Stuttered Speech and Moral Intent: Disability and Elite Identity Construction in Early Imperial China

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When examining the history of early imperial China one is struck by the number of important personages, from Han Feizi 韓非子 (ca. 280–ca. 233 B.C.E.) and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.–18 C.E.) to Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324) and Wang Wei 王微 (415–453), who are described in biographical records as *kouji* 口吃 (disfluent). This paper contextualizes these descriptions by examining both the hermeneutical tradition regarding the language used to describe this condition and its evolving understanding in the traditional Chinese medical records. These two broad bodies of social understanding provide a compelling tool for interpreting and contextualizing the many descriptions of individuals in the early imperial biographical tradition. It becomes clear when taken in this larger context and as a collective that this condition is not just a random oddity to be included in a biography as merely an outlying feature of an individual, but that disfluency was understood in the much more highly charged realm of language production and moral practice. It spoke to the long-standing tension over rhetorical skill versus moral intent, form versus content. Finally, what also emerges from the collective is a clearer understanding of the range of strategies that individuals with this disability found to navigate the specific social context of early imperial elite culture. It is out of these dual views, collective-moral and individual-functional, that this study provides insights into the lives of these highly influential individuals and adds layers to our understanding of the social and medical context for individuals with disabilities in early imperial China.

君子欲訥於言而敏於行 。
A noble man desires to be clumsy in speaking and fleet in actions.[1]

When examining the history of early imperial China one is struck by the number of important personages, from Han Feizi 韓非子 (ca. 280 – ca. 233 B.C.E.) to Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), who are described in biographical records as *kouji* 口吃 or *kouchi* in modern pronunciation, that is to say, disfluent in speech.[2] This condition is often generalized as "stuttering" in English translations. While illness and disability were regular features of premodern China, as they are in our own society, this particular disability seems to have had a deeper importance and perhaps prevalence than other conditions. As this study will demonstrate, a strong link was made between disfluency and the perceived moral potency of those suffering from it. Indeed, as the quote from the *Lun yu* above reflects, there had long been a tension in the Chinese tradition between smooth talkers and an analogical counter-preference given

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1. *Lun yu ji shi* 論語集釋, in *Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 [*XBZZJC*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 8.278–79.

2. I have included Han Feizi in this article, although he predates the Han, because the main record of his life is found in the *Shi ji* 史記, which in turn represents the interpretation of the Han.

to clumsy or disfluent speech. By extension, the disfluency, at least of those whose lives people the dynastic histories of early imperial China, was thought to be linked to their inner virtues and sentiments. In addition to biographical sources, the link between this condition and the sentiments stirred by moral righteousness is echoed in medical sources of the early imperial period. The medical texts not only help to elucidate the assumptions behind the biographical sources, they also provide us with details about how the causes and mechanics of the condition were understood at the time. Despite positing a link between disfluency and highly prized character attributes, these same sources reveal the real struggles faced by early Chinese elites with this condition. In addition to exploring how the biographical and medical sources represented the early Chinese understanding of disfluency, these sources provide rich insight into how those with this condition found a range of strategies to navigate the highly competitive elite spaces of the imperial court. In addition to individual experiences a number of patterns emerge from the biographies of these men. First, there is a strong distinction made between their success as orators in contrast to written composition. Second, it is clear that in early imperial China the central modern medical observation on disfluency, i.e., that this condition is variable, also holds true. In particular, many people suffering from this condition can sing and recite without any sign of disfluency, but find extemporaneous oral argumentation very challenging. In a social context where oral performance—both extemporaneous and recitation—was central to success for elite men, this condition was considered a formative piece of information in how these men were memorialized, understood, and evaluated.

Remarkably, there is a long and varied history of interest in disfluency in the West, including such broadly discussed figures as Moses and the Greek orator Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.E.).[3] These are accompanied by a range of attempts to understand why this condition occurs in the first place. From Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) to Francis Bacon (1561–1626) there was general agreement that the tongue was the place and cause of disfluency.[4] Following this observation there was a range of cures proposed, from Demosthenes placing pebbles in his mouth to Bacon's use of wine to warm the tongue.[5] The Western tradition resonates with some aspects of the Chinese tradition, particularly the focus on the tongue as the organ of disfluency, the fluidity of terminology, as well as a distinct focus on the global state of the body and its relationship to the symptoms. Furthermore, much as in the Chinese tradition, those with this condition where highly successful in prepared or recited speech rather than extemporaneous speech. The latter of these parallels is worth exploring briefly. As noted above, Demosthenes was known for his discussion of how he treated his disfluent speech, but in addition to this his historical biography lingers on how he navigated the demands of public oratory in Athens:

> Demosthenes was rarely heard to speak on the spur of the moment, but though the people often called upon him by name as he sat in the assembly, he would not come forward unless he had given thought to the question and was prepared to speak upon it.[6]

3. Marc Shell, "Moses' Tongue," *Common Knowledge* 12.1 (2006): 150–76; Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, tr. Bernadotte Perrin (London: W. Heinemann, 1959), 6.4, 8.3, 11.1–2.

4. James Hunt, *Stammering and Stuttering: Their Nature and Treatment* (New York: Hafner, 1967), 58–62; Sibylle Brosch and Wolfgang Pirsig, "Stuttering in History and Culture," *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology* 59 (2001): 82–83.

5. *Plutarch's Lives*, 11.1–2; Francis Bacon, "Sylva Sylvarum; or A Natural History in Ten Centuries," in *The Works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, and Lord High Chancellor of England in Ten Volumes* (London: J. Johnson, 1803), 376.386; Ynez Violé O'Neill, *Speech and Speech Disorders in Western Thought before 1600* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1980); Jeffrey L. Wollock, *The Noblest Animate Motion: Speech, Physiology and Medicine in Pre-Cartesian Thought* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins BV, 1997).

6. *Plutarch's Lives*, 8.2–3.

Here the tension being highlighted is between recitation and extemporaneous speech. In ancient Greece, just as in early imperial China, elites were expected to demonstrate their character through their speaking abilities. The Chinese men we will examine in this paper, just like Demosthenes in Greece, confronted a range of social expectation that they had to find strategies around. In the case of Demosthenes, his restrained and selective engagement in oratory was seen as almost unfair. Here a clear distinction with the Chinese tradition emerges. Of course these are very different social contexts: while Demosthenes was circulating in the Athenian assembly, the figures we shall examine by and large navigated the Chinese imperial court. The Chinese court and elite society in general valued restraint and thoughtful responses, which was amplified by the context of the power of the imperial institutions over the individual. It is this context that we will examine via the lives of those specifically labeled as disfluent.[7]

This study will begin with an examination of the language of disfluency paired with textual examples. Next we will explore the arc of traditional Chinese medical observations on this condition. Finally, we will conclude with a detailed analysis of the biographies of the figures who were reported to have suffered from disfluency.

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As with so much in early language there is a set of related terms that are linked in the hermeneutic tradition: *kouji*, *kouqi* 口喫, *jian* 謇, *jianji* <言 +蹇><心+亟>, *jian* <言 +謇>, *ji* 極, *se* 澀, *laoji* 老吃, *ji* <乞+欠>, *ne* 訥. Imbedded in the hermeneutic history surrounding these terms are a number of clues as to how early Chinese understood the condition itself. As one looks closely at these graphs and the words they write it is clear that they represent a range of conditions. At times there seems to be an attempt to make distinctions while at other times there is an attempt to make associations—the latter being a natural result of hermeneutics, while the former is the result of a specific situation being described in a primary text. *Kouji* and related terms cover the whole range of disfluency from occasional difficulties due to being nervous and serious stuttering to such behaviors as being quiet and taciturn.

Within the description/definition of these terms, at times this condition is described as "conduct" *wei ren* 為人 while at other times as an "appearance" *mao* 貌—one pointing to a moral underpinning in the interpretation of the condition and the other pointing to an underlying physiological mechanism. Overwhelmingly, there is not a hard and fast line between these two modes. These are seen as deeply related or relatable manifestations; in fact very often the whole point of providing such information is to try to relate the natural condition to intention, appearance, and action. That the Chinese tradition attempts to correlate these layers is one striking distinction between early imperial China and much of the Western tradition.

The first and most common word is *ji* 吃; it is the word generally used to define the many other terms used to describe disfluency of speech. The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 defines it as "*ji* means to speak with difficulty" 吃言蹇難也.[8] There are a number of homophonous or near-homophonous words associated with this word, such as *ji* <乞+欠> and *ji* 喫.[9] As is seen in the *Shuowen jiezi* entry, *jian* 蹇 is commonly associated with this condition. It is

7. Both "disfluency" and "dysfluency" are found in the modern English-language literature on this condition. The distinction between these terms among modern researchers is a matter of some debate, with "disfluency" becoming increasingly standard, at least in the United States. Kenneth J. Logan, *Fluency Disorders* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2014), 12.

8. Ding Fubao 丁福保, *Shuowen jiezi gulin* 詁林 [*SWJZGL*] (Taibei: Dingwen shuju, 1977), 2.1229.0887.

9. *SWJZGL*, 7.800–801.5511. *Ji* 喫 is regularly used as a variant of *ji* 吃.

defined in the *Shuowen jiezi* as "*jian* means lame" 蹇 跛也.[10] The *Shi ming* 釋名 states, "*Jian* means to be lame; it is an illness that prevents someone from working or performing duties" 蹇，跛蹇也，病不能執事役也.[11]

The binomes *jian ji* 蹇吃 and *jian yan* 蹇言 continue the usage of being "lame in speech," which eventually becomes more commonly distinguished with the graphs *jian* 謇 or <言 +蹇 >. It is also worth noting that the reduplications of all three of these words come to take on a moral meaning, "upright" or "forthright" in speech; someone who is *jianjian* (蹇蹇, 謇謇, <言 +蹇><言 +蹇>) is a straight talker. In fact, many of the words we will discuss also have this meaning as well as the meaning "to speak out boldly." These might be different words written with the same graph, but that is not how the tradition came to understand this cluster of words and meanings. As we shall see below, disfluency of outward expression is often linked to some inner strength and forthrightness. There was understood to be a hidden moral potency in this condition, which would come to be part of the coding in the biographical tradition.[12]

The next word bound to this condition is *ne* 訥; it is often found in the phrase *nese* 訥澀. The *Shuowen jiezi* defines *ne* as "speaking with difficulty" 訥言難也.[13] This word on a basic level refers to disfluency in speaking, but in usage it is frequently associated with weak rhetorical skills or being inarticulate. We see this in the *Lun yu* passage that opened this study, "A noble man desires to be clumsy in speaking and fleet in actions."[14] This is an important articulation that hinges on the tension between hidden and revealed, lame and graceful, appearance and conduct. This passage highlights how the discourse of disfluency overlaps with the deep distrust of glib speech and by extension a general focus on the power of speech that was common in the early tradition, something that we shall discuss in more detail below.

The foregoing examples highlight the broadly positive understanding of disfluency as linked to a hidden or at least an unanticipated moral quality. What is also revealed by this close examination of the lexicographical tradition is that there was also a more negative view of this condition. This reveals the broader everyday response to those with this condition in a context in which extemporaneous speech was a prized ability and expected of elite men.

This more negative view is much subtler and is often defined by the appearance of the condition rather than some exploration of the inner condition of the speaker. A good example is the word *se* 譅 (difficulty in speaking, to stutter, disfluent), which Wang Li 王力 argues is related to the words *se* 澀 (coarse) and *se* 涩 (rough, not smooth).[15] Here just the quality of speech is being described. This word appears variously with *ne*, such as in the following line from the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, "When Wang Youjun was a youth he had a severe stutter" 王右軍少時甚澀訥.[16]

In the usage of the word *jianji* <言 +蹇><心+亟> [alt. *ji* 極] (disfluent in speech) we find a similar focus on the quality of speech, but in addition it is linked to a negative observation on the inner state of the speaker. A striking example comes from the *Liezi* 列子, which

10. *SWJZGL*, 3.340.1392.

11. Liu Xi 劉熙, *Shi ming*, in *Zhongguo gudai gongjushu congbian* 中國古代工具書叢編, vol. 5 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1999), 3.3b.14.

12. A passage in the biography of Li Xie 李諧 (469–544) in *Bei shi* 北史 illustrates the use of *jian* 謇 (to stutter, to speak boldly); the text states, "because Li Xie stutters, he spoke slowly" 因謇而徐言. *Bei shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 43.1604.

13. *SWJZGL* 3.590.1580. A common variant is *ne* 吶 (broken or stuttered speech). *Xunzi ji jie* 荀子集解, in *XBZZJC* 3.87; *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 54.2447.

14. *Lun yu ji shi* 8.278–79.

15. *Wang Li gudai Hanyu zidian* 王力古代漢語字典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1302.

16. Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, *Shishuo xinyu jiao jian* 校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954), 5.444.

describes the topsy-turvy relationship between ambition and fate: "Four men, Underhanded and Frank, Tongue-tied and Browbeater, went about together in the world. To the end of their lives they never explained themselves to each other, for each was convinced that his talents would win him success" 狡愵、情露、<言 +蹇><心+亟>、凌誶四人相與游於世，胥如志也；窮年不相曉悟，自以為才之得也.[17] Interestingly, here disfluency is placed in opposition to *lingsui* 凌誶 (to bully) perhaps the most reprehensible form of speech. The opposition is not between positive and negative, but between two different negative forms of speech. Zhang Zhan 張湛 (Eastern Jin) in his commentary defines *jianji* as "appearing to be clumsy in speech" 訥澀之貌.[18]

Another interesting example is from the "Paidiao" 排調 (Teasing and taunting) chapter of the *Shishuo xinyu*, where the phrase used is *jian ji* 謇喫 (to stutter). In this work, *jian ji* is used in a series of descriptions of people who are being mocked for their uncouth behavior.[19]

The number of negative representation is strikingly limited, though present. Furthermore, they only appear after the Han, with works such as the *Liezi* (third century) and *Shishuo xinyu* (fifth century). While the apparent change in perception demonstrated in the lexicographic tradition was taking place, we see changes in both medical descriptions of the condition and in the biographical tradition, as we will examine below. Despite the fact that the number of such examples is limited, they clearly point to a competing narrative for how to respond to disfluency. It seems safe to interpret these articulations as pointing to the more everyday situation faced by those with disabilities.

Overall, it is clear from this lexicographical exploration that there was understood to be a correlation between the condition of disfluency and the inner state of the speaker, bringing together the moral state and appearance of the person. Building on this lexicographical basis, we will now look at a number of uses of these terms that form the core of citations when trying to define this condition both in terms of what it looked like and what it meant for people in early imperial China. We will start with the descriptions of this condition found in medical texts and then examine the literary tradition.

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One major feature of the condition in the Chinese medical tradition was a sense that there was a disruption in the flow of speech that was related to a rushing of sound that led to the disfluency. In other words, disfluency is associated with excessive speed or excitement that leads to disruption.

The earliest discussion of a medical condition that limited the fluency of speech is found in the *Yin Yang shiyi mai jiujing* 陰陽十一脈灸經, which is part of the cache of texts found at Mawangdui 馬王堆. In this case, choking, coughing, mutism, among other symptoms, occur when the Minor Yin vessel (*shao Yin mai* 少陰脈) is disturbed. Here we find the description of a temporary treatable condition that is the result of disturbing the vessel that was thought to run from the ankle to the kidney, and up to the tongue.[20] In this text the focus is on the tongue and the flow within the Minor Yin vessel as the source of the ailment.

17. Translation by A. C. Graham, in *The Book of Lieh-tzu* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), 130–31; *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, in *XBZZJC* 6.209–10.

18. Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮 (1775–1840) in his commentary defines *jianji* as *kouji*. *Liezi jishi* 6.209–10.

19. *Shishuo xinyu jiao jian* 25.419; Richard B. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, Univ. of Michigan, 2002), 434–35.

20. Donald John Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 210–11.

We find further discussion of impaired speech in the *Lingshu jing* 靈樞經 section of the *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經, a work with a complicated textual history, generally understood to be a mix of material from the first century B.C.E. and after.[21] In this work we see a continued focus on limited or disrupted speech, but in this case it is identified as caused by the emotions of anger or grief. Once again the tongue is identified as the main location of disruption, but it is the result of a broader failure in other parts of the mouth and respiratory system. This condition is called *chong yan* 重言 (repeated speech). Here too it is observed that the condition is related to the Minor Yin vessel and can be helped by applying acupuncture to certain points. The full passage "Grief and Anger without Words" 憂恚無言 reads:

> 黃帝問於少師曰：人之卒然憂恚，而言無音者，何道之塞？何氣出行？使音不彰？願聞其方。
> The Yellow Emperor asked Shaoshi: What passage has been blocked when someone is suddenly grief-stricken or enraged, resulting in their words to be without sound? What sort of *qi* is set loose? What prevents the sounds from manifesting? I would request to hear you discuss the reason for this situation.

> 少師答曰： 咽喉者，水谷之道也。喉嚨者，氣之所以上下者也。會厭者，音聲之戶也。口脣者，音聲之扇也。舌者，音聲之機也。懸壅垂者，音聲之關者。頏顙者，分氣之所泄也。橫骨者，神氣所使, 主發舌者也。故人之鼻洞涕出不收者，頏顙不開，分氣失也。是故厭小而疾薄，則發氣疾，其開闔利，其出氣易; 其厭大而厚，則開闔難，其氣出遲，故重言也。人卒然無音者，寒氣客於厭，則厭不能發，發不能下至其開闔不致，故無音。
> Shaoshi replied: The throat and esophagus is the passage for water and food. The throat and larynx is the passage by which *qi* moves up and down. The epiglottis is the gate for the sound and voice. Lips are the fan for the sound and voice. The tongue is the instrument of sound and voice. The uvula is the bar [in the gate] for the sound and voice. The nasal passages divide the flow of *qi*. The horizontal bone that is controlled by the *qi* of the spirit controls the movement of the tongue. Therefore, when someone's nose is running without stop, it is because the nasal passage is not open and the division of *qi* fails. According to this, if the epiglottis is extremely small and very thin, then the *qi* will be released very fast. It opens and closes readily and the *qi* departs with ease. If the epiglottis is large and thick, then it opens and closes with difficulty and the *qi* departs slowly. Owing to this speech is stuttered. When someone suddenly loses their voice, and there is cold *qi* in the epiglottis, then the epiglottis will not release [their voice], any sound that is released is not able to reach the point of opening and closing [the passage] and does not arrive. Therefore, there is no sound.[22]

Here we find disfluency being linked to the physical structure of the body, the size of the epiglottis, and the flow of *qi*, in this case both sound and air. Moreover, we are provided with a description of the normal condition and two aberrant conditions, one leading to disfluency and the other leading to mutism. In the former case the flow of *qi* is limited, and blocked, by an overly weighty epiglottis which slows the flow and stutters the sounds.[23]

Another interesting aspect of this entry is that the term used, *chong yan*, is much more descriptive than the more common *kou ji* and its many variants as discussed above. Indeed, we do find instances when *kou ji* or a description of stuttered speech is described as "repeated

21. Michael Loewe, *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1993), 196–201.

22. Su Ying 蘇穎, *Huangdi neijing lingshu yizhu* 黃帝內經靈樞譯注 (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), 387–89. For a full translation of this work and a slightly different translation of this passage see Jing-Nuan Wu, *Ling shu, or, The Spiritual Pivot* (Washington, D.C.: Taoist Center, 1993), 224.

23. Due to this description, it is tempting to read the phrase *chong yan* (repeated or stuttered speech) as *zhong yan* (weighty or slow speech).

speech," as in the case of Zhou Chang, whom we shall discuss in detail below. Zhou Chang is described as *wei ren ji* 為人吃 (he is a stutterer) and then his condition is further elaborated on with an anecdote of him repeating the sound *ji* while talking, thus recorded as *jiji*. The *Zhengyi* 正義 commentaries to the *Shi ji,* where this story appears, explain the text by stating "Due to the fact that Chang was a stutterer, every time he spoke his words would repeat [like] the words *jiji*" 昌以口吃，每語故重言期期也.[24] *Chong yan* seems to be used in the *Huang di neijing* to describe the mechanism and the resulting condition rather than the state of a particular person's character that the phrase *kou ji* seems to connote.

These two sources, the *Yin Yang shiyi mai jiujing* and the *Huangdi neijing*, together show that in the early imperial period there was a concern over the physiological conditions that affected speech. Furthermore, within these we see a strong sense that something within the body caused a blockage or disruption. Another striking bridge between these sources is that there seems to be in both of these text, but in the *Huangdi neijing* much more explicitly, a link between a single underlying condition or physiology and a range of speech impediments from disfluency to mutism. In both of these texts the condition is described as treatable, which is striking since, as we shall see in every biographical description of an individual with this condition, not a single source touches on this condition as a medical condition; it is in every case very much as it has already been described of Zhou Chang, *wei ren ji*.

In early medieval Chinese medical observations, disfluency is more exactly addressed. Two distinct states are described: one that is an incurable result of one's disposition or nature and another that is pathological and treatable. These observations are found in the *Zhubing yuan hou lun* 諸病源候論 (Treatise on causes and symptoms of diseases) published in 610. The two distinct states are as follows: the first is caused by a disharmony in the fundamental *yin* and *yang qi* and is untreatable since it is due to one's disposition/nature; the second is an obstruction that is due to a pathogenic force causing the tongue to malfunction and is treatable. Thus there is a distinction between temporary or occasional stuttering and one that is due to one's disposition. The former condition is described as follows:

> 人之五藏六府，稟四時五行之氣，陰陽相扶, 剛柔相生 。若陰陽和平，血氣調適，則言語無滯，吐納應機 。若陰陽之氣不和，府藏之氣不足，而生謇吃 。此則稟性有闕，非針藥所療治也 。
>
> The five organs and six bowels of humans are endowed with the *qi* of the four seasons and five processes, *yin* and *yang* support each other, hard and soft giving rise to each other. When *yin* and *yang* are in balance, the blood and *qi* are in harmony, then speech is without disruption and exhaling and inhaling [of breath] respond to exigencies. If the *qi* of *yin* and *yang* is not harmonized, the internal organ *qi* is not enough, and then one begins to stutter. When this is the case, then it is a response to some flaw in one's nature, there is nothing that a needle or medicine can cure.[25]

In this case, there is an imbalance of *yin* and *yang qi*, but it is one that arises not from external circumstances but from how the internal organs were endowed. This is a feature that cannot be modified through medical practices. This is in contrast with the earlier medical observations that we have examined. Both of those texts located the sources of disfluency in specific bodily structures: the effect of exterior influence on the Minor Yin vessel or the shape of the epiglottis. And in both cases these conditions were regarded as treatable.

24. The commentary in *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 96.36.2677.

25. Chao Yuanfang 巢元方 (fl. 605–616), *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 諸病源候論 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1955), 31.17.159.

The *Zhubing yuan hou lun* offers a second cause of disfluency that is similar to the earlier medical tradition. In this case, disfluency occurs due to a disruption of the *qi* caused by external forces rather than an internal imbalance of *yin* and *yang*:

> 若府藏虛損，經絡受邪，亦令語言謇吃。所以然者，心氣通受於舌，脾氣通於口，脾脈連舌本，邪乘其藏，而搏受於氣。發言氣動，邪隨氣而干之。邪氣與正氣相交，搏於口舌之間，脈則否澀，氣則壅滯。亦令言謇吃，此則可治。《養生方》云：憤滿傷神，神通受於舌，損心則謇吃。
>
> When the internal organs are depleted, and the veins and arteries are attacked by evils, it also can cause speech to become stuttered. The cause for this is the fact that the *qi* of the heart passes through to the tongue, the *qi* of the spleen passes through to the mouth, and the spleen vessels connect to the base of the tongue; when the evil encroaches on the organs then it wages an assault on the *qi*. When producing speech, *qi* is moved, and when the evil follows along with the *qi*, the *qi* is interfered with. The evil *qi* and the regular *qi* mix with each other and struggle with each other between the mouth and tongue, the vessels become rough, and the *qi* is obstructed. This also causes speech to be stuttered and if this is the case then it can be treated. The *Yang sheng fang* states: "When frustration builds it harms the *shen*, and then the *shen* passes on and settles in the tongue, if this depletes the heart then stuttering occurs."[26]

Indeed, this passage resonates with the Mawangdui text by focusing on the disruption of the flow of *qi* in the vessels, which link to the place of articulation, the tongue.[27] The *Zhubing yuan hou lun* passage is striking for the addition of the final citation of a text called the *Yang sheng fang*, which links this condition to frustration. This once again resonates with the *Huangdi neijing* passage, which described disfluency as rooted in grief and anger. This close connection between the functioning of the body and sentiments will be important to our main discussion of the biographies of those with this condition. In many of those descriptions the sentiment of the person is understood to be closely linked to the condition, which helps to explain why this condition was included in the biographies of people of such renown rather than the presumably countless other physiological conditions that must have been part of their lives.

It would be problematic to posit an absolute distinction between the condition that is treatable and the one that is not. It is certainly recognized that there are people whose condition does not respond to treatment and those whose condition does. There is also an implied link between these conditions in that one who is quick to anger or excitement would be susceptible to the mechanism described in the latter case. Indeed, in the biographical context there is no attempt to posit a split between internal and external causes of the condition except for noting that for many of those experiencing this condition it could be variable.

This brings us to our last discussion before examining the biographies: a brief overview of some of the aspects of our current understanding of this type of condition. What is being described in the ancient context as "the same" would be distributed into distinct conditions today such as stuttering, cluttering, disarthria, and functional articulation problems. The exact etiology of disfluency is still a matter of research.[28] An important aspect of stuttering

26. *Yang sheng fang* 養生方 (Recipes for nurturing life) is the same title as that of a Han-era text found at Mawangdui, but does not seem to include this passage. There is a record in the *Bei shi* of a *Diwang yang sheng fang* 帝王養生方 in two fascicles attributed to Xiao Ji 蕭吉 (late 6th c.), *Bei shi* 89.77.2955; Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 328–61.

27. This resonates with what Francis Bacon argued in the sixteenth to seventeenth century, that a cold dry tongue caused disfluency. Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, or, A Natural History* (London: Printed by J. R. for William Lee, 1670), 5.85.386; Hunt, *Stammering and Stuttering*, 67–68.

28. Both genetics and neurophysiology are thought to contribute to the condition. David Ward, *Stuttering and Cluttering: Frameworks for Understanding and Treatment* (New York: Psychology Press, 2006), 3–21; Logan, *Fluency Disorders*, 202–18.

that modern research has described is the fact that it is *variable*, which means that in certain situations, such as talking on the telephone, the stuttering might be more or less severe; even people with severe stutters experience a significant increase in fluency in choral and chanted speech. This observation will be informative in the following discussion of specific cases of disfluency in the early imperial Chinese literary tradition.[29]

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The literary tradition offers us a wealth of insights into the understanding and attitudes regarding disfluency in early imperial China. This is illustrated by a pair of early depictions of stuttered speech; the first is about Zhou Chang 周昌 (d. ca. 191 B.C.E.), an early supporter and close adviser to Liu Bang 劉邦 (256–195 B.C.E., Han Gaozu, r. 202–195 B.C.E.). Known for his straight talk but stuttered speech, Zhou Chang stutters over the word *qi* 期 (*kjəg):

> 及帝欲廢太子，而立戚姬子如意為太子，大臣固爭之，莫能得；上以留侯策卽止 。而周昌廷爭之彊，上問其說，昌為人吃，又盛怒，曰：「臣口不能言，然臣期期知其不可 。陛下雖欲廢太子，臣期期不奉詔 。」上欣然而笑 。
>
> When the emperor [Gaozu] wanted to remove the heir apparent and appoint his son by Lady Qi, Ruyi, as heir, the great officials were staunchly opposed to it, but none were able to attain their aim. The emperor in the end relented due to Marquis Liu's [Zhang Liang 張良, d. 189 B.C.E.] plan. Zhou Chang was among the staunchest of opponents in the court. When the emperor asked him to explain why, Chang, who was a stutterer and also excessively angry, said, "My mouth is unable to speak, nonetheless I know this r-r-really cannot be! Even though my lord wants to remove the heir apparent, I r-r-really will not submit to this order." The emperor laughed with delight.[30]

Not only do we find the earliest Chinese description of stuttered speech; we see Zhou's disfluent speech linked to his emotional state, which strongly parallels the medical observation discussed above. In this case Zhou was so angry that he blurted out his words amplifying his disfluency. It is also notable that such an impediment does not seem to have been something that categorically limited the roles one could play in society, at least among the elites. At the same time, the condition was clearly the object of derision, as we see with the reaction of Gaozu to his high official's impassioned resistance to the whim of the ruler.

The next early example is the case of Deng Ai 鄧艾 (197–267 C.E.), who is depicted as and mocked for stuttering over his own name "Ai," reduplicating it to "Ai Ai." Ai counters the king's jab with a quote from the *Lun yu* (18.5):

> 鄧艾口喫，語稱艾艾 。晉文王戲之曰：「卿云艾艾，定是幾艾？ 」對曰：「鳳兮鳳兮，故是一鳳 。」
>
> Deng Ai stuttered; in speaking he referred to himself as "Ai Ai." King Wen of Jin mocked him, saying, "You, sir, say 'Ai Ai,' so exactly how many Ais are there?" Ai replied, "'Phoenix oh, phoenix oh' [*feng xi feng xi*], in fact [meant] a single phoenix."[31]

29. Ward, *Stuttering and Cluttering*, 13.

30. *Shi ji* 96.36.2677. A slightly different version of this story is found in the *Xin xu* 新序 as cited in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 740.7b. For "r-r-really," I follow Gao Yifeng's 高一峰 argument that these *qi* 期 should be read as a meaningful word in the sentence and not just representing sound, though I am not sure his argument of reading *qi* as *ji* 極 (meaning "actually," *shizai* 實在) is valid. Clearly this example matches with others where the word for and the sound of stuttering are pronounced alike and written with the graph 極. Gao Yifeng, "'Qi qi' yu kouchi" "期期"與口吃, *Jiaowen juezi* 咬文嚼字 (3.2002), 33–34.

31. "Yan yu" 言語, *Shishuo xinyu jiao jian* 17.41. An alternative reading would be to take King Wen's quip as "You, sir, say 'Ai Ai'; wouldn't it be more to the point to say 'Double Ai'?" "Double Ai" is a pun on "Stuttering

Here we see Deng Ai counterbalancing his disfluency with literary acumen using an allusion to a *Lun yu* passage that is so wonderfully opaque that he could mock the ruler without it being too abrupt.[32] In the cited passage from the *Lun yu*, Kongzi is being mocked by the madman from Chu. This highlights another feature of disfluency experienced by elite Chinese as they are characterized in literary sources: a strong connection between the condition and literary ability. This is then amplified by the sense that those with this condition were not just good at composition, but that they were moral paragons. Just as we saw embodied in the biography of Zhou Chang above, who was famous for being a straight talker, we see that in the early imperial period stuttering was conceived of as linked to having a deeply moral character and intent, which led these men to speak out against the moral lapses of their ruler. Somehow these acts of loyalty and forthrightness caused the tongue to stumble. Clearly, in the medical texts that we have examined there is some sense that stuttered speech is related to rushed and disharmonized *qi* and linked to both the physical and emotional states of the body. Perhaps this sense that those who were particularly stirred by righteousness would have stuttered speech is echoed in the literary tradition, but in the literary tradition the causal relationship is no less directly addressed.

Later the aforementioned "*qiqi*" of Zhou Chang would come to be combined with Deng Ai's "Ai Ai" to form another phrase meaning to "stutter" in modern parlance, "*qiqi aiai*," a sort of audio-historical construction that is not strictly onomatopoeic.[33] These two literary nodes bring us to our full explanation of this condition as an element of biography.

In terms of biography, the main sources seem to be limited to official histories; although we will see other biographical spaces, these are genres that are deeply influenced by the modes of official histories. As we have already seen with the cases of Zhou and Deng, these are recorded in the *Shi ji* and *Shishuo xinyu* respectively. Once again, these two examples point out the range of biographical materials to be considered, from the foundational model found in the *Shi ji* to the embellished and more fantastic form found in the *Shishuo xinyu*.[34] Yet at the root of each of these is the assumed reality of the basic information being transmitted.

If we survey the many traditional biographies of early imperial China, we quickly understand that there were a striking number of people described as being disfluent. This list includes such luminaries as Han Feizi, Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 B.C.E.), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.–18 C.E.), Liu Yu 劉餘 (d. 128 B.C.E.), Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), Wang Wei 王微 (415–453), Kong Ji 孔覬 (d. 466), and so on.[35] These have been selected for the way in which their biographies highlight particular aspects of how disfluency was understood and characterized in early imperial China.

It is not just the fact that so many famous people were disfluent that is striking, but the question of why this piece of information was listed so prominently in their biographies. Even more interesting is how closely their disfluency was linked to the most basic information that comprises their identities, such as their family background, personality, and education. As we have noted, there are prominent examples of disfluent individuals in Western history, but they did not reach the level of both prominence and frequency that we see in early imperial China.

Ai," since *ji* 幾 is a homophone for *ji* 吃/喫. Wang Li argues for the phonological/etymological association of 幾 and *qi* 汽. *Tongyuan zidian* 同源字典 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1982), 393.

32. *Lun yu ji shi* 36.1261–64.

33. Unlike another modern phrase for stuttering, *jiejie baba* 結結巴巴, which is fully onomatopoeic.

34. Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, xiii–xvii.

35. These are far from comprehensive. Further examples include Cui Weizu 崔慰祖 (465–499), Lu Mao 盧柔 (fl. 535), Lu Yu 陸羽 (733–804), and Sun Cheng (Sheng) 孫晟 (d. 956).

The first set of biographies that we will look at highlight the link between disfluency and ability to write. This is perhaps the most powerful link that bound together many of the figures that we will examine. If we look at the cases of Han Fei and Sima Xiangru, their disfluency is linked with a particular ability to write; in a sense, their disfluency in speaking is seen as counterbalanced and overcome by their fluency in composition:

> 韓非者，韓之諸公子也。喜刑名法術之學，而其歸本於黃老。非為人口吃，不能道說，而善著書。與李斯俱事荀卿，斯自以為不如非。
> Han Fei was a noble son of the Han. He enjoyed the study of forms and names and the art of regulation, but his roots go back to Huang-Lao [teachings]. Fei was a stutterer and not able to make spoken explanations, but excelled at composing and writing. Together with Li Si he studied under Xun Qing. Li Si did not consider himself as good as Han Fei.[36]

This biography directly pairs speaking inability with writing ability. In fact, Han Fei is described not just as stumbling on a word or two as we saw with Zhou Chang, but with the very strong, perhaps exaggerated, description of being "not able" (*bu neng* 不能) to make verbal arguments. The passage then contrasts *bu neng* with *shan* 善, "excelled at" composition. Disfluency must be seen in the larger context of language mastery and not just as affecting the limited node of speech. This representation of a disabled speaker but masterful writer is further contrasted with the figure of Li Si, his classmate and duplicitous colleague. Li Si was known for his ability to speak, but in the *Shi ji* Han Fei is described as surpassing Li Si in writing and, by implication, in ability to influence across time and space.[37]

We find a similar pairing of speaking ability with writing in the case of Sima Xiangru, but in this case we expand our social space to include court poets:

> 司馬相如者，蜀郡成都人也，字長卿。少時好讀書，學擊劍，故其親名之曰犬子。相如既學，慕藺相如之為人，更名相如。
> Sima Xiangru was a man of Chengdu in the commandery of Shu. His *zi* was Zhangqing. When he was a youth he liked to recite texts. He also studied swordsmanship and so his parents called him "Dog Child." Xiangru came to admire the conduct of Lin Xiangru during his studies and changed his name to Xiangru.[38]

> 相如口吃而善著書。常有消渴疾。與卓氏婚，饒於財。其進仕宦，未嘗肯與公卿國家之事，稱病閒居，不慕官爵。
> Xiangru stuttered and excelled at composing and writing. He constantly suffered from *xiaoke* [wasting thirst, diabetes]. He married a woman née Zhuo and so was well provided for. He was promoted to official posts, but was unwilling to get involved in the affairs of state at the highest levels. Claiming illness, he retired, not yearning for offices and titles.[39]

In these passages we find nearly identical language to that used in the biography of Han Fei, creating what appears to be a contrast between *kouji* (disfluency) and *shan zhuo shu* (excelling at composition and writing). Based on the language used, it is important to see the relationship as both contrastive and causal—both "he stuttered, yet he was good at composition" and "he stuttered and so he was good at composition." It might seem almost obvious that one would compensate for one's disability, but that assumption requires a particular understanding of disability and its causes.

36. *Shi ji* 63.3.2146; William H. Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 7 (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994), 25; Burton Watson, *Han Fei zi* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), 2.
37. *Shi ji* 87.27.2563.
38. *Shi ji* 117.57.2999.
39. *Shi ji* 117.57.3053.

We not only see the linking of disfluency with extraordinary ability in writing; we also see disfluency unproblematically inhabiting the same biography as the ability to *du* or recite. Sima Xiangru is described as liking to recite texts, which is another common association for disfluency as we shall see. The poet Wang Wei, on the other hand, describes himself as struggling to recite his lessons after his teacher, the basic method of memorization and learning for much of Chinese history:

> 小兒時尤粗笨無好，常從博士讀小小章句，竟無可得，口吃不能劇讀，遂絕意於尋求。至二十左右，方復就觀小說，往來者見牀頭有數帙書，便言學問，試就檢，當何有哉。乃復持此擬議人邪。尚獨愧笑揚子之褒贍，猶恥辭賦為君子，若吾篆刻，菲亦甚矣。卿諸人亦當尤以此見議。或謂言深博，作一段意氣，鄙薄人世，初不敢然。是以每見世人文賦書論，無所是非，不解處即日借問，此其本心也。
>
> When I was a child, I was startlingly inept and without interests; often I would recite along with a learned scholar reading little by little, line by line, never reaching the end. I stuttered and was not able to recite quickly, and in the end I had my hopes dashed in seeking [an understanding of the text]. When I reached around twenty years old, only then was I able to read a *xiaoshuo* [short essay]; those who would pass could see that at the head of my bed were numerous slip cases of texts. Only then was I called scholarly. I tried to take the [imperial] examinations, but what did that amount to? How could I use this to compare with others? I once regarded the grand hyperboles of Yang Xiong as laughable, and I am still embarrassed to consider *cifu* [rhapsody] as the work of a noble man. Things such as my youthful seal-script carving are inept in the extreme. You and others have also been wrong in having this [high] opinion [of my writings]. Some people have said my language is deep and broad, I have created a certain tempered spirit, and I disdain other people, but this was not my intention from the start. Thereby, whenever I look at other people's *fu*, letters, and treatises, there is nothing that I consider right or wrong; the parts I don't get, I go that day to ask them about it, and this is where my heart is at.[40]

Wang would hold a number of offices in his youth, but he quickly receded from public life, famously refusing a number of official posts offered to him, and busied himself with his connoisseurship of texts and antiquities.[41] This is one of the clearest cases that show the challenges that disfluency presented to these men. It further highlights strategies they developed for navigating the expectations of elite social culture during their times. These two seemingly contrasting examples—Sima Xiangru, who was able to recite without trouble but stuttered when speaking, and Wang Wei, who found reciting utterly disabling—demonstrate the understanding discussed above that stuttering is variable with differing degrees of severity in differing speech contexts.[42]

Variability might also help to explain the success of the poets in this group, who would need to recite their compositions on certain occasions. In nearly all cases, reciting and singing are differentiated from debate and conversation, which helps explain the association of stuttering with "conduct" (*wei ren*). In the essential acts of cultivation, such as reciting and composition, for most of these men stuttering had little limit on their success, but when confronted with the need to argue and debate we find scenes of mockery such as Zhou Chang and Deng Ai experienced. This latter memory of "qiqi aiai" helps to explain the aversion

40. *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 62.22.1669.

41. David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1244–46.

42. Taniguchi Hiroshi 谷口洋 makes a similar observation about Sima Xiangru's disfluency but focuses on contrasting Sima Xiangru's case with Yang Xiong's. "Yang Xiong *kouji* yu moni qianren: Shilun wenxue shumian hua yu qi yingxiang" 揚雄「口吃」与模擬前人：試論文学書面化与其影響, in *Nian yi shiji Han Wei Liu chao wenxue xin shijiao: Kang Dawei jiaoshou hua jia jinian lunwen ji* 廿一世紀漢魏六朝文学新視角：康達維教授花甲記念論文集 (Taibei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2003), 44, 48, 58.

of many of these men to taking on the highest of offices. We have already seen this in Sima Xiangru, who was described as "unwilling to get involved in the affairs of state at the highest levels. Claiming illness, he retired not yearning for offices and titles." We will see this have an even deeper role to play in Yang Xiong's biography.

Beyond two of the greatest poets of the Han, Sima Xiangru and Yang Xiong, if we look to the next era of poets in the Western Jin (265–316), we see further examples of poets who are described as being disfluent. Most notable is the case of Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305), who was clearly influenced by these two Han era poets.[43] More importantly, he is seen in the subsequent tradition as closely linked to these two poets, so much so that the very language used in his biography to describe his conduct as a poet closely parallels that used for his Han predecessors: "His appearance was not pleasing, he stuttered, while the language of his compositions was delightful. He did not enjoy socializing and only regarded a life of leisure as his calling in life" 貌寢，口訥，而辭藻壯麗 。不好交遊，惟以閑居為事.[44] Despite the overall less flattering characterization of his disfluency, we see that it is still linked with his ability as a poet. It obscured his real talent, a talent that is revealed in his compositions.

Another poet of the same era is Cheng Gongsui 成公綏 (231–273), who is best known for his "Xiao fu" 嘯賦 (*Fu* on whistling). He is described with similar language: "When he was young he was talented and he stuttered" 少有俊才 。而口吃.[45] Clearly there is something real about disfluency and one's ability to recite and compose poetry, while at the same time there is something of a biographical imitation taking place. The language and placement of the information become very consistent by the early medieval era.

Finally, there is the great scholar, geomant, and poet, Guo Pu, whose biography brings together the threads outlined above: great talent, scholar, poet, a man with deep knowledge of texts, and disfluent. His *Jin shu* 晉書 biography describes him in the following manner:

> 璞好經術，博學有高才，而訥於言論，詞賦為中興之冠 。好 古文奇字，妙於陰陽算曆 。
> Pu took pleasure in the Classics; he had broad knowledge and great talent. Despite his stuttered speech his *cifu* were the crowning accomplishment of the [Jin] revival. He was fond of ancient texts and rare characters, and was particularly insightful about *yin* and *yang* relationships and astrology.[46]

In many ways we have the formula here for a sage, which will resonate with what we will see in our discussion of Yang Xiong. Perhaps Guo might have been considered a sage if he had not lived in a time of division. Guo Pu was a scholar versed in the Classics and seen as one of the most learned men of his times.[47] His poetry was highly praised. He would further be known in his own times and employed in high office based on his knowledge of divination and geomancy.

It is clear from the forgoing biographies when taken as a whole that what was fundamental to elite identity was their ability to embody the structures of learning and to perform them orally in the space of the court if they wanted full access to the many state institutions. This

43. Zheng Xunzuo 鄭訓佐 and Zhang Chen 張晨, *Zuo Si yu Zuo Fen* 左思與左棻 (Jinan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 36–37; Wu Mingxian 吳明賢, "Yang Xiong, Zuo Si *Shu du fu* bijiao" 揚雄左思蜀都賦比較, *Sichuan shifan daxue xuebao* 四川師範大學學報 32.1 (2005): 94.

44. *Jin shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 92.2376.

45. Zang Rongxu's 臧榮緒 (415–488) *Jin shu* biography of Cheng cited in *Liu chen zhu Wen xuan* 六臣注文選, comp. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 18.36b.342.

46. *Jin shu* 72.1899.

47. Knechtges and Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 302.

condition is described at times as limiting their success, at other times, however, as linked to their attainment in learning and composition.

Finally, these challenges were not just described as part of the biographical geography of scholar officials, but we find examples of nobles whose biographies note this condition:

> 魯共王餘，以孝景前二年用皇子為淮陽王 。二年，吳楚反破後，以孝景前三年徙為魯王 。好治宮室苑囿狗馬 。季年好音，不喜辭辯 。為人吃 。
>
> King Gong of Lu, Liu Yu, on account of being the son of the emperor was established as King of Huaiyang in the second year of Emperor Jing [155 B.C.E.]. After two years, when the revolt of Wu and Chu had been repressed, in the third year of Emperor Jing [154 B.C.E.], he was transferred to be King of Lu. He liked to build palaces and structures, manage parks and gardens, and raise dogs and horses. In his later years, he enjoyed music but did not take pleasure in rhetoric and debate. He was a stutterer.[48]

Here we see a portrait of a king who is more interested in such pursuits as architecture and gardening than in making speeches and harangues that a ruler who gravitated towards war and state craft might enjoy. Further, he is described as enjoying music rather than debate, which once again fits with our discussion of the general ease of people with disfluency in singing and reciting rather than extemporaneous debate.

Overall, we can see the shifting geography that these elites faced and the ways they negotiated it. Some were successful at this while other were pushed to the edges of elite society, but each biography speaks of an individual's search for a place in the common spaces of the court and history. A certain separation and distance from standard elite modes are common, from Liu Yu, who enjoyed the notably more reclusive life of taking pleasure in architecture and music while shunning rhetoric and debate, to Sima Xiangru, who avoided office. Further, these historical accounts strongly parallel our modern understanding of the variability of stuttering. However, disfluency in nearly every biography is linked to some outstanding counter-ability, most often the ability to write or recite. We should keep in mind that the textual representation of the condition reveals something about the actual lives of those afflicted and how this condition was perceived. It is difficult in many of the foregoing examples to untangle the two, since they are seen as so naturally bound together. Furthermore, in many of the examples above the objective status of the person is dominant. Rarely do we have a subjective observation on their condition as disfluent. In our study so far we have only seen Wang Wei speak of his own state. It is also the case that many of these accounts are brief, leaving little room for nuanced or individuated meaning. This once again points to some shared understanding of what this condition meant in the context of biography.

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This brings us to Yang Xiong, who offers the most expansive case study. In the sources about him, we see the objective and the subjective brought together in the same account. His *Han shu* biography is known to be based on his own autobiography. Furthermore, in the reception history of Yang Xiong we see the interrogation of his life and specifically of the man who

48. *Shi ji* 59.29.2095. See the similar entry in *Han shu* 53.23.2413: "King Gong of Lu, Liu Yu [d. 128 B.C.E.], was established as King of Huaiyang in the second year of Emperor Jing [155 B.C.E.]. After the revolt of Wu and Chu was repressed, in the third year of Emperor Jing [154 B.C.E.] he was transferred to be King of Lu. He liked to build palaces and structures, manage parks and gardens, and raise dogs and horses. In his later years, he enjoyed music but did not take pleasure in rhetoric. He was a stutterer and found it difficult to speak." 魯恭王餘以孝景前二年立為淮陽王．吳楚反破後，以孝景前三年徙王魯．好治宮室苑囿狗馬，季年好音，不喜辭．為人口吃難言．

stuttered. Yang Xiong was both ambitious and reserved, moving from being a court poet to a recluse in the court.[49]

> 雄少而好學，不為章句，訓詁通而已，博覽無所不見。為人簡易佚蕩，口吃不能劇談，默而好深湛之思，清靜亡為，少耆欲，不汲　汲於富貴，不戚戚於貧賤，不修廉隅以徼名當世。家產不過十金，乏無儋石之儲，晏如也。自有大度，非聖哲之書不好也；非其意，雖富貴不事也。顧嘗好辭賦。
>
> When I was young, I was fond of study. I did not engage in the chapters and sections method, but limited myself to an understanding of the glosses and explanations. I read widely, and there is nothing that I have not seen. In conduct, I am easygoing and relaxed; I stutter and cannot speak quickly. Of a taciturn nature, I am fond of deep contemplation. I am calm and unassertive, have few desires, do not scurry after wealth and honor, and I am not troubled by poverty and low position. I do not cultivate a punctilious manner in order to seek fame in my time. Although my family wealth is no more than ten catties of gold and I lack reserves of even a bushel or half bushel of grain, I am content. I have my own grand scheme of things. I do not like writings that are not by the sage and wise, and I will not devote myself to anything against my beliefs even though it may bring wealth and honor. However, I have been fond of the rhapsody.[50]

It is striking to see that Yang Xiong considered his stuttering to be in the same category as such deeply positive qualities as being easygoing and relaxed, taciturn and fond of deep contemplation, calm and unassertive, and having few desires. This makes it clear that Yang Xiong considered disfluency to be at least a contributing factor, if not a positive feature, that in part helped to explain his overall conduct and perhaps was a marker of his deep study.

In the construction of Yang Xiong's identity as it is linked to his disfluency, we can see a thematic connection to the previous examples: his abilities in study and contemplation are linked to his disabilities in speech; he is further described as becoming a recluse in the court distancing himself from the offices that might require oral argumentation. He busied himself with both extended works and memorials that he periodically submitted to the court. In the case of Yang Xiong, these features are amplified and mythologized as so much of his life was in the following generations. This is a role not distant from where Yang placed himself, as Yang states in the same biography "I have my own grand scheme of things" 自有大度. This is a turn of phrase Sima Qian used to describe how Liu Bang conducted himself.[51]

Increasingly dissatisfied with court life and the greed that seemed to drive the actions of many people around him, Yang Xiong turned away from the performative public space of court poet to dwell in the bodily space of silence and calm.[52] He describes the practice of *momo* 默默 (silence) as a tool for navigating the corrupting space of court and thereby remain whole as a person (*quan shen* 全身).[53] Yang Xiong is describing the conduct of a sage, of himself, a person whose disfluency in speech deepens this silence, which is in contrast to the frivolous and self-serving speech that the fluent in speech often indulged in.

This association between disfluency and the idealized moral conduct of being quiet that is clearly present in various forms in our foregoing discussion builds on the long-standing

49. Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. Press, 1990), 203–27; Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), esp. 140–45.

50. *Han shu* 87.57.3514; tr. David Knechtges, *The* Han shu *Biography of Yang Xiong (53 B.C.–A.D. 18)* (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State Univ., 1982), 12–13.

51. *Shi ji* 8.342–43.

52. Mark Pitner, "Embodied Geographies of Han Dynasty China: Yang Xiong and His Reception" (PhD diss., Univ. of Washington, 2010), 6.

53. *Han shu* 87a.57a.3571; Knechtges, *The* Han shu *Biography*, 50; Pitner, "Embodied Geographies," 6.

distrust of the verbose and overly eloquent that we noted in relation to the term *nese*. Perhaps the earliest expression of this comes from two of the most important textual traditions: the *Lun yu* and the *Laozi*. We have discussed the *Lun yu* passage above and so will just repeat it here: "A noble man desires to be clumsy in speaking and fleet in actions." We can add to this telling passage the following section from the *Laozi*:

> 大成若缺，其用不弊 。
> The greatest accomplishment seems flawed, yet its usefulness does not diminish.
>
> 大盈若沖，其用不窮 。
> The greatest fullness seems empty, yet its usefulness is not depleted.
>
> 大直若屈，大巧若拙，大辯若訥 。
> The greatest straightness seems bent, the greatest skill seems clumsy, the greatest eloquence seems disfluent.[54]
>
> 躁勝寒靜勝熱 。
> Speed overcomes cool and quietude overcomes heat.
>
> 清靜以為天下正 。
> Pure quietude governs the world.[55]

This is a radical assertion that the privileged modes in society are not what truly govern the cosmos, but it is the flawed, empty, bent, clumsy, and (central to our discussion) the disfluent that embody the cosmic. These are all represented by the quiet, not the powerful, not the wealthy, and certainly not the smooth talkers. In this discourse it is not speech that matters but conduct.

In addition to these two foundational traditions, there is the equally famous example from Han Feizi's essay "Wu du" 五蠹 (Five vermin), in which one of the vermin, that is, those who subvert order and increase strife within society, were the speech makers (*yantan zhe* 言談者).[56] This small sample from the vast body of such observations shows the breadth of this tension and contributes to our understanding of disfluency in early imperial China.

This tension over fluent or excessively fluent speech forms another side to the historical context that immediately surrounds the discourse of disfluency and helps to contextualize the responses to this condition that we have seen. This certainly at least hints at one layer of the motivation for including this condition as part of the essential information in the biographies of these men. If it were merely the fact that having this condition would have made their success in the highly competitive context of elite culture difficult, it seems incongruous that it is only on rare occasion posited as a negative. It is most often posited as something that in fact deepened the capacity to learn and compose. Indeed, in the case of Yang Xiong, it seems to be a wholly positive quality that not only deepened his learning but also was fundamental to understanding his conduct and moral character.

How far disfluency had become a universally understood trope that led the reader to understand the subject's perspicacity is not clear. Despite the frequent replication of this biographical feature, in the long diverse tradition that followed the Wei-Jin period there seems

54. This sentiment of valuing the inarticulate and the quiet is reemphasized in section 81. *Laozi jiao shi* 老子校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 81.310–12.

55. *Laozi jiao shi* 45.181–85; Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-Te Ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), 139–40.

56. *Han Feizi jijie* 19.454.

to have been only one instance where questions arose regarding this condition as described in the biographies. This is the only time when the subject-object dynamic was reflected on in detail. In the Song era (960–1279), a time of increased tension over a range of cultural issues, we find an intriguing and unique discussion of Yang Xiong's condition. This discussion clearly indicates that there were still many questions surrounding his being described as disfluent. Perhaps this points to a counter-narrative of negative response to the condition that is now obscured and overwhelmed in part by the dominant positive narrative discussed above. But the singular interrogation of Yang Xiong's condition is even more noteworthy for its firm rejection of the negative response to his condition. Zhao Xiang 趙湘 (959–994) wrote an essay titled "Yang Xiong ji bian" 揚雄吃辨 (Discussion of Yang Xiong's disfluency). Zhao described the basic questions that were raised regarding Yang Xiong's disfluency:

> 或問曰：揚子吃不能劇譚乎？曰：吃亦吃矣，不可謂不能劇譚。曰：是吃也，惡能劇譚？曰：揚子于衆人則吃，于聖人則能劇譚。
> Some have asked, "If Yang Xiong stutters is it not the case that he is not able to speak quickly?" My response is, "Even if he stuttered, he cannot be said not to be able to speak quickly." Some have asked, "If he was in fact a stutterer, wouldn't he be loath to speak quickly?" I respond, "Yang Xiong, when speaking with the throng seemed to be stuttering, but when speaking with sages he could speak quickly."[57]

Zhao makes it clear that it is not that Yang Xiong has a problem in communicating, but it is the listener who might speak with fluency but cannot understand the words of a sage. Obviously Zhao is not trying to refute the actual condition, but to defend Yang Xiong's ability, his ability to perceive and communicate that perception. Zhao concludes the essay by making this even clearer:

> 如是也，不可謂之吃。則衆人吃于道德，仁義，辭，志也，雄吃于衆人也。
> Accordingly, Yang Xiong cannot be called disfluent. It is the throng that are disfluent with regards to *virtus*, humaneness, language, intention; Yang Xiong is just disfluent among the throng.

According to Zhao, there is no flaw in Yang Xiong. Even if he might stutter in his speech, that is irrelevant to his abilities to elucidate the fundamental concerns of all scholars: moral force, human relations, language, and intention. One could even say that Zhao is taking this a step further and implying that it is Yang Xiong's disfluency, at least as perceived by the throng, that evidences Yang Xiong's sage-nature. It is the throng who refuse to understand and are befuddled by their own inabilities. With any familiarity with Yang Xiong's reception history one must wonder if Zhao is not pointing the reader to the well-known story of Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 C.E.) and his criticism of Yang Xiong teachings as unnecessarily obscure.[58] This is a charge that would follow Yang Xiong in the near millennium between Yang and Zhao.

The only evidence of the negative characterizations of this condition in regard to Yang Xiong remains in Zhao's own refutation of now lost arguments. So what does this back-and-forth between Zhao and unnamed critics of Yang Xiong's condition mean? It seems to point to a number of things: first there was a fairly broad acceptance of the association of stuttering and deep learning and so the arguments that Zhao seems to be refuting are now lost; second, and more important, despite the previous point, it seems something had changed since the early imperial period. What had so naturally fit in a biography in the early imperial period had come to require active defense. Indeed, between the Tang and the Ming dynasties we

57. Zhao Xiang, "Yangzi san bian" 揚子三辨, in *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, vol. 4 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1990), 166.751.

58. Pitner, "Embodied Geographies," 40–42.

only find a handful of examples where disfluency is noted in the biographies of the official histories despite the vast expanse of time covered and the increased size of the histories and population. Admittedly, this may not be just the result of a change in the view of the condition, but it does seem to be a contributing factor.

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Returning to our example of Yang Xiong's reception, one thing that is clear overall: Yang Xiong's conduct in every aspect was the object of sustained interrogation and interpretation for at least a millennium and it is hard to imagine that his critics would not draw on any aspect of his history that could provide fodder for their critique. And so the fact that criticism targeting this condition did not arise until later further points to some larger change in perceptions about the condition or else it would have already been a critique in circulation.

In addition to the indicators of changing perceptions from biographical sources, we also see a shift in the medical literature. The first indicator of this is the difference between Han medical literature and medieval medical literature. In the Han there does not seem to be posited an untreatable form of disfluency, while by the time we get to the seventh century a distinction is made between temporary disfluency and disfluency that is a life-long condition. Parallel to this is the striking decline in the number of biographies that describe people as disfluent. Perhaps part of what made this information so important in the early imperial period was that it seemed to run counter to the assumed treatability of medical conditions in general and that it seemed to point to some fundamentally different and tenacious force outside of medical understanding, which was thus left to biography to account for rather than the much more cosmological medical tradition.

We see both from the many words and phrases for disfluency and the range of biographical expressions that this condition was perceived to be of critical importance for a reader to understand the inner persons being profiled. Indeed, it was not just that their virtuous actions made up for their clumsy speech, but that their disfluency was bound to that privileged behavior and in part was an expression of it.

On a more concrete level these biographies describe the real conditions of those with disfluency who sought strategies to help them to navigate the highly competitive society of early imperial Chinese intellectuals. Success in the court was deeply bound to oral performance, from reciting poetry and making petitions to extemporaneous compositions and open debate. It is between these two seemingly linked modes, recitation and spontaneous composition, that we see strong links to modern medical observation of disfluency. Yet, at other times we find those, such as Wang Wei, who found even recitation a painful process and turned to the written word as their avenue to success, or, more importantly, to these thinkers' virtue. We find those, such as Yang Xiong, who seem to have succeeded in the front and center of court, yet clearly found it a struggle to maintain such a role and in the end turned to the hidden spaces of written composition as a recluse in the court.

This mode of coding the living body, bio-graphy, provides a unique and often overlooked set of information which I hope this little jaunt begins to uncover. In striking contrast to the medical tradition, particularly the early imperial tradition, there is no trace in the biographical tradition of attempts to cure the condition such as was common in the Western tradition. Once again the case of Demosthenes and his use of pebbles is illustrative. In the biographical tradition in early imperial China, as was the case with the lexicographical tradition, the condition was a fixed feature of the underlying body and life that was being analyzed. It was not in any case posed as a negotiable condition; what was negotiable was how it was mitigated

in terms of and often by means of social relations that were founded on demonstrating moral standing. As Deng Ai did when he observed in the face of the mockery of a ruler: "Feng xi feng xi, phoenix oh phoenix, is in fact a single phoenix." He negotiates, translates, his condition in terms of the larger and enduring tradition, just as Kongzi did when faced with a madman or Yang Xiong when faced with the "stuttered throng."