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In Response to the Howling Monkeys along the Yangtze: An American Eco-Critic's Translation of Three Hundred and Eleven Tang Poems

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數猿腸斷和雲叫

In Response to the Howling Monkeys Along the Yangtze:

*An American Eco-Critic's Translation of
Three Hundred and Eleven Tang Poems*

– Ning Yu
with Carlos Martinez

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**IN RESPONSE TO THE
HOWLING MONKEYS ALONG THE YANGTZE**

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In Response to the Howling Monkeys Along the Yangtze:

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by Ning Yu with Carlos Martinez

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“数猿肠断和云叫”：
一个生态文学批评者的
英译唐诗三百十一首

Ning Yu with Carlos Martinez

Center for East Asian Studies,
Western Washington University

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Introduction

If you have read Tang poetry, you have probably encountered its ubiquitous monkeys, especially along the narrow, rapid waterway of the Three Gorges. Sometimes, they cry sadly, sometimes they howl with excitement. Sometimes, hand in hand, they form a “monkey ladder,” taking turns descending to quench their thirst from the stream that rushes by a rocky cliff. Sometimes they approach a traveler, a poet, their one-time master, who, urged by his conscience the year before, broke the gold chains around their necks and set them free. They howl to the poet, as if sending a message to humanity through their master-friend.

Humanity, however, has not responded well to the monkeys’ call. These crying messengers went silent in Chinese poetry long before the Three Gorges Dam was built, long before the 1960s and 1970s, when people chopped down trees to create terraced fields and blew up the mountains to quarry limestone for the construction of their “Four Modernizations.” Yet the howling monkeys have left such a profound impression on the Chinese imagination that in 2007 the government and private business re-introduced eighty monkeys to the banks of the Yangtze at the Qutang Gorge, just so tourists on cruise boats could hear the famous howl once again.

Carlos Martinez and I were led to this project when we became aware of the disappearance of wild monkeys from both the actual and poetic landscapes. Personally, I read and re-read forty-three thousand poems written by twenty-five hundred Tang poets before selecting and translating three hundred and eleven poems that share a focus on the non-human environment. Carlos then worked through two subsequent drafts to finalize the translation; we cooperated closely to ensure the poetic effects experienced by American readers are as near as possible to those experienced by fluent readers of the original Chinese.

In the process of researching, translating, and revising, we confirmed once more what we had always believed: poets are meant to be misunderstood. Li Bai (in an older transcription, Li Po) in his “Prose Overture to the Banquet at the Peach and Plum Garden in a Spring Night” states that “the Great Lump [of earth] lends him his writing.”¹ What he meant was that his literary inspiration came from the natural beauty of the landscape. He simply borrowed from nature; the ultimate ownership of his talent belonged to the earth itself. In the course of history, however, the concept of “the Great Lump” was twisted to mean “writing of great length.” William Shakespeare stated that the purpose of theater, and by extension literature in general, is to “hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to Nature” (*Hamlet*. Act III, Scene ii, l. 24). Perhaps due to Hamlet’s own narrow interpretation, “Nature” has been read as the world of human affairs, including human emotions and states of mind, political struggles, military conflicts, romantic affairs, and bloody revenge. The tendency to read “Nature” in its narrower sense as the human world has led people, especially people in the “socialist bloc,” to define literature as “the study of man.” This was encouraged by Maxim Gorky, who, trying to clarify his line of writing, said his work was human studies rather than local studies. This narrower definition is obviously too limited. It was on such a literary principle that some Chinese literary scholars centuries ago misinterpreted the first poem in *The Book of Odes*, “Quack, Quack, the Wild Duck,” interpreting it as a celebration of the virtues of the kings’ queens and concubines. Gorky himself would find it hard to imagine his self-clarification evolving into such a formulaic doctrine, a notion that “literature equals the study of man.” For in his own fiction, *Tales from Old Lady Izezil* (which I read in Chinese translation many years ago, as 《伊则吉尔老婆婆》), the

eagle, the steppe, and the forests of Russia played roles as important as the human characters. The male protagonist in the first tale is a son born to an eagle and a woman.

Shakespeare's "Nature" – like Li Bai's "Great Lump" – includes, but is not limited to, human nature and the human world. To put it another way, the human world is part of a much vaster world. This inclusion is perhaps better demonstrated by the case of "Quack, Quack, the Wild Duck." The poem starts with a vivid depiction of a spring scene, where all lives wake up to the rather demanding task of perpetuating the species. Under the pressure of the mission of life itself, princes and court ladies get busy, just as do the glorious quacking ducks on the river island. Ancient folk singers sang the praises of life as a whole. The "mirror" they held up reflected a network of close connections among all life forms. If we define literature only as the study of humankind, we won't be able to explain why Confucius encouraged young people to read *The Book of Odes* not only as a "human study" about how to serve their fathers and princes, but also as a way to learn the names of birds, beasts, grasses, and trees. In fact, *The Book of Odes* – a collection of three hundred and five poems – mentions twenty-four different grain crops, thirty-eight kinds of vegetables, seventeen medicinal herbs, thirty-seven grasses and weeds, forty-three trees, fifteen fruit-bearing flowers, forty-three birds, forty animals, twenty-seven different names for horses, thirty-seven insects, and sixteen fishes.² *The Book of Odes* shows us that human beings do not exist in isolation. Our survival depends on many other species that accompany and support us. When literary critics theorize, they shouldn't overlook the important role nature, or less confusingly, the non-human environment, plays in world literatures. Eco-criticism emerged in the late 1990s in part in response to an academic failure to acknowledge the pressures humans have placed on the non-human world, through depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution and global warming.

Granting that literary theories should include a broader definition of literature, which embraces rather than expels nature from art and literature, is it still appropriate to apply a critical theory developed in late twentieth-century America to poems written twelve hundred years ago in the Tang Dynasty? In other words, is it advisable to read Tang poetry in light filtered through the green glasses of twenty-first-century ecology and environmentalism? My answer to this question is in the affirmative, as the rise of the Tang Empire, together with its poetry, was closely connected to the natural environment of the eighth-century world.

During the first half of the eighth century – about a hundred years after the Mayan Golden Age (300–600), one hundred and eighty years before Basil I began to expand the Byzantine Empire, and as Charles Martel, "The Hammer," stopped in France the expansion of the Islamic Empire – the Tang Empire in China reached its apogee. As one of the two super powers of the age – the other being the caliphate, at the other end of Eurasia – it was ambitious in territorial expansion, confident in diplomacy, active in international trade, innovative in technology, and creative in artistic expression. The poetry of the "High Tang" period has always been celebrated as free and original, reflecting the bursting vitality of a prosperous empire.³ According to S. A. M. Adshead, during the second half of the first millennium, relatively mild temperatures and higher levels of precipitation led to rapid growth of the world economy. As economies grew, empires rose. And it was, he states, the economy of the Tang Empire that grew the fastest, along with its population, which increased by fifty percent, from fifty million to seventy-five million.⁴ In accordance with Adshead's postulations, Chinese historians also point out that as the physical territory of the Tang Empire expanded, its culture came to dominate in the newly-conquered territories as well as in the heartland of China.⁵ To imagine the growth of the Tang Empire, you can visualize the following: at the beginning of Tang Dynasty, its size was about half that of modern China; in less than a century, it grew

to be one-third larger than what China is now. In short, the size of the empire nearly tripled, as it came to include Mongolia in the north, parts of Vietnam, Myanmar, and Laos in the south, the coast in the east, the Korean Peninsula in the northeast, and much of Central Asia in the west.

Thus, Li Bai, arguably the most famous of the Tang poets, was born and raised in Suiye City, located in what is now Kyrgyzstan. The city was then the seat of China's far-west military governorate, which controlled a region extending farther west into land that is now Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan. Li Bai himself spoke several Central Asian languages, and some Chinese historians have argued that he was not a Chinese, but a *hu ren*, a foreigner.⁶

As I reviewed forty-three thousand and translated four hundred Tang poems, I noticed among the diverse subject matters of High Tang poetry a ubiquitous concern for sustainability, both of the empire and of the non-human environment that had made human society sustainable in the first place. As if through intuition, the Tang poets seem to have known that human life depends on land and is interconnected with the lives of many other species. They saw that over-expansion and over-exploitation would hurt the land, which sustains the working people who labor to support the empire. What the poets found in nature was not only literary inspiration, but also an ethical lesson: humans must live within the means allowed them by nature. The rise and fall of empires, they believed, depends upon observance of this ethic. Their contemplation on and imagination of these issues are certainly relevant to the concerns of people living in the twenty-first century, an age when concerns about climate change, environmental pollution, and depletion of natural resources have not as yet led the general populace to shed their obsession with a growth-driven economy.

In response to my findings, from the four hundred translated poems I've selected three hundred and eleven to be included in this collection. These poems were written by seventy-six poets, and by one horse. I am pleasantly surprised by my ancestors' faith in a horse-poet, and I am proud of the fact that, for over a thousand years, no fellow Chinese has ever questioned that a Tang Dynasty horse could use human language to compose a short lyrical poem. I still find it hard to believe that a horse could speak Tang Chinese, but I do believe that all lives are created equal and they all have their own intelligence. My belief has been confirmed by the poems I translate, poems among which the motif of friendship and spiritual communication between humans and animals is recurrent. For the horse-poet as well as the human poets, I have written my translator's notes, providing socio-geographical and historical information about the time and place in which the poems were written. In some cases, I contrast historical geography with what I saw in those places during trips I made in 2002, 2006, and 2009.

Now, exact translation of poetry is indeed an impossible endeavor. To try the impossible, we have to be prepared to compromise. Instead of struggling for a formalistic fidelity, in this volume I aim at the sharing of emotions similar to those conveyed by the original; it is my sincere hope that my translation will provoke these feelings in an American audience unfamiliar with Chinese language or culture. My approach has been to read aloud the Chinese originals together with my translation in the presence of my good friend, poet Carlos Martinez, who then offered feedback and suggestions for further revision. We then worked together to fine-tune the translation, until he indicated reception of poetic effects similar to those I experienced reading the original. Though difficult, the process was as a whole extremely pleasant and rewarding.

As the Bible states, there is nothing new under the sun. In this collection, we can see that the Tang poets and an environmentally conscious audience in the twenty-first century share many concerns about the non-human environment that sustains us. That, however, should not lead us to the false conclusion that eco-criticism has nothing new to offer, for what is new is how we cope with the problems that humans have faced over the centuries. If, with the help of these sensitive and generous poets, we begin to give up some of the biases by which we place ourselves at the center of attention and instead begin to see that the larger picture includes other peoples and other species, we may reverse our tendency toward over-consumption and pollution at the cost of the interconnected biosphere on which our own survival depends, we may

control our behavior so that our lifestyle will stay at a level sustainable by the ecosystem, and so give our children and grandchildren a healthier environment in which they can grow up without fear of environmental catastrophe. We may even hope that someday – as a result of lifestyle changes which help mend the damage already inflicted upon nature – our progeny may hear the howl of freeborn and wild monkeys, like those Li Bai once encountered. That, indeed, would be a new thing under the sun.

Let's read these ancient poems and work toward new things under the sun.

Ning Yu, Summer 2013, Bellingham, Washington.

¹ *Guwen Guanzhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1978), p. 311. Translation mine. The notion of “Great Lump,” *da kuai* 大块, can be traced back to the Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi.

² Guo Shaoyu, ed., *Zhongguo Lidai Wenlun Xuan* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Press), 1962, p. 2.

³ See Ge Xiaoyin, “Lun chu, sheng Tang shige gexin de jiben tezheng,” in *The Social Sciences of China*. 1985, Vol. 2.

⁴ S. A. M. Adshead, *T'ang China: The Rise of the East in World History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 68–100.

⁵ For territorial expansion see Hou Bolin, *Tangdai yidi bianhuan shiliu* (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1972), pp. 180–86. For the cultural interaction and intermingling, see Li Hongbi, *Tangchao zhongyang jiquan yu minzu guanxi* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2003), p. 53.

⁶ See Lu Weifen, Zhang Yanjin et al., eds., *Sui Tang Wudai Wenxue Yanjiu* (Beijing, Beijing Press, 2001), pp. 769–74

The Poems

To Ann, John and Lynn, My Mentors

Chu Liang 褚亮

Chu Liang was born in the year 555, on the bank of Qiantang River, near present-day Hangzhou. He lived an unusually long life for his time – ninety-two years – and died in 647. As a man of letters, Chu Liang is not as well known as his son, Chu Suiliang 褚遂良, the poet, scholar, and calligrapher. Yet, in the court of the early Tang Dynasty he was one of the most important statesmen, involved in drafting important imperial documents. The famous Emperor Taizong (r.626-649) chose him as one of the eighteen members of the high chancellery, officials who took turns staying on duty in the palace, day and night, in order to offer advice to the emperor and draft documents in response to any possible urgent national affair. As a loyal and trusted courtier, he participated in the most important decision-making processes, including military planning. He supported the empire's expansion, even sending his son Chu Suiliang to serve in the military.

As a faithful and powerful counselor to the emperor, he played another role as well, demonstrated in the poem translated here.

In addition to supporting the emperor's pragmatic endeavors, he also helped to enhance the ideology upon which rested the emperor's legitimacy: the maintenance of harmony between heaven and earth, or at least the appearance thereof. In order to achieve this goal, he sought to keep the emperor and the lords in their proper places within the larger system of an agrarian cosmos. The emperor, it will be remembered, possessed the mandate of heaven, and his power was almost absolute in ancient China. Yet, it was obligatory that he behave according to rules handed down to him from emperors who had lived – triumphantly or otherwise – before. His call was to honor the ancestral god from whom his power was claimed to derive, and so set an example for his subjects to follow: to work diligently on the land that sustained their lives. Chu Liang supported myths of this kind: among the things he did in his long career was to stop the father of Emperor Taizong from hunting in winter, not wanting the retired emperor to disturb the peaceful life of ordinary farmers.

The performance of ritual plowing was maintained in Chinese culture down to Qing, the last dynasty (1611–1911). Even today, in the southern part of Beijing, there still exists a cluster of ancient buildings opposite the Temple of Heaven, which surround the acres used for ritual plowing since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). This ritual fascinated even the imagination of the western world; for example, J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur described, in Farmer James' Second Letter, how the American farmer worked his own land as proudly as the Chinese Emperor tilled the ritual acres.

Chu Liang as a poet is now eclipsed by his son, but he did receive much honor. During the Tang, his portrait was hung in the imperial archive, the highest honor an official could receive. Centuries later, during the Song dynasty, the scholar Ji Yougong 计有功 placed him in a rather high position in *Tang Shi Ji Shi*, a collection of Tang poetry first published in the year 1224. His mind, according to Ji Yougong, was “alert and sharp” from youth to very old age (Ji Yougong, *Tang Shi Ji Shi*. Shanghai, Zhonghua Press, 1965, p. 40).

《享先农乐章－诚和》

（《全唐诗》卷32第10首）

粒食伊始，农之所先。

古今攸赖，是曰人天。

耕斯帝籍，播厥公田。

式崇明祀，神其福焉。

To Our Ancestor the First Farmer, in Sincere Harmony

Grain begins with you
The First Husbandman

From ancient times to now
all have depended on you

This is the law of men and heaven

To till this land
is the duty of the emperor

To sow those fields
is the duty of the lords

All use these brilliant rituals
All watch with respect

In return may gods bless us
with good fortune

Wang Ji 王绩

Wang Ji was born and raised in Jiangzhou (mod. Hejin, Shanxi). He held a position in the court of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) in his earlier years, and was allowed to stay in that position even after establishment of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Yet, the replacement of an empire was accompanied by wars and chaos throughout the state. Wang was unhappy in the court and often pondered with a sigh: “the imperial power is like a net the size of the whole sky; where is the place where I can live in peace?” He soon “pretended to be ill with gout and abandoned his office, sailing back to home on a small boat” (Xin Wenfang, *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, The Press of Ancient Literature, 1957, p. 2). At home, he indulged himself in excessive drinking while expressing his admiration for ancient drunk poets before him, such as Ji Kang 嵇康 (223-262), Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263), and perhaps especially the great poet of reclusion, Tao Qian 陶潜 (365-427).

The exact dates of composition for these three poems are unknown, but it is fascinating to read them as a sequence, for they reveal the poet's process of adjustment to his new life and the country environment. In the first poem, Wang Ji is still confused about his identity and the kind of life he wants to live after retiring from the court. He wanders about but does not know where he belongs; he finds nothing in common with the working people and so must communicate in his imagination with the idealized sages of ancient times. The second poem shows that the poet has found a footing in his new country life and has made a friend – a fellow recluse who, like Wang himself actually works in the field to support the new life away from and so independent of the court. The poet seems to suggest that simply being there does not make country life rewarding: one must work on the land and follow the cyclical process of the seasons to develop a real sense of place. The third poem shows that Wang has successfully compromised the ideal with the practical. He pats his half-empty stomach the way an optimist looks at a half-full glass, and feels no embarrassment talking about his humble, sparse meals with tender care, having accepted the imperfect life he now lives. His life more closely approaches his ideals after he has relinquished the materialistic comforts offered by the corrupt court.

《野望》（《全唐诗》卷37第14首）

东皋薄暮望，徙倚欲何依。
树树皆秋色，山山唯落晖。
牧童驱犊返，猎马带禽归。
相顾无相识，长歌怀采薇。

Wild View

I watch the early dusk on the Eastern Hill.
I move, I lean, but what should I lean on?

Trees, trees, in all their autumn colors.
Hills, hills, lit only by the setting sun.

Oxen-herds chase their calves back to their village.
A hunter on his horse returns with game birds.

He turns to look at me, and I him – we do not know each other.
In remembrance, I utter the long chant, “Gathering Peas.”*

*“Gathering Peas” is a song created and sung by ancient sages.

《秋夜喜逢王处士》

(《全唐诗》 卷37第32首)

北场芸藿罢，东皋刈黍归。
相逢秋月满，更值夜萤飞。

Autumn Night, Happy to Meet Recluse Wang

You finish hoeing beans on the North Ground.
I return from cutting millet on the East Hill.
We meet beneath the full autumn moon,
when fireflies dance around us.

《食后》(《全唐诗》 卷37第35首)

田家无所有，晚食遂为常。
菜剪三秋绿，飧炊百日黄。
胡麻山杪样，楚豆野麋方。
始暴松皮脯，新添杜若浆。
葛花消酒毒，茱蒂发羹香。
鼓腹聊乘兴，宁知逢世昌。

After a Meal

I have nothing in my farmhouse.
My supper is always delayed.
My vegetables stay green through the
three months of autumn.
I cook my "Hundred-day Brown" rice,
grind flax seeds baked mountain style,
eat verbena seeds the way wild elk eat
them.

When those run out I eat sun-dried pine
bark.
To that I add rice wine –
nostoc counters its bad effects.*
Wild elderberries give my vegetable stew
a fresh fragrance.

I beat my tummy as if it were a drum.
How can I not know that I live in the most
prosperous age?

*Nostoc is a kind of jelly-like,
green algae.

Hanshan 寒山

An at least semi-legendary figure, Han (“cold” 寒) Shan (“mountain” 山) was a Buddhist monk and poet who has fascinated the imagination of American poets such as Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and Red Pine (Bill Porter). He lived in southeastern China, and practiced Buddhism at Mount Tiantai 天台, the Mountain of Heavenly Terraces, by a peak called Cold Rock. In addition to naming himself after the rock, Hanshan wrote many of his poems on the rock, and among the trunks of trees and bamboos surrounding it. An interesting contrast exists between him and Wang Ji, his contemporary in the North. While Wang was saddened by loneliness and cheered by friendship, Hanshan seems to brag about the desolate environment in which he lived.

As a Buddhist, he seems to have achieved a sufficiently high level of enlightenment to remain indifferent to the harsh landscape, the seasonal changes, and the human confusion. Half buried by the snow on his shoulders, Hanshan had become one with the cold mountain of Tiantai. He never worried about his identity as did Wang Ji, for his identification with the land was complete: Cold Mountain was the cold mountain. Despite the slight difference between Tiantai Buddhism and Zen, Hanshan held an attitude similar to that of the Zen masters when disciples came to ask for enlightenment. When asked about the “Way (the ‘Dao’) to Cold Mountain,” or rather, the identification he had achieved with the harsh land in which he dwelt, he answered with a deliberate arrogance Zen masters also adopted to shock their disciples into realizing that Buddha-hood already existed within them. The masters believed, in fact, that Buddha-hood existed in crumbled bits of tiles and bricks, or even, to further emphasize the point, in dry feces. When disciples asked Hanshan about the Dao to Cold Mountain, his first response might very well be annoyance: if you listen to yourself carefully, you should know; so why ask me? You must have assumed a difference between you and me, but that difference is superficial and has nothing to do with Buddha-hood.

Since Chinese poetry, or prose, for that matter, does not have punctuation, I took a certain liberty in translating Hanshan’s response to the inquirer into rhetorical questions. I hope Western readers perceive the tone of sarcasm and arrogance Hanshan assumed in those questions.

Hanshan’s simple lifestyle served him well, for he is said to have been the longest living Tang poet. According to the Chinese scholar Qian Xuelie’s 钱学烈 research, Hanshan was most likely born in 725 and died in 830, when he was one hundred and five years old (“Han Shan Shengping Xin Tan.” *Shenzhen Daxue Xuebao*, February, 1998, pp. 101-107).

《杳杳寒山道》 （《全唐诗》卷806）

杳杳寒山道，落落冷涧滨。
啾啾常有鸟，寂寂更无人。
磻磻风吹面，纷纷雪积身。
朝朝不见日，岁岁不知春。

Deep in Cold Mountain

Remote, remote,
winds Cold Mountain road.

Lonely, lonely,
its cold stream banks.

Chirp, chirp,
the birds sing all the time.

Alone, alone,
there is no other human around.

Dusty, dusty,
the wind blows into my face.

Flake upon flake,
the snow buries my body.

Morning after morning I see no sun.
Year after year I know no spring.

《人问寒山道》（《全唐诗》卷806）

人问寒山道，寒山路不通。
夏天冰未释，日出雾朦胧。
似我何由屈，与君心不同。
君心若似我，还得到其中。

The Way to Cold Mountain

You ask me the Way to Cold Mountain.
The Way to Cold Mountain is blocked.

In summer, ice does not melt,
sunrise blurred by thick fog.

How can people like me live there?
My heart differs from yours.

When your heart feels the way mine does,
you'll be on the Mountain in no time.

《家住绿岩下》（《全唐诗》卷806）

家住绿岩下，庭芜更不芟。
新藤垂缭绕，古石树嵒岩。
山果猿猴摘，池鱼白鹭衔。
仙书一两卷，树下读喃喃。

My Home Below the Green Cliff

My home is below the green cliff.
I never cut the weeds in the yard.

Young vines drape all over the walls.
Ancient crags form a natural fortress.

Wild monkeys pick wild apples there.
Snowy egrets pierce fish in the pond.

Under a tree I read to myself
books of Immortality – a volume or two.*

*Hanshan is an unconventional Buddhist in all senses of the word. The “Book of Immortality” was most likely composed of Daoist recipes for achieving actual immortality, rather than Buddhist sutras of ways to achieve Nirvana.

《可重是寒山》（《全唐诗》卷806）

可重是寒山，白云常自闲。
猿啼畅道内，虎啸出人间。
独步石可履，孤吟藤好攀。
松风清飒飒，鸟语声喧喧。

Homage to Cold Mountain

Cold Mountain should be respected,
where white clouds always roam at ease.

Monkeys howl to clear the inner Dao.
Tigers roar to overcome the noise of the human world.

Walking alone I follow the rocky trail,
climb vines up through the pine branches,

to chant with rustling winds
among chirping birds.

Du Shenyan 杜审言

“Demotion and demotion literature,” argues Professor Shang Yongliang 尚永亮, “is a unique cultural phenomenon in Chinese history” (*Yuanhe Wu Da Shiren yu Bianzhe Wenxue Kaolue*. Taipei, Wenjin Publishing Company, 1993, p. 1). While questioning whether this “phenomenon” is unique to Chinese culture, I want to extend his argument to include “service travel” (*huanyou* 宦游) as an important field of study for the scholars of Tang poetry, and, indeed, the poetry of many other Chinese dynasties. *Huanyou* means traveling to various places, be they far or near, “civilized” or “wild,” as government officials in the service of the empire and emperor. It is an interesting sub-genre of Chinese poetry that often describes the impressively diverse landscape of the Tang empire. At the same time, it reflects the subtle emotional attachment to or repulsion from various places to which these poets journeyed. The Tang poets often gained access to positions at different levels of government through their poetic achievement and reputation. Traveling to their offices, they found new inspiration and subject matter with which to further develop their poetic talent. Their experience of the land thus could vary dramatically, as witnessed by the poems of Du Shenyan.

Du Shenyan was an important poet in the Early Tang Period; his poetic reputation is surpassed only by his grandson Du Fu (also transcribed as Tu Fu 杜甫). Born in 646, he moved at an early age to Gong County, Henan Province, between the two great rivers that nourished Chinese culture and Chinese people: the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. He passed the imperial examination in 670 (Fu Xuancong, *Tangdai Shiren Congkao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Publishing Company, 1980, p. 25), when he was only twenty-four – a promising start by any standard. However, his career fluctuated with political struggles in the court. For twenty years he was unable to reach any higher rank than that of county magistrate or sheriff. The first poem translated below was written after 670, the year he was appointed county sheriff in Xicheng – in 760 changed to Xihe County – in the northwestern province of Shanxi.

The second poem was written nineteen years later, when Du Shenyan was frustrated still to be a low-rank official, the magistrate of Jiangyin County, Jiangsu Province. The poem was written during an early spring excursion with his friend Lu, the magistrate of the neighboring county of Jinling. Lu’s original poem was lost. Although the two travel poems were not written on the occasion of demotion (Du having never gotten much of a promotion to begin with), they certainly share the melancholy traits that Professor Shang highlights in his excellent book.

Following the dramatic death of his son (a long story we shall not pursue here), Du Shenyan’s luck changed in the year 702 when he became one of the inner group of poets in the court of Empress Wu Zetian 武则天. But he was soon demoted after a rebellion in the far south, together with other poets such as Shen Quanqi 沈佺期和 Song Zhiwen 宋之问. These poets wrote poems to each other as they crossed the Grand Yu Ridge. Du’s poem was lost; Song’s was preserved and is translated a few pages after this.

The third poem offers additional information about the size of the Tang empire. The minor official of the empire suffers from homesickness and finds the land of Vietnam strange. How would the local people feel about his presence and what he represents there? When we talk about “sense of place,” can we ignore the question of “whose sense of whose place”? The reader can’t help but wonder.

These three poems are representative of what I call a sub-genre in Chinese poetry. Most Tang poets were also officials, officers, and clerks serving the empire. They had to compromise their ideal lifestyle with the harsh reality. Hence, thousands of poems were written to complain about their futile pursuit of petty offices hundreds or even thousands of miles away from home. This is the sub-genre of Tang poetry that often reflects a depressing sense of placelessness, giving modern readers a better understanding of Tang China's physical environment.

《经行岚州》（《全唐诗》卷 62 第 22 首）

北地春光晚，边城气候寒。
往来花不发，新旧雪仍残。
水作琴中听，山疑画里看。
自惊牵远役，艰险促征鞍。

Traveling by Lanzhou

In the North spring light comes late.
In frontier towns it is always cold.

I come and go but flowers never bloom.
Old snow – and new snow – still remains.

The river appeals to me as a harp,
the mountain a dream-like painting.

I'm surprised how far I've come to serve the emperor.
Hardship and danger push me from my saddle.

《和晋陵陆丞早春游望》

(《全唐诗》卷 62 第 11 首)

独有宦游人，偏惊物候新。
云霞出海曙，梅柳渡江春。
淑气催黄鸟，晴光转绿蘋。
忽闻歌古调，归思欲沾巾。

**In Response to Lu Cheng's Poem "The Impression of
an Excursion in Early Spring"**

Lonely is the man who travels to serve the emperor,
shocked by signs of another new season.
Burning clouds rise with the sun from the sea.
Plum and willow buds cross the Yangtze to the North.
Spring air urges the yellow orioles to mate.
Brilliant sunlight turns the duckweeds green.
Suddenly I hear you sing our ancient songs –
Tears fall on my chest – I miss my home.

《旅寓安南》(《全唐诗》卷 62)

交趾殊风候，寒迟暖复催。
仲冬山果熟，正月野花开。
积雨生昏雾，轻霜下震雷。
故乡逾万里，客思倍从来。

Sojourning in Vietnam

Chochin China, such a different
climate!
Cold days come late, soon chased
away by warmer winds.
In mid-winter, mountain fruits ripen
in bundles.

Wild flowers begin to bloom the first
month of the year.
Incessant rains make a somber mist.
Thunder-claps shake loose the light frost.
My homeland is ten thousand miles
away –
In my thoughts, the distance doubles.

仲
昭



Wang Bo 王勃

Wang Bo was born in the year 650 and died in 676. Like John Keats, his talent was recognized by society at an early age and he lived a comparably short life. Growing up in Jiangzhou, Shanxi Province, Wang was known as a child prodigy. Recommended to take an examination in the court, he passed with honor and at the age of fourteen was given an official position as the secretary to a prince. His poems were well received, and he became one of the Four Great Poets of the Early Tang Dynasty (the other three being Yang Jiong 杨炯, Lu Zhaoling 卢照邻, and Luo Binwang 骆宾王).

The proud young genius soon ran into considerable trouble: he was first demoted because his humorous essay on cock-fighting offended the emperor. Then, he was charged with killing a servant. Though spared execution, his father was demoted to the position of a county magistrate in the remote southern prefecture of Cochinchina, an area including parts of the present-day provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, and northern and central areas of Vietnam. On his way to join his father in the far south, Wang fell into the sea; although he was soon fished out of the cold salt water, he became very ill from the shocking experience and died shortly thereafter.

According to the modern Chinese scholar Zhang Mingfei 张明非, together with the other three great poets of the Early Tang period Wang inspired the “mountains and rivers” school of previous dynasties with a sense of actual human dwellings (*Tang Yu Lun Sou*. Guilin, Guangxi University Press, 1993, esp. pp. 195-205). In addition to a vivid description of the physical locale, Wang offers the reader a sense of how it feels to live in that environment. Professor Ge Xiaoyin 葛晓音 further argues this addition allowed Wang to develop a sense of seasonal and diurnal changes in the landscape as the lights, weather, and temperature change (*Shanshui Tianyuan Shi Pai Yanjiu*. Shenyang, Liaoning University Press, 1993, esp. pp. 112-20).

《山中》（《全唐诗》卷56）

长江悲已滞，万里念将归。
况属高风晚，山山黄叶飞。

From the Mountain

The Long River flows
sad and slow.
Ten thousand miles from home,
I pray for my return.
High in the mountain
the night wind blows.
Mountains, mountains—
yellow leaves fly.

《冬郊行望》（《全唐诗》卷 56）

桂密岩花白，梨疏树叶红。
江皋寒望尽，归念断征篷。

A Winter Walk Outside the City Walls

Tight sweet olive shrubs
White rock flowers
The last of last year's pears
hanging among a few red leaves

From the cold river cliffs
I watch sails disappear
My thoughts of home
disappear with them.

《登城春望》（《全唐诗》卷 56）

物外山川近，晴初景霁新。
芳郊花柳遍，何处不宜春？

A Spring View from the Top of the City Wall

From the world of things,
I come closer to mountains and rivers.

Fine weather freshens the misty landscape—
flowers and willows outside the city walls.

What place is not appropriate for spring?

《咏风》（《全唐诗》卷 55）

肃肃凉风生，加我林壑清。
驱烟寻涧户，卷雾出山楹。
去来固无迹，动息如有情。
日落山水静，为君起松声。

On Summer Wind

Severe and chilly rises the wind
brings purity to my woods
chases the smoke out of the gurgling
ravine
rolls the mountain mist out of my hut
windows

Come and go, it leaves no clear traces
Move and stop, it feels as if with empathy
Mountains and rivers quiet
The sun strikes the harp of pine needles

Guo Zhen 郭震

Guo Zhen was born in what is now Daming County, Hebei Province, in the year 656. Contrary to what he describes in the poem, his poetic talent was well-received by Empress Wu, who heard of his poems in the year 695 and invited him to return to the capital, Chang'an, for a court interview. Guo seized this opportunity and presented to the court his poem about a legendary sword; Empress Wu appreciated it enough to have it hand-copied and presented to scores of her favorite courtiers. Guo Zhen went on to rise to rather high positions in the military, in 712 becoming general commander of the Northern Army. He was, however, soon demoted and sent to the south, and died on the road in 713 (Chen Wenxin, Liu Jiafu, et al., eds. *Zhongguo Wenxue Nianjian: Sui, Tang, Wudai*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, pp. 118, 198-99).

Through most of his career, Guo was a high-ranking official, and eventually a peer. Though there is **no** mention in the surviving historical record regarding his actual treatment of poets new to officialdom, still, the camaraderie shown in the piece below between poet and crickets is both original and quite striking. Comparison of the crickets' song with his own poetry is not directly stated in the poem, but is suggested in the personal pronoun *jun* 君 (meaning gentleman, Sir, princely man), with which the poet addresses them. The poem is both humorous and thought-provoking.

《蛩》（《全唐诗》卷66）

愁杀离家未达人，一声声到枕前闻。
苦吟莫向朱门里，满耳笙歌不听君。

Crickets

Saddened to death, I'm a man
who left home in search of fame and rank.

Chirp after chirp penetrates the pillow around my head.

Don't you direct your bitter chanting
at the Red Gates,* I tell those crickets.

The lords' ears, full of sweet songs and pipes,
have no time for you.

*In the Tang Dynasty, only aristocrats were allowed to paint their gates red.

仲

昭



Song Zhiwen 宋之问

The Grand Yu Ridge 大庾岭, also known as the South Ridge, or just “The Ridge” (in the southwestern corner of modern Jiangxi Province) is an important landmark in Chinese poetry as well as Chinese geography. Legend has it that migrating geese would not fly any farther south than this ridge before stopping and turning back north. Thus, it also demarcates a psychological limit in the imagination of ancient Chinese poets: the landscape south of the ridge, despite its actual beauty, always evokes homesickness, a sense of alienation and banishment, as witnessed by the three poems translated below.

The life of Song Zhiwen (656-712) is tragically typical of the “talented poet” in medieval China. Passing the imperial examination at the age of nineteen, he entered the bureaucracy early enough. Unlike Wang Bo 王勃, who died young, or Song’s friend Du Shenyan 杜审言, who was kept at “petty offices” by a series of setbacks, Song Zhiwen worked his way up to the fairly high rank of an assistant undersecretary in the Imperial Personnel Department (*kao gong yuanweilang*). He accelerated his advancement in the court by ingratiating himself with Zhang Yizhi 张易之, Empress Wu Zetian’s 武则天 lover, and Princess Taiping 太平公主, the Empress’s daughter. (More information about the Princess is offered below in the translator’s note to the poet Han Yu 韩愈.) In the end, however, Song Zhiwen paid the ultimate price for his involvement with power. As Empress Wu lay dying, a powerful courtier killed Zhang Yizhi, and immediately after her death, in 705, Song Zhiwen was banished to Longzhou, in what is now Guangdong Province, as reflected in the first poem below. The scenery was apparently fresh, interesting, even exciting to him, but he missed the lands he knew in the north. The exact duration of this exile is unknown, but it lasted at least a couple of years (“Through winters and springs”). Song’s sense of homesickness and alienation must have been unbearable, for he escaped from his first exile and returned to his home in central China, said to have been in northwest Henan Province or even farther north, in mid-west Shanxi Province. Traditionally, his lines – “Now a fugitive nearing home in north,/I’m too scared to talk with anyone/who seems to come/That Way” – have been read as a deep concern for the wellbeing of his family and friends. Re-contextualizing those lines in history, however, we can see that his fear was real, and not just for family or friends, but for his own life as well. Indeed, he was soon (some time in or after 710) banished again, this time to Qinzhou, Guangxi Province, a place farther southwest than his first banishment. This time he did not even think of escape. Instead, he simply wished to see the plum blossoms on the ridge, blossoms symbolizing the utmost southern limit in the poetic imagination of his time. In this second exile, he was “graciously given the imperial order to commit suicide” (*ci si* 赐死), in 712, a year before Princess Taiping attempted to murder or banish Li Longji 李隆基, the emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712-756). The Princess failed and received the same “gracious imperial order.”

In the life story of Song Zhiwen we see how naïve it can be to romanticize ancient Chinese poetry or landscape. The landscape in southern China is real, beautiful, and fresh to the poet from central China, but Shangri-la never existed in the “exotic Orient.” A Tang poet’s sense of place – or rather being out of place – was intertwined with and complicated by power struggles in the empire.

《早发始兴江口至虚氏村作》
(《全唐诗》卷 53)

候晓逾闽峤，乘春望越台。
宿云鹏际落，残月蚌中开。
薜荔摇青气，桄榔翳碧苔。
桂香多露裊，石响细泉回。
抱叶玄猿啸，衔花翡翠来。
南中虽可悦，北思日悠哉。
鬓发俄成素，丹心已作灰。
何当首归路，行剪故园莱。

Starting Early from Jiangkou River in Shixing County

Before dawn I travel over the sharp peaks of Min.
In spring I'll view the Terrace of Canton.*

Night clouds fall among the wings of rocs.†
The moon lingers between two peaks,
a pearl held by the shells of a clam.
The vines of climbing figs wave in greenish air.
Moss covers the trunks of ancient sugar-palms.
Dew-moistened cassia bark sends forth a rare fragrance.
Winding through rocks, the spring gurgles quietly.
Holding onto leaves, black monkeys howl back and forth.
Flowers between beaks, the kingfishers come and go.

The scenery of the south appears to be pleasant.
My thoughts of the north increase by the day.
In a few days my temples turn white.
My heart becomes as dead as ashes.
When can I turn around and head for home,
If only to weed my deserted garden?

* Min is now Fujian Province; Guangdong Province is its neighbor to the south. The Terrace of Canton, however, is at the southern end of the southern province of Guangdong.

† Mythical giant birds of Indian and Arabic origin.

《渡汉江》（《全唐诗》卷 53）

岭外音书断，经冬复历春。
近乡情更怯，不敢问来人。

Crossing the Han River

For the last winter and this spring, I've lived
South of the Grand Ridge.
Once an exile, now I'm a fugitive near home,
sick of waiting for letters, too scared
to ask travelers about any news.

《题大庾岭北驿》（《全唐诗》卷 52）

阳月初飞雁，传闻至此回。
我行殊未已，何日复归来。
江静潮初落，林昏瘴不开。
明朝望乡处，应见陇头梅。

Written on the Wall of the Northern Stage of Grand Yu Ridge

I've heard the legend of the wild geese
that stop here in their October flight.
I have to go on south from here,
not knowing when I could ever come back.

With the evening ebb the river falls quiet.
A deadly mist permeates the woods.
Tomorrow morning from a distant peak,
I hope to see these plum blossoms glowing
on the "southern-most" Grand Yu Ridge*

*The narrator of this poem obviously traveled much farther south from the
"southern-most" Ridge. All he could hope is to see the plum flowers on the
southern slope of the Ridge.

仲
昭



Shen Quanqi 沈佺期

Shen Quanqi (沈佺期) is a contemporary of Song Zhiwen in a literal sense. They were born in the same year, 656, passed the imperial examination in the same year, 675, fawned on the same man who served Empress Wu as a male concubine, and were both banished from court when that man was killed in 705. (Shen Quanqi, however, lived two years longer than Song, and died a natural death in 714.) Small wonder, then, to see the first poem expressing similar feelings of a lone “floating sojourner” who had crossed the outer boundary of the Central Empire. The southern landscape is beautiful, but it can only evoke hopeless feelings of estrangement: the poet had to leave the meaningful land of the “Center” and enter the uncertainty of the marginalized region of the “wild.” Interestingly, however, outside of the Central Empire – which had dictated meaning of life as well as pattern of behavior to such miserable courtiers as Shen and Song – nature seemed to assume an intention of its own and thereby derived the power to give meaning to life: the mountain moon “peeped into the window,” the “Silver River of Stars” (the Milky Way) “flowed into the door,” spring turned leaves green, and the cuckoo broke the silence of the dark “void” of the “wild” region. Knowingly or unknowingly, when pushed out of the familiar boundary of the established meaning-making system, the poets returned to a larger world, one that moves along its own orbit. Did they gain some comfort from writing these poems? Why escaping from his first exile did Song wish only for a view of the plum blossoms on the boundary ridge?

In the flitting world of humans, empires rise and fall, glories come and go. The Northern Hills of Mang outside the ancient capital of Luoyang, and the silent graves arranged there, seemed to Shen Quanqi permanent witness to the vainglory of the empire-builders who died in that place. Today, this traditional symbolism is challenged by the rapid “modernization” of China: as I traveled by Luoyang in 2009, for example, construction of a new expressway tore open several ancient tombs. Also, on what had been the remote and lonely western slope of the Peak of Seven Hairpin Bends (on the border between the modern Shaanxi and Sichuan provinces), I was trapped for an hour in a traffic jam on the newly completed inter-provincial highway. The jam was created by peddlers who crowded the “freeway” with their food and souvenir stands. A local government official told me that they had “worked on” regulations for months: on the one hand, they did not want the peddlers to stop the traffic; on the other hand, stopped traffic made travelers buy things and thereby contributed to the revenue for the local government. What can the “People’s Government” do? A dilemma that Shen Quanqi could never have imagined during the sleepless night he spent there.

《夜宿七盘岭》（《全唐诗》卷 96）

独游千里外，高卧七盘西。
晓月临窗近，天河入户低。
芳春平仲绿，清夜子规啼。
浮客空留听，褒城闻曙鸡。

Spending the Night on the Peak of Seven-Hairpin Bends

Alone I travel more than a thousand miles.
High on the west slope of the Seven-Hairpin Bends,
I lie down to a long, wakeful night.

The morning moon falls closer to my window,
The Silver River,* already low, flows into my front door –
together to make greener the leaves of ginkgo trees
that housed the cuckoo singing in the clear night.

A floating sojourner, I try to listen
to the sounds of home, east of the mountain.
What I hear from the last city of the Central Kingdom
is the chorus of roosters urging me to travel farther.

* The Milky Way.

《北邙》（《全唐诗》卷 96）

北邙山上列坟莹，万古千秋对洛城。
城中日夕歌钟起，山上唯闻松柏声。

The Northern Hill

On the Northern Hill of Mang
tombstones of ancient lords
stand in perfect files and ranks
for thousands of years
overlooking the East Capital Luoyang

In the evening, bells ring in towers
people in the city sing
with the setting of the sun

On the Northern Hills can the lords hear
pine needles and cypress leaves sigh
with the rustling wind over Luoyang

He Zhizhang 贺知章

He Zhizhang was born in 656 in Yuezhou (now Xiaoshan, Zhejiang Province), in southeastern China. He left home early, but did not pass the imperial examination until he was thirty-six, then gradually worked his way up into the Imperial Secretariat. Having nick-named himself “the mad traveler from the Siming Mountains,” he retired to become a Daoist monk in his hometown by Mirror Lake. He lived a long life, dying in 744.

Though not as widely written about as Grand Yu Ridge, Mirror Lake 镜湖 is also a famous landmark in the Chinese poetic imagination. After He Zhizhang, the lake’s “clear water” was reflected in the works of Lu You 陆游 (Song Dynasty), Zhang Kejiu 张可久 (Yuan Dynasty), Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳 (Ming Dynasty), and Li Ciming 李慈铭 (Qing Dynasty), all of whom lived by and wrote about the lake. Also known as Chang Hu 长湖 (Long Lake), it used to be a large lake along the foothills of Kuaiji Mountain, in Zhejiang Province, connected to the Cao E River to the east, which flowed into the ocean. In the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), the lake had a circumference of one hundred and fifty-five kilometers. During the Tang, even as He Zhizhang wrote about its “unchanged ripples,” the lake began to fill with silt; when the Song Dynasty poet Lu You began to write, dykes were built and most of the lake reclaimed as rice fields. Now, only one stretch of the river, somewhat broader than the rest, remains as a reminder of the former Mirror Lake. Nor are the clear ripples of the lake as unchanging as those poets had imagined, having been polluted by the rampant industrialization in southeastern China, and especially by the growing city of Shaoxing. As the city grows, the lake continues to shrink. When I visited this (once) poetic lake in the summer of 2009, I was surprised to see that a part of the lake shore had been partitioned with a rope, marked to become part of a new golf course that replaced the traditional mulberry trees on the slope of the rolling hills.

《咏柳》（《全唐诗》卷112）

碧玉状成一树高，万条垂下绿丝绦。
不知细叶谁裁出，二月春风似剪刀。

To A Willow Tree

Decorated with green jade
You stand tall and graceful

letting your hair down
a greenish silky waterfall
Who has the skills and tools
to cut such exquisite leaves so well

Winds of March* are sharper
than the best of shears

* The second month of the lunar
calendar is roughly equivalent to
March.

《回乡偶书 其一》（《全唐诗》卷 112）

少小离家老大回，乡音未改鬓毛衰。
儿童相见不相识，笑问客从何处来。

《其二》

离别家乡岁月多，近来人事半消磨。
唯有门前镜湖水，春风不改旧时波。

Homecoming, I

I left my home a young man
Now I finally return my temples grey

The village urchins see me
wondering who I am

They smile and ask me

Mr. Traveler
where are you from

Homecoming, II

For thirty years I've been away from home
Lately I've realized many friends died
Only the ripples on the lake
glitter and shimmer as always
unchanged by spring winds

Zhang Jiuling 张九龄

As explained in the note on Song Zhiwen 宋之问, the Chinese scholar-official-poet dreaded the vast region south of the Grand Yu Ridge, a region that included what is now north and central Vietnam. Zhang Jiuling, however, is an exception. He was born in 678 among the southern foothills of the Grand Yu Ridge, in Rock Pond Village, Shixing County, near what is now Shaoguan City, Guangdong. His family had lived in that small village since the time of his great-grandfather, though recent research suggests Zhang Jiuling himself lived, and in 740 died, in Qujiang District, about seventy kilometers southwest of the ancestral village (He Ge'en, "Zhang Jiuling Nianpu," and "Zhang Jiuling Nianpu Buzheng," both in *Lingnan Xuebao*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1935, and Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1937; also see Fu Xuancong, "Tang Dai Shiren Kao Lue: Zhang Jiuling" *Wen Shi*, Beijing, March, 1980).

Critical consensus says Zhang Jiuling wrote more poems about water – including lakes, rivers, and waterfalls – than mountains, farms, or other features of the landscape (Tao Wenpeng, "Du Zhang Jiuling Shanshui Shi Bijì." *Guangming Daily*, March 24, 1987). Yet, I think his belief that grasses and trees have their own heart is something that should not be forgotten, for in the mid-nineteenth century, Henry David Thoreau's first Maine Woods essay was banned for the statement in it that the white pine of Maine has as good a soul as himself and will go to as high a heaven. Even today, Western environmentalists are still trying hard to help people "think like a mountain" and respect the "mind" of other species such as the whooping crane and the spotted owl.

《感遇十二首其一》（《全唐诗》卷47）

兰叶春葳蕤，桂华秋皎洁。
欣欣此生意，自尔为佳节。
谁知林栖者，闻风坐相悦。
草木有本心，何求美人折。

Random Thoughts on My Life; Verse One of Twelve

Orchid leaves in spring grow soft and
luxuriant.
Osmanthus blossoms in autumn shine
with pure light.

Lovely is this meaning of life –
in keeping with the seasons they celebrate
their own good days.

The recluse in the woods smelling their
sweetness
is inspired to make a pleasant remark –

Grasses have their hearts,
trees their own minds.

Beautiful ladies of powerful lords,
flowers never ask you to pick them.

《湖口望庐山瀑布》（《全唐诗》卷 48）

万丈洪泉落，迢迢半紫氛。
奔飞流杂树，洒落出重云。
日照虹蜺似，天清风雨闻。
灵山多秀色，空水共氤氲。

**Viewing the Waterfalls on Mount Lu
From the Inlet of Lake Poyang**

For ten thousand feet, the flood tumbles through
layers and layers of cloud,
sending red and purple mists over the sky,
falling over shrubs and trees.

It looks like a rainbow arching over the sun,
sounds like a summer thunderstorm
in a clear, blue sky.

Inspired mountains of diverse beauty!
You impregnate the void with moist light.

Wang Zhihuan 王之涣

Wang Zhihuan's family had since the time of his great, great, great-grandfather, lived in the Prefecture of Jinyang, in what is now Shanxi Province. He served in lower offices and traveled in central and northern China most of his life, on either bank of the Yellow River. Born in 688, during the Reign of Empress Wu, he died in 742, at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, the peak of the Tang Empire.

The Tower of Storks was located in Puzhou, now Yongji County, Shanxi Province, on an island mid-stream in the Yellow River. According to Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031-1095), a Song Dynasty poet and scientist, "the Tower of Storks stood above the mighty Yellow River, facing the soaring Zhongtiao Mountains 中条山. Tang poets wrote many pieces on the walls of the tower, but only three poems could virtually re-present the scene and sense of the place. Wang Zhihuan's poem is the best of the three" (*Mengxi Bi Tan*. Chengdu, Bashu Press, 1995, p. 209).

"The Song of Liangzhou" has been established as a poetic sub-genre since the Han Dynasty, often describing the ritual in which poets broke a twig of willow to give to a departing friend as a token of the length of the period during which they would miss each other. In this poem Wang is saying that though there are no willow twigs to break in the high deserts of the far northwest, the soldiers guarding the frontier there know that, and should not grumble. American New Critics would have loved this poem, for Wang's irony is quite successful: he complains more effectively by reminding a fellow soldier not to complain.

Wang never rose higher in his official career than county secretary. He seems to have been unhappy about that, often keeping beat with a sword while singing his own poems out loud. His poems were very popular in his time, sung by sing-song girls at parties and market places. It's a pity only six of them have survived.

《登鹳雀楼》（《全唐诗》卷 253）

白日依山尽，黄河入海流。
欲穷千里目，更上一层楼。

Climbing the Tower of Storks

The pale sun comes to an end behind the mountains.
The Yellow River flows into the sea.

He who wants to see even farther than that,
must climb another story.

《凉州词》（《全唐诗》卷 253）

黄河远上白云间，一片孤城万仞山。
羌笛何须怨杨柳，春风不度玉门关。

A Song of Liangzhou

The Yellow River leads us up into the clouds
To guard a lonely castle and ten-thousand-foot mountains

Don't complain, you player of the Tartar flute
for spring winds never bother to come over the Yumen Pass

Meng Haoran 孟浩然

Meng Haoran was born in 689, the year after the birth of Wang Zhihuan 王之涣, in the key strategic city of Xiangyang, along the Han River in modern Hubei. He never much liked the court and stayed away from it until the age of forty, when, his hair having already turned gray, he finally travelled to Chang'an to take the imperial examination. He failed. While in the capital, he met the poet Zhang Jiuling 张九龄, who admired his poetic talent but could not help him win office. Frustrated, Meng traveled in southeastern China during the year of 728. A decade later, in 737, when Zhang Jiuling had been demoted to be governor of Jingzhou, he appointed Meng Haoran an administrative assistant in his prefectural office. Two years later, the poet Wang Changling 王昌龄 was demoted and sent to the southwest. On his way to his new posting, he stopped by Xiangyang and met Meng Haoran in Zhang Jiuling's office. The next year, returning from the south Wang again met with Meng Haoran, on which occasion the two ate river fish and drank a great deal of wine. That meal supposedly worsened a subcutaneous ulcer Meng Haoran had on his back, and he died soon after the party. In the same year, the poet Wang Wei 王维 was appointed to succeed Zhang Jiuling as governor of Xiangyang. Upon news of Meng's death, Wang Wei painted a portrait of Meng to hang in his office. These stories help explain why in his poems Meng Haoran described the importance of friendship in his life of rural reclusion.

The last poem translated below is likely more interesting to the environmentalists of the twenty-first century, offering a basis for reconciliation of culture and nature. Lord Yang Hu, whose epigraph moved Meng Haoran to tears, protected the interest of the common people while serving as the emperor's general. Four hundred years before Meng Haoran was born, Lord Yang had often hiked Mount Xianshou, drinking wine and composing poems there with his friends. Once, moved by the landscape, he told his friends that "this mountain seems to be born with the universe itself and sages since ancient times have hiked the mountain and viewed the panorama long before we did. Yet those sages were all gone and not to be heard of ever since. Thinking of this makes me sad" (quoted in Xiao Difei, et al., eds., *Tangshi Jianshang Cidian*. Shanghai, Dictionary Publication Company, 1983, p. 88. My translation). After he died, local people erected a monument for him on the top of Mount Xianshou, which, according to Meng Haoran, added to the aesthetic value of "mountains and rivers" and gave meaning, even immortality, to human existence. In his view, natural objects can be revealed or concealed as the seasons change, yet a text recording good human behavior stands clear, clarifying change in nature and reunifying culture with nature. Meng Haoran turned out to be right, but with a twist of irony: Yang did become immortal, but more because of Meng's poem than the monument. On the other hand, the "Swamp of Dream," often associated with another swamp, the "Swamp of Clouds," is posited in the poem as another symbol of immutability. Cold and deep in Meng's time, the swamps had long since dried up and disappeared under rice fields, villages, and towns. According to the Song Dynasty scholar and scientist Shen Kuo 沈括 (*Mengxi Bitan*. Chengdu, Bashu Press, 1995, p.47), the Swamp of Dream on the south side of the Yangtze was on higher land, and therefore dried up first; when the lower swamp on the north side of the Yangtze, the Swamp of Clouds, finally dried up, farmers in the south had already started tilling the fields and growing crops on what was the Dream. However, both swamps retain their strong presence in people's imagination through texts that include Meng's poem. Perhaps that is what environmental literature is all about. Small pools of water remain in the general areas where the two giant swamps used to be. This is how twentieth-century Chinese non-fiction writers describe them, though mistaking them as one: "Yun (Cloud) Meng (Dream) swamp was a giant lake in ancient China, but silted by the mud and sand from both Yangtze and Han rivers; it gradually became quality farms and forms what is now the Yangtze-Han Plain.

《春晓》（《全唐诗》卷 160）

春眠不觉晓，处处闻啼鸟。
夜来风雨声，花落知多少。

Waking up to a Spring Dawn

From a spring slumber I unknowingly wake
Everywhere I hear chirping birds
Overnight the sounds of wind and rain
How many flowers have fallen

《秋登兰山寄张五》（《全唐诗》卷 159）

北山白云里，隐者自怡悦。
相望试登高，心飞逐鸟灭。
愁因薄暮起，兴是清秋发。
时见归村人，沙行渡头歇。
天边树若荠，江畔舟如月。
何当载酒来，共醉重阳节。

Sent to Zhang Wu during a
Hike up Mt. Lan

In the North Mountains, in banks of
clouds
the recluse is pleased with his life.

Hoping to see him, I hike Mount Lan –
my mind flies with the disappearing birds.

A slight sadness rises as the sun sets,
my desire to travel stirred by pure
autumn.

I see people returning to their villages,
walking along the sand beach, resting
against ferry railings.

Trees along the skyline small as mustard
greens,
boats along the river slivers of new moon.

Oh, my friend! When are you coming
with wine,
to fall drunk with me on the Ninth Day of
the Ninth Month?*

*Nine 九 (*jiu*) is not only the largest single digit, but also, as the highest number, symbolizes the *yang*. It shares the same sound with the word “long (time) 久” in Chinese. The Ninth Day of the Ninth Month, also known as the Double Nine and the Double *Yang*, sounds in Chinese like “long, long,” implying the good omen of longevity.

《夏日南亭怀辛大》
(《全唐诗》卷159)

山光忽西落，池月渐东升。
散发乘夕凉，开轩卧闲敞。
荷风送香气，竹露滴清响。
欲取鸣琴弹，恨无知音赏。
感此怀故人，中宵劳梦想。

**Written While Thinking of Xin Da
in the South Pavilion on a Summer Day**

The light above the west mountains disappears
The moon over the pond slowly rises

I let loose of my hair to enjoy the evening cool
opening the windows I lie down in the leisure space

lotus flowers send me fragrant breezes
bamboo leaves drip dew – what pure sounds

I want to play my harp alas
where is the friend who appreciates my music

Feeling this I miss my old companion –
could you come to my dream tonight

《过故人庄》 (《全唐诗》卷160)

故人具鸡黍，邀我至田家。
绿树村边合，青山郭外斜。
开轩面场圃，把酒话桑麻。
待到重阳日，还来就菊花。

Visiting a Friend's Farm House

My friend prepared a chicken and millet dinner
He invited me to his farmhouse

Green trees surround the village
Blue mountains slant outside the town

Opening the windows we face the garden and threshing ground
Holding our cups we toast to the harvest of mulberries and hemp

I will come again dear friend on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month
to enjoy your chrysanthemums with or without your invitation

《与诸子登岘山》（《全唐诗》卷160）

人事有代谢，往来成古今。
江山留胜迹，我辈复登临。
水落鱼梁浅，天寒梦泽深。
羊公碑字在，读罢泪沾襟。

Hiking Mount Xianshou with Fellow Poets

In human affairs one generation replaces another
They come and go to make history and the present world
Rivers and mountains retain their beautiful traces

We hike the mountain to visit in person

The river has fallen revealing rock weirs of the past
The autumn turning chilly descends on the deep Swamp of Dreams
The epitaph of Lord Yang clear as ever

My tears make the reading dim

Qi Wuqian 綦毋潜

Ruoye Creek 若耶溪 is another famous landmark in the Chinese poetic tradition. Pre-Tang poets and Tang poets such as Qi Wuqian's friends, Qiu Wei 丘为 and Li Bai 李白, to name a few, have written about the creek, now called Pingshui Jiang – “The River of Even Water.” For centuries people believed this creek (located near Shaoxing, in Zhejiang) had seventy-two tributaries, which gathered together north of the Town of Even Water before splitting into two after passing Yu Ling—with one turning west to flow into the very Mirror Lake celebrated in the poems of He Zhizhang 贺知章. In the poetry and prose of ancient China, the creek is always described as flanked by green mountains that give the pure stream a tint of greenish blue. Yet, in the summer of 2009, I saw big barges barely passing each other in the narrow river, belching thick and black smoke of low quality diesel.

Qi Wuqian wrote this poem as a letter to his poet-friend Chu Guangxi 储光羲, who, upon receiving the poem, immediately composed a piece in return. The “fisherman” in the poem – given its geographical placement – is a literary allusion as well as an actual man of humble circumstance. It is a reference to Yan Ziling 严子陵, a famous recluse of the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25–220) who chose to be a fisherman on Fuchun River, in the same (Zhejiang) province rather than serve as high chancellor to Emperor Guangwu (r. AD 25–58), who had been a teenage friend of Yan Ziling's and fellow pupil under the same master. However, neither Ruoye Creek nor Zhejiang Province was Qi Wuqian's home, and he certainly did not grow old by the famous creek. He was born in the southern part of Hubei Province, on the mid-reaches of the Yangtze River. Born during the reign of Empress Wu, in 689, he took the imperial examination in 721, but failed. Before leaving the imperial capital for home, Wang Wei 王维 and Lu Xiang 卢象 wrote poems for him at his farewell party. Five years later, he took the exam again and passed, and was soon assigned to be the sheriff of Yishou County. He gradually worked his way up to the mid-rank position of *Zhuzulang*, in charge of composing the contemporary imperial history, but in the process grew tired of official life and in 733 resigned. At this second farewell party, his poet-friend Wang Wei again wrote him a touching poem. He was one of the few Tang poets who lived to his sixties.

The Yuan Dynasty critic Xin Wenfang 辛文房 claims in *Tang Caizi Zhuan* (first published in the year 1304) that “Qi Wuqian is especially talented in describing scenes beyond this world. In this respect, no poets in all the previous dynasties had ever achieved what he has achieved” (*Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, The Press of Ancient Literature, 1957, p. 21).

《春泛若耶溪》（《全唐诗》卷135）

幽意无断绝，此去随所偶。
晚风吹行舟，花路入溪口。
际夜转溪壑，隔山望南斗。
潭烟飞溶溶，林月低向后。
生事且弥漫，愿为持竿叟。

Boating on Ruoye Creek in Spring

My love of solitude is never broken
This trip depends on random whim

Evening wind pushes the boat
I enter a creek covered with fallen flowers

At dusk I turn around and go into a valley
Over the mountain I see the South Star

The mist over the lake mingles with moonshine
The moon behind the trees falls lower and lower

Mistier than the night is my fate in the human world
I'd rather grow old here with fishing rod in hand

Wang Changling 王昌龄

Critics and literary historians differ about Wang Changling's place of birth. Was it in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province? Or was it the capital city, Chang'an? Or was it Jiangning County on the southern bank of the Yangtze? I tend to agree with Chief Editor of Zhonghua Press, Mr. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, and favor the suburb of the capital city as Wang's home town. According to Fu, Wang's home village, Zhiyang, was located on the White Deer Plain, in Wannian County, Shaanxi Province (*Tang Dai Shiren Cong Kao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1980, pp. 110–11). Wang Changling Was born in 690, the year in which the powerful Wu Zetian discarded her title of Empress of Tang and claimed herself to be the female “Emperor” (*huangdi* 皇帝) of her own dynasty – the Zhou (which lasted just 15 years until Tang Restoration and her death in 705). Wang died in 756, when China's prosperous years abruptly began to come to an end in the chaotic wars that followed the rebellion led by Emperor Xuanzong's favorite “foreign courtier,” An Lushan. The years of Wang's life were, however, in theory at least, the best years of a great age in China. But Wang, who lived near the capital city, did not share the prosperity, despite his widely acknowledged talent. As he describes the situation in a letter to a friend: “I do appreciate the fact that I live among green hills and drink the pure water that flows by [the village]... yet with meager financial resources, I often find myself sitting alone, weeping for lacking the strength to carry some rice [from the market place to home]” (Quoted in Fu, p.115. Translation mine).

Wang Changling is best known for his short poems. His contemporary critic Yin Fan 殷璠 praised Wang's poetic talent highly: “For the four hundred years since the Yuanjia Period [424–453] in the Southern Dynasties... the poetic tradition had deteriorated... until from Taiyuan, Wang Changling... [made his] strong voice heard...” (*He Yue Yingling Ji* [comp. 752]. Reprinted with annotation, Chengdu, Bashu Press, 2006, p. 300. Translation mine).

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The three poems translated here are all about women's life. The first and the second are about how the war on the frontiers interrupted family life, soldiers missing their wives, and a lady missing her husband, whom she had encouraged to pursue fame and rank on the frontier. The third one is about the southern part of China, which was not directly impacted by the empire's expansion wars in the northwest. The ironic contrast that emerges from reading these three poems together reflects Wang Changling's attitude toward the behavior of the empire at its peak.

《从军行》（《全唐诗》卷43）

烽火城西百尺楼，黄昏独上海风秋。
更吹羌笛关山月，无那金闺万里愁。

The Song of the Enlisted

By beacon fire on the hundred-foot west
tower
alone in the evening I stand facing the
desert wind

Someone plays a Tartar flute to the castle
moon

What can we do in such an autumn night
but to miss our wives ten thousand miles
away

《闺怨》（《全唐诗》卷 43）

闺中少妇不知愁，春日凝妆上翠楼。
忽见陌头杨柳色，悔教夫婿觅封侯。

The Complaint of a Lady

Deep in a mansion
stranger to distress
a young lady
in heavy make-up
climbs her green tower

She sees the weeping willow
turn green in spring

Regret seizes her

Why did she encourage her husband
to seek fame and position

on the frontier

《采莲曲》（《全唐诗》卷 43）

荷叶罗裙一色裁，芙蓉向脸两边开。
乱入池中看不见，闻歌始觉有人来。

Song of Lotus Gathering Girls

Lotus leaves and their skirts – the same color
Lotus blossoms and their faces – pink and fresh

They scatter all over the lake – invisible
I know one is coming towards me – hearing her songs

Cui Guofu 崔国辅

With Cui Guofu, it is not only unclear where he was born, but also when. Regarding the place, some say he was from the famous city of Suzhou, in present-day Jiangsu Province; others believe he was from the county of Shanyin, now Shaoxing City, in Zhejiang, the same town where the Daoist poet He Zhizhang 贺知章 grew up and to which he retired. Though we don't know the year of Cui's birth, he passed the imperial examination in 726, and gradually rose from the position of a county sheriff to that of an editing librarian in the imperial library and a middle-rank official in the Department of Rituals. In the year 752, he was demoted to the Prefecture of Jingling – now Tianmen City in Hubei Province – where he met Lu Yu 陆羽, the famous Sage of Tea. Jingling 竟陵 is located in the middle reach of the Yangtze River, near the junction of the Yangtze and the Han. The name of the town means in Chinese “where the rolling hills end,” and the flood plain begins to show its massive expanse. Lakes and marshes are innumerable there, and they inspired Cui Guofu's songs of lotus girls.

Both lotus songs and boat songs were directly inherited by the Tang poets from the genre of *Yuefu Geci* of the Han Dynasty, a genre officially established by Emperor Wu of Han, who was in power from 141 to 87 BC. This form includes a wide variety of lyrics for ritual chanting, prayers for good harvest, celebration of important national events, and lively, simple folk songs. As songs, they were set to music, but during the long period of time between Han (206 BC–AD 220) and Tang (618–907), poets tried to turn them into more refined and elegant “pure” poetry. In the able hands of the Tang poets, however, *yuefu geci* were restored to their original folk-song style, as witnessed in the two poems by Cui, who captured with passion and accuracy the rhythm of working people's life close to the beautiful and mild nature of south-central China.

《采莲曲》（《全唐诗》卷21）

玉溱花红发，金塘水碧流。
相逢畏相失，并著采莲舟。

Lotus Gathering Song

By a river bay, green as jade,
red flowers bloom.

Around a golden pond,
green streams flow.

Two lotus gathering boats meet,
unwilling to part again.

Girls tie the boats
side to full side.

《小长干曲》（卷 26）

月暗送湖风，相寻路不通。
菱歌唱不辍，知在此塘中。

A Little Nanking Boat Song

The dim moon sends a breeze
over the dim lake.

A boy searches around
but can't find his girl –
his boat entangled in water-chestnuts.

He knows she's somewhere
on this lake –
her songs, almost endless,
rise and fall
among *Trapa* leaves.

**Trapa* is a kind of water-chestnut that bears a root-fruit in the form of a
bat-shaped nut, with white, starchy, sweet meat.

Lu Xiang 卢象

Little is known about Lu Xiang's 卢象 early life. Originally from a humble family at Wanshui, in the Yimeng Mountains of what is now Shandong Province, he later moved his family to the lower reach of the Yangtze River. Through poetry he made himself a reputation during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (712-756), finding special favor with Prime Minister Zhang Jiuling 张九龄. The order of the first two poems as they appear in *Quan Tang Shi (The Complete Poetry of the Tang Dynasty)* may very well be the chronological order, for they reflect the different climates of his home in the Yimeng Mountains in northern China, where creeks “congeal into lumpy ice,” and his new home after he moved to the south of Yangtze River, where “ice never fully seals the pond.” For me, it’s fascinating to imagine that in what is now the overpopulated southeast of China the Tang poet actually saw a bear hibernating under a cold cliff.

The technology most powerfully destructive to the natural environment in ancient China was fire, as it was elsewhere in the world. Yet, it is still mind-boggling to imagine that in order to smoke out a courtier who managed to flee his court after helping him recapture his kingdom, Prince Wen 文公 (r. 636-628 BC) of the State of Jin 晋 (now the major part of Shanxi Province) would burn down a whole mountain – Mount Mian 绵山 – fifty kilometers (31 miles) in length, with a summit 2,072 meters (almost 7,000 feet) in height. Jie Zitui 介子推 and his mother died in the fire. In memoriam, people decided not to use fire to cook anything on the day of his death, and thus the tradition of Cold Food Day started.

《乡试后自巩还家，因谢邻友见过之作》
(《全唐诗》卷122)

鸡鸣出东邑，马倦登南峦。
落日见桑柘，翳然丘中寒。
邻家多旧识，投暝来相看。
且问春税苦，兼陈行路难。
园场近阴壑，草木易凋残。
峰晴雪犹积，涧深冰已团。
浮名知何用，岁晏不成欢。
置酒共君饮，当歌聊自宽。

**Written on the Occasion of a Neighborly Gathering
After I Returned Home from the Civil Examination**

Cocks crowed to send me on the road
from the county seat in the east.
In sunset, I saw my mulberry groves –
so cold, tugged in the valley shade.

On top of the hill, south of my home,
my horse stopped, exhausted and lame.

My neighbors, old acquaintances,
come in descending dusk,
to tell me bitter stories of taxes unpaid.
In return, I tell them the hardship on the road
of a scholar pursuing rank and fame.

My garden is nestled in the cold valley.
My vegetables have lost their leaves.
Though the weather is fine, our hilltops remain
covered with patches of snow.
The creeks, though deep, congeal into lumpy ice.

What's the use of my pursuit of fame
if we can't have a merry New Year's Eve?
I loudly toast to my neighbors dear,
with this lengthy song to relieve their grief.

*The New Year's Eve here refers to the Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival.

《竹里馆》（《全唐诗》卷122）

江南冰不闭，山泽气潜通。
腊月闻山鸟，寒崖见蛰熊。
柳林春半合，荻笋乱无丛。
回首金陵岸，依依向北风。

Composed in a Hut in Bamboo Grove

A little ice here,
far south of the Yangtze,
never fully seals
the rivers or ponds.
Hills and lakes are connected
by warmth circulating
underground.

In mid-December you still hear birds
chirping in the shady woods.
Under the cold cliff I see a bear
hibernating in a cave.

When spring arrives, the willow groves
close up with luxuriant foliage,
asparaguses grow wild
along the edge of the marsh.

My heart, stirred by the wind from the north,
flies towards my home in Jinling
on the northern bank of the Yangtze.

《寒食》（《全唐诗》卷 121）

子推言避世，山火遂焚身。
四海同寒食，千秋为一人。
深冤何用道，峻迹古无邻。
魂魄山河气，风雷御宇神。
光烟榆柳灭，怨曲龙蛇新。
可叹文公霸，平生负此臣。

On the Day of Cold Meals

Within Four Seas,
over a thousand years,
people refrain from using fire
on this chilly day.
To quell their hunger, they eat
only cold meals, to remember one man,
the virtuous Jie the sage.

He ran away from his prince
and refused to comply
with the scheming world.
He hid in the mountains
yet could not avoid
total destruction.

The prince burned
the elms and willows
all over the mountains
just to smoke out one man.

The sage died in the fire –
profound injustice
no words can describe!
notorious behavior
with no match in history!

Jie's soul and ghost float with *Qi*
over mountains
and along rivers
to become the god of wind and thunder.

In fire and smoke
elms and willows were destroyed.
In fire and smoke
a man was made immortal.

Prince Wen,
proud ruler of Jin:
you have wronged
the world and man!

Ding Xianzhi 丁仙芝

Ding Xianzhi grew up in a town known in the Tang as Qu'e (mod. Danyang in Jiangsu Province), about thirty kilometers north of the town of Yanling (now Jintan), where his good friend and fellow poet Chu Guangxi 储光羲 was born and raised. Ding passed the imperial examination in 725, earlier than Chu. For unknown reasons, however, he was not offered official position until 730, when he was assigned to lower rank offices in a region of many lakes in what is now Zhejiang Province, about fifty kilometers south of the great lake of Taihu and three hundred kilometers east of his home town. His friend Chu Guangxi once compared him to a bird born with high-soaring wings, but forced to build his nest on a low branch. Apparently, it was hard for Ding Xianzhi to live a life of a low-rank official who had to help support his family by tilling the land by the lakeside. He rationalized his hard life with the help of the Daoist philosophy of simple living, yet the fear of failing to pay ever-increasing taxes haunted him like a nightmare, as in the case of other poets, such as Wang Wei 王维 and Lu Xiang 卢象 – for the Tang Empire did not tolerate civil disobedience, and failure to pay taxes on time was penalized much more severely than by one single night in the county jail, as was the case during the time at which Thoreau wrote his immortal essay. Fear of punishment prompted him to ask his high-ranking friend to remember their early Daoist ideals, and to do something to make it possible for the poor working people to exist in voluntary or not-so-voluntary poverty.

Identification of the Five Great Lakes varies in Chinese historical records. In this piece, Ding Xianzhi uses the definition offered by the scholar Wei Zhao 韦昭 (AD 204–273) in his annotation to Sima Qian's 司马迁 (145–? BC) famous *Historical Record* (*Shiji*): “The Five Great Lakes are actually [parts of] one, that is Lake Taihu” (*Shiji*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1982, p. 1407). Taihu – literally “Grand Lake” – is located between Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces in eastern China, a couple of hundred kilometers west of Shanghai. With other Tang poets, however, the term refers to five different lakes in central and eastern China, namely Lake Poyang, Lake Dongting, Lake Chao, Lake Taihu, and Mirror Lake.

《赠朱中书》（《全唐诗》卷114）

十年种树五滨湖，十年遭涝尽为芜。
频年井税常不足，今年缗钱谁为输。
东邻转谷五之利，西邻贩缗日已贵。
而我守道不迁业，谁能敢肯效此事。
紫微侍郎白虎殿，出入通籍回天眷。
晨趋彩笔柏梁篇，昼出雕盘大官膳。
会应怜尔居素约，可即长年守贫贱。

Sent to State Secretary Zhu

For ten years I planted by the side of the Five Lakes
For ten years floods laid waste of my fields
Often I'm unable to pay in full the "Ninth Plot Grains"*
This year how can I find the cash for the "Silk Tax"?†

My neighbor in the east transports grain.
His profit margin is by the half.

My neighbor in the west sells silk
He becomes wealthier every day and lives like a lord.

I stay with the Dao and do not leave the essential profession.
Who dares to follow me on the sure road to poverty?

You, my friend, the Imperial Advisor
of the White Tiger Office in the Purple Palace,
in the presence of the Emperor all day long.
In the morning you draft the document with your colorful pen.
In the evening you dine with Him with delicate chinaware.

You should remember our youthful agreement
to live a simple life by the Dao.
Please do something to make it possible now
for me to live in poverty for the rest of my years.

* The typical agricultural tax was said to be one-ninth of the harvest, but it was sometimes higher than that in Tang Dynasty.

† Farmers in southeastern China typically grew grains and mulberry trees, the leaves of which were fed to silkworms. They were then taxed for the silk they produced that way.

Wang Wei 王维

Wang Wei is one of the greatest of the Tang poets, an excellent painter, and chief of the court musicians.

The research of Professor Zhao Zhangping 赵章平 convincingly postulates that Wang Wei was born in the year 692 and died in 761 (“Wang Wei Shengzunian Kaozheng Buyi,” in *Zhonghua Wen Shi Lun Cong.* 1987, No. 1, p. 33). When he was first introduced to the capital city of Chang’an, at the age of eighteen or so, a prince read his poems and was surprised: he had read these poems and loved them, thinking they were the works of masters in ancient times. He had never suspected that a young contemporary could be the author of those wonderful pieces. Wang Wei soon became popular in the palaces of princes and princesses in the capital, and he passed the imperial examination at the top of class at the age of twenty. He was immediately promoted to the position of chief musician in the court, from which he was demoted eight years later because some of the dancers under him had improperly performed the yellow lion dance to an audience other than the imperial family. The chief musician was punished for his subordinates’ mistake.

During the rebellion of An Lushan 安禄山 (d. 757), Wang Wei was captured and forced to serve as chief musician to “the Pretender.” Impelled to perform, he wrote and performed a poem that begins with, “Ten thousand families are suffering from broken hearts; millions of acres lay wasted under the wild smoke.” Because of this poem, when the emperor of Tang reestablished his control over China, Wang Wei was not banished as was his friend Chu Guangxi 储光羲, but instead given an important position, from which he was gradually promoted to the position of Assistant Director of the Right in the Department of State Affairs (*shangshu youcheng*), an important office with supervisory control of key government ministries. Nevertheless, returning to the court Wang Wei began to adopt a more modest attitude and spent a lot of time in his country house in Wangchuan Village, in Lantian County, near the capital city. Here he adopted vegetarianism, practiced Zen Buddhism, worked the fields of his estate, and came to find a sustainable sense of place.

Wang’s poet friends Pei Di 裴迪, Qian Qi 钱起, and Chu Guangxi lived nearby and visited him often. Strolling across the plains and among the hills, they wrote poetry to celebrate the actual land on which they stood. The war that came with the rebellion led by An Lushan started a sense of loss in Wang Wei; he was far ahead of his time in noticing in the short poem “Mengchang Col” the loss of stately trees. Pei Di often walked over Huazi Hill to visit him, and wrote poems about that hill that had lost its vegetation. Today, that hill has been reduced by centuries of wear and tear, wars and rebellions, into a mound of yellow earth. It still occupies an impressive position as the view point between the plains and the mountains, but the sense of loss Wang Wei experienced in Mengcheng Col overwhelmed me as I stood on what I believed to be Huazi Hill – now called Hua Slope by the locals who live in the two villages nearby. Like Meng Haoran’s 孟浩然 *Swamps of Clouds and Dreams*, Wang Wei’s twenty famous places in Wangchuan township are permanently beautiful only in his poems. Let us all hope that this is not the essential role of environmental poetry.

As a musician who understood the importance of silence in a passionately played melody, and a painter who skillfully manipulated negative space, Wang Wei was especially good at saying a great deal in very short poems, suggesting more within the confined space of a *wu jue* 五绝 (a short poem of four lines with five syllables in each line) than other poets – or even he himself – could do in longer forms. The ability to use

intense images to describe what eyes cannot see earned him praise from Su Dongpo 苏东坡, a Song Dynasty poet and painter, who wrote on a landscape scroll painted by Wang: “[Wang Wei’s] poems have paintings in them and [his] paintings contain poetry.” The Japanese Haiku masters, such as Basho and Issa, took Wang Wei as their model when inventing their own genre. Wang Wei himself looked back to the great Southern Dynasties poet of reclusion, Tao Qian (or Tao Yuanming, 365-427), as we see in Wang’s poem developing Tao’s famous story of the Peach Blossom Spring.

The red-crown crane in “An Extempore Poem Written in My Mountain Dwelling” might be a heron or snowy egret, for cranes build their nests in marshy wetlands rather than on top of pine trees. Wang Wei is not the only poet who mis-portrayed the nesting habit of the cranes. In Chinese paintings, one can find many pine-dwelling cranes because Chinese mythology holds both pine and crane as symbols of longevity with an ethical implication: they can endure hardship and are non-conforming to the evil influence of the corruptible world.

《桃源行》（《全唐诗》卷125）

渔舟逐水爱山春，两岸桃花夹古津。
坐看红树不知远，行尽青溪不见人。
山口潜行始隈隩，山开旷望旋平陆。
遥看一处攒云树，近入千家散花竹。
樵客初传汉姓名，居人未改秦衣服。
居人共住武陵源，还从物外起田园。
月明松下房栊静，日出云中鸡犬喧。
惊闻俗客争来集，竟引还家问都邑。
平明闾巷扫花开，薄暮渔樵乘水入。
初因避地去人间，及至成仙遂不还。
峡里谁知有人事，世中遥望空云烟。
不疑灵境难闻见，尘心未尽思乡县。
出洞无论隔山水，辞家终拟长游衍。
自谓经过旧不迷，安知峰壑今来变。
当时只记入山深，青溪几曲到云林。
春来遍是桃花水，不辨仙源何处寻。

The Land of Peach Blossoms
(An Ancient Song in Andante)

A fisherman on his boat followed the winding stream,
fell in love with the spring, the peach blossoms along the ancient creek.
Watching the red trees he forgot how far he had traveled
until the creek ended in wilderness, not a man in sight.

He entered a gulley, narrow twisted and dark,
that turned again and again to reveal a broad open valley.
From afar he saw only trees upon trees under the clouds.
Approaching, he discovered thousands of houses
scattered among flowers and bamboo groves.

The fisherman, the residents mistook him for a woodchopper,
told them for the first time the name of the Han Emperor,
the surprised residents dressed in the style of the dynasty before.
They had lived by the source of Wuling Creek,
a farming community outside the busy world.

In moonshine under pine trees their houses stood in silence.
When the sun came up, roosters and dogs started a chorus in the clouds.
They gathered around the fisherman as soon as they heard of his arrival.



Competing with each other, they invited him to their houses,
asking him about the capital and other cities.
They told him that they had swept away the fallen flowers that
morning,
not expecting visitors – fishermen or woodchoppers – to come via
the creek.

They had left the empire, fleeing from wars,
deciding never to return but to live like immortals in the clouds.
Nobody in the valley knew what had happened in the outside world.
The world looked at the valley, mistaking their cooking smoke for
clouds.

The fisherman never suspected how rare it is to stumble onto
paradise.

Urged by his love of the world to return to his village and county,
he left, exiting through the gulley, resumed his life.

Separated from those people by mountains and rivers,
he never forgot their peaceful existence.
Bidding goodbye to his family he wants to join the commune in the
valley.

Having been there once he will never forget the way.
What he remembers is that he traveled far into the mountains.
The stream wound and wound and took him to the cloudy forest.

Alas, the spring flood has created streams all over the mountains.
He can't find the way to the source of that immortal creek.

《青溪》（《全唐诗》卷125）

言入黄花川，每逐青溪水。
随山将万转，趣途无百里。
声喧乱石中，色静深松里。
漾漾泛菱荇，澄澄映葭苇。
我心素已闲，青川澹如此。
请来盘石上，垂钓将已矣。

Green Creek

Whenever I come to the Valley of Yellow
Blooms
I always trace the stream of Green Creek.

It turns and twists
a thousand times in the course
of thirty short and steep mountain miles.

It roars and splashes over rocky bends,
glides serenely through shady pines.
In brimful pools it nurtures floating hearts

and water caltrops.
It mirrors bulrushes, reeds
in perfect images rocking in clear ripples.

It here resumes tranquility,
reminding me of a long suppressed
indifference
I feel to fame and power.

Heaven, Let me remain
on the rock here and fish
until the end of my life!

《渭川田家》（《全唐诗》卷 125）

斜阳照墟落，穷巷牛羊归。
野老念牧童，倚杖候荆扉。
雉鸣麦苗秀，蚕眠桑叶稀。
田夫荷锄至，相见语依依。
即此羡闲逸，怅然吟式微。

A Farming Village in the Wei River Valley

The sun sets, lighting up the village
with slanting rays.
Cows and sheep return
to poverty-stricken alleys.

An old man,
expecting his grandson,
waits by the wattle gate,
leaning against his staff.

Pheasants chuck.
Wheat puts forth ears.
Silkworms sleep, mulberry leaves picked,
as the season changes.

Peasants greet each other
on their way home.
They chat and chat,
reluctant to part company.

In vain, I admire their free and leisurely
life.
I'll never become one of them.
The only thing I can do
is to sing
the refrain
from an ancient ode:
“It's dark,
it's dark.
Why can't
I go home?”

《春中田园作》（《全唐诗》卷 125）

屋上春鸠鸣，村边杏花白。
持斧伐远扬，荷锄觐泉脉。
归燕识故巢，旧人看新历。
临觞忽不御，惆怅远行客。

Mid-Spring, Written in My Garden Farm

On the roof of my house the turtledoves coo
Outside the village white apricots bloom

My axe helps me to trim my mulberry trees
The hoe is handy for mending the ditch

Returning swallows remember their nests under my eave
Already an old man I study the new almanac

Wineglass in hand I'm unable to drink
Missing my friend the lonely wayfarer

《新晴野望》（《全唐诗》卷125）

新晴原野旷，极目无氛垢。
郭门临渡头，村树连谿口。
白水明田外，碧峰出山后。
农月无闲人，倾家事南亩。

Viewing the Fields after the Rain

I see the ferry
miles away
near the castle gate
that stands against
stacked blue peaks.

The river glares through trees
that fringe its course
supplying water to paddies
where farmers work
on a mirror under the sun.

Peasants,
elders,
children,
women,

all busy
in the busiest month of the year.

《山居秋暝》（《全唐诗》卷126）

空山新雨后，天气晚来秋。
明月松间照，清泉石上流。
竹喧归浣女，莲动下渔舟。
随意春芳歇，王孙自可留。

Written in My Mountain Villa in Autumnal Dusk

The empty mountain is refreshed by cooling rains.
A breeze of autumn comes with the descending night.

Through twigs of pines the moon illuminates
the rocks in the pure gurgling stream.
Washing girls return, with laundry loads
on shoulders, rustling through bamboo groves.
The lotus blossoms sway to let a fishing boat pass.

My princely friend! The flowers have
enjoyed their growth in spring and now they rest.
You too should stay with me in nature here.

《归嵩山作》（《全唐诗》卷126）

清川带长薄，车马去闲闲。
流水如有意，暮禽相与还。
荒城临古渡，落日满秋山。
迢递嵩高下，归来且闭关。

Composed in a Carriage on My Way to Mount Songsan

My horses trotted at an easy pace
along the river and its narrow marsh.
The stream followed me a long way
as if reluctant to say goodbye to me.
Migrating birds accompanied in dusk
my carriage to the gate of my country house
by the sandy ferry near the deserted town.

The sunset lit the mountains with mellow rays.
I closed my door to the world of man.

《终南别业》（《全唐诗》卷126）

中岁颇好道，晚家南山陲。
兴来每独往，胜事空自知。
行到水穷处，坐看云起时。
偶然值林叟，谈笑无还期。

My Villa in the Zhongnan Mountains

At middle-age I took to the practice of Dao.
Now, old, I make a home by Mt. South.
Alone I hike the mountain everyday
to see the wonders only I appreciate.
I often trace the stream to its source,
sit down to watch the mist transform to clouds.
By chance I meet a woodchopper or two.
We chat and laugh and forget it's time to leave.

《积雨辋川庄作》（《全唐诗》卷128）

积雨空林烟火迟，蒸黎炊黍饷东菑。
漠漠水田飞白鹭，荫荫夏木啭黄鹂。
山中习静观朝槿，松下清斋折露葵。
野老与人争席罢，海鸥何事更相疑。

**Composed in My Cottage Near Wangchuan Village
After Days of Rain**

Days of rain, empty woods, breakfast smoke rises, sluggish.
Steaming and boiling, village women
get the food ready for their men in the fields.

Over the rice paddy, in thin mists,
snowy egrets fly and land.

In shady trees, yellow orioles chirp
under summer leaves.

On hill top I reflect on the short life of hibiscus flowers.

In my quiet studio under the pines
I pick some okras, fresh with dew drops.
In the tavern the village elders fight with me
for the favorite seat.

Why do the gulls still suspect me
as a man of ill will?*

*This is a literary allusion to a well-known legend about a boy who plays with sea gulls everyday on the beach. One day, he comes home to tell his father what great playmates the gulls make. Upon hearing that gulls land freely on the boy's head, hands, and shoulders, the father suggests that the boy catch one for him the next day. The boy agrees and goes out to the beach with the father's plan the next morning. The gulls, however, notice the ill will and refuse to come close to the boy anymore. This story suggests that animals can tell the intentions of humans, just as they notice the boy's loss of innocence.

《孟城坳》（《全唐诗》卷 128）

新家孟城口，古木馀衰柳。
来者复为谁，空悲昔人有。

Mengcheng Col

I build a new home at Mengcheng Col,
among a few aging willows,
lonely survivors of an ancient forest.

Who are the people who come after me
to sigh, missing what our ancestors had.

《白石滩》（《全唐诗》卷 128）

清浅白石滩，绿蒲向堪把。
家住水东西，浣纱明月下。

The White Rock Rapids

Green and lush the cattails grow in the
pure,
shallow water of the White Rock Rapids.

From east and west, the girls come
to wash their clothes
in brilliant moonshine.

《竹里馆》（《全唐诗》卷 128）

独坐幽篁里，弹琴复长啸。
深林人不知，明月来相照。

Hut in the Bamboo Groves

I sit alone in a grove of dark bamboos,
chanting long and loud, playing my harp.
So deep the grove is that nobody hears me
except the moon
that peeps through the rustling leaves.

《辛夷坞》（《全唐诗》卷128）

木末芙蓉花，山中发红萼。
涧户寂无人，纷纷开且落。

Magnolia Cove

In the mountains,
at every twig's end
the magnolia sends forth
red buds.

Along the quiet creek
the petals bloom
and fall
in man's absence.

《漆园吏》（《全唐诗》卷128）

古人非敖吏，自阙经世务。
偶寄一微官，婆娑数株树。

The Keeper of the Lacquer Tree Garden

The ancient sage is no arrogant officer.
He declines the offer of a higher rank,
knowing he lacks the ability to set the world right.

By chance he finds himself a sojourner
in the petty office
of the lacquer garden manager.

By chance he dances
with the winds,
with the shadows of lacquer trees.

《酬诸公见过》（《全唐诗》卷125）

嗟予未丧，哀此孤生。
屏居蓝田，薄地躬耕。
岁晏输税，以逢稔盛。
晨往东皋，草露未晞。
暮看烟火，负担来归。
我闻有客，足扫荆扉。

簞食伊何，瓢瓜抓枣。
仰厕群贤，皤然一老，
愧无莞簞，班荆席藁。
泛泛登陂，折彼荷花。
静观素鲔，俯映白沙。
山鸟群飞，日隐轻霞。
登车上马，倏忽云散。

雀噪荒村，鸡鸣空馆。
还复幽独，重欷累叹。



**Written to The Lofty Friends Who
Came and Visited Me on
Wangchuan Farm In Lantian, the
“Blue Field”**

Oh, why haven't I died yet?
Why do I sigh again for this lonely life?

living isolated in Blue Field,
I till a few acres of barren land.
Unable to pay taxes until late in the year,
I can hardly offer the emperor five kinds
of grain
he might use in the rituals for the New
Year.

In the morning I work on the eastern hill,
dew drops shining on leaves of weeds.
In the evening I walk home towards
supper smoke,
carrying my harvest with a pole.

Then I hear that I'm having visitors!

I sweep the path clean to the wattle gate.
I ask my guests to sit down on the wicker
mat,
and mattresses stuffed with straw.

I cut melons into slices, offer dates
in a shallow bamboo basket.

In such distinguished company I find
myself old – an old man of white hair.

We take a walk around the pond,
pick up lotus blossoms here and there,
or quietly observe the fish,
silver streaks against the white sands,
until the birds scatter,
the sun hides behind feathers of cloud.

My guests scatter like birds and clouds,
aboard painted carriages, or tall on their
steeds.

They leave a deserted village and an
empty house
to chirping sparrows, cackling hens.

I return to my loneliness,
to sigh again, and again.

《赠刘蓝田》（《全唐诗》卷 125-14）

篱间犬迎吠，出屋候荆扉。
岁晏输井税，山村人夜归。
晚田始家食，馀布成我衣。
诟肯无公事，烦君问是非。

To Mr. Liu Lantian

The dog barks behind the fence
to welcome you home at mid-night.
Your family stands beside the dog
to meet the man of the house
who finally pays off the taxes
on the last day of the year.

From now on what grows in your field
can feed your family.
Whatever fabric your wife weaves
can dress the children.

You're willing to pay tribute to the lords
– so you say.
But you're a simple man,
who depends on the lords
to figure out
what is wrong or right.

《赠裴十迪》（《全唐诗》卷125）

风景日夕佳，与君赋新诗。
澹然望远空，如意方支颐。
春风动百草，兰蕙生我篱。
暧暧日暖闺，田家来致词。
欣欣春还皋，淡淡水生陂。
桃李虽未开，萼萼满芳枝。
请君理还策，取告将农时。

To Pei Di

Beautiful days, beautiful evenings,
beautiful landscape and weather to write
our poems.

Leisurely we view the sky – brilliant and
far away.
We rest our heads on hands – happy and
content.

Spring breeze stirs the weeds,
orchids emerge from under my fence.

The sun warms up the inner chamber.
My farmer neighbor comes to remind me

– spring has returned to the happy hills,
floods have filled ponds to the brim,

the plums and peaches are yet to bloom,
magnolia petals weigh down fragrant
branches.

Pray get your horse and whip ready, my
poet.
Go back to your own studio, my friend.

Today I start my farmer's year.

《山居即事》（《全唐诗》卷126）

寂寞掩柴扉，苍茫对落晖。
鹤巢松树遍，人访荜门稀。
绿竹含新粉，红莲落故衣。
渡头烟火起，处处采菱归。

An Extempore Verse on My Mountain Dwelling

Facing the fading brilliance of sunset
in loneliness I close my wattle gate.

Hardly any man has ever knocked
on this gate of my mountain dwelling.
Cranes build nests all over my one pine tree.

Bamboo scatters fresh green pollen.
Pink lotuses shed old petals on the pond.

Smoke from supper fires rises by the ferry
to welcome home loved ones
from gathering water chestnuts on the lake.

《田家》（《全唐诗》卷127）

旧谷行将尽，良苗未可希。
老年方爱粥，卒岁且无衣。
雀乳青苔井，鸡鸣白板扉。
柴车驾羸牸，草屨牧豪豨。
夕雨红榴拆，新秋绿芋肥。
饷田桑下憩，旁舍草中归。
住处名愚谷，何烦问是非。

Country Life

Grain from last year – almost gone.
Harvest of the new crop – little to expect.
That's why, an old man, I love
to water down my porridge,
to wear the same shabby clothes
year after year.

By my moss-covered well
sparrows feed their young.
On the plain plank gate
cackle skinny hens.
My sickly ox pulls home the firewood cart.
I in straw-sandals herd the hairy hogs.

I hope the evening rain
ripens the pomegranates
and early in the fall
taros grow fat.
So I can rest well
under the mulberry trees
after I carry lunch to the young men
working hard in fields.
Then I walk back
to my house surrounded by tall grasses.

Please don't ask me
whether my life is right or wrong.
Don't you know the name of my town?

The Valley of Stupid Men.

Zu Yong 祖咏

Zu Yong was born in 699, in what was called “the East Capital” city of Luoyang, now in Henan Province. The “upper” capital (*shangdu*) of the Tang Empire, of course, was Chang’an, the modern Xi’an in Shaanxi Province, to which Zu traveled to take the state examination. While in Chang’an he met Wang Wei, with whom he would maintain a life-long friendship. In one poem, Wang Wei wrote about how happy he felt when Zu Yong visited him and planned to stay overnight. The following lines from another, however, which Wang Wei wrote when demoted and sent to Jizhou, has helped critics see that for a long time Zu Yong lived in obscurity and poor health:

“I’ve been your close friend for thirty long years,
yet not a day has society fully appreciated you;
you suffer from poverty and poor health,
while I suffer from missing you, my dear friend.”

(See Xin Wenfang, *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, the Press of Classic Literature, 1957, p.18.

The translation of the four lines is mine.)

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Like many other Tang poets, Zu Yong did pass the imperial examination, in 725, and went on to serve at low ranks in the government. What is unusual about him was the fact that he resolutely quit his job and moved to the north bank of Rushui River. For a few years he lived as a fisherman and woodchopper. The hard manual labor did not help his already weak health. He died in 746.

My translation below shows the deep respect Zu Yong pays to the “true hermit,” his peasant neighbor who lived strictly off the land and never complained about the hardship that comes with such a lifestyle. To live in “close affinity to Dao” is not an easy thing, as already seen in the poems of Ding Xianzhi, Wang Wei, and Lu Xiang. Zu Yong must have learned this truth from chopping wood and fishing for dinner. In the strict definition of the word, his close friend Wang Wei was not always a “true hermit.” Twenty-first century environmental poets and critics should ask themselves, perhaps: how far are we willing to go in the direction of *tianrenheyi* 天人合一 (to live as one with nature)? How much are we willing to give up when practicing what Lawrence Buell calls “the aesthetics of relinquishment”?

《田家即事》（《全唐诗》卷131）

旧居东皋上，左右俯荒村。
樵路前傍岭，田家遥对门。
欢娱始披拂，惬意在郊原。
馀霁荡川雾，新秋仍昼昏。
攀条憩林麓，引水开泉源。
稼穡岂云倦，桑麻今正繁。
方求静者赏，偶与潜夫论。
鸡黍何必具，吾心知道尊。

An Extempore Verse for My Peasant Neighbor

My old house was on the Eastern Hill.
Left and right I overlooked deserted villages.
The woodchopper's trail was right in front,
and you, my peasant neighbor, lived across the path.

I enjoyed the country life and pleasant strolls
I took on the terrace through willow twigs,
in the floating mist after a rain,
at the dusk of an early autumn eve.

You occasionally rested
by the foot of the wooded hill
after cutting twigs to mend your wattle fence
or digging a ditch to divert the gurgling spring.

You never complained how hard farm work could be –
you were happy about the mulberries and hemp.

I, seeking peace for heart and mind,
would chat with you, my friend the true recluse.
We never dined over chicken and steamed millet.
My heart admired your closeness to the *Dao*.

Chu Guangxi 储光羲

Because of different calendar systems and the diverse sources of historical records, many of the Tang poets' years of birth are hard to confirm. The same is true with Chu Guangxi. Professor Ge Xiaoyin's research shows convincing evidence, however, that Chu was born in the year 702 rather than 706 as many believed ("Chu Guangxi Ping Zhuan," in *Zhongguo Lidai Zhuming Wenxuejia Pingzhuan*. Jinan, Shandong, Shandong Press of Education, 1989, p. 594).

Chu passed the state examination in 727, the same year as his friends Cui Guofu 崔国辅 and Qi Wuqian 綦毋潜, whose poems are also included in this collection. For some unknown reason, Chu stayed at home for a year before a lower rank position was assigned to him. He served the rebel camp in a similar post during the uprising of An Lushan. This lack of loyalty to the ruling dynasty was viewed as shameful, and for his "misconduct" Chu lost face, fame, and favor. He now went to the Zhongnan Mountains to live the life of a recluse near the country house of Wang Wei, the best landscape poet of the High Tang period. Later on, he was exiled to an obscure place south of the Grand Yu Ridge, as were Shen Quanqi and Song Zhiwen, the two poets introduced earlier in this book. But unlike Shen, and thanks to a general pardon from the new emperor who succeeded Xuanzong, Chu was allowed to return home to die the year after.

Chu Guangxi's home was White Pagoda Village in a county called Yanling during the Tang Dynasty but Jintan now, in Jiangsu Province. Located south of the Yangtze River, it was west of the great lake of Taihu, and about 350 kilometers west of Shanghai. The location of his "homestead" has been identified and is now being promoted as a tourist hotspot, though I think it's like the House of Seven Gables in Salem, Massachusetts: a product of the imagination of the county's Chamber of Commerce. That doesn't, however, mean the location is not meaningful in the understanding of Chu's poetry, his attitude toward life, and his sense of place. Yanling was a very old town, even in a country where every place can date its history several hundred years back. It is best known not for the eighth-century poet Chu Guangxi, but for Prince Jizha 季札, the famous politician and honest man who was active in late 500s and early 400s BC. The ablest, but the youngest, son of the King of Wu during the Warring States Period in Chinese history, Jizha declined his father's offer of the kingdom and supported the ancient tradition that it was the eldest son who should succeed to the throne. He retired from the court after his father's death and worked in the fields of Yanling. Jizha died in 485 BC and was buried by the fields in which he worked. A monument stands there now, high above the farmland, with ten huge characters written on it, supposedly by Confucius himself: *Wuhu, You Wu Yanling Jizi Zhi Mu* (Sigh! at the Tomb of Prince Jizha of Yanling of Wu State). This must have influenced Chu Guangxi, who, critics agree now, stands at equal height of achievement with Wang Wei and Meng Haoran as one of the best pastoral poets (literally, "poets of fields and gardens") of Tang. In his poems, we can see that he performed manual labor in the field and took pride in it. That's probably why Professor Zhang Zhongmo calls Chu the "farming poet of Tang," and argues that his farming poems "are more and better than those written by Wang Wei and Meng Haoran" ("Chu Guangxi Jian Lun," in *Xuzhou Shiyuan Xuebao*. 1989, No. 2, p. 37. Translation mine). From a personal perspective, I would argue that Ding Xianzhi (included in this collection) is as good a farming poet as Chu Guangxi, for when I read Wendell Berry – that great American farming poet and environmentalist – for the first time in the English Department of the University of Connecticut in the 1980s, I always thought of Ding and Chu together, equal in their presentation of the land and their interaction with it. What an interesting thing to see two original Chinese poets and an original American poet making similar life experiments one thousand years, one ocean, and two continents apart.

Yanling, the modern Jintan, is a warm place with four clearly-defined seasons. It has about forty inches of rain during the year and crops grow well there without too much labor required. People – the oxen herder as well as the fisherman – can live there happily without the accumulation of a great deal of material wealth. The factor that destroyed such a paradisiacal place was war, as exposed in the satire of Chu's poems. But war is guaranteed when the man of absolute power can start a war at whim. In sum, Chu's sense of place includes love of home, love of nature and work in natural rhythms, and a criticism of the factors that threaten to disturb that rhythm.

《渔父词》（《全唐诗》卷 136）

泽鱼好鸣水，溪鱼好上流。
渔梁不得意，下渚潜垂钩。
乱荇时碍楫，新芦复隐舟。
静言念终始，安坐看沉浮。
素发随风扬，远心与云游。
逆浪还极浦，信潮下沧洲。
非为徇形役，所乐在行休。

A Fisherman's Song

Swamp fish love the rattling falls.
Creek fish love the rapids upstream.
When luck doesn't favor me at the weir,
I row through the tangle of floating hearts
to fish under the new reeds that hide my
boat,
or throw my hook from the sandbar down
the stream.

From beginning to end I hold my mind at
peace.
Up and down I watch the cork bob in
quiet ease.

My white hair floats in air and dances
with winds,
a banner of my thoughts that travel farther
than clouds, following the ebb to the
distant sea.

Wherever my thoughts go,
my mind stays free from the enslaving
body.
It finds pleasure in doing what I do,
in not doing what I don't.

《牧童词》（《全唐诗》卷 136）

不言牧田远，不道牧陂深。
所念牛驯扰，不乱牧童心。
圆笠覆我首，长蓑披我襟。
方将忧暑雨，亦以惧寒阴。
大牛隐层坂，小牛穿近林。
同类相鼓舞，触物成讴吟。
取乐须臾间，宁问声与音。

An Oxen Herd's Song

The bamboo hat protects my head from the sun.
The long rush cape shelters my body from the rain.
I care not whether the meadow is far or near,
the pond shallow or deep, the cattle tame or wild.

The animals moo to cheer each other –
cows and oxen climb over the slope,
calves take the short-cut through the woods.

Looking at them I sing a wild song,
happy for the moment,
not caring for beat or tune.

《猛虎词》（《全唐诗》卷136）

寒亦不忧雪，饥亦不食人。
人肉岂不甘？所恶伤明神。
太室为我宅，孟门为我邻。
百兽为我膳，五龙为我宾。
蒙马一何威？浮江一以仁。
彩章耀日月，爪牙雄武臣。
高云逐气浮，厚地随声震。
君能贾馀勇，日夕长相亲。

The Song of a Fearful Tiger

Though cold I do not worry about the
snow
Even hungry I would never eat a person

Isn't human flesh said to be sweet
I will not eat them unwilling to offend the
gods

Taishi mountain is my house
Mengmen Gorge my neighborhood*

Animals by the hundreds serve as dishes
on my table
Dragons from the Five Oceans are my
dinner guests

Covered with tiger-skin the war horses of
Prince Jin frightened his enemy†
Swimming across the Yangtze my kind
leave the kind people of Jiujiang in
peace‡

My coat's bright patterns reflect the
morning sun
My powerful paws and fangs provide
metaphors for generals

The force of my breath makes clouds float
high
My roaring voice shakes the earth

If you dare to buy a little of my left-over
courage

I'll forever be your intimate friend day
and night

* Taishi Mountain is the east peak of the Song Mountain Range in what is now Henan Province, while Mengmen Gorge is a narrow passage for the Yellow River through the western foothills of the Lüliang Mountain Range. The area in between is vast, covering almost half of central China.

† In the year 632 BC, when faced with a superior coalition army of the states of Chu, Chen, and Cai, a general of Prince Jin covered his army's horses with tiger coats to upset the enemy's war horses. It is said to be the first recorded battle in the history of China in which an inferior army defeated a superior enemy by means of artful deception.

‡ In the First Century AD, the prefectural magistrate Song Jun noticed that the local government had hired hunters to trap tigers. He dismissed the hunters, saying: "In the wild south, tigers and cougars in the mountains are just like chickens in the coops on northern farms. There's no need to kill them. What we really need to worry about are the cruel officials who harm the people more than the tigers." Thus, he filled all the traps with earth, and appreciating his kindness, the tigers in Jiujiang swam across the Yangtze River, leaving the kind people of Jiujiang in peace.

《效古二首》 其一 （《全唐诗》卷 136）

晨登凉风台，暮走邯郸道。
曜灵何赫烈，四野无青草。
大军北集燕，天子西居镐。
妇人役州县，丁男事征讨。
老幼相别离，哭泣无昏早。
稼穡既殄绝，川泽复枯槁。
旷哉远此忧，冥冥商山皓。

An Imitation of the Ancients, No. 1

In the morning I ascend the Terrace of Cool Wind.
In the evening I start my journey to the city of Handan.

How violent the sun throws its burning heat.
Not a blade of grass is green in all four fields.

The Marshal gathers a great army here in the north,
while our Emperor, the Son of Heaven,
sits on the throne in the West Capital.

Our women are charged to protect
the prefectures and counties.

We strong men engage in offensives
in foreign lands.

Day and night we hear people cry –
parents bid farewell to their children.

Crops are wasted, tramped into dirt,
rivers and lakes dry to caked bottoms.

My worries persist in prolonged struggles.
May they reach the Four Wise Men
who centuries ago abandoned their recluse life,
descended the Mountain of Shangshan.
They gave up their peaceful life in woods
to stop a war among princes of the Han.*

*The story of the Four Wise Men happened in early Han Dynasty, about 195 BC.

《效古二首》 其二 （《全唐诗》卷 136）

东风吹大河，河水如倒流。
河洲尘沙起，有若黄云浮。
赭霞烧广泽，洪曜赫高丘。
野老泣相语，无地可荫休。
翰林有客卿，独负苍生忧。
中夜起踟躅，思欲献厥谋。
君门峻且深，踧足空夷犹。

Imitation of the Ancients, No. 2

The east wind blows on the Grand River.*
The river seems to flow backward.
Dust and sand blow up on the islands,
sending yellow columns into the floating clouds.

Scarlet clouds burn up the great lakes.
The mighty sun scorches the mountain tops.
Old men in the field cry and sigh:
“No shelter is to be found against this drought.”

A visitor from the Imperial Academy hears them and asks:
“Am I the only one who worries with the people”?
He paces back and forth late into the night
unable to think up a relief plan.

But what's the use even if he has one?
The palace walls are so high and fierce,
he'll sprain his ankle before he kneels down
to present the case to Heaven's Son.†

* “Grand River” is another name for the Yellow River.

† The emperor is believed to be the “Son of Heaven.”

《田家即事》（《全唐诗》卷137）

蒲叶日已长，杏花日已滋。
老农要看此，贵不违天时。
迎晨起饭牛，双驾耕东菑。
蚯蚓土中出，田乌随我飞。
群合乱啄噪，嗷嗷如道饥。
我心多恻隐，顾此两伤悲。
拨食与田乌，日暮空筐归。
亲戚更相诮，我心终不移。

An Extempore Poem on Country Life

Cattails grow longer day by day,
Plum flowers bloom moist and full.
An old peasant must watch these signs –
the seasons tell you when to plow and plant.

I rise early to feed my two oxen,
harness them side by side to till the eastern terrace.
My plow loosens the earth,
earthworms come out, take a fresh breath.
The crows follow me back and forth along the furrow,
wheeling, croaking, landing, and feasting on the worms.

A man of a soft heart I feel a sad dilemma,
throw my lunch basket to the crows,
hoping they leave the worms alone.

I come home exhausted in the evening
with an empty basket and an empty stomach.
Friends and family laugh at my silliness.
My heart is set. I'll never change who I am.

Qiu Wei 丘为

Qiu Wei was born in 694 and died in or around the year 789. He lived in Jiaying, in the modern Zhejiang Province. He took the imperial examinations several times and failed as many, finally passing in the year 743 when he was almost fifty years old. Though a late starter, he climbed the ladder of officialdom with decent speed, and eventually became the teacher and advisor of the crown prince. He was known in his time for taking good care of his step-mother, and legend has it that as a reward from the gods *Lingzhi* 灵芝, a mystical fungus thought of as an agent to immortality, grew in his courtyard. Coincidentally or not, he did live to see his ninety-sixth birthday. Thus, he is the second longest-living Tang poet, surpassed only by the semi-legendary Hanshan (Xin Wenfang, *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, the Press of Ancient Literature, 1957, p. 30).

He was friendly with contemporary poets, such as Wang Wei, Zu Yong, Chu Guangxi, and Liu Changqing. In the year of Qiu Wei's last failure of the imperial exam, 742, Wang Wei and Zu Yong wrote poems to comfort and encourage him. For his part, after flunking the 742 exam, Qiu Wei took the time to travel in what is now Zhejiang Province, where he wrote a poem about the famous Ruoye Creek, which Qi Wuqian also celebrated in his poem included below.

In the poem translated here, we can see that Qiu Wei has a typical Daoist attitude towards life. Although he missed his friend during his visit, he got whatever a friendly reunion can offer to both parties. He believes that a philosopher can inspire the atmosphere of his dwelling, and he admires his recluse friend who keeps close contact with the earth by working on it.

《寻西山隐者不遇》 （《全唐诗》卷129）

绝顶一茅茨，直上三十里。
扣关无僮仆，窥室唯案几。
若非巾柴车，应是钓秋水。
差池不相见，黾勉空仰止。
草色新雨中，松声晚窗里。
及兹契幽绝，自足荡心耳。
虽无宾主意，颇得清净理。
兴尽方下山，何必待之子。

**Visiting the West Mountain Hermit but He
Is Not in His Hut on the Summit**

On the mountain summit stands your hut.
I hike a dozen miles up there to call.

I knock – no servant answers the warped door.
I look – to see your desk in order and clean.

You must be tying up your firewood cart
on the ridges high and steep, or fishing by
a mountain tarn that's crystal clear and deep.

You're not at home but I feel your presence here
in the grasses freshened by the rain, in the pines
that rustle by the wattle gate. Your soul
has mingled with the mountains, trees, and stream,
lifted mine to higher planes of being.

You've played no host and I no guest,
but we've exchanged pure ideas.
So satisfied am I that I descend
the mountain happier than if we had met.

Li Bai (Li Po) 李白

Li Bai (in Mandarin Chinese) or Li Po (in Cantonese, which seems to be closer to how Chinese was pronounced during the Tang), was probably the only poet in the Tang Dynasty who did not even try to take the imperial examination. But, because of his excellent poetic talent, for a brief period at least he became a favorite for Emperor Xuanzong and was granted the high position of *Hanlin gongfeng* 翰林供奉 in the Imperial Academy, the equivalent of a distinguished chair professorship.

According to Guo Moruo's research – research supported by other scholars, such as Yu Shucheng and Yin Menglun – Li Bai was born in Suiye City, on the western frontier of the Tang Empire. The city has been reduced to a giant pile of rubble on the steppe of what is now Kyrgyzstan, the ruins lying east of the city of Tokmak and west of the great lake of Oz Issyk-kul'. Still found in the sands there are city walls built by the Tang army and brass coins minted during the Tang reign periods *Kaiyuan* (713–741) and *Dali* (766–779). During the Tang Dynasty, the city was the seat of the far-west military governorate, whose control extended farther west, far into the territories of what are now Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Li Bai's grandfather had been exiled to the far west and Li Bai's father worked as an iron merchant who traded iron from their ancestral hometown in Sichuan Province in the southwest of China. Li Bai's younger and older brothers managed family business branches along the Yangtze River. Li Bai, however, as a child prodigy, was treated specially. Having begun training in the Chinese Classics when very young – supposedly when he was just four years old – he is also reputed to have spoken several languages of Central Asia. Some historians – Chen Yinke and Zhan Ying, for example – have even argued that Li Bai was actually a “foreigner,” not a Chinese (Lu Weifen, Zhang Yanjin et al., eds. *Sui Tang Wudai Wenxue Yanjiu*. Beijing, Beijing Press, 2001, pp. 769–74).

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Li Bai's reputation preceded him, and he was summoned to the court, with different scholars giving different years: 731, 738, 741, or 742. Whenever he arrived there, at court he became a popular presence among fellow poets and courtiers. The poet He Zhizhang – included in this collection – nicknamed Li Bai *zhexian* 谪仙, “a god demoted to the human world from heaven” (Chen Wenxin, Liu Jiafu, et al., eds., *Zhongguo Wenxue Biannian Shi: Sui, Tang, Wudai*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, p. 393. My translation).

Compared to the total number of his poems, Li Bai's contemplations on nature, land, and non-human species are few. Yet, from the few poems translated below, we can see that he has something special to offer people concerned about the environment in the twenty-first century. He is a true Daoist who believes that the laws of people are modeled after the laws of heaven, the laws of heaven are modeled after the Dao, and the Dao, ultimately, is modeled after the laws of nature. So, in his scheme of the world, nature is the supreme power. That is why he questions the human mythologies about the god of the sun and his driver who drives a chariot that carries the sun across the zodiac. He further challenges the position his contemporaries hold for humans in the physical world. He himself, as he confesses, is but a small particle in the Grand Lump of Earth.

《日出行》（《全唐诗》卷19）

日出东方隈，似从地底来。
历天又入海，六龙所舍安在哉？
其始与终古不息。
人非元气安能与之久裴回。
草不谢荣于春风，
木不怨落于秋天，
谁挥鞭策驱四运，万物兴歇皆自然。
羲和羲和，汝奚汨没于荒淫之波。
鲁阳何德，驻景挥戈，
逆道违天，矫诬实多。
吾将囊括大块，浩然与溟滓同科。

Sunrise and Sunset (An Ancient Song in Andante)

The sun rises from the eastern bend,
as if emerging from the bottom of the earth.
It travels through the sky and falls into the sea.

Where is the room for the six mythical dragons
that pull the sun chariot from the beginning till the end of time?

How can man, being no part of the original void of Qi,
expect himself to drive forever along its cyclical path?

Grasses and flowers don't show any gratitude for the spring.
Trees don't blame autumn for their falling leaves.
All things rise and fall according to the law of nature.
Who needs someone to drive the four seasons with a whip?

Oh, Xi He, Xi He! How can you drive in boundless waves?
Oh, Lu Yang! What virtue, what power do you have
to stop the traveling sun by rattling your lance?
Tales about you are against the Dao and Heaven.
They must be abandoned as wrong and false.

I will return my spirit to the Grand Lump of Earth
to be one with the vast and mighty Universe.

《鸣雁行》（《全唐诗》卷 25）

胡雁鸣，辞燕山，
昨发委羽朝度关。
一一衔芦枝，
南飞散落天地间，
连行接翼往复还。
客居烟波寄湘吴，
凌霜触雪毛体枯，
畏逢矰缴惊相呼。
闻弦虚坠良可吁，
君更弹射何为乎。

A Song for the Honking Wild Geese

The geese from the north honk and honk.
They honk their goodbye to the Yan Mountains,
leaving the desert yester-night,
flying into China over guarded passes.

Formation perfect, wing-tips touching, they
disperse south between earth and sky,
with twigs and reeds between their bills,
looking for a home in the rising mist
gyrating over the marshes along the Yangtze .

Their feathers quickly lose the healthy glow
to biting frost and floating flakes of snow.
Some fall on hearing sounds of arrowless strings,
some honk in fear at the sights of nets.

Why do men shoot at birds in distress?

《树中草》（《全唐诗》卷 26）

青青树中草，托根非不危。
草生树却死，荣枯君可知。

Grasses in a Tree

A bird pecks on seeding grass
and drops the seeds on a dying
mulberry tree.
The guests send their tender roots,
revived soon by warm spring
days.

The tree should have no
sympathy for the seeds
of random grasses, yet it allows
them to live
their sojourner's floating life.

I wonder why some leaves would
die
while others prosper side by side,
on the same branch
of the same old tree.

《秋浦歌》其 10（《全唐诗》卷 167）

千千石楠树，万万女贞林。
山山白鹭满，涧涧白猿吟。
君莫向秋浦，猿声碎客心。

An Autumn Song at the Waterside

Hundreds upon hundreds grow the heather bushes.
Thousands upon thousands stand the glossy privet trees.
On hill after hill extend colonies of nesting egrets.
Gullies beyond gullies echo the howl of hoary monkeys.

Mr. Traveler, don't come to the waterside in autumn.
The crying monkeys alone can break your heart to pieces.

《清溪行（一作宣州清溪）》
（《全唐诗》卷167）

清溪清我心，水色异诸水。
借问新安江，见底何如此。
人行明镜中，鸟度屏风里。
向晚猩猩啼，空悲远游子。

Traveling along Pure Creek

Distinguished by its water, Pure Creek purifies my heart,
as I see its pebbled bottom through the gliding stream.
The famous Xin'an River, celebrated by so many poets,
cannot compare with such unworldly purity.

The boatmen who ferry across seem to glide on a mirror.
The birds that fly above its banks give life to a perfect picture.

But after sunset in dusk, gorillas howl in the hills,
and sadden the heart of me, a lonely wayfarer.

《山中问答》（《全唐诗》卷178）

问余何意栖碧山，笑而不答心自闲。
桃花流水窅然去，别有天地非人间。

A Dialogue in the Mountain

You ask me why I stay so long in green mountains.
I smile but do not answer, enjoying my heart's content.
The peach flowers float away on the swirling streams.
We live with heaven and earth beside the human world.

《谢公亭（盖谢朓、范云之所游）》
（《全唐诗》卷181）

谢公离别处，风景每生愁。
客散青天月，山空碧水流。
池花春映日，窗竹夜鸣秋。
今古一相接，长歌怀旧游。

The Tower of Lord Xie

The sight of this tower reminds me of the
past
when the famous poet parted with fellow
poets.
They had scattered, leaving the moon in
the blue sky
to me the empty mountains and the ever-
flowing streams.

On the same pond the lotuses bloom like
hundreds of small suns.
The same bamboo leaves rustle in the
evening wind of fall.
By those we are connected, the poets of
the past and today,
so I chant long and loud in memory of my
friends of yester-year.

《访戴天山道士不遇》
(《全唐诗》卷182)

犬吠水声中，桃花带雨浓。
树深时见鹿，溪午不闻钟。
野竹分青霭，飞泉挂碧峰。
无人知所去，愁倚两三松。

《独坐敬亭山》(《全唐诗》卷182)

众鸟高飞尽，孤云独去闲。
相看两不厌，只有敬亭山。

Visiting but Missing a Daoist in Mount Daitianshan

Dogs bark beyond gurgling brooks.
Peaches bloom fresh, heavy with rain.
Deer appear and then disappear in deep groves.

At noon, no bell tolls from the temple upstream,
where bamboos grow wild, greener than the green mist,
waterfalls tumble down blue peaks like white silk.

Where are you, my dear old friend? Nobody knows.
Sadly I lean against a pine, and a pine, and yet another pine.

Sitting Alone on Mount Jingting

All the birds,
flocks of them,
fly away
high above the clouds.

The Clouds, too,
have disappeared
to I know not where.

The only thing that is not tired
of my company,
and of whose company
I would never tire,
is Mount Jingting – Here.

Huangfu Ran 皇甫冉

Huangfu Ran's ancestral home was in what is now Xingchuan County, Gansu Province, only a hundred and twenty kilometers northwest of the capital of Tang, Chang'an. His great-grandfather had, however, moved from the northwest of China to the southeast, and settled down in Danyang, Jiangsu Province. Huangfu Ran was born four generations after the family relocation, in the year 718. He began to read early and started writing at the age of ten; his younger brother was also known as a child prodigy.

An earlier Tang poet, Ding Xanzhi 丁仙芝, had lived in the Danyang area, and Chu Guangxi 储光羲, discussed just above, lived only thirty kilometers south of the town. It is a general belief among the Chinese people that the lakes, rivers and mountains of Jiangnan 江南 (literally meaning "south of the Yangtze," but actually referring to the area of the lower reach of the river, the southeast coastal area in China) have generously endowed the area with literary talents. The Five Great Lakes discussed in the note on Ding Xianzhi – whether one big lake or five – are also in that area.

The poet premier Zhang Jiuling 张九龄 was impressed by the talent of the Huangfu boys and supported their official careers as well as their poetic creativity. Huangfu Ran passed the imperial examination in 756 and gradually climbed up the official ladder. During the chaotic years of the An Lushan rebellion, Huangfu Ran stayed at home to till the land. From these poems we can see that though Tang poets may soar high in their poetic imagination, they always stay close to the land on which they live, deriving strength from it like Antaeus, as Thoreau would put it. From the two poems translated below, we can see that the poet feels connected to the place, where many animal and plant species such as dogs, deer, chickens, birds, bamboos, grass, mulberries, and apricots co-exist in harmony by the rolling hills and gurgling streams.

《送王翁信还剡中旧居》
(《全唐诗》卷 250)

海岸耕残雪，溪沙钓夕阳。
客中何所有，春草渐看长。

**Written for Elder Wang Xin On the Occasion
of Returning to His Old Cottage by Shan Creek**

You will till the fields by the seashore
still covered with last year's snow.
Or you'll fish in the sun's setting glow
sitting on the sandbar in mid-stream.

But I'll remain a sojourner
whose only pastime is
to watch the grasses grow
longer and longer in spring.

《送郑二之茅山》(《全唐诗》卷 250)

水流绝涧终日，草长深山暮春。
犬吠鸡鸣几处，条桑种杏何人。

**Written for Zheng the Second on the Occasion
Of His Settling in the Mao Mountains**

In deep ravine the stream gurgles
all day long.
In the back mountains grasses grow
late in spring.
Here and there one hears
dogs bark and chickens crow
and wonders –
who are these people
that grow plums and graft mulberries
Here?

Wang Wan 王湾

Since neither of the major histories of the Tang Dynasty – “The Book of Tang,” (also called the “Old Book of Tang,” *Jiu Tangshu* 旧唐书) nor the “New Book of Tang” (*Xin Tangshu* 新唐书) – has a biography of Wang Wan, it is impossible to identify the place and time of his birth and death, or exactly where or when he lived his life. However, the modern scholar Fu Xuancong has convincingly postulated that Wang Wan probably passed the imperial examination in the year 712 or 713 (*Tangdai Shiren Congkao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Books, 1980, p. 50), and around that time traveled along the mid- and lower-reaches of the Yangtze.

This poem was written during this journey, during a lull in the production of poetry in the Tang: the Great Four of the Early Tang and Chen Zi'ang had died; Shen Quanqi and Song Zhiwen had been banished; young poets, such as Wang Zhihuan, Wang Changling, and Meng Haoran, had not yet written their best poems; while the poets of the greatest generation – Li Bai, Du Fu, Gao Shi, and Cen Shen – were still but children. That's probably why the poet Prime Minister Zhang Shui was so fond of this poem, especially these lines:

With the wind behind me
I glide towards the sun that leaps out of the sea.
In the final hours of the dying night,
I watch spring spread along the river
to replace the gray remnant of the old year.

Writing these lines in large characters he hung the calligraphy on the wall in his office, in part as a way of providing young aspiring writers with a model.

Mount Beigu 北固山 is best known as a fortress on the mighty Yangtze River, near the city of Zhenjiang. It was especially important in the third century during the War of the Three Kingdoms, when Sun Quan, the head of the the State of Wu in the southeast, agreed to join with Liu Bei, the leader of Shu in the southwest, against the aggressive Cao Cao from the Central Plains in the north of China. Wang Wan, unlike many other poets, downplays the allusion to war which was the focus of many poets before and after him; he does not, in fact, even mention these famous events. What he emphasizes is the diurnal and seasonal cycles in nature, and the most basic human emotion of missing home while traveling far away.

《次北固山下》（《全唐诗》卷 115）

客路青山外，行舟绿水前。
潮平两岸阔，风正一帆悬。
海日生残夜，江春入旧年。
乡书何处达，归雁洛阳边。

Written at the Mooring under Mount Beigu

I find myself sailing around a bluish hill
on the swift bend of the green Yangtze flood.
Unable to sleep I watch the tide rise to full.

The boat's so high I see expansive fields
on either bank of the mighty stream.
With the wind behind me
I glide towards the sun that leaps out of the sea.

In the final hours of the dying night,
I watch spring spread along the river
to replace the gray remnant of the old year.

Ah, spring! I wish to catch the first returning goose,
tie a letter to her foot, and hope
she'll drop it to my family when passing
the city of Luoyang in the North.

Rong Yu 戎昱

Although experts have not been able to determine the exact years of his birth or death, Rong Yu was an important poet during the mid-Tang period. The best clue is one of his early poems, which reveals that he was a youth during the chaotic wars along the Yellow River set off by the rebellion of An Lushan. Fu Xuancong's excellent research shows that Rong Yu died some time after 798, the year in which his last known poem was written (*Tang Dai Shiren Cong Kao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Books, 1980, p. 342).

An-Shi zhi luan 安史之乱 (the disorders of the 750s and 760s caused by the uprising of the imperial generals An Lushan 安禄山 and his lieutenant Shi Siming 史思明) was a gaping wound in the imagination of many of the Tang poets who unfortunately lived through the national catastrophe. Rong Yu is such an unfortunate example, whose poetic talent was shaped by these events. The rebellion started in 755, the fourteenth year of Emperor Xuanzong's "Heavenly Treasure" (Tianbao 天宝) reign era, when the general An Lushan, a key Tang military leader trusted by Xuanzong, started an armed rebellion, apparently because of his quarrel with the emperor's brother-in-law Yang Guozhong, who was the prime minister at that time. An Lushan even occupied the capital city of Chang'an the year after he started the rebellion. His military assistant Shi Siming at first followed him and then started his own rebellion. This set off a series of wars, fought along the Yellow River for years, until finally suppressed in 763 with the help of troops from Inner Asian nations. The devastating rebellions demarcated the turning point in the life of the Tang Empire, whose central control of China became weaker and weaker after the event. For ordinary Chinese people, including most of the poets, the rebellions destroyed their lives.

Rong Yu's home town was Jiangling, in what is now Hubei Province, on the south bank of the Yangtze River. Though far to the south of the main arenas of the civil war, this region was also affected, and the troubles did not end with the rebellions. Famine soon led to new uprisings and wars in the Yangtze River Valley. The disasters in human society made Rong Yu appreciate the feeling of attachment to everything around him.

The time of composition of the first poem has not been identified, but while in the process of translating it, I sensed from between the lines that he wrote it during his years serving in Hunan Province, on the south side of the Dongting Lake – according to Fu Xuancong, probably in the years 775–776 (p. 349). Those were the years between wars along the Yellow River and the wars along the Yangtze, when he had a brief moment of peace and the luxury to develop a sense of place, something especially precious at the point of parting with it. Soon a new war started, and the general under whom he served was killed by another general. The peace Rong Yu had briefly known was over. He went farther south, into what is now the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, to serve as the secretary to yet another general, where he wrote the second poem, in the year 777 or later (Fu, p. 349). In the chaos of wars, what can poets write about their ever-disappointed sense of place?

《移家别湖上亭》（《全唐诗》卷 270）

好是春风湖上亭，柳条藤蔓系离情。
黄莺久住浑相识，欲别频啼四五声。

Farewell to My Cottage on the Lake

Good is my cottage on Spring Wind Lake.
Willow twigs tie my feelings here – how can I leave?
Yellow orioles are used to my face – an old friend.
They warble four or five times – a sad song at our parting.

《桂州腊夜》（《全唐诗》卷 270）

坐到三更尽，归仍万里赊。
雪声偏傍竹，寒梦不离家。
晓角分残漏，孤灯落碎花。
二年随骠骑，辛苦向天涯。

New Year's Eve in Guilin

I sit staring at the lamp until the wee
hours,
three thousand miles from my home in the
north.
I fail to cover the distance in my cold
dream,
disturbed by snow flakes falling on
bamboo twigs.

Morning trumpet replaces
the night watcher's hollow drum.
Vibration of the sound shakes down lamp
petals,
broken ashes from last night's wicks.

Two New Year's Eves I've spent like this.
Two long years I've followed the General
to the edge of the earth.

Gao Shi 高适

Gao Shi was probably born in the year 700 and died in 765. His family was from Cangzhou, in what is now Jing County, Hebei Province. The modern scholar Fu Xuancong believes that in 749 Gao Shi was recommended to take the imperial examination by Zhang Jiugao, younger brother of the poet and prime minister Zhang Jiuling (*Tang Dai Shiren Cong Kao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Books, 1980, p. 163). He passed the exam and was assigned to a low-rank office in Fengqiu County, in Henan Province. He was definitely a late bloomer in Tang officialdom.

The three poems translated below happen to parallel the three stages in his career. The first one was written in the fall of 747, before Gao Shi took the examination and before he started his ladder-climbing in the officialdom. He was visiting a friend, a famous scholar and poet, Shen Qianyun, the fourth male child in the Shen family, who had failed several times in the national examination. Shen was originally from Jiangsu Province in the southeast of China but now lived as a recluse on the south bank of the Pu River in what is now Henan Province, where Gao would soon become a county sheriff, though he did not know this when he wrote the poem. The Han poets obliquely referred to in the Chinese original and mentioned in my translation are the Huainan xiaoshan 淮南小山, a group of poets in the court of the Prince of Huainan in the Han Dynasty. In their poem “Inviting Hermits to the Court,” the life of seclusion in deep mountains was described as somber and scary, in contrast to the free and pleasant lifestyle that Gao depicts. The second poem was written when Gao Shi was serving as the sheriff but unhappy about the nature of his job. The third poem was written in the period when Gao won his fame as a frontier poet, while he was helping General Gesu Han 哥舒翰 (d. 757) guard the western frontier of the Tang Empire. His official achievement and poetic talent reached their peak in this period and he became an important courtier with serious responsibilities. At this time, he wrote poems that show a strong flavor of the frontier.

If not familiar with the species of flower whose petals are scattered all over the frontier, Western readers may miss the irony of the last poem. *Meihua* 梅花, plum flowers, bloom profusely south of the Yangtze River, but are rare, if not non-existent, on the north-western frontier. *Meihualao* 梅花落, “The Falling Plum Petals,” is the title of a musical piece composed by Li Yannian, a court musician of the Western Han (202 BC–9 AD). So, what are falling all over the frontier are musical notes rather than actual petals. Furthermore, because the flowers prosper in southern China, it is reasonable to assume that the music was engendered there and that the composer, Li Yannian, was a man from the south as well. The “barbarian flute” is an instrument of the northern tribes. The player of the flute is a *huren* 胡人 (foreigner or “barbarian”), but he could be a soldier fighting on the side of the Chinese, for the Chinese army was quite diverse back then; the famous general under whom Gao served in that area, Gesu Han, was himself a *huren*. Or he could be a soldier of the barbarian army. The ambiguity of the soldier’s identity and the fact that a northern instrument is playing a southern piece about a southern flower showcase the cultural mixing happening on the battlefield. As a poet and a frontline general, what is Gao Shi’s attitude towards the war he is fighting?

《赋得还山吟，送沈四山人》
(《全唐诗》卷 213)

还山吟，天高日暮寒山深，
送君还山识君心。
人生老大须恣意，
看君解作一生事，
山间偃仰无不至。
石泉淙淙若风雨，桂花松子常满地。
卖药囊中应有钱，还山服药又长年。
白云劝尽杯中物，明月相随何处眠。
眠时忆问醒时事，梦魂可以相周旋。

**A Chant, Composed for My Friend
Shen the Fourth, the Mountain Man**

Return to the mountains, I chant.
Return to the high sky, setting sun,
and deep cold mountains.

Seeing you off I understand your heart.

In the short human life
at our age
we should follow where our heart goes.
I see you find your life project –
to bow, or to lift your head high,
or to do whatever you like
in the mountains is your own choice.

Spring leaping over rocks, spraying and splashing
like rain soughing in winds.
Osmanthus and pine seeds
carpet the glade floor all year round.

Gathering herbs, selling herbs,
you may have some money in your pockets.
Boiling herbs, eating herbs,
you may have a long life in the mountains.

White clouds are your drinking partners.
Bright moon is your bed-fellow in woods.
In sleep your soul asks you about what waking people do.
Thus you find in yourself another friend.

《封丘作》（《全唐诗》卷213）

我本渔樵孟诸野，一生自是悠悠者。
乍可狂歌草泽中，宁堪作吏风尘下。
只言小邑无所为，公门百事皆有期。
拜迎官长心欲碎，鞭挞黎庶令人悲。
归来向家问妻子，举家尽笑今如此。
生事应须南亩田，世情付与东流水。
梦想旧山安在哉，为衔君命且迟回。
乃知梅福徒为尔，转忆陶潜归去来。

Written in the Sheriff's Office of
Fengqiu County

I was a woodchopper
a fisherman
in the wild Swamp of Mengzhu.
A free man of leisure my whole life
I enjoyed
bursting into crazy songs
in the bulrushes of marshlands.

How can I bear to be
a minor officer in this
petty windy dusty office?

All because I thought I didn't have to do
much
in this small town
where everything would
fall in place – smooth routines.

But kneeling and kowtowing to superiors
have broken my heart.
Whipping peasants and peddlers has made
me
a sad man.

Seized by sadness
I ask my wife, sons and daughters.
The whole family laugh and say:
“The world of today is just like that.”

I sigh to realize that
livelihood should be found
in southern acres,
while the “world” should be dumped into
the east-flowing rivers.

Serving the Emperor
I come home late every day.
Only in dreams have I time
to figure out where my old swamp is.

I know for sure that Mei Fu,
my fellow sheriff back in Han Dynasty,
was wrong to have great plans
for his empire.

I turn and sing the Home Returning Song
by Tao Qian the Jin poet
who abandoned his office and fled to the
family farm.

《和王七玉门关听吹笛》
(《全唐诗》卷 214)

胡人吹笛戍楼间，
楼上萧条海月闲。
借问落梅凡几曲，
从风一夜满关山。

(一作《塞上闻笛》)

雪净胡天牧马还，
月明羌笛戍楼间。
借问梅花落几许？
从风一夜满关山。

**Hearing Flute on the Tower of a
Frontier Fortress**

Having finally stopped
and melted away,
the snow leaves a
clear sky.

I return with pasturing horses
in bright moon shine.
The fortress tower
issues the melody of a barbarian flute.

“Plum Petals Fall”
is the title of the piece.

But where do the plum petals fall?
At home in the South.

With the help of the wind
may the petals cover all the mountains
near this northern frontier.

Liu Changqing 刘长卿

Neither the *Book of Tang* nor *The New Book of Tang* has a biography of Liu Changqing. But in the “Arts and Literature” chapters of the *New Book of Tang*, there are two lines about his life. Unfortunately, according to the modern scholar Fu Xuancong, those two lines contain more misinformation than truth. Painstakingly combing through archival sources, Fu convincingly establishes that, despite the location of his ancestral town in the north, Liu was born and raised in central China, in the city of Luoyang, the “eastern capital” of Tang; the year of his birth probably 725. He passed the state examination some time after 747, and began to serve at the lower ranks. In 758, he was serving as sheriff of Changzhou County, in what is now Jiangsu Province, an area rich both in material goods and cultural tradition and at the time not yet directly impacted by the An-Shi Rebellions (755-763; the rebellion of the Tang general An Lushan 安禄山 [d.757], which was continued after An’s death by his deputy, Shi Siming). His frankness, however, offended his supervisor and he was demoted to the county of Nanba, in Guangdong Province, far south of the famous Grand Yu Ridge (see the notes to Shen Quanqi and Song Zhiwen), in the southwest corner of the southernmost region of Tang (Fu, *Tang Dai Shiren Cong Kao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Books, 1980, pp. 238–68).

He gradually worked his way out of the “southern barbarian” area to become an officer of transportation in the mid-reaches of the Yangtze, in the central city of Wuhan. That’s when he wrote the first poem translated below. As officer of transportation, he saw with his own eyes the damage the An-Shi Rebellions had done to the country, especially in the north, where even the sun felt cold as it looked upon the tragedy. In the Chinese original, there are four place names in the first four lines – Muling, Sanggan, Youzhou, Chu – three of which I included in the English version. Muling is in what is now Shandong Province; Sanggan and Youzhou are in Hebei; and Chu was the name of the largest state in the Warring States Period (475 BC–221 BC), which includes parts of today’s Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Anhui Provinces. These four places covered the better half of the Tang Empire. As Arnold Toynbee pointed out, during the ten years between 754 and 764 – in eight of which wars started by the An-Shi Rebellions ravaged central China – the Tang Empire lost two-thirds of its population (Arnold Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth: A Narrative History of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, Chapter 53, last paragraph). Similar feelings and scenes are present in the second poem as well. The poem was probably written in 761, when Liu was returning to central China from his southern demotion. Minor wars started in response to or as aftermath of the An-Shi Rebellions had devastated parts of southern China. Yugan County in what is now Jiangxi Province had been reduced to ruins. In both poems we can see that Liu’s expanded sense of place covers more than half China, and as “experienced landscape,” it is sad, lonely and hopeless.

Liu was demoted for a second time some time between 773 and 777, though this time to a place not as remote as the Grand Yu Ridge. On this occasion he was sent to Jiande County, now in Zhejiang Province in southeastern China, deep in the green mountains. In Zhejiang he met the famous poet-monk Lingche and wrote several poems for him. As he lived in Jiande, his son-in-law – Li Mu – sent a poem-letter to him, informing the father-in-law of his visit. Liu was so excited that he wanted to sweep his yard to welcome his son-in-law, yet, the moss and fallen leaves were so thick that he didn’t know where to start. Given the historical situation and the physical environment devastated by irresponsible human behavior, the reader may find it easier to understand Liu’s ideal lifestyle as depicted in the last poem – a small farm somewhere away from the human chaos, in poverty, yet in peace. Unfortunately, his dream, or rather the collective dream of Tang pastoral poets (literally, “field and garden” poets), was doomed by the unsustainable polity and policies of the empire.

《送灵澈上人》（《全唐诗》卷 147）

苍苍竹林寺，杳杳钟声晚。
荷笠带夕阳，青山独归远。

Farewell to Master Lingche

The monastery looks green
in the middle of the bamboo grove.
The evening bell* reverberates long and slow.

Alone, bamboo hat on your back,
the setting sun on your shoulders,
you walk away,

into the distant mountains – blue, oh, far and blue.

*Buddhist monasteries in China usually have only one bell.

《穆陵关北逢人归渔阳》
（《全唐诗》卷 147）

逢君穆陵路，匹马向桑干。
楚国苍山古，幽州白日寒。
城池百战后，耆旧几家残。
处处蓬蒿遍，归人掩泪看。

**Written North of Muling Fortress
for a Traveler Heading Home
in the North**

I run into you on the road to Muling,
you heading home by River Sanggan,
a single traveler on a single horse.

The mountains here
are as green as they were
in the ancient State of Chu.

Descending on the gate of You Prefecture
near your home in the north,
the sun is pale as if cold, touching the
cold earth.

Few have survived the hundreds of battles.
Castles and moats lie in ruins, reclaimed
by weeds,
where towns, villages, and houses were.

Homecoming travelers like you see them
through tears.

《重送裴郎中贬吉州》
(《全唐诗》卷 150)

猿啼客散暮江头，人自伤心水自流。
同作逐臣君更远，青山万里一孤舟。

**Farewell again to Assistant Undersecretary
Pei Who Was Demoted to Ji County**

The sun sets on the river
to the chorus
of howling monkeys.

The farewell party disperses.
The stream flows on,
indifferent to our broken hearts.

We both are demoted,
you
to a farther county.

Among thousands of blue mountains
meanders your single boat.

《酬李穆见寄》(《全唐诗》卷 150)

孤舟相访至天涯，万转云山路更赊。
欲扫柴门迎远客，青苔黄叶满贫家。

**In Response to the Poem
Li Mu Sent to Me**

You come to visit me by a small boat
at the end of this lonely world.

Your journey is doubled
by the winding river
through mountain folds veiled in clouds.

To welcome you, a guest from afar,
I try to sweep the dirt floor
of my long-closed front yard.

Alas, the yard is choked
by green mosses and yellow leaves
strewn to my shabby door.

《登馀干古县城》（《全唐诗》卷 151）

孤城上与白云齐，万古荒凉楚水西。
官舍已空秋草绿，女墙犹在夜乌啼。
平江渺渺来人远，落日亭亭向客低。
沙鸟不知陵谷变，朝飞暮去弋阳溪。

Ascending the City Wall of Yugan County

The castle walls are so tall
almost touching the white clouds,
lying in ruins in ten-thousand-year
desolation,
west of the River Chu.

In the fall green weeds grow rampant
all over the empty official buildings.

Evening crows moan in cacophony,
landing on the broken battlement.

Drift sand has taken over the fields
as far as I can see.

The migrating geese,
indifferent to the changes on land,
fly back and forth
across the sun rising, setting on Yiyang
Creek.

《寻龙井杨老》（《全唐诗》卷 151）

柴门草舍绝风尘，空谷耕田学子真。
泉咽恐劳经陇底，山深不觉有秦人。
手栽松树苍苍老，身卧桃园寂寂春。
唯有胡麻当鸡黍，白云来往未嫌贫。

Visiting Elder Yang at the Dragon Well

Your thatched cottage and wattle fence
ward off dusts and winds from the busy world.
In this deserted valley you till the fields,
hiding from power and fame
like the sage in the Han Dynasty.

The gurgling spring winds its way through deep mountains.
Here you are free from cruel rulers like Qin the First.

The pines you planted grow greener every year,
as you spend quiet seasons in your favorite peach grove.

A “poor” man, you eat flaxen seeds instead of chicken and millet.
The white clouds, your steady friends, never mind your poverty.

Du Fu (Tu Fu) 杜甫

One of the very greatest of the Tang poets, Du Fu (in an older romanization, Tu Fu) was born in 712 in the city of Xiangyang, now in Hubei Province, at the center of China. Later, the family moved north to the County of Gong, in northern Henan Province, near Luoyang, the eastern capital of Tang. Gong was the center of chinaware production in Tang Dynasty and the famous tri-color ware was produced there. However, Du Fu showed no interest in commerce or industry, but impressed his friends and relatives as a gifted scholar. In his early twenties he traveled to the southeast coastal areas of China, where Chu Guangxi 储光羲, Ding Xianzhi 丁仙芝, and Qi Wujian 綦毋潜 (all included in this collection) lived and wrote. He was recommended to take the imperial examination but failed. So, unlike many other poets, he got himself into the officialdom by presenting three rhymed essays to the emperor. His low-rank office took him to Chang'an, the capital city. The An-Shi Rebellions severely interrupted his peaceful – though somewhat poverty-stricken – life and he had to run away from the troubled areas. Eventually he settled down in Chengdu, now the capital of Sichuan Province. Towards the end of his life, he moved eastward, first to eastern Sichuan, in the Three Gorges Area, and then downstream along the Yangtze, turning south to Lake Dongting. He died in Hunan Province in 770.

Du Fu wrote about the landscape and animals in his earlier years, though these natural scenes and beings served mainly as prompts to present his life philosophy and ambition. For instance, the focus in his poem about Mount Taishan is not the mountain itself, but his mountain-top epiphany about climbing to the peak of the very highest, which turns other mountains into dwarfs. His poem about an eagle centers around the way this fierce bird inspired him to overcome other minor birds – the lesser minds that would mislead the emperor – so as to realize his own ambition of helping the emperor to reach the moral height of ancient sage-emperors. My reading of Du Fu suggests that it was the An-Shi Rebellions that sent him on the road and forced him to look at natural items as they were, in fresh views not taken from the Zen contemplation of mountains and rivers that characterizes the poetry of Wang Wei and Meng Haoran.

The first poem translated below was written in 754, the year before An Lushan started his rebellion. In a prose narrative written in the same year, Du Fu wrote: “This autumn I lay ill in a hotel in Chang’an. It rained and rained until the courtyard became a pool and fish appeared in it. Green moss grew up to my bed...” (Du Fu, *Qian Zhu Du Shi*, ed., Qian Qianyi. Shanghai, Shanghai Press of Ancient Classics. 1979, p. 677. Translation mine). The modern scholar Qian Qianyi provides an important piece of information in a footnote to the poem: “In the fall of the thirteenth year of *Tianbao* [754], it rained incessantly for sixty days. The emperor worried about the crops, but Yang Guozhong [the emperor’s brother-in-law and prime minister] selected the best sample of the crop and showed it to the emperor, saying: ‘Despite the rain, the crops are not damaged’” (p.677). Du Fu apparently heard of this and wrote three poems in response. I chose the first of the three to show that for Du Fu in this early stage, cassia is mainly a symbol, and not yet seen as a life form in and of itself.

After moving to Sichuan in flight from An Lushan’s rebellion, Du Fu had to grow some of his own food, and therefore began to pay attention to the plants themselves. Professors Cheng Qianfan and Ge Xiaoyin indirectly support my reading by arguing that the travels that Du Fu made

in order to flee the troubled areas helped him see the land as it is with his own eyes rather than in the poetic tradition of landscape presentation: “Du Fu focused on the real scenes along the road and rendered them in original ways in his poetry” (Cheng Qianfan, quoted in Du Xiaoqin, *Sui Tang Wudai Yanjiu*. Beijing, Beijing Press, 2001, p. 916). Du Fu also “stresses his psychological experience of the scenery... and makes his language in harmony with the actual image” (Ge Xiaoyin, *ibid.* p. 917).

《秋雨叹三首（其一）》
（《全唐诗》卷216）

雨中百草秋烂死，
阶下决明颜色鲜。
著叶满枝翠羽盖，
开花无数黄金钱。
凉风萧萧吹汝急，
恐汝后时难独立。
堂上书生空白头，
临风三嗅馨香泣。

Three Sighs in Autumnal Rains, No. 1

Incessant rains kill hundreds of herbs,
herbs that rot in the chilly fall.
Cassia bushes by my doorsteps
prosper in fresh, bright green.
Their leaves are full and healthy
like feathers of a kingfisher,
their petals small yellow
like round and shiny gold coins.

Autumnal wind blows stern and harsh.
I wonder how long you can prosper alone.

A scholar with graying hair, all I can do
is to smell your fragrance – thrice – and cry.

《无家别》（《全唐诗》卷217）

寂寞天宝后，园庐但蒿藜。
我里百余家，世乱各东西。
存者无消息，死者为尘泥。
贱子因阵败，归来寻旧蹊。
人行见空巷，日瘦气惨凄。
但对狐与狸，竖毛怒我啼。
四邻何所有，一二老寡妻。
宿鸟恋本枝，安辞且穷栖。
方春独荷锄，日暮还灌畦。
县吏知我至，召令习鼓鞀。
虽从本州役，内顾无所携。
近行止一身，远去终转迷。
家乡既荡尽，远近理亦齐。
永痛长病母，五年委沟谿。
生我不得力，终身两酸嘶。
人生无家别，何以为烝黎。

A Homeless Man's Farewell

The war was over when battles were lost.
At last I trace the way we came.
I find what's left of my home,
the garden in the overgrowth
of wormwood, ranks of hellebore.

What happened to my old neighbors here?
Dispersed east and west!
Where are the hundred families and
more?
Scattered or buried in wilderness!

Except for a couple of old widows,
survivors like myself are most rare.
So skinny, depressed and weak am I
that I almost drop and die on the
threshold –
to become supper for foxes and raccoons.
They bark at me, with hair standing on
their backs.

Like a bird that looks for last year's
branch
I decide once more to settle here.
In ruins and poverty I start to till
and prepare the field in early spring.
Alone I dig a ditch with a rusty hoe
to water the plot until late at night.

The sheriff hears of my return,
summons me to drill and train –
this time as a drummer for county guards.

Once again I prepare to leave for war,
although this trip is not as far.
I look around my house to find
no items I can pack in the bag.
This tour I've only my body to care,
for any farther tour I know
I would be lost or die – somewhere.
Now that my home is all but gone,
who cares if I go far or near?
What I regret was my mother dear,
who's dead for five long years.
From pain and illness she suffered alone.
She was thrown into a ditch when she
died.

She'd given me my powerless life.
I gave her nothing but sour tears in both
eyes.

Hard is the life of the poor masses,
for they have none to say goodbye
when they leave and leave again
the home they had but no longer have.

《观打鱼歌》（《全唐诗》卷 220）

绵州江水之东津，鲂鱼鱮色胜银。
渔人漾舟沈大网，截江一拥数百鳞。
众鱼常才尽却弃，赤鲤腾出如有神。
潜龙无声老蛟怒，回风飒飒吹沙尘。
饕子左右挥双刀，脍飞金盘白雪高。
徐州秃尾不足忆，汉阴槎头远遁逃。
鲂鱼肥美知第一，既饱欢娱亦萧瑟。
君不见朝来割素髻，
咫尺波涛永相失。

A Song: Fishing Observation

On the eastern side of the Mianzhou River
triangular breams leap and splash,
more brilliant than pieces of shining silver.

Fishermen come in eager phalanxes,
dragging behind their boats
a giant net across the mighty stream.
With one pull they catch a thousand
leaping fish.

The ordinary ones they throw away
as they lock their gaze on a red carp
that leaps high above the water
as if it were the god of the roaring flood.

The scene enraged the river dragon.
He dives deep and lies silent in the depth,
expressing his anger in a whirl wind
that stirs up dust on the gravel-bar.

The chef wields his knife left right,
sending slices of fish flesh flying
that fall in a pile on a golden plate –
white and shiny as fresh flakes of snow.

I know the ordinary fishes they abandon
are not worth of missing, and the top fish
reserved for royalty swim freely far away.
Of all the fishes that people consume
these breams are the best I've ever tasted.

So I enjoy the feast and eat to my heart's
content.

Yet what we do somehow upsets me:
Would we have any fish in the river
tomorrow?

Even the ordinary fish have been scared
and hide beneath waves several fathoms
deep.

《又观打鱼》（《全唐诗》卷 220）

苍江鱼子清晨集，设网提纲万鱼急。
能者操舟疾若风，撑突波涛挺叉入。
小鱼脱漏不可记，半死半生犹戢戢。
大鱼伤损皆垂头，屈强泥沙有时立。
东津观鱼已再来，主人罢鲙还倾杯。
日暮蛟龙改窟穴，山根鳣鲔随云雷。
干戈兵革斗未止，凤凰麒麟安在哉。
吾徒胡为纵此乐，暴殄天物圣所哀。

A Song: The Second
Fishing Observation

In early morning fishermen gather on a
bluish stream.

With nets and lines on boats they scare
the fish insane.

Some row the boat fast – faster than the
wind.

Others thrust their harpoons into dancing
waves.

Small fish escape and hide in the deep –
only half alive.

Big fish are wounded and hang their
heads low,
some so angry that they stand up in mud.

It's the second time I watch them fish.
I can no longer accept fish slices from the
host.

So I drink only rice wine – bowl after
bowl.



At sunset the flood dragon would move to
other caves
under the deep water up the stream.
The sturgeons follow him and splash
against the current louder than thunder
bolts.

We humans wage wars against each other
drive away phoenixes and unicorns,
mystical animals and auspicious signs.
Why should we find pleasure in
massacring fish
and in wasting nature's gifts?

What we do should make ancient sages
sad.

《缚鸡行》（《全唐诗》卷 221）

小奴缚鸡向市卖，鸡被缚急相喧争。
家中厌鸡食虫蚁，不知鸡卖还遭烹。
虫鸡于人何厚薄，吾叱奴人解其缚。
鸡虫得失无了时，注目寒江倚山阁。

A Song for the Bound Chickens

My young servant ties up the chickens to sell at market.
They struggle and squawk against the tightening ropes.

My family hates seeing the chickens eat worms and ants,
but fail to imagine the boiling pot waiting for the sold chickens.

What's the difference between chickens and insects for humans?
So I scolded the servant and asked him to untie the birds.

Unable to evaluate the lives of chickens and insects,
I lean against the mountain pavilion and stare at the cold river.

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《春望》（《全唐诗》卷 224）

国破山河在，城春草木深。
感时花溅泪，恨别鸟惊心。
烽火连三月，家书抵万金。
白头搔更短，浑欲不胜簪。

A Spring View

The nation is broken.
Mountains and rivers remain.
When spring returns to ruined cities,
trees and weeds turn green again.

Surveying the seasonal flowers
I shed a single tear –
shocked to learn that I've survived
to see the birds coming back here.

For over three long months
the fire of war has burnt the country cold.
A letter from home now
is worth ten thousand taels of gold.

I comb my hair to feel its thinning
length –
I have too little to hold the pin.

《曲江二首 其一》（《全唐诗》卷 225）

一片花飞减却春，风飘万点正愁人。
且看欲尽花经眼，莫厌伤多酒入唇。
江上小堂巢翡翠，苑边高冢卧麒麟。
细推物理须行乐，何用浮名绊此身。

Qujiang River

When one petal falls, you know,
you have less of the spring.
Now thousands swirl in the wind.
Can I help but cry?

Let me just enjoy
the floating flowers passing by.
How could I ever refuse
health-ruining wine.

The humble peasants by the river share
their shelter with kingfishers under the
eave,
beside the sculptures of mystery beasts
tipped over near lofty tombs.

What vanity it is to chase after fame
while the truth of life
is enjoying life's joy.

《南邻》（《全唐诗》卷 226）

锦里先生乌角巾，园收芋栗不全贫。
惯看宾客儿童喜，得食阶除鸟雀驯。
秋水才深四五尺，野航恰受两三人。
白沙翠竹江村暮，相对柴门月色新。

Visiting My South Neighbor

Mr. Black Cap, a neighbor south of me,
lives at the end of Jinli Lane.
His taros and chestnuts prosper so well
that he claims to be no longer poor.

His children smile to see me come –
they're used to visitors who invite themselves.
Even birds don't seem to mind
my climbing the steps where they feed.

We row together a boat so small,
it seems to tip with a load of two,
along a cold autumn creek
no deeper than four feet five.

When dusk descends on bamboo groves,
he sees me off at his wicker gate.
The magic light of a crescent moon
turns the sands to silver grains.

《江村》（《全唐诗》卷 226）

清江一曲抱村流，长夏江村事事幽。
自去自来堂上燕，相亲相近水中鸥。
老妻画纸为棋局，稚子敲针作钓钩。
多病所须唯药物，微躯此外更何求。

River Village

The river bends at the village,
a tight embrace of summer days,
an everlasting pleasure in grace.

Some come and go uninvited – swallows under my roof.
Some nestle and love in oblivion – gulls at the river side.

My wife draws on paper to prepare a board game with me.
My youngest bends a needle to attach to a fishing line.

What else can I ask from this humble life of mine?
Herbal cures for my declining health.

《后游》（《全唐诗》卷 226）

寺忆新游处，桥怜再渡时。
江山如有待，花柳更无私。
野润烟光薄，沙暄日色迟。
客愁全为减，舍此复何之。

Visiting Xiujue Monastery Again

I love crossing this bridge again,
recalling scenes I viewed last year.

The rivers and mountains seem to be
waiting for me.
The blooms and willows share the spring
in peace.

In the morning, the field awakes in a mist
so thin
I suspect it's just a summer haze.

The sand on beach becomes velvet warm
heated by the day's increasing length.

My homesick heart is almost set at ease
by the sense of place the temple offers
me.

What do I enjoy other than these?

《客至（喜崔明府相过）》
（《全唐诗》卷 226）

舍南舍北皆春水，但见群鸥日日来。
花径不曾缘客扫，蓬门今始为君开。
盘餐市远无兼味，樽酒家贫只旧醅。
肯与邻翁相对饮，隔篱呼取尽馀杯。

Welcoming a Guest

South and north
the spring flood
surrounds my thatched hut.

Day after day
the gulls come
in groups, my only visitors.

I have never swept the path
that fallen petals cover in piles,
that leads to the very gate
I weaved with wicker twigs.

Today I open the gate to you –
a rare and pleasant surprise!
The market flooded, far away,
we can share a single dish at home,
together with the wine I've kept
in the house since last year.

You like my neighbor as much as I,
so let me holler to him to join our toast
over the fence.

《高楠》（《全唐诗》卷 226）

楠树色冥冥，江边一盖青。
近根开药圃，接叶制茅亭。
落景阴犹合，微风韵可听。
寻常绝醉困，卧此片时醒。

The Tall Laurel

An ancient laurel stands expansive and tall
by the river, a green umbrella of giants.

I grow an herbal garden near its roots
and build a pavilion under its leaves.

The heavy shade protects me from the slanted
impaling heat of the summer setting sun.

The lightest breeze can stir leaves and twigs
in aerial music so endearing, sweet.

I'm often sleepy, often drunk, but after
I lie and nap beneath the tree,
a little while, I wake up sober and sharp.

《楠树为风雨所拔叹》
(《全唐诗》卷 219)

倚江楠树草堂前，故老相传二百年。
诛茅卜居总为此，五月仿佛闻寒蝉。
东南飘风动地至，江翻石走流云气。
干排雷雨犹力争，根断泉源岂天意。
沧波老树性所爱，浦上童童一青盖。
野客频留惧雪霜，行人不过听竿籁。
虎倒龙颠委榛棘，泪痕血点垂胸臆。
我有新诗何处吟，草堂自此无颜色。

**A Sigh for the Laurel Tree
Uprooted by a Storm**

For two hundred years, the elders say,
the laurel has stood by the river bend.
It's for this tree that I built my hut
beneath its mighty branches and shade.
They offer coolness in summer heat.

By nature I love this ancient giant –
a green umbrella over the green stream,
a travelers' shelter in frost and snow,
a music hall for peasants and me.

Yet storms from the southeast came last
night
to shake the earth and flood the bank
with thunders and rains of striking
strength.
By mandate of heaven the tree toppled.

My tears and blood have stained my
chest –
my tree among the thistles lies,
a fallen dragon or collapsed lion
to be devoured by vultures and crows.

My shadeless hut no longer a home!
My poems no place to find my voice!

《春夜喜雨》 (《全唐诗》卷 226)

好雨知时节，当春乃发生。
随风潜入夜，润物细无声。
野径云俱黑，江船火独明。
晓看红湿处，花重锦官城。

Delighted by the Rain in Spring

Good rain! You know the change of season.
You come at the right moment in spring.

Following the wind you secretly fall
in night and quietly you bring
the needed water down to the land.

Over the wild path the clouds pile up dark.
On the river boat a lone lamp shines bright.

In the morning I look towards the city – profuse and wet .
I see flowers around city walls – heavy and red.

《绝句漫兴九首 其三》
(《全唐诗》卷 227)

熟知茅斋绝低小，江上燕子故来频。
衔泥点污琴书内，更接飞虫打著人。

《绝句漫兴九首 其七》
(《全唐诗》卷 227)

糝径杨花铺白毡，点溪荷叶叠青钱。
笋根稚子无人见，沙上鳊鱼傍母眠。

《江畔独步寻花七绝句 其六》
(《全唐诗》卷227)

黄四娘家花满蹊，千朵万朵压枝低。
留连戏蝶时时舞，自在娇莺恰恰啼。

Impromptu, No. 3

The River Swallows!

They know my hut is small and low.
Yet they come again and again
dropping dirt on my books and harp.

Pursuing flies in the house,
they hit me in the face
with the tip of their wings.

Impromptu, No. 7

The willow catkins from the yard
stuck on the wet and winding path
unroll a strip of white carpet.

By the roots of the bamboo
a grouse chick pecks at a shoot—
no one sees it but I.

The emerging lotus leaves float on the
creek,
as tiny and green as ancient bronze coins.

On the sandbar
nestling against their mother
the ducklings sleep in perfect peace.

**Walking along the River
in Search of Flowers**

By the house of Aunt Huang the Fourth
the flowers crowd the narrow path –

they bloom in clusters, thousands upon thousands,
that branches bow under their weight.

While playful butterflies dance around,
the merry orioles warble behind the leaves.

《水槛遣心二首》

(《全唐诗》卷 227)

其一

去郭轩楹敞，无村眺望赊。
澄江平少岸，幽树晚多花。
细雨鱼儿出，微风燕子斜。
城中十万户，此地两三家。

**Written on the Waterside Pavilion to Dispel Boredom
(The First of Two Poems)**

Away from the city, I can afford
to build my windows tall and broad.
No villages here block my view
of land extending far and wide.

The lucid river rises so high
that dikes are almost lost to the eye.
The trees are shady with flowers in spring,
fish, through drizzle, leap out of the stream,
against the breeze that tips the swallows' wings.

Ah, thousands make their profit in town.
Two neighbors and I live here alone.

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《漫成一绝》(《全唐诗》卷 229)

江月去人只数尺，风灯照夜欲三更。
沙头宿鹭联拳静，船尾跳鱼拨刺鸣。

Occasion

Moon in the river
only a few feet from me

Paper lantern
illuminates the breeze in late night

Snowy egrets
curl up in sleep on sand

Splash
fish leap into the stern of my boat

《日暮》（《全唐诗》卷 230）

牛羊下来久，各已闭柴门。
风月自清夜，江山非故园。
石泉流暗壁，草露滴秋根。
头白灯明里，何须花烬繁。

Dusk

It's been some time
since the cows and sheep came down the
hills.
The locals too
have long closed their wattle gates.

Pure breeze, pure moonshine,
the night itself even purer,
pure rivers and mountains
far away from my home.

I sit up late, white hair lit
by the dim flame.

Expecting no happy news
I wonder why
the wick has burst into a bloom.*

I lie down in bed but can't fall asleep.
I listen to the brook gurgling down
the dark rocky cliff,
and dew drops falling on
the roots of autumn weeds.

*In Chinese folklore, when the
candle-wick bursts into the shape
of a flower, visitors are expected
to come next morning.

《白小》（《全唐诗》卷 231）

白小群分命，天然二寸鱼。
细微沾水族，风俗当园蔬。
入肆银花乱，倾箱雪片虚。
生成犹拾卵，尽取义何如。

White-and-Small

White and small
by mandate of nature
you're cast into the bodies
of two-inch fish.

The rude tribes by the river
treat you, a clan of water animals,
as garden vegetables.
They catch you by the thousands,
dump you into crates to display
at market like silver flowers.

They serve you on the table
as snowy herb-leaves.

The sages of the past
condemned the bird-egg hunters
for exhausting what heaven offers.
What are they going to say
about your extinction in the future?

《燕子来舟中作》（《全唐诗》卷 233）

湖南为客动经春，燕子衔泥两度新。
旧入故园常识主，如今社日远看人。
可怜处处巢君室，何异飘飘托此身。
暂语船樯还起去，穿花落水益沾巾。

Written for the Swallows Nesting on My Boat

On the Lake of Dongting far in the south,
I've sailed alone for two long years.
The swallows have twice carried mud
to my boat to build a nest on the mast.

In my old garden they knew me well.
Today they watch me with doubtful eyes.
I've pitied them for building nests
all over the country, both north and south.
How does my life on rivers and lakes
differ from theirs against the winds of fate?

I listen to their chirp on top of the mast,
watch them fly away to river banks.
Touching the water with the tip of shiny wings,
they flit through flowers lining the rapid stream.

My tears well up to fill my blurry eyes.
They fall to wet the front of my coat.

《小寒食舟中作》（《全唐诗》卷 233）

佳辰强饭食犹寒，隐几萧条带鹖冠。
春水船如天上坐，老年花似雾中看。
娟娟戏蝶过闲幔，片片轻鸥下急湍。
云白山青万余里，愁看直北是长安。

Written on the Boat, the Day before Cold Meal Festival

Such a good day!

I make myself drink some wine,
eat some food delicious but cold.
Wearing a Daoist's crane-feather hat,
I sit alone – a typical recluse.

The spring flood is expansive and blue
my tiny boat seems to be floating in the sky.
My vision has blurred so much as I age
that flowers seem fogged on the clearest day.

Graceful, graceful,
butterflies dance by my curtain.
Bravely, bravely
gulls challenge the rapids.

The bluish mountains capped with clouds
extend for thousands of miles.

I look to the north towards the imperial city.
In vain I murmur the name of Long Peace.*

* The capital city of the Tang Empire was *Chang'an*, with the literal meaning of "Long Peace." When Du Fu wrote this poem, the city had been ravaged by war for years during the An-Shi Rebellions.

Li Hua 李华

Li Hua was as excellent a prose writer as he was a poet. He wrote many epigraphs for his contemporaries: for poets, scholars, and fellow officials. Ironically, using these epigraphs, scholars are able to chart Li Hua's life with considerable accuracy. He was born in 715, in Zhaozhou, in what is now Hebei Province. In his lifetime, that place – inhabited mostly by “foreign” tribes from the north – was a big melting pot of several nationalities. In 736, he passed the imperial examination and eight years later he passed a newly established “Erudite Literatus Exam” (*boxue hongci ke* 博学鸿词科), a more advanced examination that allowed him to be appointed directly to the state secretariat as a drafter of state documents. In 752, he became one of the fifteen disciplinary superintendents (*jiancha yushi*), a position at lower rank but of tremendous power for its responsibility to watch over and discipline government officials at all ranks and positions (Chen Wenxin, Xiong Huili, Min Zeping et al., eds., *Zhongguo Wenxue Biannian*, Vol. 4, p. 291). In the same year he traveled to an area near his hometown and wrote a famous essay, “Memorial Oration on an Ancient Battlefield,” in which he expressed a strong criticism of wars that wasted lives. Three years after that piece was written, An Lushan started his rebellion, and wars devastated the Yellow River Valley, especially Li's home prefecture. On June 8, 756, Li Hua himself was captured by the rebels and was forced to serve in an office for An Lushan's government (Ibid. Vol. 5, p. 7). During this period he wrote the poem translated below.

The excursion took place in Yiyang County, in western Henan Province on the south bank of the Luo River, about ninety kilometers southwest of Luoyang, the “eastern capital” of the Tang Empire. Lianchang Palace, the most famous travel palace of the Tang emperors, was located in Yiyang, in the foothills of Nüji Mountain, near the Temple of the Orchid Fairy. The place was a natural garden where rare birds made their home among ancient trees and fragrant herbs. But An Lushan's rebellion and the wars devastated northern China and the imperial travel palace was no exception. Standing on what used to be “the imperial road,” Li Hua realized that the world of nature goes on with or without human presence, an epiphany similar to what Du Fu conveyed in his famous lines: The nation is broken. / Mountains and rivers remain.

《春行寄兴》（《全唐诗》卷 153）

宜阳城下草萋萋，涧水东流复向西。
芳树无人花自落，春山一路鸟空啼。

Extempore on a Spring Excursion

Grasses grow lush and green by palace walls.
A stream meanders east and west along Orchid Fairy trails.
Fragrant peaches on their own come into full bloom
or shed their petals in absence of men.
Along the road birds twitter in chorus,
their warbling echoed by surrounding hills.

Cen Shen 岑参

Cen Shen was born in 718 or 719, in Nanyang, southern Henan Province, in central China, about a hundred kilometers north of Du Fu's ancestral hometown in Xiangyang, in modern Hubei Province. He was a child prodigy and started reading at the age of five. At nine, he was already writing articles. When he was fifteen years old, after his father's death, his elder brother moved the family north, to Songyang, near Luoyang, the eastern capital of Tang, just as Du Fu's family had. Cen Shen passed the imperial examination in the year 745, yet was not assigned a position until 748. When the assignment finally came, he wrote in a poem about it: "I received my first appointment at thirty, / when my interest in officialdom was almost gone" (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 200, poem #52. Translation mine). In 750, he was sent by the empire to its western frontier, near the place where Li Bai was born (see note to Li Bai). It was fortunate for Cen Shen that the general in charge had suggested the emperor abandon the far-west fortress of Suiye, Li Bai's city of birth, and move the troops back east a thousand kilometers to the town of Yanqi. Because of this change, Cen Shen was stationed a little closer to the familiar world of central China. He served as a clerk in the imperial army, and traveled far and wide in China, especially in the northwest. He died in 769, in the city of Chengdu in the southwest.

The first poem translated below was probably written before he received his first official appointment. The next two, "Written In Desert" and "Spring Dream," were written during his first tour of duty at the western frontier.

The Garden of Liang in the last poem is a famed private park, built by Prince Liang (Liu Wu, 184? –144 BC) of the Western Han more than a thousand years before Cen Shen visited the park. Located in what is now Shangqiu County, Henan, with a circumference of a hundred miles, the park included famous scenery such as Lark Hill, Fallen Ape Cliff, Resting Dragon Cavern, Wild Geese Pond, Crane Islet, and Wild Duck Sandbar. In its heyday, the Garden of Liang entertained famous poets such as Mei Cheng and Sima Xiangru, as well as powerful princes and elegant court ladies of the Han Dynasty. It was especially popular in the springtime. After the wars waged by An Lushan, the Garden was devastated and abandoned, yet Cen Shen presented in this poem a sense of place defined by the laws of nature that remain indifferent to the rise and fall of princes, or poets like Cen himself. This seems to be a recurrent motif for Tang poets after the rebellions led by generals An and Shi.

《虢州后亭送李判官使赴晋绛（得秋字）》
（《全唐诗》卷201）

西原驿路挂城头，客散红亭雨未收。
君去试看汾水上，白云犹似汉时秋。

**Written in the Pavilion in the Backyard
of My Guozhou Office
For Mr. Li Who Was
Leaving for Jiangzhou in Shanxi**

Our friends dispersed before the rain
stopped.
Only you and I stand here
by the red pavilion.

We look up to see
the road to West Plateau
that hangs in mid-air
from the tower of the city gate.

When you get there, my dear old friend,
please look on River Fen for me
to see if clouds are still as white
as the ancient poets of Han described
them to be.

《碛中作》（《全唐诗》卷 201）

走马西来欲到天，辞家见月两回圆。
今夜不知何处宿，平沙万里绝人烟。

Written in the Desert

On horse back,
I travel west
till I almost touch the western sky.

Since I left home twice have I seen
the moon become full again.

Not knowing where to sleep tonight,
I look around.

Alas what have I
found?
endless sands –
expansive, flat –
no sign of human life,
not even a column of cooking smoke.

《春梦》（《全唐诗》卷 201）

洞房昨夜春风起，故人尚隔湘江水。
枕上片时春梦中，行尽江南数千里。

Spring Dream

Last night in my cave dwelling,
on the northern frontier,
where the spring wind never
reaches,

in a dreamy moment on my pillow,
I traveled thousands of miles
to the south of the Yangtze.

I dreamed of spring far away
by the southern source of
River Xiang,

of my beautiful friends and lovers.

《山房春事》（《全唐诗》卷 201）

梁园日暮乱飞鸦，极目萧条三两家。
庭树不知人去尽，春来还发旧时花。

Spring Scenes in an Abandoned Garden (II)

Crows in commotion wheel over the Garden of Prince Liang.
Beyond them sets the sun on desolate houses and a few old trees,
that unaware of the passing of people, send forth
the same flowers that inspired the ancient poets and their prince.

Pei Di 裴迪

Pei Di was probably born in 716; no information about the year of his death has been found. His hometown was near the capital city Chang'an and he climbed up the ladder of officialdom, reaching a ministerial position. In his late years he lived in the Zhongnan Mountains, a close neighbor to Wang Wei and arguably his best friend. After Wang Wei retired from the court, they visited each other frequently, playing musical instruments and chanting poems at Wang Wei's villa in the Wangchuan Hills. Huazi Hill is one of the places in Wangchuan Valley about which both Pei and Wang wrote poems; they even shared titles, such as "Huazi Hill," "The Hut in a Bamboo Grove," "Deer Lodge," etc. Pei Di's poetic style is also close to that of Wang Wei; unfortunately, he was often overshadowed by the better-known poet.

According to a gazetteer (*Shaanxi tongzhi*) compiled by scholars of the Ming Dynasty and first published in 1543, almost eight hundred years after Wang Wei died Wangchuan Valley was "located in the south of Lantian County, at the pass of Yao Mountain, eight *li* (two and a half miles) from the county seat. The Valley begins at the gorge between two rocky cliffs, which is about five *li* (one and a half miles) in length. The road leading to the valley is narrow and dangerous. Then the gorge opens to the valley where villages and villas are scattered about, in view of each other, among fertile fields of mulberries and hemp, enclosed by hills that seem to have no way out. Yet winding through these hills and heading south, the traveler will find thirteen smaller valleys that are even more exquisite and beautiful. That's where Wang Wei built his villa, with twenty famous viewpoints such as Mengcheng Col, Huazi Hill, Jinju Hill, etc." (quoted in Qiao Yi and Lei Enhai, eds., *Dali Shi Lue*. Tianjin, Tianjin Press of Ancient Classics, 2008, p. 101. Translation mine). The gorge is called *gu kou* 谷口 ("valley mouth") and is mentioned several times in the poems of Qian Qi, the next poet in this collection.

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An interesting clue about Pei Di's "country life" can be found in a poem of Wang Wei, "To Pei Di," in which Wang describes the pleasant time they spent together drinking and writing poetry in Wang Wei's country dwelling. However, when the time comes for tilling the field in spring, Wang frankly tells his pseudo-farmer friend Pei Di to go home so that Wang, the "true" farmer, can focus on his labor:

Pray get your horse and whip ready,
my dear poet friend, and go back to your home.
Today I start my farmer's year.

Pei Di himself seems to have had no problem with his pseudo-mountain-man status:

I'm no woodsman
I claim no woodcraft.

Yet he still enjoyed life in the woods following the trails left by the doe and stag.

《华子冈》（《全唐诗》卷 129）

落日松风起，还家草露晞。
云光侵履迹，山翠拂人衣。

Huazi Hill

The sun sets on the pines, and wind
arises through the needles, drying drops
of remaining dew and stirring clouds in the sky.
The clouds chase my footsteps, and turn
the path vermilion, while the roadside leaves
brush my shoulders and dye my clothes green.

《鹿柴》（《全唐诗》卷 129）

日夕见寒山，便为独往客。
不知深林事，但有麝麝迹。

Deer Lodge

Day and night I view
the cold mountain
now alone
I hike into its wooded side

I'm no woodsman
claim no woodcraft
I only follow the trails
created by doe and stag

《竹里馆》（《全唐诗》卷 129）

来过竹里馆，日与道相亲。
出入唯山鸟，幽深无世人。

Composed in the Hut in a Bamboo Grove

I come and stay in the bamboo grove
to be close to Dao in daily affairs.

In and out flit the mountain birds
seeing no "man of the world" so deep in green.

Qian Qi 钱起

Qian Qi was probably born around 710 and died around 780 (Fu Xuancong, *Tang Dai Shiren Cong Kao*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1980, p. 437). His hometown was Wuxing, in what is now Jiangsu Province, in the warm, mild and fertile lower reaches of the Yangtze River. From his poetry we learn that he traveled once to Jiangling, at the center of the floodplain between the Yangtze and the Han Rivers, in what is now Hubei Province. There he met Zhang Jiuling and probably Meng Haoran. Like many of his contemporaries, he traveled several times to the capital city Chang'an for the imperial examinations. And several times he failed them. The depression he felt for the failures, and longing for his home down by the Yangtze are reflected in this couplet:

The old mountain at home is far, far away even in dreams.
The new year brings many, many thoughts of home.
(*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 238, poem #22. Translation mine.)

He finally passed the examination when he was already a middle-aged man, in 750. I'm not sure whether he ever returned to his home in southeast China between the failed exams, but after he passed the examination he seemed to have decided to stay in or near the capital for good. Unfortunately, little is known about him before the infamous An-Shi Rebellions started in 755. With the onset of the rebellions, however, many clues about Qian Qi's life began to emerge in his poems. Qian was now appointed sheriff of Lantian County, next to the capital city of Chang'an, and close to the famous valleys in the Zhongnan Mountains where Wang Wei and Pei Di lived in semi-seclusion, just two and a half miles south of Qian's office.

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Qian Qi loved that valley, especially the "valley mouth" (*Gukou*), the gorge that led into the valley. There he built a cottage. In the first poem translated below, Qian Qi celebrates the new cottage he had built and the simple, self-sufficient lifestyle the habitat promised. In the second poem, he expresses guilt for having an official salary to complement the "meager" living the land offers him; and he also expresses sorrow for the simple peasants who are forced to use every single inch of land in order to meet the tax deadline.

In real life, in 763, the year after the devastating wars against An Lushan and Shi Siming had finally come to an end, Tibetan troops invaded western China, briefly occupying Chang'an. Qian Qi, and many other government officials like him, fled for refuge to the valleys of the Zhongnan Mountains. Perhaps it was such experiences that helped him develop a sense of home in a place that had previously been a strange land, thousands of miles away from his old home on the Yangtze. Thus, in the third poem, he talks about the mountains near *Gukou* as if they were his "home mountain."

In the traditional collection of Qian Qi's poems were also included one hundred short pieces about sailing up the Yangtze River. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that these were most likely written by his grandson, Qian Yu, during his demotion trip to southwest China (Fu Xuancong, p. 445). Nevertheless, I translate three of them here just to offer some idea of the family traditions of the Tang poets.

《谷口新居寄同省朋故》
(《全唐诗》卷 236)

种黍傍烟溪，榛芜兼沮洳。
亦知生计薄，所贵隐身处。
橡栗石上村，莓苔水中路。
萧然授衣日，得此还山趣。
汲井爱秋泉，结茅因古树。
闲云与幽鸟，对我不能去。
寄谢鸳鹭群，狎鸥拙所慕。

**Sent to Friends of My Home Province in the
South From My New Cottage at the
Gukou Gorge**

I plant some broomcorn millet by a misty
creek,
beside the shaggy brambles, thistles, and
thorns.
The living this place provides is meager, I
know.
I love it nevertheless – ideal for my hermit
style –
among the oaks and chestnut trees that grow
on a rocky ridge, accessible through a path,
under berry bushes and moss.
All now is flooded.

Here, in the chilly season of autumn I enjoy
a mountain life untrammelled by worldly
affairs.

I dig a well fed by a lovely spring,
and build my hut against an ancient tree.
Gulls and clouds seem to love my house.
They dance, linger in front of my door
as if to offer a promise of eternal company.

I bid goodbye with this poem to my friends at
home
who desire to fly and hover high with noble
egrets –
I enjoy my playful life with the lowly gulls.

《观村人牧山田》
(《全唐诗》卷 236)

六府且未盈，三农争务作。
贫民乏井税，墾土皆垦凿。
禾黍入寒云，茫茫半山郭。
秋来积霖雨，霜降方铄获。
中田聚黎甿，反景空村落。
顾惭不耕者，微禄同卫鹤。
庶追周任言，敢负谢生诺。

Watching Villagers Work the Field

The imperial repository is not quite full,
So peasants on plains in hills by swamps
all struggle hard in the fields.

Forever lacking the grain for taxes
they till the most barren land
to make crops grow in cold clouds
that linger over hard mountain rocks.

Autumnal rains delay the harvest
until frosts turned the sickles white.
The cold sun sets behind the empty
village
the men still busy on the terrace.

A low rank official I feel so ashamed
for the small salary that I receive
for no positive contribution to this world.

I want to follow the advice
of the great historians of ancient times.
If I do no good for people or king,
I should now resign from office.

《暮春归故山草堂》（《全唐诗》239）

谷口春残黄鸟稀，
辛夷花尽杏花飞。
始怜幽竹山窗下，
不改清阴待我归。

Late Spring, Returning to the Cottage in My Home Mountain

At the mountain pass the spring wanes –
canaries gone,
magnolias fallen,
plum petals floating, dancing in the air.

Oh, how much I miss the bamboo grove
by the windows of my cottage,
unchanged, forever green, waiting
for my return to its pure shade.

《江行无题一百首 其十二》
（《全唐诗》卷 239）

翳日多乔木，
维舟取束薪。
静听江叟语，
俱是厌兵人。

**Sailing Up the River (the twelfth of a
hundred short poems)**

Tall trees, so many,
block the light of the setting sun.

I tie my boat to a trunk,
cut a few twigs
to build a supper fire.

In the quiet of dusk
I overhear old men talk,
locals by the river –

they hate the war
as much as I,
a lone man who travels by.

《其十四》

山雨夜来涨，喜鱼跳满江。
岸沙平欲尽，垂蓼入船窗。

**Sailing up the River (the fourteenth of
a hundred short poems)**

Mountain rain
fill the river to the brim
last night.

Happy fish
leap now
all over the river.

Sand banks
so low and flat
almost lie at the level of my boat.

Drooping knotweeds
reach out to me through the window.

《其二十一》

水涵秋色静，云带夕阳高。
诗癖非吾病，何妨吮短毫。

Sailing Up the River (the twenty-first of a hundred short poems)

Still water
reflects autumn tints.
The setting sun
lights up high clouds.

My addiction to poetry
can't possibly be a disease.

So let me once more
moisten my short writing brush
with the tip of my tongue.

Lang Shiyuan 郎士元

Neither *The Book of Tang* nor *The New Book of Tang* has an exclusive biography for Lang Shiyuan. But the “Arts and Literature” chapters of the latter include a volume of his poems with a brief note on his life. Despite his ascension to the higher ranks of Tang officialdom, he was known as a talented poet of the *Dali* Era (766–779) rather than a bureaucrat. He was born in the ancient dukedom of Zhongshan, which is now Ding County of Hebei Province. He passed the imperial examination in 756, along with thirty-two other scholars, including fellow poet Huangfu Ran. Little is known about him during the first few years after he passed the exam – which coincided with the An-Shi Rebellion – but in 762 he was appointed sheriff of Weinan County in the Wei River valley, the next county south of Lantian, where poet Qian Qi was serving as the sheriff. He immediately started a friendship with the poets there, including Wang Wei, Pei Di, and Qian Qi. He exchanged poems with them on shared subjects, such as the Wangchuan Valley and his new cottage built in Half Day Village (surrounded by mountains, the day-light time of the village was only half as long as that enjoyed by villages in open areas).

In December, 777, twenty years after he started his official career, Lang Shiyuan was promoted to the office of Deputy Prefecture Chief in Ying City, along the mid-reaches of the Yangtze in what is now Hubei Province. Lu Lun, one of the ten greatest poetic talents of the *Dali* Era, wrote a poem bidding farewell to Lang Shiyuan. It’s most likely that in the spring of the next year Lang wrote the first poem translated below, “Chanted on the West Tower of the Castle of Ying.”

Ying City had been the capital of the Kingdom of Chu during the Warring States Period (475 to 221 BC). Located at a strategically crucial area – the crossroad between Sichuan, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Henan provinces – Ying City was known for the many devastating battles fought in and around it. According to *Fang Yu Sheng Lan* – a geographical gazetteer written in 1239 and first published in 1269 – the city was surrounded by eight mountains and hills (Mount Jin, Mount Long, Mount Ji, Mount Ba, Jiugang Hill, the Hill of the Painted Fan, and Xirang Hill) and five rivers (the Yangtze, the Han, the Ju, the Zhang, and the Xia Rivers). It is therefore “a strategic key to four kingdoms and the focus of armed forces. He who occupied this place can control central China” (quoted in Qiao Yi and Lei Enhai, eds., *Dali Shi Lue*. Tianjin, Tianjin Press of Ancient Classics, 2008, p. 190).

After his experience of the chaotic years of the An-Shi wars and the Tibetan invasion, Lang Shiyuan seems to have treasured the peace this place offered, proud of being uninterested in the military importance of the walled city from which he governed. But the euphoria he felt there was short lived, for in the fall of 779, he ascended the same tower looking westward and wrote a short ode of dejection – “In Autumn, Looking into the Distance From the West Tower of the Castle of Ying” – in which his homesickness was exacerbated by the honk of geese flying towards the warmer south. These two poems were based on conflicting feelings he experienced in a real place while the senses of place reflected in the other two poems below are idealized by his poetic imagination. He died in 781.

《郢城西楼吟（一作张继诗）》

（《全唐诗》卷 248）

连山尽处水萦回，山上戍门临水开。
朱栏直下一百丈，日暖游鳞自相向。
昔人爱险闭层城，今日爱闲江复清。
沙洲枫岸无来客，草绿花红山鸟鸣。

《郢城秋望》（《全唐诗》卷 248）

白首思归归不得，空山闻雁雁声哀。
高城落日望西北，又见秋风逐水来。

Chanted on the West Tower of the Castle of Ying

Above the plains of ancient Chu
a chain of mountains surrounds a town.
Where mountains end rivers wind
about the castle upon a hill.
Beneath a scarlet fence a hundred feet
in height, a school of fish enjoy the warmth –
the sun shines on their brilliant scales.

In past, men guarded their lofty castle
with care, but I, the new prefecture chief,
enjoy a peaceful leisure over the floods,
maples on the sandbar free of the presence of man,
the greening grass and reddening flowers,
chirping birds as free as mountain air.

**In Autumn, Looking into the Distance
From the West Tower of the
Castle of Ying**

My white head thinks of returning, but I
can't.
I hear the sad wild geese on the empty
mountain.

Standing on the top of the high castle, I
watch
the sun set in the northwest. Again I see
the wind chasing the river water to me.

《柏林寺南望》（《全唐诗》卷 248）

溪上遥闻精舍钟，泊舟微径度深松。
青山霁后云犹在，画出东南四五峰。

Looking South from Bailin Temple

Over the creek I hear
remote bells chime.

Tying my boat I hike
the trail through a deep grove of pines.

The rain has stopped,
the clouds linger on

to outline the blue peaks in the southeast –
four, or five?

《听邻家吹笛》（《全唐诗》卷 248）

凤吹声如隔彩霞，不知墙外是谁家。
重门深锁无寻处，疑有碧桃千树花。

Hearing My Neighbor's Reed Pipe

A phoenix singing
on the other side
of the burning clouds?

Whose house is it on
the other side of the thick wall?

Separated by gate after locked gate,
how can I find who and where?

Could I be wrong imagining
a musician in a grove
of a thousand blooming peach trees?

仲

昭



Gu Kuang 顾况

It is unsure in which year Gu Kuang was born or in which year he died. According to a contemporary of his, Gu Kuang led a long life but all researchers can ascertain is that he was born during Xuanzong's *Kaiyuan* reign era (713–742) and died sometime around 806 (Fu Xuancong, *Tangdai Shiren Cong Kao*. Zhonghua Press, Beijing, 1980, p. 385. Translation mine). However, there is one thing that is clear about him: born and raised in what is now the famous city of Suzhou, in Jiangsu Province in southeastern China, his life was defined by the chaotic wars that began with An Lushan's rebellion. The year after An Lushan occupied the capital city Chang'an, the new emperor (Suzong, r. 756-762) arranged that the imperial examinations be conducted in the coastal southeast rather than in the capital city as had been done for a century. And so in 757 Gu Kuang was able to take the examination without having to travel thousands of miles to central China. He passed and began serving in the low ranks, but when his friend Li Mi became prime minister, he was promoted to the position of *Zhuzuolang*, the officer in charge of compiling the court's ongoing chronicles. It is at this point he moved north to Chang'an, which had been reestablished as the capital of the Tang Empire soon after the end of An Lushan's occupation.

Being a gifted poet-painter and known for his sarcasm, Gu Kuang was far from being respectful to his fellow officials in the court. He was therefore soon demoted from the court to become a mid-rank official in Jiangxi and thereafter retired to Mount Mao Shan, a famous Daoist mountain near the town in which he was born. He deliberately kept a distance from the officialdom and came closer and closer to the working people in the fields. Although he didn't actually till the fields and plant the rice as did Wang Wei and Ding Xianzhi, his close observation of the farmers lends his poetry a flavor of life close to the land. In the poem "Rattan on the Rock Wall," the poet anticipates Shakespeare by centuries in his attempt to read "books in brooks and stories in stones."

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《过山农家》（《全唐诗》卷267）

板桥人渡泉声，茅檐日午鸡鸣。
莫嗔焙茶烟暗，却喜晒谷天晴。

Passing by a Mountain Farmer's House

Over the board-bridge the traveler crosses a gurgling stream.

Under the thatched eaves the hens cackle at high noon.

Don't complain about the smoke from roasting tea leaves.

Just enjoy the sunny day as grains dry on the threshing ground.

《石上藤》（《全唐诗》卷 267）

空山无鸟迹，何物如人意。
委曲结绳文，离披草书字。

**Rattan Vines on the
Rock Wall**

Empty mountain,
not even bird tracks!

What makes me happy here?

Winding, curling,
drooping, hanging,
vines practice calligraphy on the rocks.

《临平湖》（《全唐诗》卷 267）

采藕平湖上，藕泥封藕节。
船影入荷香，莫冲莲柄折。

On the Level Lake

On the Level Lake,
I harvest lotus roots,
wash the mud from them
in clear lake water.

I guide the shadow of my boat
through fragrant leaves with care.
I don't want to break
a single lotus stem.

Wei Yingwu 韦应物

Wei Yingwu was born in Chang'an (now Xi'an), the capital city of the Tang Empire. His life is legendary by any definition of the word and his poetic career truly amazing. In a poem written in his late years, "Meeting Yang Kaifu," he confesses that he became an arrogant young guard for Emperor Xuazong at the age of fifteen and was privileged, spoiled and totally illiterate:

I served the Emperor in my early years,
A haughty boy presuming on the personal favor
from the Emperor ...
Not knowing a single written word I
Indulged in drinking and other stupid deeds.
(*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 190, from poem # 65. My translation)

It was after Emperor Xuanzong's death that Wei began to feel the pressure of real life. No longer protected or invincible, he instead felt "bullied by many," and that it was "too late to study." But study he did, beginning in his mid-twenties. He excelled and was soon recommended to lower-rank positions with considerable power in central China, and then assigned to higher offices in eastern, southeastern, and southern China. What is more impressive is that he made his reputation as one of the greatest Tang poets despite his late start (Luo Liantian, *Tangdai Shiwen Liujia Nianpu*, Taipei, Xuehai Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 75-143).

According to tales in the Daoist tradition, some practitioners had become immortals with the help of a diet of boiled quartz. There is even a recipe in the Daoist classic *Yunjiqian* (Vol. 74) that prescribes the method of boiling quartz to ensure immortality. In the poetic tradition, white quartz became the symbol of a simple and spiritual lifestyle, in a manner very similar to Thoreau's bread without yeast. This is the food he imagined his recluse friend to have in the free but poverty-stricken life.

Wei Yingwu became involved in the officialdom at age fifteen and, in his forty-year career, he only had two short breaks from the official circle. He longed for the quiet and leisurely life of a recluse, as demonstrated in the poems translated below, but his vision of the carefree country lifestyle of a hermit was challenged by the reality he encountered in his duties as a county magistrate. From the working people he learned the hardship of life close to land and began to re-examine his role as an official who was supposed to take care of the people. The last two poems translated here demonstrate the profound lesson he learned from a world unimaginable from the perspective of his early, protected life. The real "empty mountains" where the old man worked along tiger-paw trails have an essential difference from the imaginary "empty mountains" depicted in poems of contemporaries such as Wang Wei, Meng Haoran, and Qi Wuqian.

《秋夜寄丘二十二员外》
(《全唐诗》卷 188)

怀君属秋夜，散步咏凉天。
山空松子落，幽人应未眠。

Written to Qiu the Twenty-Second
in an Autumn Night

Strolling, in search of a poem,
to celebrate the cooling sky,

I can't help but think of you
this late autumn night.

In your empty mountains
you can hear pinecones fall.

Dear hermit friend!
You must be as awake as I.

《寄全椒山中道士》(《全唐诗》卷 188)

今朝郡斋冷，忽念山中客。
涧底束荆薪，归来煮白石。
欲持一瓢酒，远慰风雨夕。
落叶满空山，何处寻行迹。

Sent to a Daoist Friend in Quanjiao Mountains

This morning, feeling the first chill of the year,
I worried about my friend the mountain man.

He must be collecting thistles along the gorges,
or returning home to boil white quartz.*

I want to send him a gourd of wine brewed with my own rice,
to help him ward off the evening cold brought by the wind and rain.

Where does my courier begin to look for his tracks
when the empty mountains are buried under fallen leaves?

* In the Daoist tradition, white quartz is believed to be a mystical food for longevity.

《观田家》（《全唐诗》卷 192）

微雨众卉新，一雷惊蛰始。
田家几日闲，耕种从此起。
丁壮俱在野，场圃亦就理。
归来景常晏，饮犊西涧水。
饥劬不自苦，膏泽且为喜。
仓廩无宿储，徭役犹未已。
方惭不耕者，禄食出闾里。

Observations on a Farming Village

Light drizzles send grasses and weeds
upward fast and fresh.

The first clap of thunder wakes
hibernating reptiles, bugs that crawl out of
the earth.

They end the few resting winter days,
restart
the cycle of tilling and planting for the
farming families.
With gardens cleaned up and thrashing
grounds mended,
all the young and strong go and work on
the fields.

When they return the sun is already low
and they stop
to watch their oxen drink from the creek.
Tired, cold, hungry yet too busy to
indulge in self-pity,
they chat happily about the rain that keep
the land fertile and ready.

The magistrate knows that their barns
have no food left before
the harvest, and they've not finished the
"volunteer" work for the state.
He feels shame, the shame of a man who
has never tilled the fields,
to realize that his pay has come from
peasants like these.

《山耕叟》（《全唐诗》卷 193）

萧萧垂白发，默默诮知情。
独放寒林烧，多寻虎迹行。
暮归何处宿，来此空山耕。

An Old Man Cultivating a Mountain Plot

Alone he wanders in the pathless woods,
following the tracks of tiger paws.
He picks up frozen leaves and broken twigs,
burns them to ashes to fertilize a plot
on this rocky hill. He works hard here
In the empty mountains but where's the home
that he returns to for the night?

I ask but get no answer
from this quiet man, whose graying hair
stirs thinly in the cold mountain breeze.

《幽居》（《全唐诗》卷 193）

贵贱虽异等，出门皆有营。
独无外物牵，遂此幽居情。
微雨夜来过，不知春草生。
青山忽已曙，鸟雀绕舍鸣。
时与道人偶，或随樵者行。
自当安蹇劣，谁谓薄世荣。

On Seclusion

The aristocrat and the laborer differ
in many ways.
They both leave
their home behind
in search of a living or fame.
Only the recluse enjoying a life
of simple solitude
is free
from the shackle of those worldly pursuits.

In the night a slight drizzle
passes his hermitage,
helping grasses grow
without his knowledge.
The sun
of a sudden breaks
the lingering clouds, the birds
warble around his house in the green mountains.

Occasionally he accompanies
a Daoist friend, or walks
with the woodchopper in the morning mist.
He holds it natural to accept
his inferior luck and wit, never jealous
of the glory of those who try and succeed.

Lu Lun 卢纶

Lu Lun was born to a large clan in what is now Yongji County, Shanxi Province. His family had been well known among scholars and high officials since the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) (Lin Shiyi, *Tianyuanshi Jinghua*. Beijing, Jinghua Press, 2001). But Master Lu Lun was a sickly child and started schooling later than many of the Tang poets. When he was finally strong enough to start formal schooling at the age of eight, northern China was no longer safe due to the rebellion led by An Lushan. In 755, Lu and his family moved south to Poyang, a small town in what is now Jiangxi Province, south of the Yangtze River, on the eastern bank of the great Lake Poyang. In a poem sent to a fellow poet, Cao Zhao 曹刿, he reviews his earlier life and describes how the move affected him and how his new schoolmates laughed at him because his knowledge was considerably below standard for a nine-year-old (quoted in Fu Xuancong, *Tang Caizizhuan Jiao Jian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 2000, Vol. 2, p. 2). Lu Lun's luck was as bad in imperial examination as in formal schooling and he failed several times during the *Dali* Era (766–780). However, his poetic talent was soon recognized by the people around him and as he failed the examinations, his poems placed him among the ten top poetic geniuses of the time. Gaining the respect of a high official – Prime Minister Yuan Zai 元载, who showed the best of his poems and essays to the emperor – he acquired a position in the officialdom. He later worked in several positions in and near Chang'an, then followed a field marshal to the northwestern frontier as a military secretary. His poetic talent was much appreciated by Emperor Xianzong 宪宗 (r. 805–820), who included thirty-two of his poems in a collection of Tang poems that has a total of three hundred and eleven poems.

In his earlier career, Lu imagined the mountain life as isolated in remote areas, but made warm and pleasant by barking dogs, gurgling creeks, and lights in farm-house windows. Despite the warmth and pleasantness, in the last poem, when he met an elder acquaintance who had survived another chaotic war, he lost the heart to stay overnight in this ravaged community where children and grandchildren were remembered but never again met alive.

The time of composition of the last poem is unknown. My educated guess is that it must have been written after the year 783, for in October of that year, another rebellion started, this time led by general Zhu Zi 朱泚 and for a second time the Tang capital was occupied by rebels. It was then that Lu Lun was called to serve as a military secretary under field marshal Hun.

The county of Zhouzhi is located in the heartland of the fertile Guanzhong Plains, seventy kilometers west of Xi'an (Chang'an), by the northern foothills of the Qinling Mountain Range and on the southern bank of River Wei. If people in Zhouzhi found it hard to survive, then it's hard to imagine what might have happened to the people who lived in less-favored lands. Zhouzhi was the site of a long cultural tradition, going back to the Zhou Dynasty, established in the 1100s BC. Between his many failed attempts at the imperial examinations, Lu Lun lived in a cottage in the Zhongnan Mountains, about fifty kilometers east of the Zhouzhi area. He probably visited Zhouzhi then and made some friends there. He likely visited that area again as he served in the military, recovering territories that had been lost to the rebels since 783.

《山店（一作王建诗）》
（《全唐诗》卷 280）

登登山路行时尽，决决溪泉到处闻。
风动叶声山犬吠，一家松火隔秋云。

Mountain Inn

High on the peak, the mountain trail comes to an end.
Barking dogs, gurgling creeks, leaves rustling
in the wind greet the traveler.

Beyond the autumn clouds,
behind branches of pines,
glow the three windows
of a single house.

《山中一绝》（《全唐诗》卷 279）

饥食松花渴饮泉，偶从山后到山前。
阳坡软草厚如织，因与鹿麕相伴眠。

Life in the Mountains

When hungry I eat the pine nuts raw.
When thirsty I drink from the spring cold.

When for no reason I hike
from the mountain's front to its back
slope,
where grasses grow, thick as a carpet,
I lie down to sleep among deer and elk.

《春游东潭》（《全唐诗》卷 279）

移舟试望家，漾漾似天涯。
日暮满潭雪，白鸥和柳花。

Boating on the Eastern Pond in Early Spring

Rowing the boat across the lake
I turn around to look for my house.

Sitting on the brimming tarn
I seem to mark the end of the earth.

In sunset the lake shines bright and white –
Snow? willow catkins? or flying gulls?

《和张仆射塞下曲》
（《全唐诗》卷 278）

月黑雁飞高，单于夜遁逃。
欲将轻骑逐，大雪满弓刀。

A Frontier Song

The moon, black.
Geese flying high.
Chanyu, the enemy chief,
has escaped.*

I want to lead
the light cavalry to chase him down,
but the snow!
The snow has buried my sword and bow.

*The desert is so barren, cold, vast
and unpopulated that the Chanyu's
escape was a deadly gamble.

《晚到盩厔老家》（《全唐诗》卷 280）

老翁曾旧识，相引出柴门。
苦话别时事，因寻溪上村。
数年何处客，近日几家存。
冒雨看禾黍，逢人忆子孙。
乱藤穿井口，流水到篱根。
惆怅不堪住，空山月又昏。

An Evening, Visiting an Elder in Zhouzhi County

The elder I met so long ago recognizes me.
He leads me by hand out of his wattle gate
to the village up stream. In words that hurt
we talk about our lives since we'd parted –
where have I been wandering in all these years?
How many families have survived here?

In cold rain we check the crops. As we meet
acquaintances I try to recall the names
of their sons and grand-children.* We push away
overgrown vines to disclose an abandoned well.

Water swells to overflow the path,
disappearing under a fence. I sigh
to admit that I can't bear to stay overnight.

The moon's dim disk had climbed
up the empty mountain.

* The historical context of this poem is a war between the Han Chinese and the Tibetan invaders. The children and grandchildren they try to recall didn't survive the war, for some reason, as the old men did.

Li Yi 李益

Li Yi was born in 748 into a family that took pride in their ancestor, Li Guang (?–116 BC), a famous general of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–25 AD). Li Yi's father was also a general in the Tang army which, under the leadership of General Geshu Han, was winning victory after victory against the Tibetans and other northwestern peoples. It's small wonder then that from his earliest years Li Yi showed a strong patriotic leaning. This was further fueled by the chaotic wars set off by the An-Shi Rebellion (755–762). Li started military training at the age of fifteen and wrote in a poem warning friends against laughing at him as the poet-son of a general (quoted in Bian Xiaoxuan and Qiao Changfu, "Li Yi," in Lu Huijuan et al., eds, *Zhongguo Lidai Zhuming Wenxuejia Zhuanping*. Vol. 2, Jinan, Shandong Press of Education, 1983, p. 360. Translation mine). The first poem translated below, "A Frontier Song," was probably inspired by his early training in the military.

When he was seventeen years old, the Tibetans invaded northwestern China, briefly occupying the capital city Chang'an. This changed his life. Fleeing the Tibetan occupation, he now left home to go to central China to study for the imperial examination. There his reputation as a poet grew. The second poem translated here, "Sent to Miao Fa and Sikong Shu...", was written when he was twenty years old. His early militant patriotism seemed to have left no traces in the delicate imagination of the poet, who was hyper-sensitive to his environment, subtle in his sense of place, and careful about friendship.

At the age of twenty-two he passed the examination, but was not assigned any position until three years later. In the year 780, at the age of thirty-two, he started to work as a member of the staff of a general on the northern frontier. In this capacity he visited many sites in the far north, including strategic forts in what is now Ningxia and Inner Mongolia. He is best known as a mid-Tang poet of the frontier. The third poem translated here, "Listening to a Flute," was written during this trip and is considered by some the best short poem of the mid-Tang. Comparing this poem with the one about his early military training, readers can find a much more sober, perhaps more mature, perception of frontier life. The castle that Li Yi wrote about lay between the modern cities of Baotou and Tuoketuo, Inner Mongolia, while Castle Ling, where the emperors of Tang accepted the surrender of the northern tribes, is located in what is now Lingwu County, in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, about six hundred kilometers southwest of Baotou. By merging these two places, the poet dramatizes the price that common soldiers pay for the emperors' brief moments of triumph.

In the year 800, the Tang court sent Li Yi on an official trip to the southeast. He wrote many poems about the sceneries along the Yangtze River. "The River Song on the Grand Canal" was written while traveling on the section of the canal known as River Bian, which went from Xingyang, now in Henan Province, to Xuyi, now in Jiangsu Province. This stretch of the canal was actually built under Emperor Yangdi of the Sui Dynasty (r. 604–618). Though the Grand Canal has been considered an engineering miracle, many thousands died during its construction. Li Yi's critical tone of the emperor's ambitious achievement based upon common people's sacrifice is consistent with his critical tone in the poem about listening to a flute on a castle.

《塞下曲》（《全唐诗》卷 283）

蕃州部落能结束，朝暮驰猎黄河曲。
燕歌未断塞鸿飞，牧马群嘶边草绿。

A Frontier Song

Troops train hard with discipline
on the Northwest Frontier.
From morning till dusk they drill
and gallop by the Yellow River Bend.

After, they sing, loud and high.
Their roaring songs make the wild geese
fly.
Their horses neigh in harmonious
response
from the tall grasses, luxuriant and green.

《竹窗闻风寄苗发司空曙》
（《全唐诗》卷 283）

微风惊暮坐，临牖思悠哉。
开门复动竹，疑是故人来。
时滴枝上露，稍沾阶下苔。
何当一入幌，为拂绿琴埃。

**Written to Miao Fa and Si Kongshu on the
Occasion of Hearing the Wind Rustling through
the Bamboo Twigs by the Window**

I sit by a window, set my mind free.
Evening wind surprises me with cool
delight. It stirs bamboos and opens the door
the same way my old friends used to do.
It shakes the leaves and dew drops fall
to moisten mosses on rocky steps.
I wish it would advance farther, into my house,
to sweep away the dust covering my green harp.

《夜上受降城闻笛》（《全唐诗》卷 283）

回乐峰前沙似雪，受降城下月如霜。不知何处吹芦管，一夜征人尽望乡。

**Listening to a Flute on a Castle, Where Emperor
Taizong Accepted the Barbarians' Surrender**

Beyond the walls of Castle Ling the moon
illuminates the desert – white as snow,
cold as frost. A reed flute – someone plays
somewhere – keeps the soldiers awake,
their eyes turned towards their home
through the long night.

《汴河曲》（《全唐诗》卷 283）

汴水东流无限春，隋家宫阙已成尘。
行人莫上长堤望，风起杨花愁杀人。

A River Song on the Grand Canal

The Grand Canal flows east
into the boundless green of spring,
the river a traveler doesn't have the heart
to view from the winding, endless dike.

The wind stirs, the willow catkins dance
as snow flakes in the air,
over the palace rubble of the Sui Emperor
who forced peasants to make a river.

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《水宿闻雁》（《全唐诗》卷 283）

早雁忽为双，惊秋风水窗。
夜长人自起，星月满空江。

Hearing the Geese on a Boat

In a long sleepless night
I pulled myself up,
surprised to see the sudden descent
of autumn on my window – oh, the wind and waves!
Two wild geese, a pair, took off with a splash.
The stars, the moon, fill up the empty river.

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Meng Jiao 孟郊

Meng Jiao's ancestral home was in a town in northern Shandong Province, though the family had moved to Luoyang, Tang's eastern capital in central China, a few generations before Meng Jiao was born. Having become a lower rank government official, Meng's father had taken the immediate family with him to his office in Kunshan, now in Jiangsu Province, near the Yangtze Delta. It was in Kunshan that Meng Jiao was born, in the year 751. It was also in Kunshan that the father died, whereupon the widow moved Meng Jiao and his two brothers to Deqing, a town in northern Zhejiang Province, south of the Yangtze. In Deqing, Meng Jiao began to emerge as a child prodigy, both in poetry and scholarship. He was, however, unlucky in the imperial examinations and, despite many tries, did not pass until he was forty-six years old. Even after passing, he was not assigned any position for four years.

He probably wrote the first poem translated below in the course of his repeated failures at the official examination, showing disillusionment with the world of officialdom before he had had the opportunity to enter it. He admired the simple but healthy lifestyle of people in the mountains and felt upset by the stress of a life in pursuit of fame. He also traveled to the far northwest before he passed the examination, where he wrote the poem inviting his friend to go and appreciate the flowers rendered rare by the severe climate of the area.

Meng Jiao was finally assigned the position of county sheriff in Liyang County, in what is now Jiangsu Province. Though a minor position, it was just a few hundred kilometers from Deqing, where his mother still lived and so allowed him to serve both family and empire. But though a talented poet, Meng Jiao was a poor sheriff, who neglected his duties in pursuit of his poetic endeavors, spending most of his time wandering around a semi-wild place that a poet friend recommended to him:

About five *li* (one-and-a-half miles) south of the county seat, Gold Throwing Rapids, and eight *li* further south from there was the site of the ruined Pingling Castle. The site has a circumference of over a thousand yards, elevated three or four feet above the ground and by no means even. The vegetation there is luxuriant, with many tall and thick oak trees and green bamboo groves. Water has pooled in the lower parts of the site and in the deeper pools fish and turtles have made their home. This place is secluded and quiet, visited by no other people than wood choppers and anglers (Lu Huijuan, et al., eds., *Zhongguo Lidai Zhuming Wenxuejia Pingzhua*. Vol. 2, Jinan, Shandong Press of Education, 1983, p. 381. Translation mine).

Meng Jiao fell in love with this place; unlike Thoreau who built a hut in his favorite place by Walden Pond, Meng Jiao visited the semi-wild spot daily and wrote many poems there. However, because of his negligence of his duty, his superior had to hire a deputy to work for him, paying the deputy with half of Meng Jiao's already meager salary. Unable to support himself with what he was paid, Meng Jiao soon resigned and moved back to Deqing to take care of his aging mother. One has reason to imagine that Meng Jiao wrote the "mountain man songs" during his visits of the ruins.

Meng Jiao died in 814, at the age of sixty-four, near Luoyang, where some of his family still lived.

《游终南山》（《全唐诗》卷 375）

南山塞天地，日月石上生。高峰夜留景，深谷昼未明。
山中人自正，路险心亦平。长风驱松柏，声拂万壑清。
到此悔读书，朝朝近浮名。

Hiking the Zhongnan Mountains

The Zhongnan Mountains fill heaven and earth.
The sun and moon rise behind the rocky ridge.
At twilights the sun lingers on the jarring peaks.
At mid-day the deep canyons are in eternal shade.
A long wind strikes the pines, a harpist's finger on strings.
It makes pure sounds echoed by purified valleys.

Those who live here are naturally upright,
always at ease though walking on perilous trails.
Thinking of this I regret having studied books
all my life, chased floating fame morning after morning.

《邀花伴（自注，时在朔方）》
（《全唐诗》卷 375）

边地春不足，十里见一花。
及时须遨游，日暮饶风沙。

**Inviting a Friend to See Flowers
(I was in the far north then)**

In the frontier of the far north
the spring is always starved –

you have to walk ten miles
before you see a single bloom.

Let's start early and travel far
for dusty storms rise in the desert dusk

《春雨后》（《全唐诗》卷 380）

昨夜一霎雨，天意苏群物。
何物最先知，虚庭草争出。

After the First Rain in Spring

It rained last night,
a brief moment
of heaven's will
to wake up all things.

Who knows the will of heaven first?
In my empty yard,
weeds push each other,
standing up through dirt.

《山老吟》（《全唐诗》卷 372）

不行山下地，唯种山上田。
腰斧斫旅松，手瓢汲家泉。
讵知文字力，莫记日月迁。
蟠木为我身，始得全天年。

**A Song Chanted by an
Old Mountain Man**

I plant the terrace plots
up on the mountain top
I never walk the road
in valleys of towns

I pull the ax from my belt
to chop off pine twigs
use my hand-cut gourd
to fetch water from springs

I ignore the power of words
be they written or spoken
nor ever bothered to record
the passing days or moons

Like a twisted and knotted tree
I have no use for the Greats
They leave me alone to complete
my natural life in hills.

《小隐吟》（《全唐诗》卷 372）

我饮不在醉，我欢长寂然。
酌溪四五盏，听弹两三弦。
炼性静栖白，洗情深寄玄。
号怒路傍子，贪败不贪全。

A Humble Hermit's Song

I drink but never get drunk –
four or five cups of cold spring.
I make merry – but quietly –
a harmonious tune on strings.

To temper my natural character
I rest peaceably among the clouds.
To cleanse my emotions and desires
I meditate on Dao in depth.

Unlike other scholars who fall
in pursuit of power and fame
easy prey to greed and passion
I strive to become whole.

Chang Jian 常建

Not only do we not know the birth or death dates of Chang Jian, but from the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368) his homeland was mistakenly identified as Chang'an, the capital city of Tang (Xin Wenfang, *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, the Press of Classical Literature, 1957, p. 22). This misinformation was corrected with excavation of a tombstone in Hebei Province in August 2006, on which was an inscription stating that Chang Jian and his clan lived in Xingtai, Hebei Province for generations (http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_57036a6b0100fbu7.html). Chang Jian passed the imperial examination in 727, the same year as Wang Changling, a poet also included in this collection. Chang went on to work in the lower ranks of officialdom, serving for a few years as the sheriff of Xuyu County, now in Jiangsu Province. Since no poems Chang has left describe anything about the An-Shi Rebellions, it's reasonable to assume that he died before 755, the year the rebellions began.

Poshan Monastery 破山寺, originally known as Xingfu Monastery, was built during the Southern Qi Dynasty (479–502). Its name was changed to Poshan during the reign of Emperor Taizong (626–649). Chang Jian's poem made the temple famous, and Mind-Cleansing Tarn 空心潭 is named from a line from the poem. The place is now a tourist hotspot, mostly owing to Chang Jian's poetic genius.

Passing the examination in the same year, Chang Jian and Wang Changling became life-long friends. It's probable that after retiring from his sheriff post, Chang Jian traveled northwest along the Yangtze River for about a hundred and fifty kilometers to visit the cottage where Wang Changling had lived in seclusion before he finally passed the examination at the age of thirty-seven. But when Chang Jian visited that cottage, Wang was no longer a hermit; he was serving at a low rank similar to that of Chang. That's probably why, determined to live in seclusion, Chang Jian implicitly invited his friend Wang Changling to turn his back on officialdom as well and join him and the immortal cranes in the "West Mountain" in Ezhou, Hubei Province, about five hundred kilometers further west.

It seems that Chang Jian found the peaceful and leisurely lifestyle he had been looking for in the West Mountain. The poem of that title shows that he has merged his body with a small, leaf-like boat that helped connect him with the mighty stream, the long sky over the Yangtze, the egrets and geese on the sandbars, and the reeds and bulrushes along the banks.

In the last poem translated below, the Tang poet's experiment with returning to nature was going through its ultimate test. Kongling Mountain, also known as Kongling Gorge or Kongling Bluff, is located sixty kilometers southwest of Xiangtan County seat and therefore about five hundred kilometers southwest of the West Mountain where Chang Jian lived in reclusion. The far south is the limit of Chang Jian's environmental imagination and, when confronted with truly wild and unfamiliar peoples, the advocate of nature was frightened and resorted to ethnocentrism in order to cope with the unknown. Turning his back on the wild southwest he walked homeward, staff in hand. Though Chang Jian's limitations were shared by some of the Tang poets who chose nature as an alternative to the empire, not all were as narrow-minded. The poet Du Fu saw the same place in a different light. In his poem "Mooring near the Banks at Kongling," Du Fu admired the way the setting sun highlights the rugged cliffs, realizing that the green season of spring has no selfishness, for the brilliant sun lights up the remote corner of the central kingdom as it does elsewhere (Du Fu, "Mooring near the Banks at Kongling," *Quan Tang Shi*. Vol 223, poem# 24; paraphrase mine).

《题破山寺后禅院》（《全唐诗》卷 144）

清晨入古寺，初日照高林。
竹径通幽处，禅房花木深。
山光悦鸟性，潭影空人心。
万籁此都寂，但余钟磬音。

**Written on the Wall of
Poshan Monastery**

In early morning when sun rays
gild the top of trees,
I walk into this ancient temple.
The bamboo-lined path leads me deep
into the grove
where flowers and leaves hide the simple
Zen room.

The mountain light pleases the birds.
Reflections in the tarn
empty my mind and heart.

Thousands of trees and bamboo stand in
silence,
letting me hear bell chimes echo in the
valley.

《宿王昌龄隐居》（《全唐诗》卷 144）

清溪深不测，隐处唯孤云。
松际露微月，清光犹为君。
茅亭宿花影，药院滋苔纹。
余亦谢时去，西山鸾鹤群。

**Spending A Night in the Old Cottage Where My Friend
Wang Changling Used to Live in Seclusion**

The creek, pure in its unknown depth,
led me far into the mountains to your old cottage,
where the only resident now is a lingering cloud.

Through pine needles, the moon cast its pure beams on the house.
The flowers you planted slept by the thatch-roofed pavilion.
Streaks of moss grew across the herbal garden.

I too have bade goodbye to the impetuous world
to befriend cranes and herons in mountains of the west.

《西山》（《全唐诗》卷144）

一身为轻舟，落日西山际。
常随去帆影，远接长天势。
物象归馀清，林峦分夕丽。
亭亭碧流暗，日入孤霞继。
渚日远阴映，湖云尚明霁。
林昏楚色来，岸远荆门闭。
至夜转清迥，萧萧北风厉。
沙边雁鹭泊，宿处蒹葭蔽。
圆月逗前浦，孤琴又摇曳。
泠然夜遂深，白露沾人袂。

The West Mountain

My body unites as one with the tiny boat,
the sun merging with mountains in the west.
I follow the shadows of the flying sails
along the Long River* and the longer sky.
In the remaining hours the clear stream collects all scenes
along its banks, reflecting in sharp contrast
evening beauties of hills and trees.
Soon the sun falls lower, touching the bar of sand,
illuminating the clouds that linger over the lake.
When the woods become darker, showing the true
colors of south, they close the gate at the castle
that guards the river city on the bank.

The wind from the north swirls sharply in the night,
cleaning everything in the rotating sky.
On a sandbar geese and herons fall asleep,
sheltered by bulrushes and reeds.
I play my harp alone to the shining stream.
The moon dances on water to my beat.
We entertain each other all night through,
my coat moistened by the morning dew.

*In China, the Yangtze is better known as the Long River.

《空灵山应田叟》（《全唐诗》卷144）

湖南无村落，山舍多黄茆。
淳朴如太古，其人居鸟巢。
牧童唱巴歌，野老亦献嘲。
泊舟问溪口，言语皆哑咬。
土俗不尚农，岂暇论肥饶。
莫徭射禽兽，浮客烹鱼鲛。
余亦罨置人，获麋今尚苞。
敬君中国来，愿以充其庖。
日入闻虎斗，空山满咆哮。
怀人虽共安，异域终难交。
曳策背落日，江风鸣梢梢。

**In Response to Old Man Tian at
Kongling Mountain**

South of Dongting Lake
villages are unknown to local tribes.
They live in houses of yellow thatch
perched on tree-tops like nests of birds.
People are honest and simple here
as they were in remotest antiquity.
Cow-herds would sing barbarian ballads.
Wild elders would offer satirical songs.

I moor at the river-mouth and ask
for directions but I don't know
a word of their gibbering dialect.
Then I meet Old Man Tian who too
is from the Central Kingdom. He says
people here grow no crops
nor distinguish the fertile from the barren
land.

The Yao barbarians hunt for food,
the River Wanderers boil the fish.

He too is a hunter, better than any locals,
offers me an elk, kept fresh in dewy
leaves:

"I respect you," he says, "a man from the
Central Empire
and want to present the elk to you and
your beloved ones."

With gratitude I leave the old man, and
turn
my back to the setting sun. I hear tigers
roar in woods,
mountains echo the wild commotion.
With good faith I could live with people
here in peace,
but talking to barbarians is beyond my
scope.

I can cleanse my heart with clear water.
I can quench my hunger with wild herbs.
But I have to turn my back to the setting
sun
over this place, staff in hand against the
howling winds.

Zhang Ji 张籍

Zhang Ji was born in 766 in Suzhou City, now in Jiangsu Province, then moved with his family a hundred and eighty kilometers northwest to the town of Wu, in what is now the County of He (Harmony County), Anhui Province. He went to Shandong to study the classics and there he met twenty-year-old poet Wang Jian, who became his life-long friend. They would thereafter continue to send poems in support of each other, in good years and in bad. I don't think it was by mere coincidence that Zhang didn't take the imperial examination until the year 799, at the age of thirty-three, in the same year that Wang Jian left his mountain life and became a secretary in the military.

Zhang Ji was friendly with many other poets of his time. The famous "chilly" poet Meng Jiao finally passed the imperial examination at the age of forty-six in the year 797, and, as he traveled by the County of He he visited Zhang Ji in Zhang's river cottage by the Dock of Peach Blossoms (yet another allusion to the famous work of the fifth-century poet Tao Qian). There they wrote several poems and Meng Jiao later recommended Zhang Ji to the poet Han Yu. Zhang Ji would also become close friends with the famous younger poets Bai Juyi (Po Juyi) and Yuan Zhen. The Dock of Peach Blossoms thereby became a well-known literary gathering place. Hundreds of years later, in the Song Dynasty, He Zhu wrote a poem in remembrance of this poetic meeting. And more than a thousand years after Zhang Ji, the Qing Dynasty writer Xiao Mu wrote this about that literary place:

walking out of the Grand West Gate of the county seat, we followed the stream for about two *li* (a *li* being about a third of a mile) and crossed a large bridge, which was called Peach Blossom Bridge. Walking scores of steps we came to open land of an acre or two, where peaches came into full bloom and hills rolled higher up. Next to the bridge lay the ruins of the Dock of Peach Blossoms. . . . I tried to envision poets Zhang Ji and Meng Jiao, their smiling faces and their wine glasses, yet couldn't get a clear picture (quoted in Luo Liantian, *Tangdai Shi Wen Liu Jia Nianpu*, Taipei, 1986, p. 167. Translation mine).

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Zhang Ji was known as a realist and preferred the poetic form of ancient times to the more stylish *lüshi* 律诗 ("regulated verse") popular in the Tang. In his time, many poets celebrated the mountain man's life, exploiting the structure of the Chinese character *xian* (仙 immortals, gods) which is made up by combining the radical (the significant element of a Chinese character) for mountain 山 and the radical for man 人: immortal gods live in the mountains and people go to the mountains to get away from the sordid reality of the human world to achieve a more fulfilling life. In contrast to his contemporaries, Zhang often dwelled on the harsh life of the working people, especially those who live in the less fertile, mountainous areas to avoid heavy taxation. As Zhang shows in this poem, taxes followed people wherever they went. Critics commended the seeming lack of transition between the main body of the poem and the final two lines, for the conspicuous absence effectively dramatizes the gap between the haves and the have-nots. It is interesting to notice that Henry David Thoreau celebrates a "natural" lifestyle by informing the reader that a part of his diet comes from berries and nuts; yet Zhang Ji's mountain man eats acorns not because he prefers the natural diet but because his meager harvest was taken away by an unjust government. More than twelve centuries ago, Zhang Ji was already asking a question that now concerns twenty-first century environmentalists: can we really talk about environmental harmony without addressing the issues of social justice? In the next poem, Zhang Ji continues this theme by de-romanticizing the scholar's fantasy of the pastoral life of a cowherd boy.

Zhang Ji's family remained in their homeland for generations; after his death, they stopped entering officialdom and became full-time farmers until his great-grandson five generations down, who again took the examination and became a scholar-official. His great-grandson seven generations after him, Zhang Xiaoxiang, became a famous poet in the Song Dynasty.

《白鼃鸣》（《全唐诗》卷 29）

天欲雨，有东风，南溪白鼃鸣窟中。
六月人家井无水，夜闻白鼃人尽起。

When White Alligators Bellow

No family in June of this year
has a well that's not gone dry.

the white alligators in muddy holes
on the banks of the South Creek.

People get up in mid-night
on hearing loud and deep bellows –

Ah, relief!
The east wind is stirring.
The rains are coming.

《野老歌（一作山农词）》
（《全唐诗》382）

老农家贫在山住，耕种山田三四亩。
苗疏税多不得食，输入官仓化为土。
岁暮锄犁傍空室，呼儿登山收橡实。
西江贾客珠百斛，船中养犬长食肉。

A Mountain Peasant's Song

An old peasant with a poor family
I live on the rocky terrace
cultivating my half-acre plot.

I pay taxes upon taxes with grain
leaving little for myself and mine.
They dump my grain into the Imperial
Silos
to rot away like dirt.

Late in the year, by my empty house,
I still till my meager plot,
my sons sent to the mountain top
to collect acorns and nuts.

They say that the merchants on the West
River
trade jewels by the bushel.
They feed their dogs in the boat
with choicest meat all year round.

《牧童词》（《全唐诗》卷 382）

远牧牛，绕村四面禾黍稠。
陂中饥鸟啄牛背，令我不得戏垅头。
入陂草多牛散行，白犊时向芦中鸣。
隔堤吹叶应同伴，还鼓长鞭三四声。
牛牛食草莫相触，官家截尔头上角。

An Ox-herd's Song

To herd the oxen I walk many miles
away from fields around the village
where crops are growing thick and well.

At the lakeside hungry crows land on the
back
of my lead ox to peck at the spine –
impossible for me to play on the field
ridge.

I shoo the birds away to let
oxen disperse. They disappear
in the tall reeds on the marsh.

I know where they are
Listening to the pale calves moo.

Boys on the other side of the lake
blow shrilly on reed leaves,
I respond with three cracks of my whip,
holler with all my might –

Oxen and calves behave yourselves.
Make sure you graze the tender grass.
I will tolerate no fight among you beasts.
If you push each other with your horns
The Emperor's men will catch you and
saw them off.

《惜花》（《全唐诗》卷 386）

山中春已晚，处处见花稀。
明日来应尽，林间宿不归。

Love of Flowers

The beginning of spring is already late
spring.
It always is in mountains this deep.
Late spring flowers are always sparse,
especially so in mountains this deep.

I don't want to come again in another day
to find petals scattered on the ground.
I camp right here among the trees
instead of going home for a night of sleep.

《山中酬人》（《全唐诗》卷 386）

山中日暖春鸠鸣，逐水看花任意行。
向晚归来石窗下，菖蒲叶上见题名。

Sent from the Mountain

Deep in the mountains
turtledoves coo in warm sunshine.
I view flowers along the river
wherever my fancy guides my feet.

Late in the evening
I finally get home, pleasantly surprised
to see your name on a bulrush leaf,*
attached to my stone window sill.

* Zhang Ji believes that bulrush has twelve joints in every inch of its stem, and the stems and leaves are longevity foods that keep a person's face spotless and hair black. See Zhang Ji, poem # 61, volume 382 in *Quan Tang Shi (The Complete Tang Poems)*.

《山禽》（《全唐诗》卷 386）

山禽毛如白练带，栖我庭前栗树枝。猕猴半夜来取栗，一双中林向月飞。

White Pheasants

A pair of mountain birds,
feathers whiter than a satin ribbon,
have made a home in the branches
of the chestnut tree in my yard.

At midnight the rhesus monkeys come
to fetch their dinner from my trees.

They frighten the couple in their sleep –
the pheasants whirl out of the twigs
into the silver moon.

Wang Jian 王建

Wang Jian is an interesting anomaly among the Tang poets. Born in 766 into a clan that had been declining both in power and in number, he had no interest in joining the officialdom and held a general contempt for those who spent long years preparing for the imperial examinations in order to acquire a position in the government. In the year 783, a general in the army rebelled and took Chang'an. Just seventeen, Wang Jian now left his home in the fertile Guanzhong plains surrounding the capital and went east to Confucius' homeland in Lu, now part of Shandong Province, to study with masters of the Chinese Classics. There, three years later, he met the young poet Zhang Ji, who "followed him around on Mount Que and along the River Zhang" in what is now Hebei Province (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 385, Poem #25. Translation mine). Zhang became his life-long friend, sympathetic with both his poetic pursuit and his critical worldview. After about five years of study and travel, Wang Jian decided to search for an alternative to worldly pursuits, and for the decade between 789 and 799 in the mountains around the River Zhang he experimented with Daoist ways of achieving immortality through a disciplined life and a diet taken from legend. When a friend and fellow practitioner left the mountain to take the examination in the capital city, he "burned the thatched hut" they had shared and declared that he never again wanted to see that man, who, he believed, had betrayed their ideals (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 297, Poem #22. Translation mine). It was during these years in the mountains that he wrote the first and second poems translated below. Unfortunately, at the end of his ten-year experiment, he ran out of money to support his life in voluntary poverty, and had to serve as a military secretary on the northern frontier so as to feed himself.

A couple of years after he joined the military, in 801, he moved to the far south, crossing the notorious Grand Yu Ridge to serve in the military staff there. On his way to Grand Yu Ridge, he stopped by Jingzhou on the mid-reach of the Yangtze River and wrote many poems reflecting pleasant sceneries on the southern bank of the mighty river, including the third poem translated below..

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But Wang Jian's poetic talent caught the attention of Hong Zheng, a marshal in charge of the northern frontier who happened to be a moderately talented poet himself, and invited Wang Jian back to the north. Wang was grateful for this opportunity to leave the "barbaric south" and willing to settle for the rest of his life on the bank of River Zhang in central China, where he and his friend Zhang Ji had spent their best years together. Ironically, at this moment Hong Zheng and another important official, Pei Du, recommended him to the emperor and he was promoted to the office of a county magistrate near the capital where Hot-Spring Palace was located. It was a lower-rank but important position from which he climbed up the official ladder and eventually ended up in a upper-middle rank position of *Shanzhou Sima*, the chief of staff for a general who guarded the key pass between the East Capital, Luoyang, and the West Capital, Chang-an. Wang retired from that position to his home area on the Guanzhong plains and wrote, among other things, *Thirteen Poems about My New House on the Terrace*.

I find it amusing to contemplate the limited power of voluntary poverty, and how the non-conforming Wang Jian was forced by what Thoreau called the "necessities of life" to give up his ideals and in the end join with the bureaucrats. But considering the circumstances under which he had left his home in Guanzhong, one may easily understand his disappointment with officialdom and its lack of ability to protect people and their homes. Could this be the reason why Wang Jian refused to take examinations but was willing to serve in the military?

《雨过山村》（《全唐诗》卷 301）

雨里鸡鸣一两家，竹溪村路板桥斜。
妇姑相唤浴蚕去，闲看中庭栀子花。

Passing a Mountain Village in Rain

Behind the bamboo grove,
across the plank bridge,
at the end of the mountain path –
cocks crow to reveal
a handful of houses in misty rain.

Girls, sisters-in-law, holler back and forth
to start on the road to silkworms selection,
leaving the jasmine blossoms
to the empty courtyard.

《山居》（《全唐诗》卷 299）

屋在瀑泉西，茅檐下有溪。
闭门留野鹿，分食养山鸡。
桂熟长收子，兰生不作畦。
初开洞中路，深处转松梯。

Mountain Dwelling

My hut is to the west of the waterfall.
A creek meanders under my thatched eaves.

I close the gate to keep in my yard
elk and deer, my neighbors, my guests.

I open my kitchen and share my meals
with ruffed mountain grouses.

I gather laurel blossoms when they're full,
let the orchids grow in their own wild patterns.

I open a path leading to the cave of immortality –
to go farther from there I build
stone steps around ancient pines.

《饭僧》（《全唐诗》卷 199）

别屋炊香饭，薰辛不入家。
温泉调葛面，净手摘藤花。
蒲鲊除青叶，芹齏带紫芽。
愿师常伴食，消气有姜茶。

Offering a Meal to a Buddhist Monk

I wash my hands extra clean to pick
for you tender blossoms of wisteria,
mix them with wheat flour,
adding warm spring water.

Then I make pancakes in a shed outside –
no smoke would come into the house
where I offer the meal to you with care.

I wrap the salted fish with bamboo leaves,
then take them out and pick the leaves off,
the fish's green, having absorbed the bamboo fragrance.

I cut from my garden celeries, chives
with a fresh, purple tint, toss them in a bowl,
offer the meal simple and clean.

After you eat, over a cup of ginger tea,
I beg of you to bless me more often
with your sage company.

《原上新居十三首 其一》

(《全唐诗》卷 299)

新占原头地，本无山可归。
荒藤生叶晚，老杏著花稀。
厨舍近泥灶，家人初饱薇。
弟兄今四散，何日更相依。

Thirteen Poems about My New House on the Terrace

No. 1

Unlike the ancient hermits
I have no mountain house
where I can return.

I claim a plot on the terrace
to build a humble cottage.

In wilderness vines
grow ever so slowly,
old plum trees have
few flowers on their twigs.

With terrace clay I build
an earthen fireplace.
It helps feed my family
with cooked herbs and roots.

My only remaining wish
is how my brothers,
scattered over the country,
would come here to live
with me.

We'll make a home on this land
in mutual dependence.

《其二》

一家榆柳新，四面远无邻。
人少愁闻病，庄孤幸得贫。
耕牛长愿饱，樵仆每怜勤。
终日忧衣食，何由脱此身。

**Thirteen Poems about My
New House on the Terrace**

No. 2

Surrounded by young
elms and willows,
my house stands without
any neighbors near or far.

My concerns grow
into sadness
when one of the few
family members falls ill.

To have this lone farm
to live in poverty
is my choice,
my good fortune.

My wish
is to be able to
feed the ox
until he's full.

My firewood servant
works hard
to keep the house
and my heart warm.

My worry
is how to feed and clothe
my family and those
who work for me.

In what ways can I
free my heart and mind
from the needs of
this body?

《小松》（全唐诗）卷 301）

小松初数尺，未有直生枝。
闲即傍边立，看多长却迟。

A Young Pine

A tiny sapling –
not three feet high –
grows not a single branch
straight.

I spend my leisure time
standing by its side.
I watch a lot.
It grows little.

《园果》（《全唐诗》卷 301）

雨中梨果病，每树无数个。
小儿出入看，一半鸟啄破。

Fruits in My Orchard

Incessant rains
make my pears
and apples sick.
No tree bears more
than a hand can count.

My young son examines
the trees going out,
re-examines them coming in.
Of the few sickly fruits
half are broken
by the pecking birds.

Yu Hu 于鹄

Yu Hu probably grew up in what is now eastern Hebei Province. It is unknown when he was born or when he died, but he wrote the bulk of his poetry between 766 and 804. In his early years he studied under a well-known scholar in Shandong Province, and Fan Ze was a fellow student. It seems that Yu Hu never took the imperial examination and therefore had no regular access to officialdom. However, his schoolmate Fan Ze later became a high ranking official – the head of an important government department – and was for a few years in charge of the fertile area of the mid-Yangtze. It was Fan Ze who invited Yu Hu to work in his staff, but when Fan was transferred to another strategically important area, Yu Hu didn't follow him to the new office, choosing instead to retire to semi-poverty in his mountain cottage between the Han and the Yangtze Rivers.

Yu Hu spent most his life living in the mountains of Hanyang, on the north bank of River Han. There he probably worked in the field himself at least on a part-time basis – thus his poetic familiarity with farm work. Yu lived near his contemporary poet Zhang Ji and they were well acquainted. Both wrote poems about a woman who did not eat food for years yet lived a healthy, if not physically strong, life. Perhaps because neither Zhang Ji nor Yu Hu was well off, they were fascinated by the possibility of being free of food. In Yu Hu's poem, however, he is resigned to the fact that a supernatural ability to live independent of food is something one is born with, or not. When Yu Hu died, Zhang Ji came to his tomb to bid him goodbye and wrote a poem, "Weeping for the Loss of Yu Hu," in which he tells Yu's family that when Zhang Ji began to write poetry, Yu Hu was the only poet who appreciated his effort and wrote poems in response to encourage him. According to this poem, when Yu Hu died farmers dropped their ploughs in the field and firewood in their kitchen to come to his funeral. According to Zhang Ji, the poet "feels the Grand Empire becomes suddenly poor because of the loss of such a free mind in the green mountains" (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 383, poem #10. Translation mine). With twenty-first-century hindsight, we can see that Yu Hu was able to keep his mind free because he didn't get himself too involved in the imperial ideology dominating the officialdom; after a brief period of service in the staff of an old friend, he left the official world to face what Thoreau called the essentials of life. The price Yu Hu paid was living on the brink of poverty for many years. His life and poetry reveal an amazing fact: people who live in or near poverty still love to share with their neighbors, be they humans, birds, or rhesus monkeys.

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《买山吟》（《全唐诗》卷 310）

买得幽山属汉阳，
槿篱疏处种桃榔。
唯有猕猴来往熟，
弄人抛果满书堂。

Purchasing a Mountain Lot

I bought a small hill in trees
on the northern bank of River Han.
I used wild rose bushes as a fence
planting sugar-palms in its gaps.

My visitors are few – they soon get too
familiar.
The rhesus monkeys tease my children,
throw fruits all over my hall of books.

《南谿书斋》（《全唐诗》卷 310）

茅屋往来久，山深不置门。
草生垂井口，花落拥篱根。
入院将雏鸟，寻萝抱子猿。
曾逢异人说，风景似桃源。

My Studio by the South Creek

I built a thatched hut a long time ago
in mountains so deep that it needs no door.
Around the well weeds grow rampant
like tassels dangling over the well bricks.
When flowers fall they cover the base of the fence
which offers no barrier for mother birds –
they lead their chicks into my yard for food.
Apes with their young climb up the cliff
along vines that crawl up the wall of my house.
A mysterious stranger once told me:
your hut resembles a house by Peach Blossom Creek.*

* For the legend of Peach Blossom Creek, please see the note to Wang Wei
and his poem of that title – drawing upon the fifth century Tao Qian –
included in this selection.

《种树》（《全唐诗》卷 310）

一树新栽益四邻，
野夫如到旧山春。
树成多是人先老，
垂白看他攀折人。

Planting a Tree

I plant a sapling and know it's something
good,
something neighbors share in the east and
west.
What a wild man like me would love to
have
is the sense of home my old hut used to
afford
in my mountain abode many springs ago.

I know that I'll be old before the tree is
grown.
I'd like to watch it when my hair turns
white,
watch my neighbors pick twigs from the
tree
to kindle the supper fire in their house.

Han Yu 韩愈

Han Yu (768–824) was born in Heyang, now Meng County, Henan Province, to a family distinguished for the high positions they had held in various dynasties in Chinese history. One of his early ancestors was a lord during the Western Han (202 BC–9 AD); his great-great-grandfather six generations before had been the chief officer in charge of a southern prefecture, a position usually held by a prince; when his father was in charge of Wuchang County, all the lower rank officers and local rich and powerful families stood in awe of their strict, just, and honest magistrate. As for Han Yu himself, in 801, in response to a severe drought around the capital, he made a plea to the emperor for a deduction of taxes, and thereby offended higher officials who took care that he was demoted to magistrate of Yangshan County in the southern “barbarian” regions of China. This demotion was actually an exile, as we see in a poem written to Han Yu by a friend and fellow official demoted to the same area, who in the poem describes his fear of even getting out of his bed in the official residence because of the snakes, not to mention going out the door into the often-deadly disease-laden humidity. In response to that poem, Han Yu wrote a poem-letter, which, when read in juxtaposition with his poem “Rocky Mountain,” reveals an ambivalence towards nature and court generally shared by scholars, poets, and officials of his time. But despite his unpleasant experience in the officialdom, he achieved amazing feats: when demoted to Chaozhou in the far south, he freed the slaves, founded schools, and built irrigation-drainage systems; in 822, he went without any guards to the headquarters of a general plotting a rebellion and convinced the agitated army to give up their plan. When he died, he was given the title Lord of Culture 文公.

Han Yu’s poetic form, considered “original” by his contemporaries but also somewhat “peculiar,” was especially influential to the poets of the next major dynasty, the Song (960–1279). The two poems selected here, however, were written in the well-established *jueju* 绝句 form, short lyrical poems of four lines with seven or five syllables in each line. The first one is a satire of Princess Taiping, the favorite daughter of Empress Wu Zetian and aunt to the crown prince who later became Emperor Xuanzong. Love of the outdoors is regarded in the Chinese cultural tradition as a noble and wise emotion, but Han sees a greed in the Princess’s love of the spring landscape, a desire to wall it off within her own private garden. Han Yu also loved nature, but in contrast to Taiping, found pleasure in experiencing rather than possessing it. As a busy official, he couldn’t always find time to go on excursions like the one that provided him with subject matter for his famous poem “Rocky Mountain.” And so he buried an earthen bowl in the ground to create a miniature lake. With a few frogs, fish, and lotus shoots in it, the bowl offered him a microcosm, containing plants, animals, insects, rains, and stars. For the twenty-first-century nine-to-five too busy to enjoy “grand nature,” Han Yu’s idea of the “small nature” could be a pleasant substitute, playing a similar role as did Thoreau’s hut and Leopold’s sandy farm.

《山石》（《全唐诗》卷338）

山石荦确行径微，黄昏到寺蝙蝠飞。
升堂坐阶新雨足，芭蕉叶大支子肥。
僧言古壁佛画好，以火来照所见稀。
铺床拂席置羹饭，疏粝亦足饱我饥。
夜深静卧百虫绝，清月出岭光入扉。
天明独去无道路，出入高下穷烟霏。
山红涧碧纷烂漫，时见松栢皆十围。
当流赤足蹋涧石，水声激激风吹衣。
人生如此自可乐，岂必局束为人鞿。
嗟哉吾党二三子，安得至老不更归。

Trip On A Rocky Mountain

Among the craggy rocks the narrow path
is hard to see. Following it with
stubornness
I finally arrive at the temple at dusk.
Bats begin to dart in evening flight.
Ascending stairs to the hall, I'm pleased
to see
banana leaves and jasmine buds fattened
by the new rain.

A monk receives me. In torchlight he
shows
a treasure on the wall – he rightly praises
the frescoes of Buddha, something few
have seen.

To quell my hunger he prepares a meal
of brown rice and cabbage grown wild.
He sweeps the mat and makes a bed for
me.

The moon beyond the ridge rises soon,
and sends in its light through the open
door.
Its silver rays keep me awake
until all the insects cease to chirp.

I leave in morning mist, alone, unable
to see the path. I wander up and down.
The sun rises to paint the mountains red,
aglow against the winding azure streams.

Several times I see oaks and pines –
gigantic girth that take ten men to hold.
I step bare-foot on slippery boulders
to cross the roaring stream, inspired
by torrent force and the wind that tugs my
shirt.

A life like this indeed is pleasant.
Why do we enslave
our hearts and minds to men of power?

I ask my best friends, two or three: can't
we
return to nature before we grow too old?

《雉带箭》（此愈佐张仆射于徐，从猎而作也）》

（《全唐诗》卷338）

原头火烧静兀兀，野雉畏鹰出复没。
将军欲以巧伏人，盘马弯弓惜不发。
地形渐窄观者多，雉惊弓满劲箭加。
冲人决起百馀尺，红翎白镞相倾斜。
将军仰笑军吏贺，五色离披马前堕。

Pheasant with an Arrow

They start the fire to chase the birds
from the plain that's quiet as death.
Pheasants fly out of burning woods
to land again in fear of circling hawks.
The general bids his men to hold
their bows and arrows as he pleases.

Then the general lifts his hand.
The men surround the prey and shoot
a hundred deadly barbs.
A bird is hurled a hundred feet
by missiles shot into the sky.

Scarlet feathers scatter –
a rainbow falling on hunting horses.

The general laughs among his men,
The men praise their great lord
for the subtle arrangement
of his ambush strategy.

《游太平公主山庄》

（《全唐诗》卷344）

公主当年欲占春，故将台榭押城闉。
欲知前面花多少，直到南山不属人。

Visiting the Mountain Villa of Princess Taiping

The great princess in her great past
wanted to possess the whole spring.
She built pavilions on terraces
higher than the castles on city walls.

The traveler wanted to know
how many flowers were out there
between the city and the South Mountain.
Every single one belonged to Her Highness
alone.

《盆池》（《全唐诗》卷343）

《其一》

老翁真个似童儿，汲水埋盆作小池。
一夜青蛙鸣到晓，恰如方口钓鱼时。

**Five Poems on a Washbowl Pond,
No. 1**

An old man I'm really a boy at heart.
Burying a washbowl in my yard,
I fill it with water to make a pond.

Frogs make their home there and chant all
night,
the same chant I heard when I was a
fishing child.

《其二》

莫道盆池作不成，藕稍初种已齐生。
从今有雨君须记，来听萧萧打叶声。

No. 2

They say a bowl of water doesn't make a
pond
until I plant a single lotus shoot.
It soon sends up discs of leaves.

From now on, gentlemen, you come here
whenever it rains, to listen to drops on
leaves –
a hundred little drums.

《其三》

瓦沼晨朝水自清，小虫无数不知名。
忽然分散无踪影，惟有鱼儿作队行。

No. 3

The water in bowl-pond is so clear in the
morning.
It doubles the nameless bugs on its
surface.
The insects suddenly disappear in air
to reveal the fish swimming in rows.

《其四》

泥盆浅小讵成池，夜半青蛙圣得知。
一听暗来将伴侣，不烦鸣唤斗雄雌。

No. 4

The earthen bowl's so small, you say,
that it can't make a decent pond.

Frogs know this better than you, Sir –
they meet and mate here at mid-night
croaking louder than any sage.

《其五》

池光天影共青青，拍岸才添水数瓶。
且待夜深明月去，试看涵泳几多星。

No. 5

The shining water in my bowl-pond
shares the blue of the shining sky.

I send tidal waves to its banks
by adding three bottles of water.

I can't wait to count the stars
held in the pond when the moon
disappears behind a passing cloud.

Pei Du 裴度

Pei Du was one of the most successful bureaucrats among Tang poets and because of that his life is well documented in official history. He was born in the year 765 and died on the fourth day of the third month (lunar calendar) of 839. He grew up in Wenxi, now a county in Shanxi Province, and passed the imperial examination in 790. From then on, his career was mostly an upward swing. In seven years he became the prime minister of the empire and an army marshal in charge of bringing under control the upheavals in the area west of the Huai River. It's interesting that a politician with military experience was also a poet passionate about nature. His friend and fellow poet Han Yu was with him during the Huai River Campaign and wrote a poem when they passed Nüji Mountain ninety kilometers southwest of Luoyang. In that poem Han Yu asked the marshal to take his officers, Han included, on a hike after their sure triumph on the west bank of Huai River (see Han Yu in *Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 344, poem #14). In another poem, Han Yu praised the artificial rockery in Pei's garden and the prime minister's genuine love for mountains:

The minister really loves mountains so
he watches them from morning until eve.
It's not enough just keep them in the eyes –
he wants to experience the rocks with feet.

(*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 342, poem #21. Translation mine.)

As a powerful politician, Pei Du had his enemies, one of whom was fellow poet Yuan Zhen. At the peak of his career, Yuan Zhen was able to remove Pei Du from the position of prime minister. Nevertheless, Pei Du was able to remain a good friend to Yuan Zhen's best friend, Bai Juyi. As witnessed in the crane poem below, Pei Du and Bai Juyi were good friends in their years of retirement.

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《白二十二侍郎有双鹤留在洛下予西园多
野水长松…请之》

(《全唐诗》卷335)

闻君有双鹤，羁旅洛城东。
未放归仙去，何如乞老翁。
且将临野水，莫闭在樊笼。
好是长鸣处，西园白露中。

**Undersecretary Bai Has Two Cranes in
Luoyang And My West Garden Has
Plenty of Wild Water as Well as Tall
Pine Trees,**

*So I Write This Poem to Ask Him
for the Cranes*

I heard that you keep two cranes,
in your garden east of the capital.

Since you haven't set them free
to join their real companions,

the legendary immortals,
why don't you let this old man

beg you for their adoption?
Don't shut them in your cages.

Let them live by the wild water
in my West Garden.

Let their extended honk
shake the white dew off my plants.

《溪居》（《全唐诗》卷 335）

门径俯清溪，茅檐古木齐。
红尘飘不到，时有水禽啼。

My Dwelling on the Creek

The path to my gate overlooks the creek.
My thatched roof is tall as the top of the pines.

No worldly dust reaches my window.
Water fowl honk to break the silence.

《傍水闲行》（《全唐诗》卷 335）

闲余何处觉身轻，暂脱朝衣傍水行。
鸥鸟亦知人意静，故来相近不相惊。

A Stroll by the Waterside

Ah, my body feels so light!
Where am I, in this leisurely mood,
with my official gown taken off?

I'm strolling by the pond.

Gulls and herons seem to share my inner
peace –
they come closer to enjoy my company.

Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元

Liu Zongyuan's ancestors lived for many generations on the northern frontier, in Yuxiang township, in what is now Yongji County, Shanxi Province, on the northeast bank at the great bend of Yellow River (Wu Wenzhi, *Liu Zongyuan Pingzhuan*. Zhonghua Press, Beijing, 1962, p. 7). But as Liu wrote in an essay, although the Great River that flowed by Yongji had inspired many scholars and poets, as did the close-by Zhongtiao Mountains, he himself had never been to his family's frontier homeland (see *Liu Zongyuan Ji*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1979, p. 606 . My paraphrasing). Liu Zongyuan himself was born in the great metropolis of Chang'an, in the year 773, while his father served the empire in a low-ranking post on the south bank of the Yangtze. His grandmother raised and educated him in the family garden, a few acres that provided them with fruits and vegetables.

In the year 793, when he was twenty years old, Liu Zongyan passed the imperial examination together with his best friend Liu Yuxi. Three years later he was appointed to be an editor in the Imperial Secretariat, and in 801 was promoted to the position of the County Sheriff in Lantian County near the capital. Two years later he became an imperial inspector, an internal-affairs post of relatively low rank but a great deal of power. Idealistic in politics, he hoped to help revive the aging empire. He was promoted to the position of undersecretary of an important ministry in the first month of 805, yet his power made him as many enemies as friends and in the ninth month of the same year he was demoted to Yongzhou, a remote county in what is now southern Hunan Province, next to Guangdong Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a region of "barbarian" climate and landscape. At the beginning of his service in Yongzhou, he lived in a Buddhist temple; after he built a house for the family, it burnt down a couple of times. His life in Yongzhou was not easy. After four years or so, he apparently developed a case of rheumatoid arthritis so severe that he described himself in a poem as unable to walk to the gate of his courtyard, even with the help of a walking stick. Despite pressure from the court he would not change his political position, instead turning his interest from politics to nature. After ten years in Yongzhou, Liu Zongyuan was further demoted to Liuzhou, in what is now Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. There he helped local people drill wells and freed indentured slaves by helping them pay off their debts. He died in Liuzhou in 819. In a short life of forty-six years, he wrote over six hundred excellent pieces of prose and poetry.

The poems translated here were written during his demotion in the south. The first one demonstrates a strong case of what Lawrence Buell calls the "aesthetics of relinquishment." As Liu wrote in a letter to a friend in Sichuan, he was so sick that when he stood up his knees trembled and when he sat down he couldn't feel his legs. He was nevertheless unwilling to cut a few sticks from a rare tree whose nature and name he loved. The second poem shows how he set up an example for the local people to learn and love a tree to which they had been indifferent. That kind of teaching, Liu admits, is not easy, yet he is happy for having succeeded in sharing that kind happiness, regardless of its difficulty. The last poem is a fine example of the tradition of *fangshengshi* 放生诗, or poems about setting captured animals free. A poem by his contemporary Lü Wen about freeing a goose includes explanation of the reasoning in the human's mind. Liu's poem, on the other hand, tries to imagine how the francolin – a Southern Asian partridge – feels at the moment of regaining its freedom. He also criticizes the scheming men who train birds to be live decoys in order to capture more birds of the same kind, which were known for their fat, sweet meat. In this sense, Liu is more humane than Lü. What he didn't know, however, is that in general, animals enjoy a longer lifespan in captivity than in the wild. Is that why a bird is willing to be turned into a lure? What can we make of Liu's moral judgment on the bird as well as man?

《溪居》（《全唐诗》卷352）

久为簪组累，幸此南夷谪。
闲依农圃邻，偶似山林客。
晓耕翻露草，夜榜响溪石。
来往不逢人，长歌楚天碧。

My Dwelling on the Creek

The burden of keeping my rank
has long bent my back.

In secret I congratulate myself
for demotion to the barbarian South.

Like a genteel hermit of the woods,
I enjoy freedom and leisure, and lean
against my neighbor's garden fence.

Tonight I plan to hoe the plot
by the rocky, gurgling stream.
At dawn I'll till the dewy field.

I come and go but see no "civilized" man.
I feel free to sing loud and long
to the azure sky of the South.

《秋晓行南谷经荒村》
（《全唐诗》卷352）

杪秋霜露重，晨起行幽谷。
黄叶覆溪桥，荒村唯古木。
寒花疏寂历，幽泉微断续。
机心久已忘，何事惊麋鹿。

**Passing a Deserted Village in the South Valley
Early in an Autumnal Morning**

I get up early in the morning
and walk through a secluded valley
in the chilly frosts of late fall.

The board bridge over the creek
is covered with yellow leaves.
The path leads to a village
peopled by ancient trees.

The stream cuts through the ville
disappears in a deep ravine,
on the edge of which
cold chrysanthemums, a few sparse rows,
in seclusion, stand still.

I thought I had long been freed
from the scheming tricks of society –
why does my presence here
disturbs this elk or that deer?

《江雪》（《全唐诗》卷352）

千山鸟飞绝，万径人踪灭。
孤舟蓑笠翁，独钓寒江雪。

River Snow

In hundreds of surrounding mountains
– not a flying bird to see.

On thousands of winding trails
– not a footprint to show.

I, an old man,
in bamboo hat and rush cape,

fish alone
on the river of floating snow.

《植灵寿木》（《全唐诗》卷353）

白华照寒水，怡我适野情。
前趋问长老，重复欣嘉名。
蹇连易衰朽，方刚谢经营。
敢期齿杖赐，聊且移孤茎。
丛萼中竞秀，分房外舒英。
柔条乍反植，劲节常对生。
循玩足忘疲，稍觉步武轻。
安能事翦伐，持用资徒行。

Planting a “Soul-Longevity” Tree

Your white blossoms reflected in the cold
tarn
you sooth me with a matching wild mood.

I go and ask the elders –
they tell me of your propitious name.

Tricks in politics have
frustrated me. Exile
away from the court
has aged my body and soul.
I’d cut no branch from you,
as ancient books suggest,
to make a walking stick.

I transplant a single sapling
to the plot near my house.
As the soft thing starts to grow
it develops hard, symmetrical joints.
When it blooms its pistils compete
with stamens –
a contest, a beauty-show.

I limp and hobble around it
never feeling tired, my steps
“springier” and lighter than before.

What idiot would cut a tree dead
and use the sticks to help himself walk?

《自衡阳移桂十馀本植零陵所住精舍》
(《全唐诗》卷353)

谪官去南裔，清湘绕灵岳。
晨登蒹葭岸，霜景霁纷浊。
离披得幽桂，芳本欣盈握。
火耕困烟烬，薪采久摧剥。
道旁且不愿，岑岭况悠邈。
倾筐壅故壤，栖息期鸾鷟。
路远清凉宫，一雨悟无学。
南人始珍重，微我谁先觉。
芳意不可传，丹心徒自渥。

**Transplanting from Hengyang a Dozen
Laurel Trees to My Study in Lingling**

Demoted to the southern frontier
I wander by the clear River Xiang
that winds its way around
the spirit of South Mountain.

In the morning I step on the bank,
frost on bulrushes reflecting the sun.
I push my way through the jungle
to find a single laurel by the path.
Its girth barely a handful, how
did it survive the ax and fire?

I hate to see such a noble tree
left by the side of a trail.
How can I leave it here
in deep, barbarian hills?

So I fill a bamboo basket
with the soil at its root
to transplant it near
my hut of scholarship.
I hope some day the phoenix
would nest among its fragrant branches.

The Daoist heaven may be far away,
yet the philosophy of Nature can be
learned
in one rain.
So southerners begin to value laurels
as they see me transplant it with care.

The laurels may have feelings of their
own.
They hardly communicate with men.
After all that I do and say
I might in vain have tried to share
the love from my beating heart.

《放鹧鸪词》（《全唐诗》卷 353）

楚越有鸟甘且腴，嘲嘲自名为鹧鸪。
徇媒得食不复虑，机械潜发罹罟罟。
羽毛摧折触笼籓，烟火煽赫惊庖厨。
鼎前芍药调五味，膳夫攘腕左右视。
齐王不忍觳觫牛，简子亦放邯郸鸠。
二子得意犹念此，况我万里为孤囚。
破笼展翅当远去，同类相呼莫相顾。

Setting Free a Francolin

In the jungles of the southern wild
lives a bird known for its fat meat.
Chuck, chuck it sings in trees;
People say it's calling its own name.

One is captured by a man.
He trained the bird to be a decoy.
Now it's well fed and thinks of none
but himself, satisfied in the cage.
It obeys the man and lures fellow birds
into a hidden trap where their feathers break
as they struggle, frightened of the kitchen smoke,
of spice bottles beside the boiling pot.
Eager is the cook who looks left right.

I've heard that the King of Qi State
took pity and let go the trembling cows,
and the Lord of Zhao State
who set the turtle-dove free.
They both were lofty and powerful,
yet they both seem to understand those in distress.
Now on exile thousands of miles away from power,
how can I afford to be callous to the bird?

I break the cage. He spreads the wings:
far away he should fly, never turn around
in response to songs of fellow partridges.

仲昭



Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡

Liu Yuxi was born in 772, the same year in which Bai Juyi and Lü Wen were born. To help readers put the lives of Tang poets into perspective, we can see 772 as ten years after Li Bai had died and two years after the death of Du Fu, when Han Yu was five years old and Meng Jiao twenty-two. Unlike his fellow poets, Liu Yuxi found his life important enough to justify an autobiography, in which he traced his ancestry to Prince Zhongshan of the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220). Included in the autobiography is an account of Liu Yuxi's seventh-generation great-grandfather, who had settled the family in the northern suburbs of Luoyang.

Liu Yuxi was a sickly child – he remembered well when, as a five-year-old, he was taken by his nurse to the witch-doctors to undergo painful therapy. At the age of seventeen, in order to protect himself from such painful and questionable treatment, he started to study Chinese herbal medicine, which he later prescribed for himself. In 792 he went to Chang'an to take the imperial examination. Passing at the first try he made a moderate reputation for himself, and became friendly with Liu Zongyuan – who passed the exam in the same year – and other poets in the capital city. After spending a short term with his father back at the ancestral home near Luoyang, he was appointed to be an editor of the imperial library. With Liu Zongyan he became involved in politics and in 803 was promoted by the prime minister, Wang Shuwen, to the low-rank but high-power position of Imperial Inspector. In the same month, however, he was with Liu Zongyan demoted and banished to the far south: Liu Zongyuan to Yongzhou, Liu Yuxi even further south to Lianzhou. While crossing the Yangtze, however, Liu Yuxi received a new order changing his place of demotion to Langzhou, on the west bank of the famous Dongting Lake, much closer to home and two hundred kilometers north of Yongzhou where his unfortunate friend Liu Zongyuan had been sent.

Liu Yuxi seemed to have a more positive attitude towards his demotion than Liu Zongyan, during that period learning many local folk songs on which he based new songs of his own, of which the “Bamboo Twig Song” translated below is a good example. His positive attitude is also shown in his poem praising autumn, a season symbolic of decay and death for many of his contemporary poets. For him, however, autumn inspired a feeling of soaring high with the cranes.

While Liu Zongyuan died in his place of demotion, Liu Yuxi survived and in the end was called back to the court. He gradually climbed to higher and more powerful positions, eventually retiring from a position as head of an important ministry in Luoyang, Tang's eastern capital and his own hometown. He wrote a medicine book – *Chuan Xin Fang* 传信方 (*Prescriptions That You Can Believe and Distribute*) – and many poems in correspondence with Bai Juyi during his retired years. Liu Yuxi died in 842, at the age of seventy (see Luo Liantian, *Tangdai Shiwen Liujia Nianpu*. Taipei, Xuehai Press, 1986, pp. 257–462).

《春日寄杨八唐州二首 其一》
(《全唐诗》3 5 5)

淮西春草长，淮水透迤光。
燕入新村落，人耕旧战场。
可怜行春守，立马看斜桑。

Sent to Yang the Eighth

On the west bank of the River Huai
the grass grows long and green,
through which, from time to time, I see
The Huai River winds and shines in
spring.

The peasants have started to till the field –
battle field of the recent war.
The swallows have returned with people
to build their nests in new villages.

I, the magistrate of the prefecture,
have no power to enforce the seasons.*
I only sit on the back of my horse
to watch the shadow of the mulberry trees
grow dark, slant, and long.

* The main job of an imperial
official is to make sure that farmers
do their work according to what the
seasons dictate.

《竹枝词九首 其九》
(《全唐诗》卷3 6 5)

山上层层桃李花，
云间烟火是人家。
银钏金钗来负水，
长刀短笠去烧畲。

A Bamboo Twig Song

On terraces beyond terraces, peach
and plum blossoms mix with clouds
and breakfast's smoke from every house.

Girls wearing silver bracelets and gold
hairpins come to river for their morning wash.

Boys with swords and round bamboo hats
ascend the hills to slash and burn.
In ashes, they till the fields.

《伤愚溪三首》

(《全唐诗》卷365)

溪水悠悠春自来，
草堂无主燕飞回。
隔帘惟见中庭草，
一树山榴依旧开。

Mourning Liu Zongyuan

Never stopping yet never in a hurry
flows the Southern Spring.

Your thatch-roofed hut,
now absent of its master,
still houses the swallow couples.

Through the curtain I see only weeds
rampant in the yard.

The mountain pomegranate blooms
as it did in olden days.

仲昭



Lü Wen 吕温

Lü Wen was Liu Zongyuan's cousin, one year older than his kinsman. Like Liu, his *junwang* 郡望 – the place where his family was well known – was also the frontier district of Yongji County, in Shanxi, but also like Liu, Lü Wen never actually lived in that area. Born in 771, he was educated in the Luoyang suburbs. Taking the provincial examination there, in 794, he scored at the top of the class. It would, however, be four years before he went to Chang'an to take the highest level imperial exam, because his father was in charge of the tests during that time, raising understandable concerns of “conflict of interest.” Indeed, Lü Wen and his three younger brothers were named after the four important Confucian virtues: *Wen* 温 means “warm” and “mild”; his brother Gong's name 恭 means “respectful”; Jian 俭 means “thrifty”; while Rang 让 means “willing to yield to others what is rightly theirs.” Ezra Pound would have made a good case with the idea of “virtuous rulers,” for the four brothers of the Lü family all became government officials and some at quite high ranks. Lü Wen himself was moderately successful as an official and was promoted by Prime Minister Wang Shuwen, the same powerful man who supported Lü's cousin Liu Zongyuan. In 804, Lü Wen was appointed an emissary to Tibet, where he served for more than a year. When he returned to China, however, Wang Shuwen was out of power. In 808, Lü Wen was demoted and banished to the “barbarian south,” in Daozhou, Hunan Province, even farther south than his cousin Liu Zongyuan. In 810, he was transferred to Hengzhou, still in Hunan, but somewhat closer to home – three hundred kilometers north of Daozhou. He died in Hengzhou in the next year.

The poem translated here was written during his banishment in Daozhou. Southern Hunan is on the north slope of the famous Grand Yu Ridge, which demarcates the southern boundary of the Tang poetic imagination. Daozhou, where Lü Wen was sent, and Yongzhou, to which Liu Zongyuan was banished, were inhabited by minority tribes, regarded as barbarians by the Chinese. That's why Liu Zongyuan felt extremely out of place living there, although he loved the beautiful mountains and rivers. Lü Wen, as his name suggests, was a “mild” fellow and dealt with his frustrating life at Daozhou in a mild way: he set a goose free so it could fly back north to its homeland and thus acquire a temporary relief from homesickness. His lack of “appetite for a roasted friend” seems to prove that humor worked for the poet in distress.

《道州北池放鹅》（《全唐诗》卷371）

我非好鹅癖，尔乏鸣雁姿。
安得免沸鼎，澹然游清池。
见生不忍食，深情固在斯。
能自远飞去，无念稻粱为。

Setting Free a Goose on the Northern Lake

I'm no calligrapher
who sees the neck of a swan
as a graceful model for his brush.

You're no swan,
who honks and lifts its head
with elegant pride.

What I try to achieve
is to help you avoid the roaring fire,
and let you swim quietly
on this clear lake.

My motive is homely, nothing profound –
since I've known you alive,
I've no appetite for a roasted friend.

You of course can fly away
but beware of the trap
covered with a handful of grain.

Lu Tong 卢仝

It is unknown when Lu Tong was born or when exactly he died. Scholars recently abandoned an incorrect earlier consensus that he died in 835; instead, they now tend to agree that he probably lived into his late forties and died either in 812 or 813 (Fu Xuancong, *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Zhonghua Press, Beijing, 1999, Vol. 2, p. 271). He grew up in central China, near Luoyang in northern Henan. It is said that his family was poor and when he lived in Luoyang all he could afford to rent was a few shabby rooms, with no furniture but with a great heap of books piled to the ceiling. He never took the imperial exam. Instead, he lived an obscure life in the Shaoshi Mountains near Luoyang, or at times within the city itself. Known for his “strange” poetic style, he became friendly with the famous poet Han Yu, whose style contemporaries also regarded as peculiar.

Han Yu wrote several poems about Lu Tong, and the two exchanged poems as letters, a popular practice in their time (the exchange of poetic letters between Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen itself becoming an important subject for research on Tang poetry). I don’t think Lu Tong was really as poor as claimed, or that he was a scholar-farmer who really worked in the fields, as seems to have been the case with Ding Xianzhi and Zu Yong. Describing his friend’s “poverty,” Han Yu said Lu could afford only two old servants: an elderly woman with no teeth or shoes, and an old man known for his long beard and bare, cap-less head. Han Yu did find it necessary to send Lu some rice from time to time.

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Lu seemed to be a very kind and fair man. He was taken advantage of by local bullies, who threatened his family and tried to steal from him. It happened that Han Yu was the county magistrate of Lu Tong’s town, and when Lu’s servant reported the mistreatment to Han, he made plans to protect his friend by punishing the bullies in the market place, in a manner both public and severe. Lu Tong, however, talked Han out of it by suggesting that those people, though annoying, did not deserve such severe punishment. This kind nature of Lu Tong is best shown in the three poems translated below. In our time, we can more readily appreciate his effort of trying to understand the egrets from the “birdy” perspective and his rather tolerant attitude towards fish, magpies, and apes.

Because he never served the empire, neither *The Book of Tang* nor *The New Book of Tang* has his biography. He is remembered only by his poems and his friendship with a few of his contemporary poets.

《观放鱼歌》（《全唐诗》卷387）

常州贤刺史，从谏议大夫除。
天地好生物，刺史性与天地俱。
见山客，狎鱼鸟。坐山客，北亭湖。
命舟人，驾舫子，漾漾菰蒲。
酒兴引行处，正见渔人鱼。
刺史密会山客意，复念网罗婴无辜。
忽脱身上殷绯袍，尽买罟擣尽有无。
鳣鲡魑魍，涎恶最顽愚。
鱗鲙见幽风，质干稍高流。
时白喷雪鲫鲤[]，此辈肥脆为绝尤。
老鲤变化颇神异，三十六鳞如抹朱。
水苞弘窟有蛟鼉，饵非龙饵唯无鲈。
丛杂百千头，性命悬须臾。
天心应刺史，刺史尽活诸。
一一投深泉，跳脱不复拘。
得水竞腾突，动作诡怪殊。
或透藻而出，或破浪而趋。
或掉尾子子，或奋鬣愉愉。
或如莺掷梭，或如蛇衔珠。
四散渐不见，岛屿徒萦纡。
鸕鶿鸂鶒，喜观争叫呼。
小虾亦相庆，绕岸摇其须。
乃知贪生不独顽痴夫。
可怜百千命，几为中肠菹。
若养圣贤真，大烹龙髓敢惜乎。
苦痛如今人，尽是鱼食鱼。
族类恣饮啖，强力无亲疏。

明明刺史心，不欲与物相欺诬。
岸虫两与命，无意杀此活彼用贼徒。
亦忆清江使，横遭乎余且。
圣神七十钻，不及泥中鳅。
哀哉托非贤，五脏生冤仇。
若当刺史时，圣物保不囚。
不疑且不卜，二子安能谏。
二子倘故谏，吾知心受诛。
礼重一草木，易封称中孚。
又曰钧不纲，又曰远庖厨。
故仁人用心，刺史尽合符。
昔鲁公观棠距箴，
遂被孔子贬而书。
今刺史好生，德洽民心，谁为刺史一褒誉。
刺史自来，德风如草铺。
衣冠兴废礼，百姓减暴租。
豪猾不豪猾，鰥孤不鰥孤。
开古孟渎三十里，四千顷泥坑为膏腴，刺史视之总若无。
讼庭雀噪坐不得，湖上拔茭植芙蕖。
胜业庄中二桑门，时时对坐谈真如。
因说十千天子事，福力当与刺史俱。
天雨曼陀罗花深没膝，四十千真珠璎珞堆高楼。
此中怪特不可会，但慕刺史仁有馀。
刺史敕左右兼小家奴，慎勿背我沉毒钩。
念鱼承奉刺史仁，深僻处，远远游。
刺史官职小，教化未能敷。
第一莫近人，恶人唯口腴。
第一莫出境，四境多网罟。
重伤刺史心，丧尔微贱躯。

Composed upon Watching the Magistrate
Of Chang Prefecture Set Fish Free

Once the Emperor's adviser,
He's now the Magistrate of Chang Prefecture.
Heaven and earth love living things,
the magistrate by nature
reflects the virtue of both.

The magistrate invited me, a wild man from mountains,
to be his guest in the pavilion on the North Lake.
Having ordered his men to load
the boat with sweet rice wine,
he asked them to row the boat along
the bank through wild rice and bulrushes.

Our boat followed our mind
as our mind followed the wine,
which led us by chance to a group of fishermen.
The magistrate saw my color change –
the wine-red drained.
Out of his own blessed heart
that always sides with the innocent and weak,
he took off his purple silk gown
and traded it for all the catch.

Then he set all the fish free –
gross and slimy eels, finless eels
catfish, snakehead and loaches,
the more prestigious trout and bream
mentioned in the *Book of Odes*,
and the best-tasting at all seasons,
including carp, crucian carp
famous for their flesh – fat, crispy, white as snow.

Among these, some ancient carp
are well on their way to metamorphosis,
evolving into some mystical being
shown by their thirty-six red scales.
There's even a white Yangtze crocodile,
but no Perch for the lure was less delicate.

All together there must be hundreds or more
whose life is on that thin line held by the fishermen.
But heaven's love of life has found
its counterpart in the heart of my friend.

As he threw them one after another
into the depth of the boundless lake.
the fish leapt over the lake surface,
free from tangling nets and barbed hooks.
Landing in the water they behave strangely –
they dashed over the waves or swam through reeds,
wagging their tails and fins gracefully,
shaking their whiskers in grateful delight,
like a dragon playing with a shining pearl
or an oriole flying through willow twigs.

Then they disperse under the deep water
disappearing behind isles and slippery rocks.
The wood ducks, wagtails, gulls and grebes
scream and cackle in great happiness.
Tiny shrimp also seem to celebrate
by swimming around the cape, waving their whiskers.

Ah, from them I learned that stupid men
are not the only creatures that value their lives.
Look at these – hundreds of lives –



they almost became meat pulp
in the stomach of foolish men.

If meat can really make humans saints and sages,
I wouldn't hesitate to cook the marrow of the dragon
and offer it to all men foolish or wise.
But upon closer inspection I've found
these men are nothing but fish eating other fish.
Power makes them indifferent to friends or foe
and they're not above eating each other's flesh
or drinking each other's blood to quench their thirst.

I understand the Magistrate's heart –
he doesn't want to cheat or bully people or things.

There is no point in killing a swimming life
to feed another that walks on two legs.
I thus remember the courier of the river god,
captured by a legendary fisherman –
The messenger tried seventy illusionary forms
but couldn't get away better than a loach in mud.

Tragic fate, even the gods can't escape your hands!
All grievances and revenge come from you.
But had the messenger run into the hand of the Magistrate,
his godly virtue would have been soon detected.
He in any form would've been set free.

I have no doubt and have little need
to consult the fortune teller for the god in fish.
I know the fisherman and courier had not lied.
If they had lied damned is my mind!

The Book of Rituals urges us to respect
a single blade of grass and a single sapling tree.

The Book of Changes praises fair and sincere men,
Who cultivate the roots of growing plants.

Confucius laid out more interesting rules –
“If you have to fish, fish with a single hook.
The net should be banned, for it would catch
more than one can eat. If you have to eat meat,
stay away from the butcher and the kitchen.”

The Magistrate's kind heart matches
Those of ancient sages –
In ancient times the Lord of Lu State
indulged himself in shooting fish with bow and arrow
against the advice of his wise councilors.
That's why Confucius reprimanded his Lord
and recorded it in detail in *The Book of History*.
Now the Magistrate loves life.
His virtue comforts the hearts of men,
Who is going to sing his praises?

Our Magistrate comes from a higher plane.
Like wind bending grasses
he bends us all towards virtuous deeds.
Scholars now restore the ancient moral codes
so that common people are free from excessive taxation.
The sly bullies quit bullying,
the widows and orphans taken back into the communities.

He dredged the ancient Meng Waterways for thirty miles.
He turned the mud hole into four thousand hectares of
fertile land.
Under his rule, the court house is deserted.
None presses charges there where sparrows chirp, hop
around.
He also had the reeds pulled up,
lotus planted in their place.



When people went happily about their business
he would go and visit his two Buddhist friends,
discussing the meaning of life by hours.

The Buddhists insisted that the Magistrate's power of
virtue
equals those of ten thousand ancient kings combined.
As they talked the magical petals of wisdom fell
and piled up on the ground as high as the knee.
Forty thousand shining pearls appeared from nowhere
to form a pagoda hundreds of feet high.

I, unable to believe the Buddhist miracles,
would rather admire the Magistrate's kind heart
and what he said to his servant boy:

"Never, behind my back, use the hook for fun."
Upon hearing that I offer a piece of advice for the fish –
the Magistrate rules over but a small prefecture.
His virtue hasn't reformed every man.
So my scaled friends please swim and live quietly
in the remote areas of the lake.
Follow closely these two rules:
first stay away from people
who value their palates more than their virtue.
Secondly you stay within the area under
the guidance of the Magistrate
for outside of it are many nets and hooks.

When they hurt you, they hurt the Magistrate's heart
and take away your precious life.

《白鹭鹭》（《全唐诗》卷387）

刻成片玉白鹭鹭，欲捉纤鳞心自急。
翘足沙头不得时，傍人不知谓闲立。

To a Snowy Egret

As if carved from pieces of jade
You, snowy egret, stand on the sandbar,
for hours and hours
on a single foot – doing what?

The poets admire you for your leisurely life.
Only you know the anxiety
of waiting for the next meal.

《出山作》（《全唐诗》卷389）

出山忘掩山门路，钓竿插在枯桑树。
当时只有鸟窥窬，更亦无人得知处。
家僮若失钓鱼竿，定是猿猴把将去。

Walking Out of the Mountain

Walking out of the mountain I forgot
to close the door to my mountain hut.
I left my fishing rod
in the hollow trunk
of an ancient mulberry tree.

Nobody saw me leave it
but a few mountain magpies.
If my servant boy couldn't find it,
it must have been taken away
by Father Ape.

Yuan Zhen 元稹

Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi are two of the most important figures in late Tang poetry. They were also best friends and their long-lasting friendship produced touching poems on both sides that have influenced many of pre-modern Chinese and Japanese poets. What interests me from an eco-critical perspective is the ethnic origins of these two friends and the complicated senses of place their origins engendered.

Neither of these two great poets were Han Chinese, “Chinese” in the narrow ethno-linguistic sense. As I will explain in the next note, Bai Juyi’s clan descended from a royal family of a kingdom in the far west of China, a kingdom that disappeared in the stream of time and the sand of the Gobi Desert. Regarding Yuan Zhen, the epitaph on his sister’s tomb-tablet states that their family descended from the imperial family of the Northern Wei (386–534; followed by brief rival successor regimes, Eastern Wei 534–550; Western Wei 535–556). The name of this line of rulers had originally been the Inner Asian Tuoba. After a century of rule, however, in 493, the dynasty relocated its capital from the northern frontier to Luoyang, deep in the interior of China. Three years after that a Chinese surname was adopted: Yuan (see Fu Xuancong ed. *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Zhonghua Press, Beijing, 1999, vol. 3, p. 22). Yuan Zhen was born in 779 (Fu, p. 25) in Wannian County near Chang-an, the West Capital (or Upper Capital) of the Tang (Fu, p.23). Both the *Old Book of Tang* and the *New Book of Tang*, however, insist that he was from Henan Province rather than Shaanxi Province where Wannian County and West Capital are located. This is because of the interesting concept of “local prestige” *junwang* (郡望), which complicates the idea of place in Chinese culture. *Junwang* literally means the place where the clan or family has made their reputation or fame, or where the family is best known. That is a more important factor in terms of home for the individual than where she or he was actually born and brought up.

Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen became great friends, in a manner comparable to Wordsworth and Coleridge. There is no evidence they did this because of their ethnic backgrounds, but the concept of *junwang* made their sense of place more flexible than a modern reader in the west can imagine.

When Yuan Zhen was born, his family was already in decline. When he was eight, his father died and the family became poor. His mother, according to history, was both able and intelligent. She took her son’s education into her own hands and, at the age of nine, Yuan Zhen had already become a proficient writer. He passed the imperial examination at the young age of fifteen, though he was not assigned a real position until nine years later. At the age of twenty-four, Yuan became an editor in the Imperial Secretariat. As he climbed the bureaucratic ladder, however, he offended powerful people who had him sent out of the court to be an Imperial Inspector in eastern Sichuan Province. He died in 831 in his office in Wuchang, now in Hubei Province.

《后湖》（《全唐诗》卷 398）

荆有泥汙水，在荆之邑郢。
 郢前水在后，谓之为后湖。
 环湖十馀里，岁积潢与污。
 臭腐鱼鳖死，不植菰与蒲。
 郑公理三载，其理用煦愉。
 岁稔民四至，隘廛亦隘衢。
 公乃署其地，为民先矢谿。
 人人悦自为，我亦不庀徒。
 下里得闻之，各各相俞俞。
 提携翁及孙，捧戴妇与姑。
 壮者负砾石，老亦捽茅刍。
 斤磨片片雪，椎隐连连珠。
 朝餐布庭落，夜宿完户枢。
 邻里近相告，新戚远相呼。
 鬻者自为鬻，酤者自为酤。
 鸡犬丰中市，人民岐下都。
 百年废滞所，一旦奥浩区。
 我实司水土，得为官事无。
 人言贱事贵，贵直不贵谀。
 此实公所小，安用歌袴襦。
 答云潭及广，以至鄂与吴。
 万里尽泽国，居人皆垫濡。
 富者不容盖，贫者不庇躯。
 得不歌此事，以我为楷模。

The Back Lake

Out side the city wall
 of Jing Prefecture in the south
 lies a large muddy pool –
 that locals call the Back Lake.

Five miles around
 dead water has made a pool there for
 years.
 With no wild rice or bulrushes to freshen
 it
 dead turtles and fish float and rot.

During his three-year term
 Lord Zheng united his people
 in a warm and pleasant community

that attracted neighbors from everywhere,
 overcrowding the market and the streets.

The Magistrate started to clean up the
 lake-side
 and posted his plan there for people to
 read:
 “We people should improve our
 circumstances
 by our own efforts. I myself, your
 magistrate,
 will not hire workmen to do my share.”

Working people heard him in the narrow
 lanes

and back streets and started to work
 together.
 Hundreds labored,
 grandfathers and grandchildren alike,
 together with mothers-in-law and
 daughters-in-law.

The strong ones carried rocks and gravel.
 The old and weak transported twigs and
 straw.

Women helped sharpen axes
 which shine like bright snow flakes.
 Children cared for the hammers,
 Lining them up like giant pearls on a
 necklace.

They broke their fast in early morning,
 together, under a giant cloth tent.
 They slept in comfort that night
 under the roof of the new public market,
 completed with large windows and gates.

Excited neighbors tell each other the
 news,
 relatives walked far to inform other
 relatives.
 They came to the new market to trade,
 to share a happy, communal drink.
 Many chickens and dogs made the market
 abundant.
 These thousands almost started a new
 city.



For centuries this place was a sewage
dump.

Now it's been dredged, deepened and
cleansed,

offering a large area for trade,
a sense of place and community.

Under the Magistrate I managed the land
and the lakes.

Writing about it is my pleasant duty.

For lakes are large and many
in the provinces of Chu and Wu.
Extending thousands of miles
these provinces are marshes
where everyone lives in damp dwellings,
even those built on higher ground.
The "rich" here don't have a tight roof,
the poor not even enough shelter to cover
their bodies.

That's why I wrote this song

of how people can improve their
surroundings and life.
People here value action.
In words they value the true.
The Magistrate looks down upon flattery.
Therefore I'm not trying to brag
about his achievements as magistrate.
I record and praise the event,
hold it up as my guiding example
of the work to be done in the country of
lakes.

《生春二十首

(丁酉岁。凡二十章) 其十一》

(《全唐诗》卷410)

何处生春早，春生鸟思中。
鹊巢移旧岁，鸂羽旋高风。
鸿雁惊沙暖，鸳鸯爱水融。
最怜双翡翠，飞入小梅丛。

The Birth of Spring

Where was spring born the earliest?
It was born in the mind of birds –
magpies move out their old nests,
say goodbye to the old year.

Hawks and falcons hover high,
circle above the high wind.

On sandbars wild geese feel
the sudden return of warmth.

Woodducks begin to make love
in smooth water beside melting ice.

I love most the couple of kingfishers
who suddenly leave the river and fly
into plum twigs among tiny buds.

仲
昭



Bai Juyi (Po Chü-i) 白居易

According to both *Book of Tang* and *The New Book of Tang*, Bai Juyi (Po Chü-i in older transcription) was from Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. Recent research shows, however, that he was actually born near the east gate of the seat of Xinzheng County, now in Henan Province (Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 3, p. 1). This seemingly insignificant correction reveals a typical phenomenon in the life of a Tang scholar-official: they and their families were relatively privileged people, who enjoyed significant mobility. Thus, in the traditional Chinese terminology, Taiyuan was Bai Juyi's *junwang* 郡望, the place where the clan had made its fame. But it was not necessarily the place where each member of the clan was born or raised. Bai Juyi's great-grandfather seven generations back had been Bai Jian 白建, a powerful general of the Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577), who made the family's fame in northern China and settled down near the city of Taiyuan. Subsequently, however, serving in various posts for the Tang, Bai Jian's descendants had dispersed. Bai Juyi's grandfather, Bai Huang 白滢, for example, served as magistrate of Gong County in what is now Henan Province. Seeing the beautiful landscape of a neighboring county, Xinzheng, he settled his branch of the Bais there. And so this was the place of Bai Juyi's birth.

Recent research by the modern scholars Gu Xuejie and Wei Changhong goes further, suggesting that Bai Juyi's family was not even Chinese, but were originally a branch of the royal family of the Guizi Kingdom in what is now Kuqa, in the arid lands of the farthest northwestern corner of modern China (quoted in Lu Weifen and Zhang Yanjin, eds., *Sui, Tang, Wudai Wenxue Yanjiu*. Beijing, Beijing Publishing Company, 2001, p. 1001). American critics nowadays, especially eco-critics, find “sense of place” a promising site for literary investigation. Bai Juyi's story suggests, however, that for the Tang poets, such analysis had an additional layer of exploration. While attached to their homes, they were also always on the road in pursuit of official rank, carrying the honor of their clan, their *junwang*, with them wherever they went.

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As both career bureaucrat and talented poet, Bai Juyi was much more successful than most of his fellow poet-officials. Starting as sheriff of Zhouzhi County, he gradually moved up the ladder of ranks. He did have reverses: his honesty and outspokenness caused him to be demoted to Jiangzhou, now Jiujiang in Jiangxi Province, where the marsh-like landscape of the mid-Yangtze region both depressed and inspired this northerner. He was, however, subsequently recalled to the central government and when sent again to a provincial post went to be prefect of one of the wealthiest and most beautiful prefectures, Hangzhou, where he wrote many poems celebrating the land south of the Yangtze.

He retired to the eastern capital Luoyang, where he built a garden and raised animals such as cranes and fish. The garden and its animal residents became the subject matter of many of his poems. His close observation of his garden and its inhabitants led him to contemplate the independent minds of animals.

In the poems of Bai Juyi we see a kind-hearted, honest, and caring man. He made many friends with his contemporary poets. His best friend was Yuan Zhen, with whom he promoted a literary movement known as *xin yuefu* (new folk songs), which advocated the notion that literature should address real issues in the real lives of real people. Their friendship has been the subject matter of literary studies in China for over a millennium. He was also friendly with Liu Yuxi, and even Han Yu, who had an opposite theory about the role of literature and who had an obscure style drastically different from the plain style that Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen tried to promote.

《采地黄者》（《全唐诗》卷424）

麦死春不雨，禾损秋早霜。
岁晏无口食，田中采地黄。
采之将何用，持以易糒粮。
凌晨荷锄去，薄暮不盈筐。
携来朱门家，卖与白面郎。
与君啖肥马，可使照地光。
愿易马残粟，救此苦饥肠。

To the Herb Man Who Digs the Rehmanniae*

No rain during the spring.
All the wheat died.
Frosts too early in the fall.
Much rice is lost.

It's late in the year
when food runs out.
Preparing for the coming winter, you
comb the field for rehmanniae roots.

I ask what you're going to do with these roots.
You reply, "Of course I trade them for food."

You get up early every chilly morning,
with a hoe on your shoulder, you search
and dig all day long. Despite your hard work
you're unable to fill the basket until the sun sets.

Then you carry it to the mansions of tall red gates.
The roots are good for the eye – of man or horse.
So you sell them to the fat men of fair complexion.
They feed their horses with your medicinal roots
so that the horse see well when they ride at night.

What you get in return is the grain from the horse fodder –
you hope to get enough of it
to appease your growling stomach.

* A genus of flowering plants in the order Lamiales, endemic to China.
Chinese traditional medicine believes that it may cool down overheated
blood in the human body.

《观刈麦(时为盩厔县尉)》
(《全唐诗》卷424)

田家少闲月，五月人倍忙。
夜来南风起，小麦覆陇黄。
妇姑荷簞食，童稚携壶浆。
相随饷田去，丁壮在南冈。
足蒸暑土气，背灼炎天光。
力尽不知热，但惜夏日长。
复有贫妇人，抱子在其傍。
右手秉遗穗，左臂悬敝筐。
听其相顾言，闻者为悲伤。
家田输税尽，拾此充饥肠。
今我何功德，曾不事农桑。
吏禄三百石，岁晏有馀粮。
念此私自愧，尽日不能忘。

Watching the Wheat Reapers

Peasants in the field have no idle months.
They are doubly busy in the month of
May.
The wind from the south arises last night,
to turn the wheat on the ridges brown and
ripe.

At dawn wives and daughters shoulder
foods in baskets.
Boys and young men carry jars of water.
together they ascend the hill in the south
to feed the men who toil on the terraces.

They walk bare-foot on the hard, baked
earth.
They work with back bent in the
scorching sun.
Exhausted laborers don't even feel the
heat –
they grudge the shortness of the long
summer day.

A woman in poverty carries her child to
the field.
She follows the working men, a few yards
behind,
picking up stray ears with her right hand
to fill a broken basket dangling from her
left.

The explanation she gives to the men
seizes my heart with pain and shame.
“The harvest from my half acre was
already done.
It's barely enough to pay taxes with the
grain.
To feed the hungry child and myself,
I depend on these stray ears from your
field.”

Her words make me reflect upon myself –
I've never worked in the field or by
mulberry trees,
but have extra food by the end of the year,
thanks to the three hundred bushels from
the emperor –
my annual income for working in the
court.

In private I can hardly face myself –
contrasted to the working men.
for days I can't erase the child
or the woman from my mind.

《慈乌夜啼》（《全唐诗》绢 424）

慈乌失其母，哑哑吐哀音。
昼夜不飞去，经年守故林。
夜夜夜半啼，闻者为沾襟。
声中如告诉，未尽反哺心。
百鸟岂无母，尔独哀怨深。
应是母慈重，使尔悲不任。
昔有吴起者，母丧丧不临。
嗟哉斯徒辈，其心不如禽。
慈乌复慈乌，鸟中之曾参。

The Night Song of a Filial Crow

A mother crow died – a natural thing in
nature.
Her son cawed and cawed, until his throat
was hoarse.
For a whole year he stayed on the very
tree –
he never left it for more than a single day.

Every night at midnight he'd caw so sadly
that everybody who heard it
would weep profuse tears.

He must be telling a story of unfulfilled
love,
unable to take care of his mother in old
age.
All birds have mothers. Why does this
one
have to cry and mourn in sorrows so deep?

The mother must have loved him so much
when she was alive, he was young,
that the young one, now grown, can't
stand the loss.

There was a “great” general
in one of the warring states,
who in order to obtain the king's trust
forwent his mother's funeral
held in the land of the enemy.
Alas, such a being was called a human
whose heart does not compare to the
crow's!
I can't help but exclaim and sigh.
What a filial crow, what a filial crow!
In the eyes of humans, you're a Saint
among birds!

《燕诗示刘叟》（《全唐诗》卷424）

梁上有双燕，翩翩雄与雌。
 衔泥两椽间，一巢生四儿。
 四儿日夜长，索食声孜孜。
 青虫不易捕，黄口无饱期。
 觜爪虽欲敝，心力不知疲。
 须臾十来往，犹恐巢中饥。
 辛勤三十日，母瘦雏渐肥。
 喃喃教言语，一一刷毛衣。
 一旦羽翼成，引上庭树枝。
 举翅不回顾，随风四散飞。
 雌雄空中鸣，声尽呼不归。
 却入空巢里，啁啾终夜悲。
 燕燕尔勿悲，尔当返自思。
 思尔为雏日，高飞背母时。
 当时父母念，今日尔应知。

A Poem for the Swallows in My House

In my house, upon the roof beam
 two swallows, husband and wife, have
 made a home.

They fly in and out with grace and care
 to build a nest of twigs and mud.

Four chicks are born there,
 four grow up day and night.
 They chatter and scream for food,
 for parents' everlasting love.

The chicks' beaks grow larger everyday,
 with larger appetite to match.

The worms are tiny and hard to catch.
 The parents wear out their beaks and
 claws

yet never give up hunting, tired as they
 are.

Ten times they come, ten times they go,
 all within an hour, every hour of the day.
 After thirty days of hard work the mother
 is reduced to bones. The chicks are grown.

Then the mother teaches them how to
 speak,
 how to brush their new feathers with their
 beaks.

When their wings are strong enough,
 she escorts them onto the top of the tree.
 The four flap their wings for the first time,
 vanish, dispersing with the summer winds.

The couple scream and circle in the sky.
 The chicks may have heard them but
 never come back.

The couple finally return to the empty
 nest
 to chant their sad songs day and night.

I've been touched and tried to tell the
 swallows
 to control their sorrow, to reflect on life:
 when you were young chicks didn't you
 fly away

from your own parents who summoned
 you in vain?

You didn't know how they felt at that
 time.

Now you're parents, your parents you
 understand.

《放鱼（自此后诗，到江州作）》
（全唐诗卷424）

晓日提竹篮，家僮买春蔬。
青青芹蕨下，叠卧双白鱼。
无声但呀呀，以气相煦濡。
倾篮写地上，拨刺长尺馀。
岂唯刀机忧，坐见蝼蚁图。
脱泉虽已久，得水犹可苏。
放之小池中，且用救干枯。
水小池窄狭，动尾触四隅。
一时幸苟活，久远将何如。
怜其不得所，移放于南湖。
南湖连西江，好去勿踟蹰。
施恩即望报，吾非斯人徒。
不须泥沙底，辛苦觅明珠。

**Releasing the Fish (Composed in
Jiangzhou Prefecture)**

My servant rises with the sun.
He brings back in a bamboo basket
the freshest catch from the market.

Under the green celeries and greener
fiddleheads
Two big white fish curl up in a pile,
moving and breathing – very much alive!
Their mouths open and shut –
no sounds ever come out.
Are they breathing moisture to each
other's face
so as to stay alive longer together?

The boy dumps them onto the ground
to show the two-foot full length of each.
They leap and turn on the earthen floor.
Without water they can make no splash.
They must be scared of the knife and pan,
most directly the gathering ants.

Although they're out of the river for a
while,
I still can save their life with a water bowl.
I transfer them then into a pool nearby
to keep them away from certain death.
The pool being small, they bump into the
banks
with a slight shake of tails and fins.
They may stay alive for a little longer
but there's not enough water for their
natural span.

I pity them for being out of place,
so I take them to South Lake to set them
free.
The lake is fed by the famous West River
where they may swim without hesitation
or fear.

There you go, fish, with a free will of
your own.
I'm not the kind of man who expects
rewards for every little help I provide.
Feel free to forget the legend of the
dragon carp
who, to reward its savior, searched the
ocean floor
to find and bring him the largest pearl.

《赎鸡》（《全唐诗》卷430）

清晨临江望，水禽正喧繁。
 凫雁与鸥鹭，游飏戏朝墩。
 适有鬻鸡者，挈之来远村。
 飞鸣彼何乐，窘束此何冤。
 喔喔十四雏，罩缚同一樊。
 足伤金距缩，头抢花冠翻。
 经宿废饮啄，日高诣屠门。
 迟回未死间，饥渴欲相吞。
 常慕古人道，仁信及鱼豚。
 见兹生惻隐，赎放双林园。
 开笼解索时，鸡鸡听我言。
 与尔镪三百，小惠何足论。
 莫学衔环雀，崎岖漫报恩。

Redeeming Chickens

Early in the morning
 I stroll by the broad river
 to view and hear the cackling fowls:
 grebes, wild geese, gulls, herons and
 egrets
 wheel in the breeze
 and chase each other in play,
 against the rising sun.

Then I'm accosted by a chicken peddler
 who
 comes to market from a village far away.
 The fourteen chickens in his cage,
 are bleeding against the barbed wire,
 their crowns rubbed raw against the
 bamboo lid.
 They haven't had any food
 for a full day and night.
 When the sun rises higher
 they'll be offered to the butcher.
 Faced with imminent death, they try
 to devour one another, for chickens are
 no saints but victims of hunger and thirst.

Oh, how happy are the fowls who fly and
 scream at large!
 How sad are these chickens that starve to
 death in cage!
 A bookish scholar I always love
 the lofty ethics of ancient sages
 who extended their kindness to fish and
 pigs.

Out of sympathy I purchase them –
 fourteen in all –
 to let them free in the Garden of Double
 Trees.
 Before I let them go I offer them advice.
 Chickens, chickens please listen:
 You mustn't follow the example
 of the legendary sparrow
 who searched all over the world
 to find a precious ring,
 to offer it to the man who set its life free.

I only paid the peddler
 three hundred brass farthings.
 The small help is not worth
 your lasting gratitude,
 let alone your searching up and down the
 world
 for that silly reward – the legendary ring.

《游石门涧》（《全唐诗》卷430）

石门无旧径，披榛访遗迹。
时逢山水秋，清辉如古昔。
常闻慧远辈，题诗此岩壁。
云覆莓苔封，苍然无处觅。
萧疏野生竹，崩剥多年石。
自从东晋后，无复人游历。
独有秋涧声，潺湲空旦夕。

Hiking up the Creek of Rock Gate

The old trail to the Rock Gate is nowhere
to be found.
I push through the bushes hoping to see
traces left by poets in the past.
What meets my eyes and ears?
Autumnal mountains and gurgling brooks
radiating a pure light as they did in
ancient days.

I've heard that Master Huiyuan, with
other Buddhist poets,
wrote poems on the cliff rocks,
somewhere near,
hidden behind clouds and under mosses.

There grow a few bamboo – skinny and
wild.
Million-year old rocks stand – eroding
away.

Nobody has visited this place
since the poets of the East Jin Dynasty.
But I hear a unique chanting in the
autumn creek
– in the empty day, empty night.

《山雉》（《全唐诗》卷431）

五步一啄草，十步一饮水。
适性遂其生，时哉山梁雉。
梁上无罾缴，梁下无鹰鹯。
雌雄与群雏，皆得终天年。
嗟嗟笼下鸡，及彼池中雁。
既有稻粱恩，必有牺牲患。

To a Mountain Pheasant

Five steps you stop
to peck some grass seeds.
Ten steps you stop again
to drink from the creek.

Oh, the sage of a mountain pheasant
that lives happily on the ridge!
Your guide is your own temperament,
your life whatever you please.

No net or poison on mountains where you
live.
No hawks or falcons hunt over your ridge.
Cocks, hens, new-born chicks
all live out their natural lives.

Thinking of you I sigh for chickens in
cages
and the geese kept by men on ponds.
For them a handful of grain's assured
daily –
before the birds are served on the table.

《东溪种柳》（《全唐诗》434）

野性爱栽植，植柳水中坻。
乘春持斧斫，裁截而树之。
长短既不一，高下随所宜。
倚岸埋大干，临流插小枝。
松柏不可待，楸楠固难移。
不如种此树，此树易荣滋。
无根亦可活，成阴况非迟。
三年未离郡，可以见依依。
种罢水边憩，仰头闲自思。
富贵本非望，功名须待时。
不种东溪柳，端坐欲何为。

Planting Willow Trees on the Banks of the East Creek

I'm a man of nature and field.
I love to plant and grow
especially willows on river isles.

I trim them in the spring
with an ax and scissors.
Soon they'll grow into mature trees.

I'm not picky with saplings –
long and short, big or small.
Whatever shape they come, I simply
find them the right places
on banks high or low.

Pines and cypresses take too long to grow.
*Phoebe Nanmu** is hard to transplant.
It's best to plant more willows
that can prosper on shallow roots
and offer shade in three years,
before my term expires as magistrate
in this remote prefecture in the south.

After planting I rest by the waterside,
reflect upon my own life.
As a man I expect neither fame nor wealth.
What else should I do but plant these willows
mid-stream in East Creek?

*A hardwood tree that grows in southern China, often used for building
imperial palaces.

《步东坡》（《全唐诗》卷434）

朝上东坡步，夕上东坡步。
东坡何所爱，爱此新成树。
种植当岁初，滋荣及春暮。
信意取次栽，无行亦无数。
绿阴斜景转，芳气微风度。
新叶鸟下来，萎花蝶飞去。
闲携斑竹杖，徐曳黄麻屦。
欲识往来频，青芜成白路。

Hiking the East Hill

I hike the East Hill in dawn.
I hike the East Hill in eve.

What attracts me so on the East Hill?
I love what I planted there – the newly grown trees.

It was the beginning of this auspicious year,
in the moist and blooming later spring.

I randomly planted these saplings
with no rows or number in mind.

As the season progresses green
shades emerge with the mounting sun
to wave and shiver in fragrant breeze.

Wild birds descend among new leaves
as butterflies flit away from withering flowers.

Whenever I have some leisure time
I'd hike the hill in my hemp sandals,
with the help of my spotted-bamboo stick.

If you have to know how often I come here,
please look at the white trail I wear
with my feet in the green carpet of grass.

《放旅雁（元和十年冬作）》
（《全唐诗》卷435）

九江十年冬大雪，江水生冰树枝折。
百鸟无食东西飞，中有旅雁声最饥。
雪中啄草冰上宿，翅冷腾空飞动迟。
江童持网捕将去，手携入市生卖之。
我本北人今谴谪，人鸟虽殊同是客。
见此客鸟伤客人，赎汝放汝飞入云。
雁雁汝飞向何处，第一莫飞西北去。
淮西有贼讨未平，百万甲兵久屯聚。
官军贼军相守老，食尽兵穷将及汝。
健儿饥饿射汝吃，拔汝翅翎为箭羽。

Releasing a Migrating Goose

Over Jiujiang, the River of Nine Rivers,
it snowed heavily in the winter of the
Tenth Year
of the Reign of Original Harmony.
Ice congeals the river and breaks the trees.
Hundreds of birds, hungry, flew
east and west in search of food.

Among them I heard the saddest cry
of the most hungry migrating geese.
They pecked at the frozen grasses in snow,
slept on the cold surface of the ice.
Wings stiffened by the wind
they couldn't fly fast enough to flee
the net of river boys, who captured a
goose,
brought it to the market alive.

I'm a northerner demoted to the south
a sojourner facing the sojourning bird.
Oh, bird! The sight of you saddens my
heart
I now redeem you, and release you
into the clouds.

Sweet goose wherever you're to fly,
you stay away from the Northwest.
West of River Huai, my childhood home,
the rebels are still fighting for their lives.
Millions of armored troops are still
stationed there,
some "official," others called "bandits."
Trapped in a deadlock for years and years,
running out of supplies, they would
readily prey
on you. Strong soldiers are good
marksmen.
They wouldn't hesitate to shoot you down
to make a supper of your meat
and attach your feathers to their arrow-
tails.

《得袁相书》（《全唐诗》卷437）

谷苗深处一农夫，面黑头斑手把锄。
何意使人犹识我，就田来送相公书。

**On Receiving a Letter from
Minister Yuan**

I'm a dark-faced peasant handling a hoe
In the middle of the rice paddy, among
fresh seedlings.

Your messenger nevertheless recognizes
me

and delivers a letter to the field –

a letter from you, my friend,
Lord Prime Minister Yuan.

《白鹭》（《全唐诗》卷438）

人生四十未全衰，我为愁多白发垂。
何故水边双白鹭，无愁头上亦垂丝。

To the Snowy Egrets

In his late forties
a man
should not be totally weakened
by age.

I, because of many worries,
feel old in mid-life
with long and hanging white hair.

The couple of snowy egrets,
standing by waterside
must be worry free.

Why do they also
have long silver threads.

《种荔枝》（《全唐诗》卷441）

红颗珍珠诚可爱，白须太守亦何痴。
十年结子知谁在，自向庭中种荔枝。

Planting the Litchi Tree

Giant pearls of coral,
so red and lovely!

The magistrate in exile,
so old with white beard!

He plants a litchi tree
in the courtyard of his official residence
now.

It'll bear fruits in ten years
here.

Where
would the old man be
then?

《鹦鹉》（《全唐诗》卷447）

陇西鹦鹉到江东，养得经年觜渐红。
常恐思归先剪翅，每因喂食暂开笼。
人怜巧语情虽重，鸟忆高飞意不同。
应似朱门歌舞妓，深藏牢闭后房中。

To A Parrot

Bird of far west, how did you
get here to the east of the Yangtze?

After a year in captivity
your beak gradually turns red –
ready to talk.

Your master loves you and is afraid
of losing a favorite pet.
He cuts off your remex feathers,
keeps the little cage-door locked
after he feeds you in morning and evening.

His love for your words seems real and profound.
Your love, bird, is always devoted
to the days of high, free flight.

He treats you the same way
he treats sing-song girls –
deep in the harem, behind locked doors.

《春风》（《全唐诗》卷450）

春风先发苑中梅，樱杏桃梨次第开。
荠花榆莢深村里，亦道春风为我来。

The Wind of Spring

In the Imperial Garden,
they say the wind of spring
first opens with its warm breath
plum buds followed by
cherry, apricot, peach and pear.

Growing wild
in remote villages
the shepherd's purse and elm pods say,
"Spring wind comes for us."

《舟中夜坐》（《全唐诗》卷451）

潭边霁后多清景，桥下凉来足好风。
秋鹤一双船一只，夜深相伴月明中。

Mid-Night, Sitting in a Boat

After rain, the sky clears up
to reveal pleasant views
by the freshened lake.

Under the bridge,
the current moves fast
making cool wind.

Autumn, one man, two cranes,
on one tiny boat,
keep each other company
in bright moonshine.

《四月池水满》（《全唐诗》卷452）

四月池水满，龟游鱼跃出。
吾亦爱吾池，池边开一室。
人鱼虽异族，其乐归于一。
且与尔为徒，逍遥同过日。
尔无羨沧海，蒲藻可委质。
吾亦忘青云，衡茅足容膝。
况吾与尔辈，本非蛟龙匹。
假如云雨来，只是池中物。

When April Fills the Pond

When April fills the pond
turtles swim,
fish splash into the air.

I love the full pond
as well as they, and build
a hut on its banks.

I know fish and men
belong to different groups.

The happiness we share is the same –
we live together as friends and spend
the same relaxing days.

You no longer admire the ocean,
comfortable with bulrushes and algae.
I forgot the ambition for fame in clouds,
settling in my thatched shack.

It's easy by this pond to live
a humble life. You and I
are no match for dragon gods*
either deep or high. When they make
clouds and rains in rivers and sky,

we remain lowly
dwellers of this pond.

*In Chinese mythology, dragons control clouds, rain, and snow.

《池上寓兴二绝 其一》
(《全唐诗》卷459)

濠梁庄惠漫相争，未必人情知物情。
懒捕鱼来鱼跃出，此非鱼乐是鱼惊。

Two Extempore Poems on the Pond

No. 1

On a Stone Bridge
two philosophers Zhuang and Hui
debated whether
Zhuang really knew
the happiness of fish
or not,
in vain.

The human mind
doesn't understand
feelings of animals.

A fish leaping out of water
may not be happy
but is frightened
of the otter after him.

《其二》

水浅鱼稀白鹭饥，劳心瞪目待鱼时。
外容闲暇中心苦，似是而非谁得知。

No. 2

The snowy egret
stands by the shallow rapids,
where fish are few,
water cold,
for long hours in apparent ease,
with eyes wide open.

A posture poets often admire – how leisurely!

What human knows
whether it's leisure or hunger
that the egret feels?

Zhangsun Zuofu 长孙佐辅

Little is known about Zhangsun Zuofu. All we know is that he was from northern China and was a very good poet. A Song Dynasty poet, Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086), included him in an early anthology of a hundred Tang Poets and what little is known about Zhangsun comes from the brief introduction provided by Wang Anshi in the anthology. That's probably because Zhangsun Zuofu failed the imperial examination the first time he took it and never tried again. Nor did he serve the empire as a government official. His younger brother, Zhangsun Gongfu, however, was once the governor of Jizhou Prefecture, in what is now Jiangxi Province, in south-central China. Zhangsun Zuofu lived with his younger brother most of his life. Judging from the poems he wrote, we can say that Zhangsun Zuofu was active from the 760s through the 780s, and was probably still alive in 794. He left behind a collection of poems titled *Gudiao Ji* (*Songs to Ancient Tunes*).

《拟古咏河边枯树》

(《全唐诗》卷469)

野火烧枝水洗根，数围孤树半心存。
应是无机承雨露，却将春色寄苔痕。

To A Dead Tree by the River

Your top branches burned off
by wild fire.

Soil between your roots washed away
by flowing water.

Wide trunk half gone,*
there is no way
for you to celebrate
the bounty bestowed
by sunshine and rain.

Yet you've managed
to capture spring's freshness
with the moss
on your dying trunk.

*The species of the tree is unspecified. The trunk in the Chinese original is so large that it takes several men to encircle with their arms outstretched.

《山行经村径》（《全唐诗》卷469）

一径有人迹，到来唯数家。
依稀听机杼，寂历看桑麻。
雨湿渡头草，风吹坟上花。
却驱羸马去，数点归林鸦。

The Trail to a Mountain Village

One trail,
worn by human feet,
leads to the village of
five houses,
where spindles' vague sounds
buzz.

Quietly
hemp and mulberry trees
emerge from thin mist.

Heavy
with large rain drops
the grass blades bend by the ferry.

Brilliantly
wild flowers dance in wind
all over the graveyard.

Sadly
I pull myself away from the peaceful
village
on the back of a skinny horse,

followed
by a few black dots in the air –
crows returning home to the woods.

Li Deyu 李德裕

Li Deyu was born in 787 to the house of Li Jifu, who was at the time prime minister of the empire. The ninth son of the family, he was raised in what is now Hebei Province in northern China. He didn't take the imperial examination but was invited into the court as a token of the emperor's appreciation of his father's service. Li Deyu himself was an able politician who served in the important position of Defense Minister and then eventually himself became prime minister. During the seven years he served in that position, he stripped the eunuchs of excessive power at court, and directed defense of the empire's frontiers. According to his friend and fellow poet Li Shangyin, he was "a great prime minister whose reputation will last for ten thousand years" (quoted in Xiao Difei, et al., eds., *Tangshi Jianshang Cidian*. Shanghai, Shanghai Dictionary Press, 1983, p. 987). While serving the empire, he traveled extensively in China, on the western frontier, the southeastern coast, and in southwest Sichuan. When a new emperor came into the court, he was demoted to what a later poet called "the edge of heaven and corner of sea" – Qiongzhou on Hainan Island. He died there two years later. The poem translated below very likely reflects his longing for home while living on a remote island in humiliation.

《忆平泉杂咏。忆春雨》

(《全唐诗》卷475)

春鸠鸣野树，细雨入池塘。
潭上花微落，溪边草更长。
梳风白鹭起，拂水彩鸳翔。
最羨归飞燕，年年在故乡。

The Memory of Rain in Spring

Spring.
Turtledoves coo
in wild trees.

Rain,
in fine threads falls
over the rippling pond.

Fallen petals,
two or three,
bob on water.

Growing grasses
by the feeding creek
double their height over night.

Soft breeze
combing the feather of the egrets
sends them up the sky.

Wood-ducks
reflected by the water
fly in colorful brilliance.

But I admire most
the migrating swallows
who return to their home
every spring.

仲
昭



Li She 李涉

Li She was the second of five brothers of a family that originally made its fame in western Gansu Province, in northwest China, but later moved and settled near Luoyang, where they remained for generations. Late in his life, Li She was recommended to become *taixue boshi* 太学博士 – the equivalent of “doctoral professor of the imperial academy” – at the same time serving in senior clerical positions in the court. There is, however, no record that he ever took the imperial examination and so Li has no official biography. We can, however, learn something about him from the biography of his younger brother, Li Bo, which is included in both *The Book of Tang* and *The New Book of Tang*. Li Bo was born in 773, and since he was the fourth of the five, it is reasonable to assume that Li She was born in the late 760s or early 770s.

Li She and his brothers grew up in Luoyang, during a time when one general after another rebelled against the court. Famines, wars, and upheavals filled his teenage life. So the family moved south on the bank of Yangtze River in what is now Jiangxi Province and the brothers immediately fell in love with the beautiful mountains, rivers, and lakes along the Yangtze. For several years Li She and his brother Bo led a hermit life on Mount Lushan, famous since the Eastern Jin (317–420) for its literary history. Legend has it they lived in a cave where they raised a very tame white deer that followed them around, after which they named their dwelling “White Deer Cave.”

For unknown reasons, the two brothers later moved from the Yangtze region back to northern Henan, in central China. There they continued their hermit life in the Shaoshi Mountains, where the famous Shaolin Temple is located. From their mountain life, Li She was called by the empire to serve as a clerk in the military; he gradually moved up to be one of the messengers for the crown prince, a low-ranking but powerful post. He was, however, then demoted to Xiazhou, at the mouth of the famous Three Gorges, as an assistant manager of the imperial silos. He stayed at Xiazhou for ten years, as his hair turned grey and his health deteriorated. When finally called back east to “civilized” China, he was happy to visit Mount Lushan where he and his brother had once lived.

His demotion to the Three Gorges made it possible for him to contact ordinary folk, and it is likely that he wrote the two poems translated here during his banishment to Xiazhou. While visiting his old haunts, his boat was stopped on the Yangtze by a band of river pirates. When they learned that his name was Li She, the head pirate said: “if you really are who you say you are, then I’ve heard of your name for a long time. I won’t rob you but I won’t be satisfied until I get a poem from you” (quoted in Xiao Difei, et al., eds., *Tangshi Jianshang Cidian*. Shanghai, Shanghai Press of Dictionaries, 1983, p. 937). Li She, of course, obliged the fellow, and on the spot wrote the following:

Meeting Night Visitors on Jianglan Sandbar

In a noisy downpour I meet in a river village
brave guests from the green woods. They made
their names known to me late in the evening. I
admire their style: nor need they hide their names
when we meet again elsewhere and in some other time,
for half the world now share their ancient trade. (Translation mine)

Modern readers may be surprised by the pragmatic roles that poetry played in Tang Dynasty life: it allowed Meng Haoran to be introduced to the emperor; Lu Tong to be supported by a better-off fellow poet (Han Yu); and Li She to get past a Chinese Robin Hood!

After his decade of banishment, Li She returned to northern Henan, to his cottage in the Shaoshi Mountains. At about this time his wife decided to become a nun and left home, for which occasion Li She wrote a poem sadly contemplating the occasion: if they ever met again, he thought, his wife would be to him an “autumn moon in the lake.” He remarried, not to a second wife, but to a concubine, a secondary working wife who wove and provided the family with clothes. Li She himself worked the fields; his seven-year-old son collected and split firewood. Together they built a working family quite like that of the cowherd Li She had earlier described in the two poems translated below. He now understood better why those “peasant fathers” were still hard at work in the field at midnight.

It was from this situation that he was recommended by the prime minister to become a professor of the imperial academy. Yet this was not necessarily a good turn in his life, for soon after, in 825, he was again demoted – exiled, actually – to Kangzhou, on the southern coast of China, in what is now Guangdong Province. On his way to Kangzhou, he passed Guilin and became fascinated by the limestone landscape and the karst terrain in the southwest. He might later have returned north to the Shaoshi Mountains; it is unknown when or where he died.

《山中》（《全唐诗》卷477）

无奈牧童何，放牛吃我竹。
隔林呼不应，叫笑如生鹿。
欲报田舍翁，更深不归屋。

In the Mountain

What can I do
with the naughty cowherds
who just let the animals
eat my tender bamboo shoots?

I holler at them all over the woods,
but they just ignore me, laughing and
shouting,
like playful fawns.

I go tell their peasant fathers,
but find their houses empty at mid-night –
are they still working in the fields?

《牧童词》（《全唐诗》卷477）

朝牧牛，牧牛下江曲。
夜牧牛，牧牛度村谷。
荷蓑出林春雨细，芦管卧吹莎草绿。
乱插蓬蒿箭满腰，不怕猛虎欺黄犊。

A Cowherd's Song

In the morning
I herd the cows down the river bend.

In the evening
I herd the cows through the valley's ville.

Lotus leaf – my round hat,
bulrush cape – my overcoat,
I play my reed pipe on the back of a cow
riding through the green meadows.

With my bamboo bow and arrow in my belt,
not even the tiger dares to bully my calves.

仲

昭



Li Shen 李绅

Li Shen's ancestors built the family reputation in what is now Hebei Province, in northern China, but his great-grandfather moved to Bozhou, in the northwest corner of modern Anhui Province, on the south bank of River Wo. His father served as county magistrate in three counties in Jiangsu Province, southeast of the Yangtze. One of the counties was Wuxi, where Li Shen was born and raised, from 772 until 806, the year he took and passed the imperial examination. Although he was appointed assistant professor in the imperial academy immediately after the exam, he had no interest teaching in the capital and returned east to his home in Wuxi. For the group of seven poems he wrote (one of them, "Kingfisher Cove," is translated here) he wrote a preface in which he states that he had lived in Meili Village in Wuxi County for forty years. However, staying at home didn't guarantee a peaceful life. A general in charge of safe-guarding the coastal region liked Li Shen's literary talent and invited him to serve as his secretary. Li accepted the invitation but in the year after, 807, the general decided to rebel against the empire and ordered Li Shen to draft a declaration of his intent. Li Shen pretended to be so nervous that his hand shook and wasted sheets of paper without being able to write one word. The general in rage threatened to behead him. In response, Li said that he was raised in a scholar's family and was too frightened by military trumpets and the gongs to think clearly – he'd rather die than suffer from fear and shock like this. Somehow the general didn't carry out his threat, but arranged for another secretary to draft the document. After that narrow escape, Li Shen was appreciated by the emperor for his loyalty to the central government and refusal to follow the rebels. His career as a bureaucrat now began an upward swing and he eventually became the prime minister in 842. Readers may find it reassuring to learn that this prime minister seemed to have firsthand knowledge of the hardship that common peasants have experienced. He died in 846.

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《过梅里七首家…今敝庐数堵犹存今列题
于后。翡翠坞》

(《全唐诗》卷481)

翡翠飞飞绕莲坞，一啄嘉鱼一鸣舞。
莲茎触散莲叶欹，露滴珠光似还浦。
虞人掠水轻浮弋，翡翠惊飞飞不息。
直上层空翠影高，还向云间双比翼。
弹射莫及弋不得，日暮虞人空叹息。

Seven Poems about My Old Home Where Only Walls Stand Now

No. 6 – Kingfisher Cove

Two kingfishers, a couple,
wheel over the lotus cove.
One fishes, the other dances and sings,
scattering lotus stems,
knocking leaves slant –
water flows down the leaves
like shining pearls rolling
into the ocean.

The fishery warden,
armed with bow, with arrows
set to tightened string,
rows stealthily over the water,
frightens the birds.

They fly away fast,
never looking back
their green backs barely visible
high among the clouds,
soaring wing to wing.

They are far beyond
the warden's arrows and slingshots.
He looks up,
sighs in vain until sunset.

《古风二首 其一》

(《全唐诗》卷483)

春种一粒粟，秋成万颗子。
四海无闲田，农夫犹饿死。

Two Songs in Ancient Style

No. 1

One seed
planted timely in spring
renders a harvest of ten thousand grain
in fall.

Over the four seas
not a single acre is left fallow.

Why is it then, one asks,
that peasants should die
of starvation?

《其二》

锄禾日当午，汗滴禾下土。
谁知盘中餐，粒粒皆辛苦。

No. 2

Hoeing the weeds
from dawn till noon,
I water the land
with large drops of sweat.

Does anyone know
that each grain of rice
in his bowl is a drop
of my hard working sweat?

Bao Rong 鲍溶

Little is known about Bao Rong except that he was friendly with fellow poets Han Yu, Meng Jiao, Xu Hun, Liu Deren, and, especially, Li Yi (all but Liu Deren are included in this collection). Bao Rong passed the imperial examination in 810; after that he served in a number of low-rank posts, traveling in service far and wide across China, including the Gobi Desert on the western frontier. His best friend, Li Yi, for a time shared his fate, at first making little progress in officialdom and serving at low ranks. Later in life, however, Li Yi became a minister in an important department. Their friendship, however, remained the same. In one poem to Li Yi, Bao Rong mocked himself, jokingly warning Li Yi that the clouds that clung to Bao the “mountain man” might contaminate the embroidered uniform of the high official Li. The two friends got a good laugh out of the poem and drank more wine to celebrate this rare happy hour in their life. Late in his life, Bao Rong served in Sichuan and there he died. The poets Xu Hun and Liu Deren wrote verse to commemorate Bao Rong as talented poet and obscure bureaucrat.

《巢乌行》（《全唐诗》485）

乌生儿子林萧条，雄乌求食雌守巢。
夜愁风雨巢倾覆，常见一乌巢下宿。
日长雏饥雄未回，雌乌下巢去哀哀。
野田春尽少遗谷，寻食不得饥飞来。
黄雀亦引数青雀，雀飞未远乌惊落。
既分青雀啖尔雏，尔雏虽长心何如。
将飞不飞犹未忍，古瑟写哀哀不尽。
杀生养生复养生，呜呜啧啧何时平。

Nesting Crows

Among a few bleak trees
crows build their nest
to raise a family – a handful of chicks.

The male flies out to search for food.
The female stays to watch her chicks.
Afraid her nest might fall in a stormy
night
she stays beneath the tree of her nest.

The days are long, chicks forever hungry,
father not in sight.
The mother has to leave the nest with sad,
sad croaks
to comb the field for food.

At spring's end the fields are bare of grain.
The mother flies back home. By chance
she sees a mother oriole a few feet
away from oriole chicks.
The mother crow in surprise snatches...

Oh, crow, crow!
You feed your chicks with oriole chicks
But how do you feel in the bottom of your
heart?

I see the crow fly in a circle
as if in regret she hesitates.

My ancient harp plays sad music.
Sadness does not end on harp strings.

We kill life to raise life.
That life does the same.

We cry and weep, weep and cry!
How can we end the sadness of life?

《宿青牛谷梁炼师仙居》

(《全唐诗》卷487)

随云步入青牛谷，青牛道士留我宿。
可怜夜久月中行，惟有坛边一枝竹。

Staying Overnight in Daoist Liang's Hut In the Black Ox Valley

Following the clouds, my steps
take me into Black Ox Valley,
where Master Black Ox offers me
a bed for the moon-lit night.

Far into the long night
I walk around his dwelling.
All I see is a single bamboo
beside the incense altar.

Shi Jianwu 施肩吾

Often mistaken as a native of Hongzhou (now Nanchang of Jiangxi Province), Shi Jianwu was actually born and raised in Huzhou, Zhejiang Province. He spent most of his earlier years in Zhejiang, visiting famous mountains such as Siming and Tiantai, and lakes such as Taihu and Mirror Lake (see note to He Zhizhang). He passed the examination in 821 but he didn't wait for the appointment in a governmental position; instead, like Li Shen, he left the capital immediately and returned home in the southeast. Unlike Li Shen, he didn't join the service of any powerful general, but went to Jiangxi, the adjacent province west of Zhejiang, where he became a Daoist monk on the West Mountain of Hongzhou. That's why his birth place was mistaken for Hongzhou. He was obviously well received there and soon he felt confident enough to regard himself as the thirteenth Daoist saint who achieved the true Dao and became immortal. Because he gave up the officialdom so resolutely, little is known about him in the official history, not even the years in which he was born and died. Perhaps this is a sign of his "true immortality": his poetry lives in the Chinese imagination, and it is refreshing to learn from his poems that in his time there were still tigers in Nanchang, which is now a city of five million.

《谕山中叟》（《全唐诗》卷494）

老人今年八十几，口中零落残牙齿。
天阴伛偻带嗽行，犹向岩前种松子。

Teasing an Old Man on the Mountain

Old man, old man, late in your eighties,
few teeth remain in your depressed mouth.
On a cloudy day, bent by rheumatism, you
cough and go to the front of the cliff
to plant a few pine seeds.

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《山中玩白鹿》（《全唐诗》卷494）

绕洞寻花日易销，人间无路得相招。
呦呦白鹿毛如雪，踏我桃花过石桥。

Encountering a White Deer on the Mountain

The roads in the human world no longer
appeal to me.
I hike through gorges and caves in idle
search
of blooming trees to pass my days with
ease.

Then I hear a deer's bell voice,
see his hair white as snow.
He steps over my fallen peach petals
to cross the rock bridge.

《日晚归山词》（《全唐诗》卷494）

虎迹新逢雨后泥，无人家处洞边溪。
独行归客晚山里，赖有鹧鸪临路岐。

Late in the Evening, Returning to My Mountain Dwelling

Late in the evening,
I, a lone traveler,
walk up the mountain
heading for my cave dwelling
by the creek,
miles away from human neighbors.

Then I'm taken aback
by fresh tiger tracks
in the muddy path after the rain.

What good fortune! I have the partridge*
to guide my way.

*In Chinese mythology, the partridge's cry sounds like a sentence in human language: "Don't go, brother, don't go." Therefore, the poet might be advised by the bird not to go down the trail of tiger tracks.

Zhang Hu 张祜

Though known as a Zhang from Nanyang, Henan Province, Zhang Hu was actually born south of the Yangtze in the famous city of Suzhou. He of course looked at Suzhou as his home and had strong feelings for the mountains and lakes in the southeast part of China. *Tang Caizi Zhuan* mistakenly states that because of his proud personality he never took the examinations that might have enabled him to find a position in the officialdom (Xin Wenfang, *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, the Press of Classic Literature, 1957, p. 107). The truth is that Zhang did want to take the exams, though was perhaps overconfident about his literary talent and his chance of scoring at the top in the local examinations which were the first step for the national exams at Chang'an. It happened that the official in charge of the local exam taken by Zhang Hu was the famous poet Bai Juyi, who did consider him as one of the two candidates. In the end, however, Bai Juyi favored the other candidate. Zhang Hu now lost appetite for any further efforts in that matter.

He did, however, still wish to enter the bureaucracy, an ambition he now pursued in a different manner, sending his poems through powerful friends to the emperor, who became interested enough to ask his courtiers about Zhang Hu's talent. This time it was Bai Juyi's best friend, Yuan Zhen, who unwittingly helped frustrate Zhang's effort to enter the court (Fu Xuancong, *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, p. 170). In Yuan Zhen's view, though Zhang's poetic style was exquisite, it was not "manly" enough, and would not help the emperor's effort to stir up the spirit of his subjects whose confidence was already dampened by the upheavals and wars that plagued the empire. This was the last straw. From this point on, Zhang Hu satisfied himself with the reputation of *chushi* 处士 (a gentleman who chooses to stay at home rather than serve in the court). He never, however, ceased to connect with powerful people, such as Pei Du, Li Deyu, and Li Shen, all poets who eventually rose to be prime minister. The second poem translated here shows that Yuan Zhen's criticism of Zhang Hu's poetic style was wrong. Although Zhang Hu had a sharp eye for the details in a peasant's life and spoke in the voice of a girl, that did not make him "unmanly." His brave exposure of governmental encroachment on private land reminds readers of Li Shen's critique of the state of the country: no land is laid in fallow but peasants still die of starvation. In the first poem, if we read the tree as a symbol of people and the grass as the court and its expanding road system, we know that Zhang Hu was one of the poets who considered environmental justice as a part of the overall harmony under the heaven.

It was unknown when he was born. He died in 853.

《树中草》（《全唐诗》卷544）

青青树中草，托根非不危。
草生树却死，荣枯君可知。

Grasses in a Dead Tree Trunk

The grasses grow green in a hollow tree.
They've sent down their roots
at a high and dangerous place.

From them one can learn the secret
of what's going to prosper
and what's going to wither –

as the tree slowly dies
the grasses grow greener.

《读曲歌五首 其五》
（《全唐诗》卷511）

郎去摘黄瓜，郎来收赤枣。
郎耕种麻地，今作西舍道。

A Song

My young man went to gather cucumbers

My young man came to collect red dates

he also tilled the field and planted hemp

where he worked has become

roadway to my neighbor in the west.

Xu Hun 许浑

Xu Hun's year of birth was estimated by Wen Yiduo to be 791 (quoted in Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiao Jian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 3, p. 234). His great-grandfather six generations back had been a prime minister who lived in Chang'an. But Xu Hun himself probably lived near Luoyang during childhood and then moved to the region around Dongting Lake in what is now Hubei and Hunan Provinces. He loved the lake area so much that when he sojourned for three years further upstream on the Yangtze in the famous Three Gorges area in what is now Greater Chongqing City, he missed the lake area as if it were his home. Probably it was in the Three Gorges (the Wizard Gorge is one of the Three) that he adopted a pet monkey. When he finally got back to the lake area, he empathized with his new companion: perhaps the monkey missed its home in the Wizard Gorge as much as he had missed the lake district when he was in the Gorges, and as a young man in his late twenties with no clear future in sight, had felt like "a fish in a tank or a bird in a cage" (quoted in Fu Xuancong, ed., p. 234). With the monkey actually on a chain, he had no choice but let it go to trace its way up the Yangtze back to its own home.

When he finally passed the imperial examination in 833, after several tries, he was already a middle-aged man. He was appointed the year after to the position of assistant director in the Bureau of Forestry and Crafts (*Yubu* 虞部), which had charge over hunting and the gathering of food in mountains and forests. He went on to serve in various positions all over China, including magistrate of a county in the mid-Yangtze region, an imperial inspector traveling through Shanxi, Henan, Guangxi, and Guangdong Provinces, and finally from the age of 68 governorships in Zhejiang and Jiangxi Provinces. Many of his poems celebrate leisure days in the countryside, but a close look at his life shows that the only leisurely days he had after he passed the examination came when he excused himself from his first appointments, and during a couple of years he spent on sick leave in Danyang County, Jiangsu. As an inspector, he traveled extensively and loved best the mountains in Zhejiang Province on the southeast coast.

We don't know when he died.

《放猿》（《全唐诗》卷529）

殷勤解金锁，昨夜雨凄凄。
山浅忆巫峡，水寒思建溪。
远寻红树宿，深向白云啼。
好觅来时路，烟萝莫共迷。

Releasing a Monkey

The rain last night – sad and sad –
kept me awake. Early this morning
I unlocked the gold chain around your neck,
offered you my heart-felt goodwill.

These mountains are not too far
for you to remember your way,
that leads back home near the Wu Gorge.*
At least the cold water of this river
should lead you to your familiar Creek.

For shelter you may want to try
the remote trees of red leaves.
For companionship you should holler
into the depth of white clouds.

Re-trace your steps with caution.
Try not to lose yourself
in the mist among phantom vines
in the manner I lost mine.

* Wu 巫 means “wizard” in Chinese.

Li Shangyin 李商隐

Li Shangyin was a good friend of Bai Juyi 白居易, although their poetic styles were quite different. Bai Juyi and his friend Yuan Zhen 元稹 tried to promote a simple style that could be understood by common, working people, allegedly including an elderly female servant of Bai. Li Shangyin, however, developed an exquisite style rich in literary allusion that only the well-educated elite could have understood and appreciated. Yet interestingly, Bai Juyi in his old age admired Li Shangyin's style so much that, as legend has it, he even said something to the effect that after death he hoped to be reincarnated as a son to Li Shangyin, who was forty-one years his junior. Li Shangyin, in return, did name his first born "Senior Bai" (Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol.3, p. 279).

Although Li Shangyin is known for his more ambiguous love poems, because of his extensive travel experience, his few nature poems are genuine, plain, and pleasant. In the two "nature" poems selected here, Li was deliberately simple and, almost, free from literary allusions, except the reference to the gull, which is so well known that it is hardly ambiguous. The gull, as also mentioned in Wang Wei's 王维 poem "Composed in My Cottage Near Wangchuan Village after Days of Rain," comes from the "Yellow Emperor" chapter 黄帝篇 of the Daoist text *Liezi* 列子: a boy is on familiar terms with the gulls on the beach and plays with them like close companions. When his father learns about it, he asks the son to catch a sea-gull and bring it home, for the father wants to taste the meat. Being a dutiful son, the boy goes back to the beach the next day with his father's plan in mind. However, the gulls are so sensitive and intelligent that they know that this boy has a different mind now; so they are on guard against the boy and refuse to come close to him. In Wang Wei's poem, the poet complains that he is already wild – and thereby honest – yet why should the gull stay suspicious about him; in Li's poem, the poet is happy for the gulls flying around him seem to testify that he is truly one with the wild.

Li Shangyin was born in the year 813 to a cadet branch of the imperial family of Tang that had over time fallen into genteel poverty. Originally inhabitants of Qinyang, Henan Province, Li Shangyin's grandfather and his immediate family had moved about a hundred kilometers southeast to what is now Zhengzhou, in eastern Henan. Li Shangyin was exceptionally talented. In his teenage years he was already known as a prolific writer. Unlike many Tang poets, Li Shangyin didn't take the imperial exam but was recommended into the officialdom by a powerful bureaucrat. He served in different areas of China, traveling as far as Xunzhou, now known as Longchuan County in northern Guangdong Province, and Guizhou, now Guilin, in what is now northern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

《自喜》《全唐诗》卷539)

自喜蜗牛舍，兼容燕子巢。
绿筠遗粉箨，红药绽香苞。
虎过遥知阱，鱼来且佐庖。
慢行成酩酊，邻壁有松醪。

Self-Happiness

In the way the snail loves
its tiny shell house,
I love my little hut
and share it with swallows.

By my front gate, green
bamboos shed their fading leaves
when the herbaceous peony
emits fragrance from petals.

The tigers already know my traps.
They walk around my gaping fence.
I'm grateful to the biting fish
for offering me an additional dish.

My neighbor brews a special rice wine
seasoned with pine seeds.
We stroll together, our steps shaky,
after drinking – too much.

《赠田叟》（《全唐诗》卷541）

荷筱衰翁似有情，相逢携手绕村行。
烧畲晓映远山色，伐树暝传深谷声。
鸥鸟忘机翻浹洽，交亲得路味平生。
抚躬地道诚感激，在野无贤心自惊。

For the Old Man in the Field

A sickly old man,
shouldering a hoe,
seemed to feel sorry for me –
when I asked for directions,
he simply took my hand,
walked me around the ville.

The flame and smoke
from the burning fields in the
morning
tinted the far hills purple.

The dark valley echoed
the chopper's axe deep in the
woods.

Gulls and magpies forgot
we were plotting men.
They wheeled around us
in familiar ease.

Doubly rewarded with directions
and a friend
I bowed with gratitude and a
pleasant surprise –
such a good man!
In such a wild place!

Ma Dai 马戴

Like his good friend Jia Dao, Ma Dai was from a rather obscure background. It is only in recent research that scholars have figured out that he was probably from Yanzhou, now in Shandong Province, less than two hundred kilometers from the coast (Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 3, pp. 335–36). It is still unknown when he was born, but historical records do show that he passed the imperial examination in 840. After that, he served as confidential secretary on the staffs of several military headquarters. The rank was low but responsibility was high. His outspoken personality offended one superior and he was thus demoted to the position of county sheriff. Jia Dao was well known as being poor, and perhaps because of his close friendship with him, Ma Dai was understood to be poor as well. Ma had, however, traveled far and wide – east to the coast of Jiangsu, west to the mountains of Sichuan, north to the frontier and south to the southern bank of Dongting Lake – with a mobility not available to the truly impoverished. However he was close to poor working people and understood their happiness and hardship, as shown in the two poems translated here. He probably died in 867.

《过野叟居》（《全唐诗》卷555）

野人闲种树，树老野人前。
居止白云内，渔樵沧海边。
呼儿采山药，放犊饮溪泉。
自着养生论，无烦忧暮年。

Passing a “Wild” Man’s Dwelling

A wild man in leisure time plants a wild tree.
It grows old before the planter seems to age.

He lives and travels in mountains among white clouds,
fishing, chopping firewood by the boundless sea.

Hollering his four sons to harvest mountain herbs,
he leads the calves to drink from the creek.

The author of a book on longevity,
he has no worries about his own age.

《路傍树》（《全唐诗》卷556）

古树何人种，清阴减昔时。
莓苔根半露，风雨节偏危。
虫蠹心将穴，蝉催叶向衰。
樵童不须翦，聊起邵公思。

The Tree by the Road

Who planted this ancient tree,
in what ancient time?

Its pleasant shade has dwindled,
its roots half-covered by fungi.
In the slightest storm it may topple,
its leaves eaten by cicadas,
its trunk hollowed by worms.

Oh, please, woodchoppers, leave it alone –
it reminds me of the ancient sage
who sold watermelons under an old tree,
declining the king's invitations to serve in the court.

Li Qunyu 李群玉

Li Qunyu was from a humble clan on the banks of the Fengshui River in the northwest of Hunan Province. He had a studio on a sandbar midstream in the river, and he named the sandbar “Sleeping Immortal Island” and his atelier “Water Bamboo Studio.” Though not famous, neither was his family truly poor for he could afford not to bother trying the exams and instead enjoyed an artistic life on the sandbar, writing poetry and listening to his talented servant play the reed pipe. In one of his poems he celebrated his leisurely lifestyle of “falling drunk everyday in the immortal boat over the blue waves” of the Fengshui River. This river originates in the famous tourist hotspot Zhangjiajie – with its spectacular quartzite sandstone pillars – and flows hundreds of miles eastward into Dongting Lake. However, its water is no longer blue, but sort of brown, for the paper mills in Jinshi City on its bank have polluted it severely.

Li Qunyu was probably born in 811 (Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 3. p. 390). For forty years he lived his gentleman’s life on the sandbar until Prime Minister Linghu Tao – the one who used Wen Tingyun’s lyrics as his own (see note to Wen Tingyun) – recommended him to the emperor. The emperor admired Li Qunyu’s talent and offered him a job as an editor in the imperial academy. His naivety and outspoken honesty made the job difficult, however, and he missed his old life back on the sandbar. His poem about the cranes losing their freedom for a handful of grain is both a faithful description of the two cranes in the garden of Lord Cui and a metaphor of his life working for the empire. He died in 861, not many years after he was introduced into the court.

《乌夜号》（《全唐诗》卷568）

层波隔梦渚，一望青枫林。
有鸟在其间，达晓自悲吟。
是时月黑天，四野烟雨深。
如闻生离哭，其声痛人心。
悄悄夜正长，空山响哀音。
远客不可听，坐愁华发侵。
既非蜀帝魂，恐是桓山禽。
四子各分散，母声犹至今。

The Night Song of a Crow

Behind the tossing waves
on the dreamy sandbar
in the blurred greenness of a young maple
grove
croaks a lonely crow
from night till dawn
in the saddest of tones

With the moon behind clouds the
darkness is complete
Drenched by a drizzle the whole world is
chilly
The bird’s song depresses my heart
as a mother’s moan
when she has to let go of her child

In this long and quiet night
listening to the mountains echo the crow
the traveler plucks his first white hair

This is not the legendary cuckoo
supposedly the reincarnation of Emperor
Shu’s soul
it must be the bird about which Confucius’
disciple
told the master

with her four chicks gone,
the mother bird cries all year round

《失鹤》（《全唐诗》卷569）

瑶台烟雾外，一去不回心。
清海蓬壶远，秋风碧落深。
堕翎留片雪，雅操入孤琴。
岂是笼中物，云萝莫更寻。

To My Lost Crane

Behind the clouds,
beyond the ocean islands,
you disappear without a backward glance.

Among the mountains of immortality
on the other side of the ocean
you soar high above the rising autumn
winds
in the boundless azure sky.

You drop off a single feather –
a snow flake of memory.

I try to recapture
Your graceful moves
on the strings of my harp.

I realize how futile it is
to search for you in the air.

You were born to be free
in clouds, among cypress trees.
You're not a pet bird
locked in a bamboo cage.

《池州封员外郡斋双鹤丹顶霜翎仙态浮旷
罢政之日因呈此章》
（《全唐诗》卷569）

潇洒二白鹤，对之高兴清。
寒溪侣云水，朱阁伴琴笙。
顾慕稻粱惠，超遥江海情。
应携帝乡去，仙阙看飞鸣。

Written for the Two Cranes in Mr. Feng's Garden

Graceful creatures! You make my heart pure.

I sail down the cold river to seek company of clouds.
I play my harp and pipe for you in a scarlet pavilion.

Far above the temptation of a handful of grain,
your heart circles over rivers and oceans.

I should take you to the palace
of gods
to watch you fly
to hear you trumpet
there.

Jia Dao 贾岛

Jia Dao's family seems never to have made any fame for themselves before this poor poet was born in 779 in the town of Fanyang, now Dingxing County, about eighty kilometers southwest of Beijing. For a time Jia Dao was a Buddhist monk, though there are conflicting sources about when he became one, and whether he did so before or after his many failed attempts at the imperial examination. My own educated guess is that it was both, for I think he went to the monastery not out of religious devotion, but under the pressure of poverty, as did his younger brother. He didn't seem to like the rules that guided the a monk's life, however, one of which was that no monks should be outside their temple after mid-day. Two lines from a complaint he wrote in 810 have survived:

The cows and sheep return their home at sunset,
I can't even compare with the beasts.

(quoted in Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 2. p. 318. Translation mine)

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Failing the imperial exams on multiple occasions over the course of a decade seems to have made Jia Dao slightly insane. He would not greet anybody at the examination hall, but talked to himself so loudly that the supervisors had to reject him, and list him as one of the ten bad students of the year. A story goes that one day, later in Jia's life, he was chanting his own lines to himself in the bell tower of a temple, when the emperor came in disguise and picked up his poetry collection. Jia Dao first glared at the emperor and then waved his arms about, shouting: "how can a young man like you understand [my poetry]?" Embarrassed, the emperor walked downstairs and returned to the palace. When afterward Jia Dao was informed that the "young man" might be the emperor and knowing that the emperor often walked around the capital city in disguise, Jia Dao was so scared that he went to the palace and knelt at the gate for a long time. When the emperor heard of it, he "punished" Jia Dao by offering him a low rank position of county secretary in Changjian County, Sichuan. Three years later, he was slightly promoted to be the official in charge of the imperial silos in Puzhou, eastern Sichuan. He died in the winter of the year of his promotion, 840. When he died, there was not even a single coin in his home; he left behind only an ancient harp and a sickly donkey. What kind of soul in such poverty can still love the cicadas, egrets, and cranes with such caring sympathy?

《病蝉》（《全唐诗》卷573）

病蝉飞不得，向我掌中行。
拆翼犹能薄，酸吟尚极清。
露华凝在腹，尘点误侵睛。
黄雀并鸂鸟，俱怀害尔情。

A Sickly Cicada

Have you lost your wings, sickly cicada?
Is that why you crawl onto my hand?

Your wings, though broken,
still look like a shiny film.

Your chant, hoarse as it is,
still has that extreme, pure tone.

The dew drops you drink, the petals you chew,
have been distilled
into a fragrance inside you.

The dust in your pupil, blinding you,
is there by mistake.

If you hadn't lost your vision,
you should have known
that pretty orioles and fierce hawks
are born to harm you.

《崔卿池上双白鹭》

(《全唐诗》卷574)

鹭雏相逐出深笼，顶各有丝茎数同。
洒石多霜移足冷，隔城远树挂巢空。
其如尽在滩声外，何似双飞浦色中。
见此池潭卿自凿，清泠太液底潜通。

Written for the Egret Couple on the Pond of Lord Cui

The young pair of egrets
push one another
out of a deep cage.

Silvery feathers, threads of silk, hang
from their heads, exactly the same number.

Stepping on the frost-covered rocks,
do you feel the cold?

Looking over the skyline,
do you see your old empty nest?

If your thought of home
is blocked by the splashing shallows,
if your dream of flying wing to wing
disappears behind the sunset over the remote bay,
you may want to try this pond
dug by His Lordship himself.

Its water is connected with the Lake of the Jade Emperor*
through invisible channels.

*The Jade Emperor is the Supreme God in Daoism.

《崔卿池上鹤》（《全唐诗》卷574）

月中时叫叶纷纷，不异洞庭霜夜闻。
翎羽如今从放长，犹能飞起向孤云。

Written for the Cranes on the Pond of Lord Cui

Your pure trumpets,
cool as the falling leaves in moonshine,
sound exactly the same to me
as when I heard it in the frosty night
over the thousand-mile Lake of Dongting.

If they let loose
the string that ties the feathers in your wings,
you can still fly high
above that lonely cloud.

Wen Tingyun 温庭筠

Wen Tingyun is a complex character. He was born into the upper class in 801 and died in 866. In the years before his death, he was a teaching assistant in the imperial academy in charge of examinations. Thinking several of the essays in the exams to be excellent, however, he breached the rules and posted them in public, thereby offending his superior who now had him demoted to the position of county sheriff in Fangcheng County, in the south of what is now Henan Province. He died there before the year came to its end.

His grandfather was Prime Minister Wen Yanbo, who had served the emperor Taizong (r. 626-649), the most famous of the Tang monarchs. For his service, the Prime Minister was offered a fief in Bingzhou, now Taiyuan. His grandson, Wen Tingyun, however, was born and raised in the suburbs of Chang'an, in Hu County, and had hardly ever been to his supposed homeland in Taiyuan on the other side of the Yellow River. A social opposite to Jia Dao, the poor monk and poet, Wen Tingyun associated with the children of the rich and powerful, and did all the things that rich and spoiled boys do. But Wen Tingyun was smart, a “natural” musician who blew on anything with holes and strummed anything with strings, making beautiful music with all of them. He also was quick in creating verses that went well with the music, and then went on to become popular among singsong girls. One of his friends and fellow bad boys was Linghu Hao, whose father happened to be Prime Minister Linghu Tao. Lord Linghu liked Wen Tingyun's poetic talent and treated him well, allowing him to live in the Prime Minister's Mansion. But he used the boy: when Lord Linghu learned that the emperor favored a certain style of lyrics, he would ask Wen Tingyun to write verses for the music and then presented these as his own work. He had from the start informed Wen Tingyun of his plan, telling him to keep it a secret. Unwilling to comply, Wen almost immediately shared the news with his friends. Offended, the prime minister kicked the youth out of the house. Still, people didn't seem to mind Wen Tingyun's bad reputation and the crown prince now invited him to stay with him in the East Palace (the traditional residence of the heir apparent in China). He stayed with the prince for two years – 837 and 838 – leaving shortly before the prince's sudden death, which was probably murder.

Wen Tingyun now finally felt that he should live on his own and in 839 he took the local examination, the necessary first step to taking the imperial examination and entering officialdom. Though not outstanding, his score sufficed to qualify him for the national exam, but he fell ill and was forced to stay for two years in his hometown, Hu County, near the capital. He later took several tries at the imperial examination, but never passed it. In 855, already in his mid-fifties, he was accused of unruly behavior during the examination and was penalized by being relegated to the position of county sheriff in Sui County, in what is now northern Hubei. From there he wandered west to Xiangyang, where he spent four years with powerful friends. He subsequently traveled east to Jiangsu, before finally returning to the capital. At the age of 65, he was recommended to the position of teaching assistant in the imperial academy. He died the next year. Reading the two poems translated here, it is hard to connect the peaceful voice and beautiful imagery with the life of a bad-boy poet.

《过分水岭》（《全唐诗》卷579）

溪水无情似有情，入山三日得同行。
岭头便是分头处，惜别潺湲一夜声。

Passing the Grand Divide

Water in the creek, you seem to have
Feelings – in truth you have not.

For three days you follow me on this mountain.
Tonight your gurgling sound's so sad,
as if you know that over that ridge
you'll have to go your way
and I mine.

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《早秋山居》（《全唐诗》卷582）

山近觉寒早，草堂霜气晴。
树凋窗有日，池满水无声。
果落见猿过，叶干闻鹿行。
素琴机虑静，空伴夜泉清。

Early Fall, in My Mountain Cottage

I live close to the mountain and feel
the cold days come early.

The frost on my thatched roof
presages another fine day.

Leaves falling off,
sunshine pours in through the window.

Out there, the autumn tarn is filled to the
brim,
still and quiet.

Monkeys pass in groups,
picking up windfalls before my eyes.

When dry leaves rustle,
I know the deer are strolling through.

At night I play my harp with a quiet mind
to match the pure sounds of the gurgling
stream.

Pi Rixiu 皮日休

One of Pi Rixiu's ancestors had been governor of Xiangyang prefecture in northern Hubei Province. Therefore, he was always regarded by his contemporaries as hailing from Xiangyang, though he was in fact actually born in Jingling, in southern Hubei, in 840. And there he spent most of his life. He went back to the Xiangyang area only occasionally to live as a recluse in Mount Lumen, working his garden and growing vegetables. That's probably why his poems reveal a degree of familiarity with farm work. In 863, when he was twenty-three, he left a stint on Mount Lumen to make a grand tour. First he headed south, going all the way to the region south of Dongting Lake, in what is now Hunan Province. Then he turned east, into Jiangxi Province, then back north to the bank of the Yangtze, where he hiked Mount Lushan. From there he went further east into what is now Anhui Province, hiking Mount Tianzhu (Heaven's Pillar) and Mount Huo. The tour ended in the eastern Shou County where his family owned a country house.

He failed the imperial examination in 866, but passed it the next year. In 868 he left the capital for a second grand tour. This one began with Mount Hua, eighty kilometers east of the capital Chang'an, when on to the Nüji Mountains in Henan Province, and then to the Shaoshi Mountains, where the famous Shaolin Temple is located. Eventually he went southeast to Jiangsu, where he took up official work as secretary in the staff of the governor of Suzhou Prefecture. There he met his best friend, Lu Guimeng, with whom he exchanged scores of poems. The poems translated here are mostly chosen from these exchanges.

Pi Rixiu lived in the gasping years of a dying empire, when peasant rebellions occurred one after another. Caught up in one of these, which swept the lower reaches of the Yangtze before finally turning north to occupy the capital city of Chang'an, Pi Rixiu was made "Grand Scholar" of the new "Grand Qi" dynasty of the rebel leader Huang Chao 黃巢. When forced to make some auspicious statement out of Huang's name, he said something offensive and was killed. He was forty years old.

《正乐府十篇。橡媪叹》

(《全唐诗》卷603)

秋深橡子熟，散落榛芜冈。
伛偻黄发媪，拾之践晨霜。
移时始盈掬，尽日方满筐。
几曝复几蒸，用作三冬粮。
山前有熟稻，紫穗袭人香。
细获又精舂，粒粒如玉珰。
持之纳于官，私室无仓箱。
如何一石余，只作五斗量。
狡吏不畏刑，贪官不避赃。
农时作私债，农毕归官仓。
自冬及于春，橡实诳饥肠。
吾闻田成子，诈仁犹自王。
吁嗟逢橡媪，不觉泪沾裳。

A Sigh for an Acorn-Collecting Woman

The acorns ripen late in autumn hills.
They fall and scatter in prickly bushes and
weeds.

A hunchback woman of yellow hair
ascends the hill before the rising sun
to search for acorns on the frosty ground.
It takes her hours to collect a handful,
a full day to fill her bamboo basket.
Three times she dries them under the mid-
day sun.

Three times she steams them for winter
food.

The rice fields downhill are sweet and
ripe
with purple ears attracting passers-by.
Peasants harvest them with the greatest
care,
husk with mortar and pestle, and transport
the grains of rice, millions of shiny studs
of jade,
to the tax collector's warehouse – gaping
deep.

All the rice they'll give, not a grain to
keep at home.

They wonder why a bushel they bring
becomes

"half a bushel" in the official measuring
box.

In season the tax officers use the grain as
loans.

After season they return the rice to the
warehouse.

Sly lower officials aren't afraid of
punishment.

Their greedy superiors never refuse
handsome bribes.

Yet the peasants, like the woman on the
hill,
stuff acorns in their growling stomach
from winter to spring and spring to
summer.

In ancient books I've read about
hypocrites
who built kingdoms upon their phony
kindness.

But now even the phony kindness has
disappeared.

The only thing that I can do is to sigh
and shed tears for the woman on the hill
until the front of my coat is soaking wet.

《奉和鲁望渔具十五咏. 叉鱼》
(《全唐诗》卷 6 1 1)

列炬春溪口，平潭如不流。
照见游泳鱼，一一如清昼。
中目碎琼碧，毁鳞殷组绣。
乐此何太荒，居然愧川后。

On Fishing with Harpoons

At the confluence of the spring creeks
the water seems to stand still.

Rows of fishermen hold torches there
to turn the night into a shining day
to reveal swimming fish in the pure
stream.

They stab the fish eye with sharp iron,
the fish head exploding like
a shattering piece of jade.
Its blood dyes the scales
into red patterns of embroidery.

A flowing river reminds Confucius
how life runs away like water.
What do I see at this river!
How absurd it is to take pleasure in this?

《奉和鲁望渔具十五咏. 射鱼》
(《全唐诗》卷 611)

注矢寂不动，澄潭晴转烘。
下窥见鱼乐，恍若翔在空。
惊羽决凝碧，伤鳞浮殷红。
堪将指杯术，授与太湖公。

On Shooting Fish with Bow and Arrow

The fisher, silent and motionless keeps
his eyes on the arrow across the bow.

He feels the heat reflected from the lake
that shimmers under the scorching sun.

He sees the underwater world in peace,
a world inhabited by fishes, free
and happy as the birds that soar.

Then he lets the arrow loose –
a feather shatters the green water
with shocking speed, scattering scales
like snowflakes, tainting the water red.

On seeing this I can't help but wonder –
what would Tai the famous chef say
if he knew how they shot the fish here.

《奉和鲁望樵人十咏。樵溪》
(《全唐诗》卷 611)

何时有此溪，应便生幽木。
橡实养山禽，藤花蒙涧鹿。
不止产蒸薪，愿当歌棫朴。
君知天意无，以此安吾族。

The Woodchopper's Creek

When the creek began to flow
trees emerged along its course.

Acorns fell to feed the birds,
vines providing a home to deer.

Forests offered more than fuel for fire.
Let's sing the praises of temple beams.

Now you know it's heaven's will
that my clan live here forever in peace.

《奉和鲁望樵人十咏。樵家》
(《全唐诗》卷 611)

空山最深处，太古两三家。
云萝共夙世，猿鸟同生涯。
衣服濯春泉，盘餐烹野花。
居兹老复老，不解叹年华。

To the Woodchoppers

In the deepest of empty mountains, two or three
humble families have lived since ancient times.

They share a world of clouds and dreams
with generations of monkeys and birds.

They wash their clothes in fresh and placid spring,
prepare their meals with wild flowers and herbs.

Many grew old here and many more have passed,
yet those alive never worry about death
or ever sigh for the passing of days.

《奉和鲁望樵人十咏。樵歌》（《全唐诗》卷 611）

此曲太古音，由来无管奏。多云采樵乐，或说林泉候。
一唱凝闲云，再谣悲顾兽。若遇采诗人，无辞收鄙陋。

A Woodchopper's Song

This song is said to be from ancient times.
It never was accompanied by a flute.
It sings the happy life of the chopper
and the mild climate along the river in trees.

Sing it once you may slow down the floating clouds.
Sing it twice the beasts turn their heads toward you – sad faces.
Today you sing it to me the poetry collector.
How can I ignore such songs from the wild?

《西塞山泊渔家》

(《全唐诗》卷 613)

白纶巾下发如丝，静倚枫根坐钓矶。
中妇桑村挑叶去，小儿沙市买蓑归。
雨来莼菜流船滑，春后鲈鱼坠钓肥。
西塞山前终日客，隔波相羨尽依依。

Mooring My Boat By a Fisherman's House Near the West Fortress Hill

Beneath your white silk cap your hair
is white and shiny as the silk.

You lean against the maple roots
and watch your line without care.

Your middle daughter-in-law is selecting leaves
from the best mulberry trees around the house.

Your youngest son has returned with a bulrush cape
he purchased from the market by the sandy beach.

After the rain the water-shield*
floats by the boats,
so slippery
and smooth, a delicious match
for
the fat perch that weighs down your rod.

I, a sojourner by the West Fortress Hill,
observe and admire you all day long,
from the other side of the rippling bay.

*A plant that grows in water, the leaves of which are edible, with a slippery
and starchy texture.

Lu Guimeng 陆龟蒙

Lu Guimeng's great-great-grandfather seven generations back was a powerful courtier, but by the time of Lu Guimeng himself the family had sunk into obscurity in Suzhou, down in southeastern China. It is unknown when he was born, but judging from the way he and his friend Pi Rixiu addressed each other, I have reason to believe that he was slightly younger than Pi Rixiu, who was born in 840. Under the pressure of supporting his mother and family, in the year 865 Lu started clerical work for Lu Yong, a distant relative then serving as governor in Muzhou, now Chun'an County in Zhejiang Province, over three hundred kilometers southwest of Lu Guimeng's home. It was a long distance back then and quite a commitment for a young man. Yet, he was not that poor for his family owned a farm of about fifty acres (three hundred *mu*), with a dozen farmhands and ten water buffalos. The farm and a thirty-room compound were located in Songjiang, now a district in Shanghai. He also had a tea garden in Yixing, and a library of ten thousand volumes. That's probably why during his travels he could afford not to receive some government officials who admired his poetic talent but whose personalities didn't appeal to him.

Lu Guimeng passed the local examination in 868 but was unable to take the national examination because of the rebellion led by Pang Xun, a frontier soldier who had been recruited to guard the southwestern frontier. Pang's rebellion swept through southern China, making traveling dangerous. Upon the recommendation of his best friend, Pi Rixiu, Lu took up work as staff member for the governor of Suzhou from 869 to 871. In 875, Lu Guimeng joined the staff of Zhang Tuan in Luzhou, now Hefei City in Anhui Province. When Zhang was in the next year transferred to Suzhou, Lu gladly followed his employer to work in his hometown. Re-united with his family and his best friend Pi Rixiu, Lu Guimeng was happy for awhile. But then, with the encouragement of Pi Rixiu, Lu was tempted to try the examination again. However, fate seems to have decided that he would not take it anyway. Another peasant rebellion, this one led by Wang Xianzhi, now advanced rapidly from Hunan Province to Jiangxi, then through Anhui, Hubei, Henan, and all the way to the gates of Chang'an. Lu Guimeng thus returned to his old life of part poet, part clerk and part farmer.

In Lu Guimeng's poems we can see familiarity with the life of the peasant. He actually worked in the field. Although he hired a dozen farmhands to work with him, his land was situated at a low-lying bend of the Yangtze and was often flooded. When the floods came, he wrote, the field and the river became one. So he had to work, shovel in hand, side by side with his men to save the crops. When his scholar friends laughed at him for laboring alongside servants, he would blame them for not following the examples set up by legendary leaders such as the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黄帝) or the Great Yu 大禹. As both experienced farmer and thoughtful intellectual, Lu wrote in depth about the evolution of the Chinese plow in his book *The Classic of Plows (Leisi Jing 耒耜经)*. With anachronistic application of Pierre Macherey's Marxist theory of literary production to the writing of *Classic of Plows*, one may argue that the book is a product of the development of means of production under the pressure of changing times. The numerous rebellions and uprisings of this period, and the wars they set off, had devastated the northern and central areas of China. The center of agricultural production thus moved from central China to the densely populated area south of the Yangtze and farming techniques consequently became more focused on methods to increase the productivity of every square foot of the land. As a farmer in a flood zone, Lu needed the changing techniques and technology for his survival; as an intellectual, he needed to communicate them to other farmers so as to work together with a changing economy that made necessary the intensive farming he practiced on his own farm.

In addition to traditional farming, Lu paid close attention to fish-farming. He was the first in Chinese history to advocate active “planting” of fish, while also strongly objecting to the practice of fishing with poison. These were reflected in the fifteen pairs of poems on fishing he and Pi exchanged. I translate three from Lu below – and two from Pi, just above – to offer a sampling of the two closely connected but subtly different minds.

Never physically strong, Lu became seriously ill in 879. He died in 882.

《渔具诗·叉鱼》（《全唐诗》卷 620）

春溪正含绿，良夜才参半。
持矛若羽轻，列烛如星烂。
伤鳞跳密藻，碎首沈遥岸。
尽族染东流，傍人作佳玩。

On Fishing with Harpoons

At midnight the creek flows by quietly,
reflecting the spring verdure on the banks.

Men come with feather-light spears and harpoons,
their torches outshining the Silver River in the sky.

Fish jump, scales fly, out of the waterweeds.
Shattered heads and chopped-off tails
sink down to the river's bottom.

Spectators, as if watching a fun game,
witness the extinction of aquatic families and clans.

《渔具诗.射鱼》（《全唐诗》卷 620）

弯弓注碧浔，掉尾行凉沚。
青枫下晚照，正在澄明里。
攄弦断荷扇，溅血殷菱蕊。
若使禽荒闻，移之暴烟水。

On Shooting Fish with Bow and Arrow

Behind the green maples
the sun,
almost setting,
lights up the clear lake –
such shiny water!

Wagging their tails as if merry
the fish circle around the sandbar.

A man bends his bow to the shape of a
full moon,
stares deep into the flowing green.

With trembling vibration the arrow
pierces through a round lotus leaf,
splattering blood and painting
the tiny white petals of the water-chestnut
red.

If the hunters on the steppes
hear of this fisherman,
will they move down here
to the misty waterside?

《渔具诗.药鱼》（《全唐诗》卷 620）

香饵缀金钩，日中悬者几。
盈川是毒流，细大同时死。
不唯空饲犬，便可将貽蚁。
苟负竭泽心，其它尽如此。

On Fishing with Poison

They used to fish with lines and golden hooks
that hung in water wrapped in sweetened baits.
From morning to noon they sat on shady banks,
but how many fish can they catch like that?

Now they turn the whole river into a poison stream
to kill the fish, big or small, all at once.

They feed the fish to dogs afterward
with enough left-over for the crawling ants.

Why is “taking all now” the way
of all trades in the world of today?

《樵人十咏。樵溪》
(《全唐诗》卷 620)

山高溪且深，苍苍但群木。
抽条欲千尺，众亦疑朴楸。
一朝蒙翦伐，万古辞林麓。
若遇燎玄穹，微烟出云族。

The Woodchopper's Creek

Mountain high
creek deep
forest green
with towering trees
millions of lower bushes.

Once you chop these giants down
they leave their mountain home forever
You make fire with them at night
They disappear in a small puff of smoke

《樵人十咏。樵家》(《全唐诗》卷 620)

草木黄落时，比邻见相喜。
门当清涧尽，屋在寒云里。
山棚日才下，野灶烟初起。
所谓顺天民，唐尧亦如此。

To the Woodchoppers

You build your houses
in piles of cold clouds.

Your gates open to
the pure mountain stream.

Your hearts warm up
when you see your neighbors come
through crisp yellow leaves.

As soon as the sun sets behind the hills,
cooking smoke come up in columns
through the cracked roofs
of your mountain huts.

Your lifestyle follows nature
as described of the Golden Age.

《鹤媒歌》（《全唐诗》卷 621）

偶系渔舟汀树枝，因看射鸟令人悲。
盘空野鹤忽然下，背翳见媒心不疑。
媒闲静立如无事，清唳时时入遥吹。
裴回未忍过南塘，且应同声就同类。
梳翎宛若相逢喜，只怕才来又惊起。
窥鳞啄藻乍低昂，立定当胸流一矢。
媒欢舞跃势离披，似谄功能邀弩儿。
云飞水宿各自物，妒侣害群犹尔为。
而况世间有名利，外头笑语中猜忌。
君不见荒陂野鹤陷良媒，
同类同声真可畏。

The Live Crane Decoy

I tied my fishing boat on an island tree,
to witness by chance a hunting tragedy.
A crane was shot in an eerie way
that saddened me and all who saw how it
died.

A crane decoy stood on a sand bar
sending peaceful honks into clouds.

A wild crane attracted by the decoy on
land
had no suspicion of any harm.

He circled above the isle,
changed his mind of flying further south.

He honked back to the crane on sand
ready to land near a fellow bird.

The decoy combed his feathers clean
to welcome a friend or guest.
Unwilling to lose a companion, he
worked
with utmost grace –
in leisure searching for a fish
or pecking at the floating weeds.

All seemed natural, all was calm, the
crane
from the clouds landed for a rest.

A sudden arrow from the bushes pierced
him through his white, exposed chest.

The decoy flapped his wings and danced a
merry dance,
as if pleased with his service to the
hunting boy.

Oh, cranes! Flying over the clouds and
sleeping on lake,
you are certainly free and lofty creatures.
Yet some of you hate your fellows and
hurt your own kind.

In the human world there are fame and
wealth
for which men smile and smile but plot
against
their friends. I know the greatest danger
comes
from our kind that speaks our tongue,
just as the crane decoy who tricked his
fellow birds.

《偶掇野蔬寄裘美有作》
(《全唐诗》卷 624)

野园烟里自幽寻，嫩甲香蕤引渐深。
行歇每依鸦舅影，挑频时见鼠姑心。
凌风蒿彩初携笼，带露虚疏或贮襟。
欲助春盘还爱否，不妨萧洒似家林。

Written while Picking Herbal Leaves
For My Friend Pi Rixiu

Through thin mist, around my wild
garden
I search in deeper shades.
Small tender leaves and sweet petals lead
me on.

I walk and rest under the Crow's Uncle –
the shady tallow tree.
I separate and pick at the heart of the
Mouse's Aunt –
the peony flower.

In the colorful breeze I fill the bamboo
basket.
I stretch out the skirt of my jacket to hold
more dewy leaves. Enjoy them my friend,
as if they come
from your own wild woods. I hope they
will
add more flavor to your meals in spring.

《奉和夏初裘美见访题小斋次韵》
(《全唐诗》卷 625)

四邻多是老农家，百树鸡桑半顷麻。
尽趁清明修网架，每和烟雨掉繰车。
啼鸾偶坐身藏叶，饷妇归来鬓有花。
不是对君吟复醉，更将何事送年华。

In Response to the Poem Written by My Friend Pi Rixiu
When He Visited My Humble Hut

You've met my neighbors, peasants for generations.
Together we raise a hundred chickens, grow
a hundred mulberry trees, half an acre hemp.

In fine weather we fix the vine racks.
In misty rains we reel silk from boiled cocoons.

The warbling orioles sit behind shady leaves.
Our daughters-in-law walk under them,
delivering lunch to the field, with wild flowers
in their hair. What else can I do with my life?
Write poetry, drink wine with you, my friend.

《新秋杂题六首。吟》
(《全唐诗》卷 629)

忆山摇膝石上晚，怀古掉头溪畔凉。
有时得句一声发，惊起鹭鸶和夕阳。

Poetry Chanting

Sitting on a rock in evening ease,
I reminisce about my mountain home.
Walking along the cooling creek
I reflect upon events of the past.

I sometimes find an expression of
thoughts,
chant my lines out loud.

Does my voice make the egrets fly
or the setting sun jump?

《新秋杂题六首。食》
(《全唐诗》卷 629)

日午空斋带睡痕，水蔬山药荐盘飧。
林乌信我无机事，长到而今下石盆。

Lunch

Getting up at noon,
my face crinkled from the pillow-press,
I start my lunch of yam and water-chestnuts.

The crows have always trusted me – a mindless man.

Today they descend
from the top of the tree
to peck from my stone plate.

仲

昭



Sikong Tu 司空图

Sikong Tu's ancestors lived in eastern China, in Sizhou (mod. Xuyi, Jiangsu), not too far away from the eastern coast on the southern bank of Hongze Lake, the fourth largest in China. That's why his family was often called by his contemporaries the Sikongs from Sizhou. Yet his family for at least two generations had lived in the north, on the northern bank of the Yellow River, in what is now Yongji County, Shanxi Province.

This tradition of respecting one's ancestral origin (*zuji* 祖籍), together with the often conflicting concepts of *junwang* 郡望 (the locale where the family had first made itself known) and place of registration (*zhanji* 占籍, the place the family actually lived), complicate the sense of place, origin, and identity for Chinese people and their poetic imagination. Back in the Tang, quite a few poets and scholars could trace their ancestry and original homeland back up to ten generations, especially if a forebear had served a previous dynasty. This was an effective way for power to maintain itself: you have to serve the state, although you may not like it, if you want to keep your family reputation (*junwang*), or add to it. It is in your own and your family's interest to serve the status quo. The tension involved is seen in many poems in this collection. Sikong Tu did this in an almost legendary way.

His father, Sikong Yu 司空舆, had excelled as government manager of two important salt lakes in Anyi, now Xia County in southern Shanxi Province, on the northern bank of the Yellow River. In the process he turned his temporary residence into his family's formal place of residence, its *zhanji* 占籍. Pleased with the success of new rules drawn up by Sikong Yu curbing bribe-taking by government officials, the court promoted him, which provided the father funds to buy property in the nearby Zhongtiao 中条 Mountains. For the son, Sikong Tu, this became home, the place he could feel most comfortable to live and die in, as he went on to show in his own life, and death.

Sikong Tu was born in July, 837, on the northern bank of the Yellow River in the southwestern tip of what is now Shanxi Province. He passed the imperial examination in 869 as one of the top four of his class. He appreciated support from a powerful friend and worked in his staff. When the imperial appointment came to call him to the position of Imperial Inspector, he could not bear to leave such a caring supporter and failed to report to duty in the court in a hundred days as required by law. Though reprimanded severely, he was still allowed to stay in the service of his friend, whom he followed in demotion as well as in promotion. Sikong Tu worked diligently and gradually climbed up the ladder in officialdom to the position of vice minister of the Ministry of Rituals. When Huang Chao, the rebel who killed poet Pi Rixiu, occupied Chang'an, Sikong Tu managed to escape and hide in the family's country house in the Zhongtiao Mountains. In 886, after the emperor had returned to the capital, he was called back to court to a less powerful position. Then already in his fifties he was apparently not in best health. When later restored to a post of the rank he had had before the rebellion, he asked for sick leave. The emperor granted him leave yet called him back again in 897, this time to the vital position of vice minister of the Defense Ministry; he again declined on the basis of poor health. He was now allowed to return to Wanguan Valley in the Zhongtiao Mountains, where his father had bought the land and houses decades before.

Sikong Tu's health was not as bad as he claimed. Once back home, he enjoyed a creative life writing poetry, talking with Buddhists and Daoists, drinking, hiking, and painting portraits of famous courtiers – his moral exemplars – on the walls of the hall his father had built. In 908, hearing of the execution of the last emperor of Tang, he refused to eat. He died within a few days, at the age of seventy-two.

《退居漫题七首 其四》
(《全唐诗》卷 632)

身外都无事，
山中久避喧。
破巢看乳燕，
留果待啼猿。

On Retirement

Avoiding the noisy world,
I have retired into the
mountains
for years.

Free from all obligations I
peek
at the nursing swallows and
leave
some fruits and nuts on the
trees
for the howling monkeys.

《秋景》(《全唐诗》卷 632)

景物皆难驻，
伤春复怨秋。
旋书红叶落，
拟画碧云收。

An Autumnal Scene

Knowing I can't keep things
and scenes
from sliding away day by day,

I weep at fading flowers in
spring,
mourn fallen autumn leaves.

Before I finish my poem of
burning foliage,
I start a painting of the azure
clouds.

《放龟二首》(《全唐诗》卷 633)

却为多知自不灵，今朝教汝卜长生。
若求深处无深处，只有依人会有情。

Releasing a Turtle

Celebrated for spirit,
respected for knowledge,
you at this moment ought to take
advice from me –
live out your natural long life.
The depth of water is not deep enough to protect you,
yet meeting more and more men may run
into one with sympathy.

Nie Yizhong 聂夷中

Nie Yizhong was from an obscure family in Zhongdu (mod. Qinyang, Henan), on the northern bank of the Yellow River, in the foothills of the Taihang Mountains. Knowing both poverty and the real life of peasants, he introduced a harsh realism to the pastoral tradition of Chinese poetry. It is unknown when he was born or when he died, but the official record shows that he passed the examination in 871, during the upheavals of the uprising led by Pang Xun, the same rebellion that had made it impossible for the poet Lu Guimeng to travel from the lower Yangtze up to Chang'an (see note on Lu Guimeng). In short, the once powerful empire was built on an unsustainable system. Pressed to the limit, the deeply oppressed and exploited peasantry had through their uprisings proved a simple truth: nothing unsustainable will be sustained. Nie Yizhong's poetry reflects this historical moment in a way so powerful that the emperor of the dying empire had to pay it special attention (Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 4, pp. 11-12). During the upheaval, he was not assigned a job until his coat was worn out and his money ran out. When finally assigned the position of county sheriff in Huazhou, at the foot of Mount Huashan, all he brought with him were a few books and a harp.

《赠农（一作孟郊诗）》
（《全唐诗》卷 636）

劝尔勤耕田，盈尔仓中粟。
劝尔无伐桑，减尔身上服。
清霜一委地，万草色不绿。
狂风一飘林，万叶不着木。
青春如不耕，何以自拘束。

Written to a Farmer Friend

Work hard on your fields,
let grain fill your silos.
Don't chop down mulberry trees.
Be frugal with your clothes.

When frost falls on the earth
no grass can keep its blades green.
When cold wind combs through the woods
all leaves must fall.

If you don't till the field when young,
how can you discipline yourself
for the rest of your life?

《公子家（一作长安花，一作公子行）》
（《全唐诗》卷 636）

种花满西园，花发青楼道。
花下一禾生，去之为恶草。

Garden of a Rich Boy

He's had flowers planted
all over the western garden,
along the road to the pleasure house.

Below one flower grew a rice-sprout.
The boy pulled it out – what
a nuisance weed!

《田家二首 其一》（《全唐诗》卷 636）

父耕原上田，子劬山下荒。六月禾未秀，官家已修仓。

A Peasant's Family Song

Father tills the fields on the terrace,
sons the rocky valley floor.
June – the rice has not grown ears.
The government has readied the silo
to take in the tax grain.

Zhang Qiao 张乔

Zhang Qiao was a resident of Chizhou, on the southern bank of the Yangtze, among the Jiuhua Mountains. After twelve centuries, his home town is still called Chizhou, though it has developed into a city of one and a half million residents, looming large in southwestern Anhui Province.

It is unknown when Zhang Qiao was born or when he died, but we know that he took and failed an imperial examination in 870. He returned to his home in the “old mountain” – one of the Jiuhua Mountains 九华山 – where he lived as a recluse for ten years. Jiuhua literally means “nine flowers.” These mountains had originally had a different name, but during the Tianbao reign period of Emperor Xuanzong (742–756), the poet Li Bai visited the area and thought the nine highest peaks of the mountains looked like nine lotus flowers. So, in one of his poems, he said “Exquisite is the scheme of Yin and Yang, / That brings forth nine inspirited rock flowers” (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 788, poem #1. Translation mine). In this way Li Bai, together with two other versifiers – Wei Quanyu and Gao Ji – changed the name of the mountain into Jiuhua, the Nine Flower Mountains. Decades later, the poet Liu Yuxi exclaimed: “one glance at the exquisite peaks, one shock on my amazed soul” (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 756, poem #4).

Li Bai and Liu Yuxi were travelers, who in their brief encounter with the Jiuhua Mountains found them impressive, but abstract. Zhang Qiao, on the other hand, was a permanent resident. From his “Winter Night in the Mountains” we get a lower-key, sobering, and even slightly depressing picture both of mountain life and of life in the larger world of a dying empire. This difference is especially interesting for ecocritics who hold physical accuracy and specificity as important standards in the evaluation of literary works.

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《题小松》（《全唐诗》卷 638）

松子落何年，纤枝长水边。
斫开深涧雪，移出远林烟。
带月栖幽鸟，兼花灌冷泉。
微风动清韵，闲听罢琴眠。

Written on the Trunk of a Pine Sapling

In what year, by what chance
did this pine seed fall here?

Its tiny twig somehow emerged
by the side of the creek

through the snow of the deep ravine –
a puff of green smoke in distant woods.

The quiet birds love it,
sleep on it in the moonshine.

The lonely hermit loves it,
waters it as his flowers.

The pure breeze loves it,
stirs its needles as strings of a harp.

I love its music so much –
I let my harp rest, listen, until I sleep.

《猿（一作长安赠猿）》
（《全唐诗》卷 639）

挂月栖云向楚林，
取来全是为清音。
谁知系在黄金索，
翻畏侯家不敢吟。

Written to a Monkey

They capture you from the
forest
of the southern State of Chu
where you used to reach for
the moon
and sleep among the clouds.

They capture you for your
pure voice
but they lock you up with a
gold chain.
You're afraid of the mighty
lord –
you lose the courage to howl
again.

《渔者》（《全唐诗》卷 639）

首戴圆荷发不梳，
叶舟为宅水为居。
沙头聚看人如市，
钓得澄江一丈鱼。

The Fisherman

You never comb your hair,
your hat a round lotus leaf.
You live in your boat,
on mighty floods.

On the head of a sand bar
people gather as if in a
market –
to see the ten-foot fish
that you caught in the clear
stream.

《山中冬夜》（《全唐诗》卷 639）

寒叶风摇尽，空林鸟宿稀。
涧冰妨鹿饮，山雪阻僧归。
夜坐坐心定，长吟语力微。
人间去多事，何处梦柴扉。

Winter Night in the Mountains

The wind has sent cold leaves to the ground.
The woods are empty with few birds sleeping.
The creek is frozen – hard for deer to drink.
The snow fills the mountain –
what an impediment to the traveling monk!

I sit through the night, all worldly thoughts gone,
and chant a long time, the power of my language weak.
In the world of messy upheavals, where is the place
for me to dream of a peaceful wattle gate?

Zheng Gu 郑谷

Zheng Gu was born in 851 in Yichun, in what is now Jiangxi Province. A child prodigy who started his education in Chang'an, at the age of five, he soon started writing poems. When he turned seven, he went to Hunan with his father, who had been sent to serve as governor of Yongzhou. On their way, the seven-year-old wrote a poem on the wall of the famous Yueyang Tower, which was praised highly by the poets Ma Dai (included in this selection) and Li Peng. They believed the child had a bright future as scholar and poet. Yet, life turned out to be ironic. Our genius started taking examinations in 872 but didn't pass until 887. During the long years of the repeated intervening failures, he lived in seclusion near Jingmen, on the west bank of the Han River, now a city of three million people. Humiliated by his own failures, he also had to face tumultuous larger events, such as the burning of the nearby city of Jiangling in 879 by the rebel Wang Xianzhi, or the occupation of Chang'an in the next year by Huang Chao, which made it impossible for him to even try to take the exams that year. "For ten springs my tears have sped up my aging," wrote Zheng Gu in that year, "ashamed, I can't face my graying hair in the clear stream" (quoted in Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 157. Translation mine). Zheng Gu subsequently fled to Sichuan where he would remain for six years, spending most of his days there with monks in Buddhist temples. When Emperor Xizong was finally able to return to Chang'an, Zheng Gu returned, too, and as a frustrated, middle-aged man finally passed the examination there in 887. First placed in the post of county sheriff of Hu County, in the Chang'an suburbs, he gradually climbed up the ladder of an officialdom deeply shaken by the many uprisings, eventually becoming department head of a minor ministry. He begged the emperor to allow him to retire in the year 902 and died in the place where he was born, Yichun, in 910.

Although Zheng Gu made himself a reputation at the age of seven, the last poem translated here is what he is best known for. It brought him the nick-name Zheng the Partridge Poet. The Chinese poets believed that the chuck of the partridge sounds like a piece of advice for the travelers: "Don't go, Brother. Don't Go."

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《鹭鸶》（《全唐诗》卷 675）

闲立春塘烟淡淡，静眠寒苇雨飕飕。
渔翁归后汀沙晚，飞下滩头更自由。

To A Snowy Egret

Standing alone in the misty pond of spring
you exemplify leisurely grace.

Sleeping quietly among the reeds
you seem oblivious to the cold rain.

The fisherman leaves the sandbar
late in the night.
You land on the beach perfectly free.

《失鹭鹭》（《全唐诗》卷 675）

野格由来倦小池，
惊飞却下碧江涯。
月昏风急何处宿，
秋岸萧萧黄苇枝。

On Losing My Snowy Egret

A wild character of course
you're tired of my small pond.

Frightened in flight
you land by the green river bank.

Where are you going to sleep,
in the windy night of a dim moon?

Everywhere I look, I see and hear
yellowing leaves, rustling reeds.

《鹧鸪（谷以此诗得名，时号为郑鹧鸪）》
（《全唐诗》卷 675）

暖戏烟芜锦翼齐，品流应得近山鸡。
雨昏青草湖边过，花落黄陵庙里啼。
游子乍闻征袖湿，佳人才唱翠眉低。
相呼相应湘江阔，苦竹丛深春日西。

The Partridge

On the warm and misty marsh you play
to display wings of embroidered silk.

They say your character must be similar
to that of a mountain pheasant.

You pass the drizzling Lake of Green Grass,
chuck-chucking at the fallen flowers
by the Temple of Emperor Huang.

Upon hearing your homecoming call,
travelers wet their sleeves with homesick tears.
Singing girls knit their brows
stopping in mid-song.

In pairs you call and respond to each other over the broad
River Xiang, and land in groves of bitter bamboo.
The spring sun sets behind western hills.

Wu Rong 吴融

Wu Rong was a native of Shanyin, now Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, the same place that the poet He Zhizhang had called home. It is unknown when he was born, but he passed the imperial examination in 889 after two decades of trying and failing, already in his forties. During those frustrating two decades, he lived on the west slope of Mount Maoshan in what is now Jiangsu Province, about two hundred kilometers northwest of his hometown. As he turned thirty, his future in officialdom still uncertain, he bought a seven-acre farm on the lower Yangtze, in a region that is now a district of Shanghai.

It was an embarrassment for Wu that his livelihood and retirement depended on landholding, and after he finally passed the imperial examination he joined the army and went to western Sichuan. Two years later, he was involved in some trouble and demoted to Jiangling, in the mid-reach of the Yangtze, much closer to home. Showing loyalty and ability during the upheavals that would soon end the Tang Empire, he was promoted to the position of vice-minister of the Ministry of Defense. He died in 903. The Tang dynasty had its final death four years later.

From his poems and the brief biography provided here we can see that Wu Rong lived mostly south of the Yangtze, except for the months he spent traveling to and taking the exams in the capital city. Rivers, lakes, and swamps are the familiar landscape for him.

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《溪边》（《全唐诗》卷 685）

溪边花满枝，百鸟带香飞。
下有一白鹭，日斜翘石矶。

By the River

By the river flowers bloom on every twig.
Through flowers birds fly and scatter sweet
petals like festoons behind them.
In sweetness, under the blooms
a snowy egret stands on a single foot
until the sun slants towards the rock in the stream.

《水鸟》（《全唐诗》卷 685）

烟为行止水为家，两两三三睡暖沙。
为谢离鸾兼别鹄，如何禁得向天涯。

The Water Fowl

In mist you fly, on waves you bob, and on bars
of warm sand you sleep neck by neck.

You gently decline the company of swans,
the mystical phoenix who flies aloof and high.

They're lofty and graceful, yet how can they stand
the journey to the edge of the sky?

《鸳鸯》（《全唐诗》卷 686）

翠翘红颈覆金衣，
滩上双双去又归。
长短死生无两处，
可怜黄鹄爱分飞。

The Wood Ducks

A green crown here,
a glimpse of red cape there,
brilliant feathers everywhere –
wood-ducks fly back and forth
all over the sand beach in pairs.

Life or death,
may it be short or long,
you couples always stay together,
pitying the yellow crane who flies alone.

《忆猿》（《全唐诗》卷 687）

翠微云敛日沈空，叫彻青冥怨不穷。
连臂影垂溪色里，断肠声尽月明中。
静含烟峡凄凄雨，高弄霜天袅袅风。
犹有北山归意在，少惊佳树近房栊。

Remembering the Monkeys

The sun sets
The clouds disperse
The blue mists diminish
in the disheartening howls
that pierce the sky.

You form a chain
hanging hand-in-hand
from an elegant tree
reflected by the colorful creek.

Echoed again
and again
your howls finally vanish
as the bright moon rises
from behind the North Mountain.

The gorges hold between them
a silent, misty drizzle,
and in the chilly autumn sky
blows a high, frosty wind.

Remembering you
I too want to return to the mountain home.
Please refrain from howling at me here
near my house for you may scare
these fine trees that I recently planted.

《池上双凫二首》（《全唐诗》卷 687）

碧池悠漾小凫雏，两两依依只自娱。
钓艇忽移还散去，寒鸥有意即相呼。
可怜翡翠归云髻，莫羡鸳鸯入画图。
幸是羽毛无取处，一生安稳老菰蒲。

To the Young Teals on the Pond

Two teals, very young,
bob up and down on the jade-green pond.
They seem happy
to entertain each other
like a grown couple.

They separate and fly away
as the fishing boat approaches.
They call and warn each other
when they sense the chilling presence of the hawk.

They don't have to fly high,
as the kingfishers do,
to find home beyond the clouds.
Nor do they need to admire
the brilliant wood-ducks –
favorite of the painter's brush.

It's their good fortune
to have feathers so plain:
they live a simple and peaceful life
among reeds and sweet bulrushes.

Du Xunhe 杜荀鹤

There has long been a widespread rumor that Du Xunhe was the illegitimate son of the famous poet Du Mu, though the efforts of many scholars over many ages to prove or disprove the claim have proved inconclusive. But an unexpected result of their studies has been that now we know for sure he was born on the tenth day of the first lunar calendar month of 846 in the same place where an earlier poet, Zhang Qiao, was born: on the southern bank of the mid-Yangtze, by the Jiuhua Mountains, in Chizhou, Anhui Province. He long lived in obscurity in the mountains, for two decades trying and failing to pass the imperial examination. Of this time, ten years were spent on Mount Lushan, reading, preparing for the next exam, and writing poetry. He finally passed in 891, a saddened if not embittered middle-aged man. But by this time the once-powerful Tang Empire was dying and had no position for this miserable scholar who “owns not an inch of land among the four seas but bitterly chants his poems all his life” (Du Xunhe, *Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 691, poem #104. Translation mine).

Du Xunhe’s “opportunity” came from an unorthodox direction. In the midst of the rebellion of Huang Chao (d. 884) – the one who killed the poet Pi Rixiu – one of the rebel commanders, Zhu Wen, betrayed Huang, surrendering to Tang and assisting in putting down the rebellion. In return, the court made him a “prince,” with control over a large chunk of central China. Du was recommended to Zhu Wen and won his trust with an impromptu poem written at Zhu’s command about rain drops that fell on a sunny day. In his poem, Du said something to this effect: if the days are always regular, how can heaven show the role that Prince Zhu plays in the process of creation? With his ego tickled, Zhu Wen recommended Du Xunhe to a fairly important office in the last days of the Tang Empire. Du Xunhe died a few days after he accepted the offer.

Before his death, Du Xunhe did have the opportunity to write ten other poems for Zhu Wen, advising him to lower the taxes and let people and land have a chance to recover from the wars that had rendered more than half of China wasteland.

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《溪居叟》（《全唐诗》卷 691）

溪翁居静处，溪鸟入门飞。
早起钓鱼去，夜深乘月归。
见君无事老，觉我有求非。
不说风霜苦，三冬一草衣。

The Old Man on the Creek

The creek man lives in perfect peace.
The creek birds fly in and out of his hut.

At dawn he goes to fish
midnight he returns in brilliant moonshine.

I must be wrong to pursue fame and power,
especially when I see him so naturally age.

I never wonder how he’s braved
the bitter wind and cold frost
in the long winter, in a shabby straw cape.

《春日山居寄友人》（《全唐诗》卷 692）

野吟何处最相宜，春景暄和好入诗。
高下麦苗新雨后，浅深山色晚晴时。
半岩云脚风牵断，平野花枝鸟踏垂。
倒载干戈是何日，近来麋鹿欲相随。

**In Spring, Sent from My
Mountain Dwelling to a Friend**

Where's the best place
for the wild chant
of a wild poet?

It's the sunny spring scenes
of my home mountain:
fresh after the rain wheat seedlings wave
up and down in green ripples.

In glorious sunset the mountains change
colors –
blue and purple in various shades.

Half-way around the rocky cliff
the clouds hang like a ribbon.

Over the flat fields the birds
land on the boughs of the few lone trees.

Lately the deer and elk seem to like me,
following me around, making me wonder
when will people lay down their weapons
and begin to live in peace like this.

《溪岸秋思》（《全唐诗》卷 693）

桑柘穷头三四家，挂罾垂钓是生涯。
秋风忽起溪滩白，零落岸边芦荻花。

Autumn Thoughts on the Creek

At the very end of the mulberry grove
three or four families live
by means of old nets and broken rods.

The autumnal wind suddenly stirs up
catkins on the creek banks
scattering snow-flakes over the stream.

《田翁》（《全唐诗》卷 693）

白发星星筋力衰，
种田犹自伴孙儿。
官苗若不平平纳，
任是丰年也受饥。

Old Peasant

Grey-templed, weak-limbed,
you still work hard in the fields
beside your sons and grandsons.

If the Emperor doesn't lower taxes,
you'll be hungry through the year
despite the best of harvests.

《鸬鹚》（《全唐诗》卷 693）

一般毛羽结群飞，雨岸烟汀好景时。深水有鱼衔得出，看来却是鹭鸶饥。

To the Cormorants

In green mists, by the waterside,
birds of same feather circle in congenial groups.*

They dive into the depth and bring fish to the surface.
In this beautiful scenery I see hungry egrets.

*Unfortunately, this is a literal translation of the Chinese original. Although in English it sounds like a cliché, I can't find any way to work around it.

仲
昭



Wei Zhuang 韦庄

Wei Zhuang was born in Wannian County, near Chang'an, probably in 836. Though he grew up in a well-to-do family, receiving a good education, he was a badly behaved child. Many of his childhood friends, who ganged up with him against their unfortunate teachers, later became major officials of the dying empire.

The last years of the empire saw rampant warfare, and Wei and his family eventually had to flee the capital for survival. In 884, they first went to Luoyang, then continued south, crossing the Yangtze in the hope of finding some temporary peace in Runzhou, in Jiangsu (now Zhejiang) Province. There Wei Zhuang became a military secretary in the staff of General Zhou Bao. He worked there for three years before a military *coup d'état* happened right before his eyes and his general was driven out of town. He and his family had to leave too, this time going to Wuzhou in what is now Jinhua, in western Zhejiang. The second poem translated below was probably written there, where he spent another three years or so living in the rocky mountains.

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Wei Zhuang passed the imperial examination in 894 and in 897 was assigned to serve as assistant to a court envoy sent by the court in an attempt to oversee a military man, Wang Jian, who had taken control of western Sichuan. Wei Zhuang somehow won the trust of Wang and in 901 became his confidential secretary (*zhangshuji* 掌书记). As Tang floated downstream in a flood of rebellions and wars, General Wang decided to establish his own little empire in the Sichuan Basin. Involved from the start in planning, documenting, and organizing the ceremonies and rituals by which Wang attempted to legitimize his regime, Wei Zhuang was soon promoted to the powerful role of acting prime minister. He died in the eighth month of the lunar calendar in 910.

《题吉润卢拾遗庄》（《全唐诗》卷 696）

主人西游去不归，满溪春雨长春微。
怪来马上诗情好，印破青山白鹭飞。

**Written on the Wall of Mr. Lu's
Farm House on Creek Ji**

The owner travels west and will not return,
leaving the creek to overgrown wild
vetches.
Spring rains fill it to the brim.

On horseback I'm overwhelmed by poetic
inspiration.
I see egrets in flight – white prints on blue
mountain walls.

《虎迹》（《全唐诗》卷 700）

白额频频夜到门，水边踪迹渐成群。我今避世栖岩穴，岩穴如何又见君。

Tiger Tracks

Beasts with white patterns on their foreheads
visit me again and again during the night.
They gradually appear in families
on the water-margin where I live –
in a cave now to avoid the violent world.

Why do I see you here by my cave door?

Wang Renyu 王仁裕

According to the inscription on the memorial tablet buried in his tomb, Wang Renyu's ancestral home was Taiyuan, in what is now Shanxi Province (Chen Wenxin, ed., *Zhongguo Wenxue Biannianshi*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, Vol. 6, p. 595). The clan then moved to Tianshui, now in Gansu Province, where Wang Renyu was born in 880. Like Wei Yingwu and Wen Tingyun, Wang Renyu was a "bad boy," who enjoyed betting on horses and dogs and shooting cross-bows, but never liked school. He was, however, exceptionally talented. At the age of twenty-five, he finally began to focus on his education and within three years had become well-known in eastern Gansu for his literary skills. With this start, he eventually rose into officialdom, and also became a prolific writer, especially in poetry and stories.

At the beginning of the tenth century, the Tang Empire had splintered into several smaller kingdoms and regimes, the northwestern area where Wang Renyu lived still held by Tang loyalists. The general who had taken control of the region liked Wang's literary talent and appointed the poet to be his assistant. Though he had reached the age of thirty-two, Wang Renyu still had something of the dare-devil in him. He hiked Mount Maijishan, famous for the many Buddhist shrines carved in niches high up on cliffs near Tianshui. While there, he climbed a dangerous ladder up to the highest shrine, and looking at the land below him, expressed a feeling that he must leave his name "at the edge of heaven" (quoted in Chen Wenxin, ed., *Zhongguo Wenxue Biannianshi*. Changsha, Hunan People's Press, 2006, Vol. 6, p. 470). As the general's assistant, he was then sent to Sichuan, where a rival warlord had declared himself emperor of a new dynasty, the Shu. Wang now transferred his loyalty to this new group, and became a favorite of the Shu heir, who became emperor after his father died. Shu, however, did not last long: Wang together with the new "emperor" were both soon captured by the army of his old overlord, the general who had sent him down to Sichuan in the first place.

In captivity Wang Renyu was sent to Luoyang, the former eastern capital of Tang. The two poems translated below were probably written on his way there. In Luoyang, in 934, he wrote a collection of stories about the peak years of the Tang Empire. Yet wars were still raging in central China, and in 948 Luoyang was seized by the emperor of the Later Han Dynasty (947-951), a Turk. Wang Renyu now became a high official in the third post-Tang regime he had served. As the vice-minister of an important ministry, he had responsibility for conducting examinations in order to find talent for Later Han. He was quite successful in this business, for his favorite student, Wang Pu, became the prime minister of the short-lived regime, which would collapse in 951. Wang Renyu lasted five years longer, dying in 956.

《放猿》（《全唐诗》卷 736）

放尔丁宁复故林，旧来行处好追寻。
月明巫峡堪怜静，路隔巴山莫厌深。
栖宿免劳青嶂梦，跻攀应惬白云心。
三秋果熟松梢健，任抱高枝彻晓吟。

Releasing A Monkey

I let you go now, go back to your home
forest.
Again and again I bid you farewell –

go find and follow your old tracks.
Along the gorges of Yangtze

among the Wu Mountains
enjoy your life with your family,

quiet in brilliant moonshine.
Never mind the deep mountains –

climb and leap and play
to satisfy your heart in white clouds.

Sleep and rest, avoiding the dream
of those green mountain barriers.

When pine seeds are ripe in late fall,
hold tight to the top branches.

Howl and chant like your poet friend,
from dawn to evening, from evening to
dawn.

《遇放猿再作》（《全唐诗》卷 736）

蟠冢祠前汉水滨，饮猿连臂下嶙峋。
渐来子细窥行客，认得依稀是野宾。
月宿纵劳羁绁梦，松餐非复稻粱身。
数声肠断和云叫，识是前时旧主人。

Running into the Monkey I Released

By the altar, over the graveyard,
on the bank of River Han,
a file of monkeys, hand in hand,
form a ladder, hanging from the craggy
cliff,
taking turns to quench their thirst.

One walks shyly towards the traveler,
closer and closer, to take a good look.

I think I recognize you too –
my old friend and wild guest?

Have you thought of me in your dreams,
as I've thought of you in moon-lit night?

You've returned to your diet of pine seeds
your spirit immortal and free.

You no longer need the human food I fed
you.
I remain a slave of rice and sorghum they
pay me.

Your three howls clear the clouds and
touch
my heart. Are you telling me that you do
recognize me, your former host and friend?

Xue Tao 薛涛

Xue Tao is the only woman poet in this collection. She was born into a good family in Chang'an, in 770. Her father was a government official who went to Chengdu, Sichuan, in service of the empire. At the age of eight, Xue Tao started to write poetry and her name became known among her father's friends. Her father died in Chengdu, survived by his widow and daughter. No documentation survives regarding her mother, but it's reasonable to assume that she died shortly after the death of her husband, for Xue Tao was soon sold into prostitution, where she specialized in music and lyrics. At the age of sixteen, she became the favorite of the general in charge of the whole Sichuan area. She lived in the neighborhood where the "Poet Saint" Du Fu (Tu Fu) used to live, by Wanli (Ten-Thousand Mile) Bridge, over Wanhua (Flower Washing) Creek. She planted bulrushes and rhododendrons in her yard and along the creek. She had long-lasting friendship with several male poets of her time, including Yuan Zhen, Wang Jian, and Zheng Gu.

When Wu Yuanheng became the prime minister of the empire in 807, he recommended that the emperor appoint Xue Tao to be one of the editors for the imperial academy. Although she was the only woman and only prostitute in Chinese history who had that title, many prostitutes who conducted their business near military camps were called "female editors" after Xue Tao died in 832.

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《池上双鸟》（《全唐诗》卷 803）

双栖绿池上，朝暮共飞还。
更忆将雏日，同心莲叶间。

A Pair of Water Fowl on the Pond

A couple makes a home on the green pond.
They fly away in the morning and return
together at night. They'll remember the happy days
raising ducklings beneath lotus leaves.
Two birds, they share one heart.

《鸳鸯草》（《全唐诗》卷 803）

绿英满香砌，两两鸳鸯小。
但娱春日长，不管秋风早。

Wood-Duck Grass*

Fragrant, green, all over the stone steps,
wood-duck grasses send out tiny buds in pairs,
like lovely ducklings that play
all the long spring day.

They never mind autumn winds
that come to put their games to an early end.

* The Chinese call honeysuckle “wood-duck grass” because, like wood ducks, the petals of honeysuckle, yellow and white, or as the Chinese say, gold and silver, grow in pairs.

Guanxiu 贯休

Guanxiu was a Buddhist monk. His family name was Jiang, and he was born in 832, in Denggao Lane, Lanxi County, in what is now western Zhejiang Province, south of the Yangtze and about two hundred kilometers from the coast of the East China Sea. He was converted to monastic life at the age of seven, in He'an Temple, in Lanxi and with a fellow monk of his age learned to write poetry at fifteen. After undergoing full ordination at the age of twenty, he went into a ten-year retreat in the Monastery of Mount Wuxie. In the early 860s he left the monastery and traveled west to Hongzhou, now the Nanchang area in Jiangxi Province, to continue his Buddhist study and practice in the Zhongling Mountains. He apparently stayed there for decades. In the late 880s, the general controlling that area became aware of him, and developed a liking for his poetry and calligraphy, while for his part Guanxiu became friends with a member of the general's staff – the poet Wu Rong, who had been demoted to serve in the area. It was from Guanxiu that Wu Rong learned the Zen attitude towards frustrations in life and how to work himself out of depression. The two became such good friends that, according to Wu Rong, during the one and a half years Wu Rong spent in Hongzhou (from the summer of 895 to the winter of 896), they would miss each other if three days went by in which they didn't meet and talk (see Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 431). But Guanxiu's relationship with the general himself came to a crisis when the general asked him for calligraphy instructions. Guanxiu took offence: how can the general so casually ask for the most serious artistic commitment? His response shocked the general, who exiled him to the unhealthy mountains in what is now Guizhou Province.

After that, Guanxiu went back east to Hangzhou, near his hometown, and settled in the famous Lingyin Temple. His temper and outspoken attitude, however, soon offended another warlord and he had to go west again, to Sichuan where he would bless yet another powerful general with his honesty. Though offended, this military man was able to put up with the criticism and in fact built Longhua Temple for the monk. Guanxiu died there at the age of 82, in the year 912.

《村行遇猎》（《全唐诗》卷 826）

猎师纷纷走榛莽，女亦相随把弓矢。
南北东西尽杀心，断烧残云在围里。
鹞拂荒田兔成血，竿打黄茅雉惊起。
伤嗟个辈亦是人，一生将此关身己。
我闻天地之大德曰生，
又闻万事皆天意，
何遣此人又如此。
犹更愿天公一丈雪，
深山麋鹿尽冻死。

Running into Hunters While Passing by a Village

The hunters comb the woods in larger and smaller groups,
followed by their women holding arrows and bows.

The killing mood comes from the south, the north, the east and west,
competing with the lingering fire on the smoky plain.

Their falcons sweep over the burning fields
with bleeding hares in claws. They whip long
bamboo sticks to scare the pheasants from yellow weeds
until the birds in fear dash up into the sky.

I can't help wondering what life is supposed to mean,
why these people take up such a trade.

I've heard the greatest virtue is to live and let live.
Everything that happens happens by heaven's will.

Then why does heaven make these men?

Why doesn't heaven send a blizzard in June
and freeze to death the elk and deer in ten feet of snow?

《田家作》（《全唐诗》卷 826）

田家老翁无可作，昼甑蒸梨香漠漠。
 只向阶前曝背眠，赤桑大叶时时落。
 古木侵门桃竹密，仓囤峨峨欲遮日。
 自云孙子解耕耘，四五年来腹多实。
 我闻此语心自悲，世上悠悠岂得知，
 稼而不穡徒尔为。

The Activities of an Old Peasant

The old peasant doesn't have much to do –
 he places sliced pears in a bottle to steam.

While the fragrance fills up the village,
 mulberry leaves, large and red, fall to ground.

He dozes off on stairs as the sun warms his back
 and lulls him into a mid-day nap.

The trees are old and thick – bamboo and peaches side by side,
 their shades darker than those of the tall silos.

He tells me that since his grandchildren became
 skilled farmers, he's eaten well for five long years.

On hearing his story my heart begins to ache.

It's a simple truth known to the world that none
 can be happy if they can't harvest what they plant.

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《道情偈》（《全唐诗》卷 828）

草木亦有性，与我将不别。
 我若似草木，成道无时节。
 世人不会道，向道却嗔道。
 伤嗟此辈人，宝山不得宝。

A Short Poem on Dao

Grasses and trees have their own nature
 which is no different from that of mine.

Yet if I behave like grasses and trees,
 I'll never find myself approaching the
 Dao.

People of this world say they want to
 achieve it,
 but they're unwilling to act as the Dao
 dictates.

I pity these people who find no treasure
 although they live in a grand treasure
 house.

《寄僧野和尚》（《全唐诗》卷 829）

鸟外更谁亲，诸峰即四邻。
白头寒枕石，青衲烂无尘。
橡栗堆行径，猿猴绕定身。
恍然重结社，愿作扫坛人。

Sent to Master Wild, a Monk

The surrounding peaks – your closest
neighbors.
The nesting birds – your dearest relatives.

Your white head finds a pillow on a cool
rock.
Your black gown, despite the patches, is
forever clean.

You find plenty of food in piles of acorns,
the chestnuts fall by the foot trail.

Apes and monkeys sit around you as you
sit
in profound meditation.

If you re-open your gate and start a Zen
commune,
I'd volunteer to be the sweeper of your
altar.

《湖头别墅三首 其一》
（《全唐诗》卷 832）

梨栗鸟啾啾，
高歌若自由。
人谁知此意，
旧业在湖头。
饥鼠掀菱壳，
新蝉避栗皱。
不知江海上，
戈甲几时休。

On the Lake House

In the leaves of pear and
chestnut trees
birds, high pitched, twitter
happy and free.

The man who understands
their songs lives
in an old house on the far end
of the lake.

Hungry mice in his pantry
nibble at water caltrop.
New cicadas hide in cracks
of the chestnut trunk.

He wonders when the wars
would finally stop
in the human world beyond
rivers and seas.

《新猿》

（《全唐诗》卷 833）

寻常看不见，
花落树多苔。
忽向高枝发，
又从何处来。
风清声更揭，
月苦意弥哀。
多少求名者，
年年被尔催。

The New Monkey

Finally I see you
after the flowers fall
and mosses cover the tree
trunk.

Suddenly you start howling
on the high branch,
make me wonder where you
come from.

The pure wind sends your
voice high.
It sounds more chilling in the
dim moonlight.

How many fame-pursuers, I
wonder, feel
depressed by your voice year
after year.

Qiji 齐己

Qiji was a Buddhist monk, his name before conversion Hu Desheng. He came originally from the Tongqing Temple in the Dawei Mountains in Hunan. This was a large temple and major landowner, which had more than a thousand tenant peasants who rented land from the temple. One of these tenants was Hu Desheng's father, and at the age of seven Hu Desheng himself started herding cows and buffalos for the temple. An intelligent boy, he was a quick learner, with remarkable language skills. He started writing poetry while sitting on the back of buffalos as he herded them along. His talent was soon discovered by the Tongqing monks, who persuaded his parents to allow him to join the temple as a *shami* – a student monk. That was how the lad Hu Desheng became the monk Qiji.

Qiji soon became a well known poet, highly respected by the poets south of Dongting Lake. He traveled north partly to further stimulate his poetic imagination and partly to meet more poet friends. He started with the famous Yueyang Tower, where he thought he could get a view of the Dongting Lake he had read so much about. However, he climbed up the tower during the wintertime, to discover that at that time of the year the lake shrank down to be just a moderate extension of the Xiangjiang River, the river that flowed past his temple in the Dawei Mountains. I myself was worried about the lake when I read last winter that Dongting Lake had shrunk to one-third of its regular size. Qiji's experience of the same lake somehow sounds reassuring to me, for now I understand that the seasonal change of size has a history extending back long before construction of the notorious dam on the Three Gorges.

Qiji continued his trip to the capital city Chang'an, and met Zheng Gu (included in this selection). They became great friends, and Qiji even respected Zheng Gu as a teacher. From there he hiked the mountains around the capital, the Zhongnan Mountains, Mount Huashan, and the Zhongtiao Mountains on the northern bank of the Yellow River. In later time, he made several more trips of this sort to Zhejiang and Jiangxi, eventually settling in western Hunan, in the Daolin Temple.

He died in 943 in Jingzhou, now Hubei Province.

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《新栽松》（《全唐诗》卷 838）

野僧教种法，冉冉出蓬蒿。
百岁催人老，千年待尔高。
静宜兼竹石，幽合近猿猱。
他日成阴后，秋风吹海涛。

Planting a Pine Sapling

A wild monk taught me how to plant.
I help the sapling grow higher than the
bushes.

Every man grows old within a hundred
years.
A thousand years are just enough for
pines to reach their prime.

Quiet is the pine, suitable companion of
bamboo and rock.
Deep is its shade, shelter for monkeys and
apes.

Looking at the sapling I hear tidal waves
made by giant branches hundreds of
autumns to come.

《放鹭鸶》（《全唐诗》卷 838）

洁白虽堪爱，腥膻不那何。
到头从所欲，还汝旧沧波。

Releasing a Snowy Egret

I love your fine feathers, white and pure.
You eye the slimy eels.
In the end I have to let you follow
your own will and give you back
to the ripples of your native lake.

《小松》（《全唐诗》卷 840）

发地才过膝，蟠根已有灵。
严霜百草白，深院一林青。
后夜萧骚动，空阶蟋蟀听。
谁于千岁外，吟绕老龙形。

The Pine Sapling

Its tiny trunk barely above my knees,
its dragon-clawed roots already possess a
spirit.

In harsh frost all plants turn yellow or
white.
In my yard its greenness makes a small
forest.

Late at night the wind sighs through its
twigs,
to accompany the chirping crickets under
the stairs.

I try but fail to imagine a thousand years
from now –
who would be walking around the pine,
comparing its twisted trunk to an ancient
dragon?

《野鸭》（《全唐诗》卷 842）

野鸭殊家鸭，离群忽远飞。
 长生缘甚瘦，近死为伤肥。
 江海游空阔，池塘啄细微。
 红兰白苹渚，春暖刷毛衣。

Wild Mallards

The mallards on my pond left without
 bidding farewell to their cousin ducks.
 They're leaner but live longer than the ducks who stay,
 cooked for their tasty fat.

The mallards fly over expansive rivers and lakes,
 swim and dive in ponds and pools to search
 for tiny fish and shrimp. Among the white
 flowers of the duckweed in spring, they play
 and brush their feathers fresh and green.

《题画鹭鸶兼简孙郎中》
 （《全唐诗》卷 844）

曾向沧江看不真，却因图画见精神。
 何妨金粉资高格，不用丹青点此身。
 蒲叶岸长堪映带，荻花丛晚好相亲。
 思量画得胜笼得，野性由来不恋人。

**Written on a Painting of Egrets
 As a Letter to Director Sun**

I used to see them on broad rivers
 but never observed them so close.

Today in this wonderful painting I see
 the true spirit of water fowl.

Never use golden color to add value to
 characters,
 nor artificial paint to give beauty to their
 feather.

The bulrush has grown long on banks –
 what a pleasant screen!

The catkins glow bright in the evening –
 such a wonderful place to be close.

Thinking carefully I realize
 that for a closer look at the birds
 I prefer the painting to the cage.

By nature wild birds don't like
 to be too close to men.

《辞主人绝句四首。放猿》
(《全唐诗》卷 846)

堪忆春云十二峰，野桃山杏摘香红。
王孙可念愁金锁，从放断肠明月中。

The Monkey's Farewell to the Master

So worthy of my remembrance, ah, the twelve peaks
behind the clouds in spring, along the Wu Gorges.
Peaches and apricots ready for picking – sweet, red, wild.

Looking at the gold chain Your Highness may feel sad.
In moonlight you let me go
despite your broken heart.

《辞主人绝句四首。放鹦鹉》
(《全唐诗》卷 846)

陇西苍鹯结巢高，本为无人识翠毛。
今日笼中强言语，乞归天外啄含桃。

A Parrot's Plea to Its Master

My home was the nest on the highest tree
on the highest peak farthest west,
so far that no one notice my colorful coat.

Now I'm forced to talk the human tongue –
I tell you this: please be kind and let me go
to the other side of heaven to peck on a few peaches.

Horse in Human Language 马作人语

This poem was supposedly written in the ninth century, while the *Complete Tang Poems* (*Quan Tang Shi* 全唐诗) was compiled in 1707. What impresses me most is that over a millennium, no Chinese reader or poet ever challenged the idea that a horse could compose a poem in human language. I just wonder what my western colleagues, especially the ecocritics would say about this small wonder of literary production.

The story was allegedly about Lu Yan 路岩, a Tang scholar/bureaucrat who became a prime minister at the age of thirty-six, but was demoted to Xinzhou 新州 (in what is now Xinxing County, Guangdong Province) in the year 873. According to *Beimengsuoyan* 北梦琐言 by Sun Guangxian 孙光宪 (901-968), on the road to demotion in Xinzhou, when passing Jiangling in what is now southern Hubei Province, Lu Yan's horse suddenly spoke up in human language and uttered the lines in the form of a short lyric. The poem turned out to be prophesy: soon after Lu Yan arrived at his demoted office, he was further demoted to Hainan Island, and then was offered the "graceful" opportunity to commit suicide. Sun Guangxian, the collector of this horse story, didn't believe that the horse could predict future disasters, though he never questioned that the horse did utter those words. (See *Taiping Guang Ji* 太平广记. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1994, p. 1043.) Thus, what the horse said is an achievement in Chinese poetry rather than in Chinese mythology.

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《马作人语》（《全唐诗》卷 867）

芦荻花，此花开后路无家。

A Poem Composed by a Horse in Human Language

Catkins – blooming white flowers.
After these flowers,
No home but the road.

仲
昭



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