Among the galaxy of poets of the two Song Dynasties, Zhang Xian exudes rays of a peculiar charm. However, for all his achievements in producing a body of great Ci, his liberating of the Ci genre, and his influence for poets of later generations, he has as yet received little critical attention. For this reason, I have attempted a comprehensive study of Zhang Xian's works.

Song Ci is deeply influenced by its predecessor in the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. No discussion of Song Ci can be complete without some reference to its origin and development. By the same token, no discussion of Zhang Xian would be complete without dealing with the evolution of the various schools of Ci of the two Song Dynasties. Only by testing Zhang Xian against a wide background can we have a clearer view of Zhang Xian's status and influence in Song Ci. It is also essential to take into account Zhang Xian's biography, the social conditions of his times, his outlook on life, for a better understanding of his poetic works. In addition, much of the beauty of Zhang Xian's poetic works has to do with Zhang Xian's knowledge of music. To a certain extent, his poetry reflects his personal life and innermost feelings; it also mirrors the social life of his day.

It is an assiduous task to study Chinese traditional poetry. It covers a wide field, encompassing Cipu, Cipai, Music Theory, etc. Here is a brief description of my methodology.

1) Deciding on the scope of research. For my purposes I have limited my study to Zhang Xian's Xiaoling and Manci.

2) Combining appreciation with criticism, focusing on a number of important poems.

3) Deciding on the specific steps of the thesis. So far as I know, critical interest in Zhang Xian has been limited to short, disperate essays. There has been no monograph on Zhang Xian. Therefore there is no example to follow. I have divided my thesis into six chapters:

Chapter One  Introduction
Chapter Two  Biographical sketch of Zhang Xian
Chapter Three  Themes of Zhang Xian's Anlu Ci
Chapter Four  Artistic achievements of Zhang Xian's Anlu Ci
Chapter Five  Zhang Xian's Contribution to and Influence on Ci
Chapter Six  Conclusion