

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 over-populated 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, tucked 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，蒸藜炊黍饷东菑。
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.

雀噪荒村，鸡鸣空馆。
还复幽独，重欷累叹。

《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。

**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，踯足空夷犹。

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 Wuqian 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，召令习鼓鞞。
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。
饔子左右挥双刀，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.

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《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。

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《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?