted longing for the Jiangnan region, serving as a spiritual refuge for the literati. In turn, this emotional allegiance constantly inspires and gives rise to new modes of aesthetic expression. This aesthetic elaboration is, on the one hand, rooted in emotional responses to tangible objects; on the other hand, it transcends the aesthetic level of the Wei and Jin periods, reaching a deeper plane of artistic insight. It continually enriches and expands both the connotation and extension of the Jiangnan imaginary, propelling it further into the domain of regional aesthetic consciousness. Ultimately, the image of Jiangnan evolved into a classical cultural symbol, one that came to circulate widely across a broader cultural landscape.

5.2 Cultural Identity

A close examination of the historical period spanning from the Qin and Han dynasties to the Six Dynasties reveals that, alongside the rise and fall of state power and the frequent shifts in political regimes, a prolonged cultural contest unfolded between Jiangnan and the northern regions. This contest gave rise to a series of cultural interactions driven by differing regional aesthetic perspectives. The developmental trajectory of these interactions can be broadly outlined as follows: viewing the south from a northern perspective (during the Qin and the Han dynasties); longing for the south after entering the north (as in the case of people from the Wu region during the Western Jin); observing the south through a southern perspective after entering the south (from the Western Jin to the Eastern Jin); expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms (during the Eastern Jin and Southern Dynasties). Particularly noteworthy is that, throughout this evolutionary process, with the nascent formation of a Jiangnan-centered consciousness, the cultural strategy of "expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms" gradually became a deliberate endeavor. Consequently, a sense of cultural identity rooted in Jiangnan began to emerge.

Hu Xiaoming 胡晓明 once proposed the concept of a "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" (Hu 2011). The "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" refers to the emergence of a conscious Jiangnan identity among the people of the region, with increasingly prominent local sentiments and a strong cultural influence. This influence—generated through the advancement of literature and scholarship—transcended both political recognition and moral legitimacy, giving rise to a distinctive form of cultural tension. According to Hu Xiaoming, it was "during the Southern and Northern Dynasties that a truly shared cultural concept of Jiangnan took shape," marked by the continual emergence of iconic cultural phenomena, the abundance of cultural achievements, and the flourishing of new cultural currents and critical discourses. The shift from "the south depending on the north" to "expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms" represents a significant transformation in cultural attitude among the people before and after the Jin migration southward. This indicates that, after repeated interactions and accommodations between Jiangnan culture and Central Plains

culture, the literati ultimately developed and shaped a "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan."

It is important to note that the formation of the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" was not accomplished overnight; rather, it was a cyclical and turbulent process. Simultaneously, a countervailing "northern complex" continued to intensify, standing in tension with this Jiangnan-centered consciousness. From this perspective, Southern Dynasties literati's collective endeavor to "express southern culture through northern cultural forms" can be understood as the gradual process by which the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" absorbed and dissolved the "northern complex." In this process, the literary strategy of "being nominally northern, but in essence southern" 名北实南 became a common practice among Southern Dynasties literati. Wang Wenjin's 王文进, in his article "The Spatiotemporal Thinking of Southern Dynasties Scholars" 南朝士人的时空思维, provided an in-depth analysis of the frequent appearance of imagined Chang'an and poetic evocations of Luoyang in Southern literary works (Wang 2008, 157–196). He argued that Southern Dynasties scholars invoked the names of "Chang'an" and "Luoyang" as symbolic references to Jiankang (present-day Nanjing), thereby constructing a deeper emotional and cultural longing for the Han Dynasty as a kind of spiritual totem. In the present author's view, while Southern Dynasties literati's effort to assert political legitimacy was indeed a critical aspect of their cultural attitude, the aesthetic transference of spatial sentiment reflected in the strategy of "being nominally northern, but in essence southern" is of even greater significance. Although the Northern Dynasties asserted their orthodoxy through edicts and official records, they were comparatively lacking in literary expression. In contrast, Southern Dynasties literati sought to claim cultural and literary dominance through a confident literary posture that transcended mere psychological compensation or substitution. Thus, the depth of this practice—"expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms"—in many ways determined the depth of the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan."

On the one hand, there was the phenomenon of "expressing southern culture through northern cultural forms"; on the other, there was a deep sense of "longing for the south from the north." After the Jin court's southward migration, the situation underwent a dramatic transformation. The northern literati flocked to the south, and Jiangnan became a center where many aristocratic families from the Central Plains congregated, establishing itself as the cultural stronghold of orthodoxy. This position of cultural primacy was supported by real and substantial achievements in the realm of culture. *History of the Northern Qi Dynasty* 北齐书 records Gao Huan's 高欢 appraisal of Emperor Wu of Liang, Xiao Yan 萧衍, "Now the Jiangdong region has produced a man from Wu, Xiao Yan, who devotes himself to promoting court dress, rites, and music, and the literati of the Central Plains all regard him as the standard-bearer of orthodoxy." Li Tao 李焘 of the Southern Song further elaborated this idea in his historical writings, explicitly stating that legitimacy should not be determined by geography but by the cultural heritage of the elite: "The rulers of the Eastern Jin, Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen may have resided in Jiangnan, but they embodied the cultural orthodoxy of the Central Plains. In contrast, the five ethnic groups and Yuan Wei, though occupying the Central Plains, were culturally alien … Wang Meng 王猛, before his death, repeatedly advised Fu Jian against invading the Eastern Jin, asserting that Jiangnan was where legitimacy lay. Similarly, Cui Hao 崔浩 pointed out that the south was the dwelling

place of the aristocratic families of courtly refinement. Though he served under two emperors of Northern Wei, he was always reluctant to wage campaigns against the south" (Zhang & Li 2007, 155–156). Within this historical context, the southern literati were held in extremely high esteem across all levels of the Northern courts. Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei, for example, demonstrated a clear endorsement of the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" in his approach to talent selection and literary cultivation. According to "Biography of Liu Jun" in *History of the Southern Dynasties* 南史・刘峻传, "At the time, Emperor Xiaowen was committed to recruiting talented individuals from all regions. Those in Jiangnan who were gifted in learning and literature were all appointed to official positions." The same held true in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, the era of Yu Xin and Wang Bao. "Biography of Yu Xin" in *History of the Northern Zhou Dynasty* 周书・庾信传 notes, "Emperor Shizong and Emperor Gaozu of Northern Zhou both cherished literature. Yu Xin in particular received generous favor and distinction. Princes, such as the Prince of Zhao and the Prince of Teng, maintained close relationships with him, interacting with him as freely and affectionately as commoners do. Many officials of the court sought out Yu Xin to compose the inscriptions for their tomb steles." The works of Yu Xin and Wang Bao circulated widely in the north, achieving great popularity.

This cultural reverence for Jiangnan continued into the Sui Dynasty. Emperor Yang of Sui held the cultural achievements of Jiangnan in high regard and even punished court historians who disparaged Jiangnan culture in their writings. As recorded in *Supplement to the Daye Era of Sui* 隋大业拾遗: "In the early years of the Daye reign, Emperor Yang of Sui issued an edict commanding more than thirty officials, such as Dou Wei 窦威, Secretariat Drafter 内史舍人; Cui Zujun 崔祖濬, Imperial Diary Drafter 起居舍人; and Hou Wei 侯伟, Assistant Administrator 赞治 of Longchuan, to compile a work titled *Geographical Treatise of the Realm* 区宇图志, which ultimately spanned over five hundred chapters. Once the compilation was completed, it was submitted to Emperor Yang for review. In addition, they had also composed *Customs of Danyang Commandery* 丹阳郡风俗, but in this work, the people of Wu were portrayed as eastern ethnic groups, accused of transgressing ritual and moral codes. Furthermore, the language and reasoning throughout deviated entirely from the proper standards of historical writing. Emperor Yang was displeased upon reading it. He sent Liu Kui 柳逵, Director of the Secretariat, to deliver an imperial edict censuring Dou Wei and the others, saying, 'In the late Han period, the realm was divided into three states, and the Eastern Wu regime was home to many eminent talents. That is why Emperor Wu of Jin once said, 'The Wu and Kuaiji commanderies in Jiangdong are like Runan and Yingchuan in Jiangxi—places where men of refinement gather, a rare sight in a thousand years.' At the end of the Yongjia era, noble families of the Central Plains crossed the river and settled in Jiangnan, turning it into the preeminent metropolis of the realm. Ever since the pacification of the Chen Dynasty, the majority of scholars well-versed in classical learning, refined Confucians, and literary talents have emerged from Jiangnan. Yet in your writing on their customs, you have described the people of Wu as eastern foreigners and accused them of violating propriety and virtue. How is this acceptable? Moreover, your book lacks proper structure and organization according to the conventions of historical composition. Each of you is hereby punished with a caning'" (Li 2008, 536).

This cultural policy backdrop gave rise to a new aesthetic perspective on Jiangnan. Unlike the nostalgic view held by southerners who moved northward (namely, southerners in the north missing the south), this was a perspective held by people originally from the north who came to cherish Jiangnan due to their admiration for its culture. This emotional attachment did not stem from homesickness but was instead guided by the cultural trend of the shared cultural concept of Jiangnan. Representative figures of this sentiment include Emperor Yang of Sui and Lu Sidao. Emperor Yang's "A Moon and Flower Night of the Spring River" 春江花月夜 was a tribute to the style of Jiangnan *yuefu* poetry: "In the twilight, the river's surface is calm and unbroken, And spring blossoms are blooming luxuriantly on the trees. The flowing river seems to carry the moon along with it, While the rising tide surges forward with the stars" 暮江平不动，春花满正开。流波将月去，潮水带星来. Another of his works, "A Poem by the River in Summer" 夏日临江诗, vividly depicts the scenery of the Yangtze River: "By the summer pool, slender bamboo casts its shade, And tall maple trees grow along the high banks. As the sun sets, the broad river becomes especially serene. With the clouds dispersed, the distant mountains appear vast and desolate. Egrets fly beyond the woods, and their white forms are clearly visible. Lotus flowers bloom upon the water, a sea of vibrant red. I gaze upon it all in leisurely delight, my heart full of carefree joy, Yet a sense of melancholy lingers still" 夏潭荫修竹，高岸坐长枫。日落沧江静，云散远山空。鹭飞林外白，莲开水上红。逍遥有余兴，怅望情不终. In his "Song of Jiangdu Palace" 江都宫乐歌, he wrote, "In this once-flourishing land of Yangzhou, one finds reason to pause and linger. The palace's terraces and pavilions tower brightly, perfectly suited for carefree enjoyment. In the wind pavilion, fragrant grasses and lush trees herald the arrival of early summer, And the furrowed fields of grain bid farewell to the waning autumn" 扬州旧处可淹留，台榭高明复好游。风亭芳树迎早夏，长皋麦陇送余秋.

Lu Sidao's "Lotus-Picking Song" closely echoes the style of *yuefu* poetry popular in the Southern Dynasties: "By the winding riverbanks, I played with graceful maidens, And their slender forms were hard to control. Holding lotus leaves in hand, they delighted in the round river waters. Breaking off lotus roots, they toyed with the long lotus filaments. Their ornaments fluttered in the wind, their skirts stirred up a breeze, And their makeup was dampened by sweat. Pity that the lotus-picking song could not be sung to its fullest—It would have to wait until they returned at dusk" 曲浦戏妖姬，轻盈不自持。擎荷爱圆水，折藕弄长丝。佩动裙风入，妆销粉汗滋。菱歌惜不唱，须待暝归时. In his "Rowing Song" 棹歌行, he vividly portrayed the beauty and affection of the Jiangnan rivermaidens: "In autumn, the river water is crystal clear, And the beauties of Yue are stunning in appearance. Together, they ride a small boat to pick lotus roots, Most enchanting of all. Fallen petals float away with the current, carrying off their precious ornaments. The gentle breeze stirs their fragrant sashes. Their double-tied belts are wetted by the water, And the magnolia oars move lightly through the stream. Their whispered words are carried by the wind, Their distant affection conveyed on the rippling waves. Who could tether a brocade cable, So they might vanish at dusk beside the long, stretching sandbank?" 秋江见底清，越女复倾城。方舟共采摘，最得可怜名。落花流宝珥，微吹动香缨。带垂连理湿，棹举木兰轻。顺风传细语，因波寄远情。谁能结锦缆，薄暮隐长汀?

In summary, since the migration of the Jin people to the south, the "shared cultural concept

of Jiangnan" and "Jiangnan imagery" have been mutually dependent and complementary. The "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" constitutes a cultural psyche, while "Jiangnan imagery" serves as an artistic form of expression. The two promote and reinforce each other. On the one hand, the early dissemination of "Jiangnan imagery" to some extent facilitated the establishment and realization of the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan." On the other hand, and this is a point especially emphasized in this study, the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" holds a highly significant external role in the historical formation of Jiangnan imagery. Initially, the literati's understanding of Jiangnan's landscapes and local features was largely utilitarian. Subsequently, it shifted primarily toward aesthetic appreciation. After the Jin migration southward, the literati not only continued to admire Jiangnan's natural scenery but also increasingly revered the demeanor of its eminent scholars, as well as its cultural relics and institutional systems—this represents the profound assimilative power of the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan." Precisely because the "shared cultural concept of Jiangnan" provided strong support at the level of cultural concepts and important guarantees at the institutional level, the previously literary-specific "Jiangnan imagery" was ultimately supplanted by the collective consciousness of an era, allowing "Jiangnan" as a specific conceptual signifier to be constructed and solidified.

6 Conclusion

The historical formation of the Jiangnan imagery during the Six Dynasties period holds profound significance. Regarding Jiangnan culture, it played a foundational role in the historical evolution of Jiangnan culture and even enabled the later establishment of Jiangnan culture as a distinct system. The admiration and appreciation of Jiangnan by the literati of the Six Dynasties, along with the naturally melodious and regionally distinctive style of Jiangnan folk songs, were deeply integrated into the creative consciousness of these literati. The concept of Jiangnan, imbued with rich regional aesthetic characteristics, became a recurring subject repeatedly expressed and written about by later literati, ultimately becoming the most regionally distinctive aesthetic space within Chinese literature and culture. All of this was the result achieved through the continuous artistic construction by the literati of the Six Dynasties.

In the history of Chinese poetry, the formation of the Jiangnan imagery is equally significant and far-reaching in its influence. *Collection of Poems and Talks of Poets* 诗人玉屑 quotes from "Chengzhai's Discussion on Creation of Writings" 诚斋论造语法 as follows: "Jiangbei and Jiangnan are imagery frequently used by poets." In fact, the imagery most commonly employed by poets is solely "Jiangnan." During the Six Dynasties period, the Jiangnan imagery was transformed into poetic language, becoming the source for numerous poetic images in later poetry, such as Jiangnan, lotus picking, beauties, Wujiang River, Yue beauties, and Yangzhou, all of which evolved into poetic expressions most characteristic of Jiangnan. The poetry of the Six Dynasties not only constructed a vast array of Jiangnan imagery but also established its aesthetic style, which directly influenced Tang poetry. Chapter 6 of *Thickets of Criticism* 诗薮 in inner compilation records: "The five-character quatrains [*jueju* 绝句] of the Tang Dynasty, in the early and flourishing Tang periods, were

mostly composed in the style of *yuefu* poetry. However, early Tang five-character quatrains were merely echoes of the Chen and Sui periods. It was only after the Kaiyuan era that the style of poetry became extraordinary and refined, exemplified by Cui Guofu's 崔国辅 "Flowing Water Tune" 流水曲 and "Lotus-Picking Tune" 采莲曲, Chu Guangxi's 储光羲 "Jiangnan Tune" 江南曲, Wang Wei's 王维 "Ban Jieyu" 班婕妤, Cui Hao's 崔颢 "Song of Changgan" 长干行, Liu Fangping's 刘方平 "Lotus Picking" 采莲, Han Hong's 韩翃 "Song of the Han Palace" 汉宫曲, Li Duan's 李端 "Worshiping the New Moon" 拜新月 and "Listening to the Zither Tune" 闻筝曲, Zhang Zhongsu's 张仲素 "Spring Boudoir Tune" 春闺曲 … These poems deeply capture the essence of Six Dynasties poetic imagery. The best among them can rival the poetry of the Jin and Song periods, and even the more average works retain the style of the Qi and Liang periods. Most of the outstanding Tang five-character quatrains belong to this category." Later poets largely modeled their creations on Tang poetry, and since Tang poetry extensively and profoundly imitated and inherited Six Dynasties poetry, the influence of Six Dynasties poetry on subsequent poetic creation is thus extremely profound.

Tracing back to its origins, it was precisely during the Six Dynasties period that the development of the "Jiangnan imagery'" was successfully integrated into the trajectory of cultural inheritance. From then on, the "Jiangnan imagery" continued to grow and strengthen within the cultural system, gaining a broader and deeper space for development as well as a lasting vitality that ensured its enduring presence. Ultimately, it accomplished a historically significant poetic construction of Jiangnan culture. The poetic aesthetic standards embodied in the gradually maturing Jiangnan imagery entirely transcend limitations of time and space, earning recognition and admiration from literati across different eras. Western humanistic geography holds that "people's attachment to a place is essentially an attachment to the self; when a place is imbued with human emotions and values, people become 'one' with that place. This 'oneness' is not a fusion with the natural attributes, but a fusion with human nature" (Tang 2002, 62). The Jiangnan imagery reveals an aesthetic characteristic originally concealed and unclear deep within the hearts of Chinese literati, and it vividly expresses and amplifies this trait to such an extent that later generations regard it as one of the important artistic standards of classical Chinese poetry.

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