



The Emergence and Development of "Shihua" from the Perspective of Bibliographies

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Abstract. Shihua (poetry talks), categorized into two major schools: the Ouyang School, centered around Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua*, primarily focusing on poetry and related events; and the Zhong School, centered around Zhong Rong's *Shipin*, mainly discussing poetry and rhetoric. The initial emergence of Shihua is closely related to historical records and notes in terms of content, form, and creative mentality. Since historical records and notes belong to the genre of note-taking literature, they have been consistently included in the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* of bibliographies. The first work to categorize "Shihua" was the *Songshi-Yiwenzhi*, which, according to the form and content of Shihua, respectively listed them under the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* and *Jibu-Wenshilei*. This categorization implies that during the Song and Yuan dynasties, people's understanding of Shihua was not clear enough, and the classification was not rigorous enough, leading to the omission of "one type of work listed under two categories". After the Southern Song Dynasty, the development of Shihua gradually leaned towards the Zhong School, with the vast majority focusing primarily on poetic analysis and rhetoric, a trend even more pronounced in the Ming and Qing dynasties. By then, it was already clear to people that Shihua was primarily a poetic critique work based on poetic theory, hence its classification in bibliographies under the *Jibu-Wenshilei* or *Jibu-Shiweninglei*.

Keywords: Shihua; Poetry talks; Bibliography; Catalog; Poetry and related events; Poetry and Rhetoric.

1 Introduction

Since the Song Dynasty when Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) pioneered the format of "Shihua" (poetry talks), it has become an important literary genre in China for commenting on poetry, analyzing poetic techniques, or recording the deeds of poets. Currently, most scholarly research on Shihua focuses on discussions of poetics and the study of Shihua texts. For example:

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Wong Wai-leung's *Chinese Impressionistic Criticism: A Study of the Poetry-Talk (Shih-hua, Tz'u-hua) Tradition* explores the Chinese Shihua (and tz'uhua) tradition, focusing on its impressionistic style of criticism. By analyzing the form and content of Shihua, particularly its critical language and style, Wong reveals the non-systematic nature of Chinese literary criticism and compares it to Western impressionistic criticism, highlighting Shihua's significance in the history of Chinese literary criticism [1].

Chen Huiling, Marino E., and Syed Mohammed S. F.'s *Evolution of Poetic Composition Theories from Shilin Shihua to Chengzhai Shihua* discusses the development and inheritance of poetic theories from *Shilin Shihua* to *Chengzhai Shihua* [2].

Hsiang-ling Lin's *Lyricism, the Veneration of Feeling, and Narrative Techniques in the Poetry Talks of the Southern Society* analyzes the vast number of shihua written by members of the Southern Society, identifying two prominent trends in their literary discussions: the veneration of emotion and narrative strategies typical of female poetry [3].

This paper, however, takes a bibliographic approach to explore the reasons behind the emergence of Shihua and its development.

From our current perspective, Shihua should undoubtedly be categorized under the *Jibu-Wenshilei* or *Jibu-Shiwenpinglei* in bibliographies. However, the initial categorization of Shihua in the *Songshi-Yiwenzhi* (hereinafter referred to as the *Song Zhi*) recorded Shihua separately under the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* and *Jibu-Wenshilei*. This not only indicates that people's understanding of Shihua was not clear enough and the classification was not rigorous enough at that time but also indirectly suggests a certain association between Shihua and Xiaoshuo (fictions). One of the important functions of bibliography is to "distinguish academic achievements and trace their origins." We can understand the process of the emergence and evolution of Shihua, as well as the understanding of Shihua by the Song people at that time, through the recording and classification of Shihua in bibliographies. Although there were private bibliographies such as Chao Gongwu's *Junzhai Dushu Zhi*, Chen Zhensun's *Zhizhai Shulu Jieti*, and You Mao's *Suichutang Shumu*, during the Song Dynasty, we focus solely on historical records as represented by the *Song Zhi* since it embodies the official and scholarly mainstream perspectives of the time.

2 The Listing of *Xiaoshuojialei* in the *Hanshu-Yiwenzhi*

Shihua is listed under the *Jibu-Wenshilei* or *Jibu-Shiwenpinglei* in bibliographies because its content nature belongs to works of poetic theory. However, Shihua was also recorded under the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* in the earliest times. Therefore, it is necessary to first discuss briefly the nature of books recorded under the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* to further understand why Shihua was initially listed under this category. To trace the origins, we must start with the earliest bibliography—the *Hanshu-Yiwenzhi* (hereinafter referred to as the *Han Zhi*).

The term "Xiaoshuo" initially surfaced in the *Zhuangzi-Waiwu*: "Seeking lofty reputation by xiaoshuo (embellishing inconsequential remarks) is also far removed from

great Dao (the ultimate truth)" [4] (p. 925). This suggests that Daoist teachings are considered the great Dao, whereas all other teachings beyond Daoism are labeled as "Xiaoshuo". It denotes a relative concept involving value judgment. "Xiao" carries a sense of disdain and depreciation, while "shuo" refers to the teachings of the various schools of thought, not specifically referring to any one school but rather a general term.

Recorded in Ban Gu's *Han Zhi-Zhuzilue*, fifteen works are classified under the category of Xiaoshuo, including *Yiyinshuo*, *Qingshizi*, *Daizhaochen Raoxinshu*, *Daizhaochen Ancheng Weiyangshu*, and *Yuchu Zhoushuo*. An annotation under *Yuchu Zhoushuo* notes, "Yuchu was from Henan and served as a Taoist attendant to Emperor Wu of Han, known as the Huang Che Envoy" [5] (p. 1745). Referring to Zhang Heng's *Xijing Fu* and Xue Zong's annotations, it is evident that the Han people's so-called Xiaoshuo were peculiar books and secret texts used by Taoists to participate in politics and seek imperial favor, serving as materials for the emperor's inquiries. Its content mainly consisted of medical witchcraft, divination techniques, but also included knowledge in many fields such as astronomy, geography, religion, flora, and fauna, making it a compendium of knowledge [6] (pp. 102-128). However, due to its vastness, it lacked depth. Although its theoretical discussions often veered towards being scattered, absurd, shallow, and lacking in moral principles, there were still commendable aspects, as stated in the *Han Zhi*, "Although it is a minor way, there must be something worth seeing" [5] (p. 1745). In terms of form, its length was not long, using short stories rich in plot and imagery to expound its views, which was its characteristic.

The teachings of various schools of thought are "the branches and descendants of the Six Classics" [5] (p. 1746) and also have ideological and political value. Although they belong to works of philosophical thinking and discourse, they are overly absurd and shallow, unable to compare with the Confucian, Daoist, Mohist, and Legalist schools, and are difficult to ascend to the grand stage. Therefore, "Among the ten schools of thought, only nine of them are worthy of attention" [5] (p. 1746). Hence, they are called "Xiaoshuo". "Xiao" carries a sense of disdain and triviality, while "Shuo" indicates the teachings and literary style. Particularly, the concise form of Xiaoshuo had a significant influence on the later emergence of Shihua.

3 The Listing of *Xiaoshuojialei* in the *Suishu-Jingjizhi*

The *Suishu-Jingjizhi* (hereinafter referred to as the *Sui Zhi*) by Wei Zheng of the Tang Dynasty was the first formal book in China to categorize works into the four divisions of Jing (classics), Shi (history), Zi (philosophy), and Ji (literature). Transitioning from the six-fold classification system of the *Han Zhi* to the four-fold classification system of the *Sui Zhi*, it was inevitable that certain books initially classified under technical categories like the *Bingshu lüe* (Military treatises), *Shushu lüe* (Astronomical calculation and divination), and *Fangji lüe* (Medical texts), would be reclassified into the philosophy divisions that deal with ideological and philosophical matters, including the *Xiaoshuolei* (fiction category).

The *Sui Zhi* primarily reflects the records and development of books from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties periods. Its classification of "Xiaoshuo" plays a significant role

in explaining why later works like "Shihua" were categorized under this genre. The *Xiaoshuolei* in the *Sui Zhi* lists twenty-five works, including: *Yandanzi* (1 scroll), *Guozi* (3 scrolls), *Zaduiyu* (3 scrolls), *Suoyu* (1 scroll), *Xiaolin* (3 scrolls), *Shishuo* (8 scrolls), *Xiaoshuo* (10 scrolls), *Gujin Yishu* (20 scrolls), *Zashuchao* (13 scrolls), *Zuoyoufa* (1 scroll), and *Lushi Qiqitu* (1 scroll), totaling 155 scrolls ^[7] (pp. 1011-1012). (The original total of the twenty-five works was 140 scrolls. However, with the inclusion of additional texts such as *Qingshizi* under *Yandanzi*, as well as works like *Sushuo*, annotated by Liu Xiaobiao, the final count reaches 155 scrolls.)

From the listing in the *Sui Zhi-Zibu-Xiaoshuolei*, we can see that, apart from several works such as *Yandanzi*, attributed to Prince Dan of Yan, *Shishuo* by Liu Yiqing, *Guozi* by Guo Chengzhi, *Xiaolin* by Handan Chun, and *Xiaoshuo* by Yin Yun—texts we now consider as examples of *Xiaoshuo*—other strange tales, such as *Lieyizhuan*, *Bowuzhi*, *Soushenji*, and *Shiyiji*, as mentioned by Lu Xun, were not included in the *Xiaoshuolei*. Instead, books like *Zayu*, *Zaduiyu*, *Gujin Yishu*, *Zashuchao*, *Zuoyoufa*, and *Lushi Qiqitu* were included. Since these works lost and cannot be directly judged based on their content whether they belong to the genre of *Xiaoshuo*, inference can only be made from other perspectives.

The *Sui Zhi* also lists *Zayu* as three scrolls and *Zashuchao* as forty-four scrolls in the *Zibu-Zajialei*, the same names but with different scroll numbers as in the *Zibu-Xiaoshuolei*. This situation may have three possibilities: first, different books with the same title; second, they were listed separately due to "different genre"; third, the *Sui Zhi* itself was not careful in classification and listed the same book with different scroll numbers in two categories. The third possibility is considered the most likely.

The *Sui Zhi* listed these two books separately under the *Zajialei* and *Xiaoshuolei*. Although it was a mistake caused by the inconsistency of its classification system, it provides us with a clue to explore their relationship. Liu Hsuehlun's analysis of the listing of the *Zajialei* in the *Sui Zhi* includes works on ideological philosophy, complex technical matters, classified books, biographies of Buddhist monks, and Buddhist bibliographies. They all share the common characteristic of "Za" (being miscellaneous). The significance of the *Sui Zhi-Zajialei* is no longer purely philosophical works as in the *Han Zhi*, but rather carries the meaning of "miscellaneous notes" or "miscellaneous records" ^[8] (pp. 35-36). Based on this inference, although *Zayu* and *Zashuchao* are lost, judging from their titles, they are likely similar to miscellaneous notes, and perhaps belong to the category of "collective notes and miscellaneous records" (cong chao zhong shu) like Ma Zong's *Yilin* and Gao Sisun's *Zilue*. The book titled *Zaduiyu* which also contains the character "Za" should also belong to a similar category of works.

As for *Gujin Yishu*, *Zuoyoufa*, and *Lushi Qiqitu*, it is particularly difficult to determine their nature. It is believed that judging from their titles, they were likely technical works originally classified under *Shushu lue* or *Fangji lue* for some unknown reason and were later included in the *Xiaoshuolei*.

Whether they are classified books or collective records, they share a common characteristic: they are all in a short format, similar to a collection of notes. Whether it is Liu Yiqing's Zhiren xiaoshuo (anecdotal novels) in *Shishuo* or Gan Bao's Zhiguai xiaoshuo (tales of the strange) in *Soushenji*, they can all be collectively referred to as "biji xiaoshuo (notebook fictions)" because they are written in a note-taking format.

They can also be called ancient novels because they are all created in classical Chinese. Although the *Sui Zhi* still classified Xiaoshuo under the *Zibu*, its meaning is completely different from the *Han Zhi*. It is no longer works of ideological and philosophical nature but rather any work in the format of note-taking, such as historical notes, can be listed under the Xiaoshujialei, leading to confusion in classification.

4 The Emergence and Evolution of "Shihua" - Starting from the *Songshi-Yiwenzhi*

In later bibliographies, the method of cataloging almost invariably follows the approach set by the *Sui Zhi*, placing works in "note-taking format" under the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei*. However, the *Song Zhi* diverges by recording volumes such as Sima Guang's *Xu Shihua*, Liu Ban's *Shihua* (Liu Ban's *Shihua* is the *Zhongshan Shihua*, now cataloged according to the *Song Zhi*), Wei Tai's *Yinju Shihua*, and Zhou Zizhi's *Zhupo Shihua* under the *Jibu-Wenshilei* ^[9] (pp. 5408-5411). Additionally, it considers anonymous works like *Dayin Jushi Shihua*, Zeng Jili's *Tingzhai Shihua*, Su Shi's *Dongpo Shihua*, Ye Kai's *Nangong Shihua*, Chen Shidao's *Houshan Shihua*, Lu You's *Shanyin Shihua*, and the anonymous *Chuihong Shihua* as "note-taking format" works and catalogs them in the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* ^[9] (pp. 5219-5231).

The format of Shihua began with Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua*. Many subsequent Shihua works followed this precedent. Cai Zhenchu's *History of Chinese Shihua* divides Shihua into two major schools: the "Ouyang School" and the "Zhong School" ^[10] (pp. 17-19). Since *Liuyi Shihua* is the origin of all Shihua, understanding its format and narrative content greatly aids in grasping the evolution and development of the entire genre. We briefly present two excerpts from *Liuyi Shihu* as follows:

During Emperor Renzong's reign, several high-ranking officials were known for their poetry. They often admired "Bai Letian's style," favoring simplicity in their language. A couplet from that period stated: "With a stipend, one enriches one's wife (referring to one's family), yet fails to extend the same benevolence to one's subordinates or the general populace." In response, a witty observer remarked: "Yesterday, I saw a carriage heavily laden with goods, pulled by a weak and struggling ox. Could that ox be pulling your 'enriched wife'?" Upon hearing this, those present laughed heartily and shared it as a light-hearted jest" ^[11] (p. 2).

Since the imperial civil examination emphasized prose-poetry for candidate selection, the jinshi examinations no longer placed significant emphasis on poetry, resulting in a lack of outstanding works. However, during the provincial exams of the second year of the Tian Sheng era, the *Caihou Poem* by Song Qi, a minister of the Ministry of Rites, garnered widespread acclaim. His lines, "Colors reflect in clouds of pestles, sounds meet the feathered moon slow," were particularly celebrated in the capital, leading to examinees referring to him as "Song Caihou" at that time ^[11] (pp. 28-29).

From the examples listed above, it can be seen that Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua* adopts the "note-taking format" to document matters related to poetry in concise entries. This demonstrates that works cataloged under the Xiaoshuojialei share a common feature of short "note-taking format", whether they are biji xiaoshuo, historical notes, or shihua.

If we further explore why "Shihua" chose the note-taking format as its literary style and its origins, we can better understand its close relationship with other works in note-taking format. Generally, Shihua can be divided into two categories: one focuses on "discussing poetry and related events", which primarily narrates stories related to poetry and originated from the Tang dynasty with Meng Qi's *Benshi Poetry*. The other category focuses on "discussing poetry and rhetoric," emphasizing poetry critique and originating from the Liang dynasty with Zhong Rong's *Shi Pin*.

Luo Genzhe, in *A History of Literary Criticism in the Late Tang and Five Dynasties*, states: "The *Benshi Poetry* is the precursor to Shihua, and its origin is related to biji xiaoshuo. During the Tang Dynasty, there was a large number of biji xiaoshuo recording various anecdotes, naturally including those about poets. Examples include Fan Shu's *Yunxi Youyi* and Wang Baoding's *Zhiyan*, which particularly focus on literati and poets. The transition from such notes to purely recording poets' anecdotes led to the *Benshi Poetry*. Knowing that Shihua originated from *Benshi Poetry*, and *Benshi Poetry* from biji xiaoshuo, it is not surprising that Shihua focuses on exploring the background of poems" [12] (p. 126). Cai Zhanchuh, in *The History of Chinese Shihua*, states: "*Benshi Poetry* originated from biji xiaoshuo, influencing the content and form of Shihua. Six Dynasties biji xiaoshuo recorded anecdotes about famous people and artistic circles, focusing on literati and poets. When these notes transitioned to purely recording poets' anecdotes, they became *Benshi Poetry*. The influence of *Benshi Poetry* on Shihua lies in its focus on exploring the background of poems and its structure of connecting unrelated poetic critiques into a single piece" [10] (p. 13).

I believe that although Meng Qi's *Benshi Poetry* can be traced back to the biji xiaoshuo of the Six Dynasties period, its creation was more significantly influenced by other contemporary works in the note-taking format. Luo's examples are all Tang Dynasty biji xiaoshuo recording anecdotes. To further illustrate, consider the following examples: *Suitang Jiahua* by Liu Shu of the Tang Dynasty: "Shen Quanqi was renowned for his poetic talent. The Duke of Yan, Zhang Yue, once said, 'In comparison to the poetry of Brother Shen, Dongfang Qiu's poetry should still be considered the best'" [13] (p. 39). *Chaoye Qianzai* by Zhang Zhuo of the Tang Dynasty: "Ming Hall registrar Luo Binwang's *Dijing Pian* says, 'The sudden gale brings forth wings, soon lost to the sands.' Later, Binwang raised an army in Yangzhou and was defeated, casting himself into the river—an omen" [14] (p. 11).

Datang Xinyu by Liu Su of the Tang Dynasty: "Emperor Taizong told his ministers, 'I composed an erotic poem.' Yu Shinan admonished, 'Though your writing is excellent, its form is not elegant. What the ruler likes, the subjects will follow. If this style spreads, it may become popular. Hereafter, please allow me to disobey your orders' Taizong said, 'Your sincerity is commendable, and I appreciate it. If all ministers were like Shinan, the empire would have no worries.' He then rewarded him with fifty bolts of silk. Earlier, Emperor Jianwen of Liang, as crown prince, favored composing erotic poems, which became popular in the Liang Kingdom and became a custom, known as 'Palace Style.' Later, regretting it, he ordered Xu Ling to compile *Yutai Ji* to correct the trend. The admonishment by Shinan somewhat followed this precedent" [15] (p. 41).

Liu Xu's *Suitang Jiahua*, Zhang Zhuo's *Chaoye Qianzai*, and Liu Su's *Datang Xinyu* are examples of what Luo Ganze refers to as "biji xiaoshuo (notebook fictions)." However, I believe that, from a modern perspective, these works should be termed "historical notes" because they emphasize the authenticity of stories rather than their fictional nature, as in biji xiaoshuo.

They record various matters, including poetry-related stories, and although they were cataloged similarly to biji xiaoshuo in the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei*, they are different from the works that "recorded anecdotes about famous people and artistic circles, focusing on literati and poets". Furthermore, these works are contemporary to the creation of *Benshi Poetry*. I believe that although *Benshi Poetry* can be traced back to the anecdotal novels of the Han, Wei and Six Dynasties, these historical notes containing poetic stories from the Tang Dynasty had a greater impact on Meng Qi's creation of *Benshi Poetry*. Since *Liuyi Shihua* is based on *Benshi Poetry*, and *Benshi Poetry* derived from "historical notes," there is a clear connection between *Liuyi Shihua* and historical notes, influenced by them.

In terms of the creative mindset, Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua* notes, "The scholar retreated to Ruyin (now Fuyang City) and compiled this collection for leisurely conversations." indicating that the book was compiled during moments of leisure, with a relaxed and free-spirited attitude. This approach is quite similar to the process of compiling historical notes, which lack strict content guidelines and can include a wide range of topics recorded casually and with a high degree of privacy. This often results in a casual, less rigorous, and even playful attitude during the recording process. Therefore, we can say that the creation of Shihua also inherited this relaxed mindset from historical notes.

It is evident that Shihua focusing on "poems and related events" was primarily inspired by historical notes, converting all content into pure records of poets' anecdotes. The format also inherited the note style. Both in terms of creative mindset and form, Shihua and historical notes were written in a similarly relaxed and free manner. For these reasons, categorizing Shihua as historical notes in the "Philosophers and Miscellaneous Works" section is justifiable. Essentially, Shihua focusing on "poems and related events" can be considered historical notes dedicated to poets' anecdotes.

However, why does the *Song Zhi* categorize Shihua under both *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei* and *Jibu-Wenshilei*. This can be explained by the evolution of "Shihua" from "poems and related events" to "poems and rhetoric." The Southern Song period marked this transition. The Northern Song mainly followed Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua*, focusing on "poems and related events." After the Southern Song poet Ye Mengde's *Shi Lin Shihua*, the focus shifted to "poems and rhetoric." Works from the Southern Song, such as Jiang Kui's *Baishi Daoren Shishuo*, Yan Yu's *Canglang Shihua*, Jin Dynasty's Wang Ruoxu's *Hunan Shihua*, and Ming Dynasty's Xu Zhenqing's *Tan Yi Lu* and Hu Yinglin's *Shi Sou*, emphasized poetic theory and criticism. By the Qing Dynasty, these works became more theoretical, systematic, and specialized, strongly adhering to the Zhong school ^{[10] (p. 18)}. Apart from the content differences, the creative mindset of the "poems and rhetoric" school shifted from casual essays to serious discussions on poetry. The only commonality between the two schools was the note-taking format.

The *Song Zhi* was compiled by Yuan scholars based on the four national histories compiled during the reigns of the first four Song emperors, including Lü Yijian's *Three Dynasties National History*, Wang Gui's *Two Dynasties National History*, and Li Tao and Hong Mai's *Four Dynasties National History*, and the *Song Zhongxing National History* sections on literary records. Although compiled by Yuan scholars, the *Song Zhi* inherited the Song Dynasty's bibliographic approach ^[9] (p. 5033).

Based on the format, *Song Zhi* could have categorized all Shihua under *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei*. However, it categorized Shihua into two categories. If the works from the Northern Song focusing on "poems and related events" were categorized under *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei*, and the works from the Southern Song focusing on "poems and rhetoric" were categorized under *Jibu-Wenshilei*, it would indicate that the Song scholars recognized the transition from "poems and related events" to "poems and rhetoric." However, the *Song Zhi* did not follow this categorization. For example, Sima Guang's *Xu Shihua* and Liu Ban's *Zhongshan Shihua*, clearly following Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua*, were categorized under *Jibu-Wenshilei*. The *Song Zhi* had many deficiencies, including improper categorization, likely because Yuan scholars compiled it entirely based on the Song Dynasty's literary records. This suggests that the understanding of Shihua by scholars during the Song-Yuan transition was not clear, and the categorization lacked rigorous standards, sometimes based on content nature, sometimes on format, resulting in "Shihua" being categorized into two sections.

By the time of the Southern Song Dynasty, Shihua predominantly consisted of works focusing on "poems and rhetoric," a trend that became even more pronounced in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Although belonging to the segmented literary records, both the *Yiwen Zhi* of the Ming Dynasty and the *Yiwen Zhi* of the Qing Dynasty separately categorized works on poetry theory and criticism, falling under the category of *Wenshilei* ^[16] (pp. 2499-2501) and *Shiweninglei* ^[17] (pp. 4415-4417).

Based on our current understanding of Shihua, works of this genre should be categorized under *Jibu-Wenshilei* or *Jibu-Shiweninglei*. If they were divided between *Shiweninglei* (including *Wenshilei* and *Xiaoshuojialei*), it would not only cause confusion but also make it difficult to discern the nature of Shihua works. For instance, Ji Yun compiled in *Siku Quanshu Zongmu*: "Liu Ban's *Zhongshan Shihua* and Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua*, also belong to the essay category" ^[18] (p. 5362). This indicates that although aware of the characteristics of "poems and related events" Shihua like *Liuyi Shihua* and *Zhongshan Shihua*, which also contain features of *Xiaoshuojialei*, they were still recognized primarily as works focusing on poetry criticism and were thus included in the *Jibu-Shiweninglei*.

One particular point warrants special attention: some titles may bear the name Shihua but may not solely consist of works on poetry. For example, Yang Zhongyi's *Xueqiao Shihua*, despite its title, actually comprises a compilation of historical anecdotes, academic origins, and literary accounts, extending beyond poetry criticism alone. It is not much different from general historical notes. The reason for naming it Shihua might be due to the deep-rooted connection between Shihua and historical notes, leading some historical notes to be named "Shihua," thus causing confusion between the two. This also implies that some people still fail to distinguish between Shihua and

historical notes. Therefore, one must be extremely cautious when using these terms to avoid mistaking historical notes for works of Shihua.

5 Conclusion

The genre of "Shihua" originated with Ouyang Xiu's *Liuyi Shihua*. Its emergence, whether in terms of content, form, or creative mindset, all evolved from historical records. However, it's important to understand that Shihua is not equivalent to historical records but belongs to the category of Shiwending (poetry and literature evaluation) works. The *Song Zhi* did not have a clear understanding of Shihua, and its classification was not rigorous enough, resulting in the listing of Shihua in both the *Jibu-Wenshilei* and the *Zibu-Xiaoshuojialei*. Understanding why the *Song Zhi* initially listed some Shihua under *Xiaoshuojialei* helps prevent confusion today when searching for works such as *Liuyi Shihua* and *Zhongshan Shihua*, which might be mistaken for novels.

After the Southern Song Dynasty, most Shihua focused on theoretical and critical discussions of poetry, and people gradually realized the need to classify Shihua under the *Jibu-Wenshilei* or *Jibu-Shiwendinglei*. This indicates that there was a clear awareness among people that Shihua is a type of "poetry criticism" work. However, some people still cannot differentiate between Shihua and historical records. Therefore, some historical records are titled Shihua, and extra caution should be exercised when using them to avoid mistaking such historical records as works of Shihua.

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