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Meng Jiao 孟郊

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

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

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

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

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

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

《游终南山》（《全唐诗》卷 375）

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

Hiking the Zhongnan Mountains

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

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

《邀花伴（自注，时在朔方）》
（《全唐诗》卷 375）

边地春不足，十里见一花。
及时须遨游，日暮饶风沙。

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

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

you have to walk ten miles
before you see a single bloom.

Let's start early and travel far
for dusty storms rise in the desert dusk

《春雨后》（《全唐诗》卷 380）

昨夜一霎雨，天意苏群物。
何物最先知，虚庭草争出。

After the First Rain in Spring

It rained last night,
a brief moment
of heaven's will
to wake up all things.

Who knows the will of heaven first?
In my empty yard,
weeds push each other,
standing up through dirt.

《山老吟》（《全唐诗》卷 372）

不行山下地，唯种山上田。
腰斧斫旅松，手瓢汲家泉。
讵知文字力，莫记日月迁。
蟠木为我身，始得全天年。

**A Song Chanted by an
Old Mountain Man**

I plant the terrace plots
up on the mountain top
I never walk the road
in valleys of towns

I pull the ax from my belt
to chop off pine twigs
use my hand-cut gourd
to fetch water from springs

I ignore the power of words
be they written or spoken
nor ever bothered to record
the passing days or moons

Like a twisted and knotted tree
I have no use for the Greats
They leave me alone to complete
my natural life in hills.

《小隐吟》（《全唐诗》卷 372）

我饮不在醉，我欢长寂然。
酌溪四五盏，听弹两三弦。
炼性静栖白，洗情深寄玄。
号怒路傍子，贪败不贪全。

A Humble Hermit's Song

I drink but never get drunk –
four or five cups of cold spring.
I make merry – but quietly –
a harmonious tune on strings.

To temper my natural character
I rest peaceably among the clouds.
To cleanse my emotions and desires
I meditate on Dao in depth.

Unlike other scholars who fall
in pursuit of power and fame
easy prey to greed and passion
I strive to become whole.

Chang Jian 常建

Not only do we not know the birth or death dates of Chang Jian, but from the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368) his homeland was mistakenly identified as Chang'an, the capital city of Tang (Xin Wenfang, *Tang Caizi Zhuan*. Shanghai, the Press of Classical Literature, 1957, p. 22). This misinformation was corrected with excavation of a tombstone in Hebei Province in August 2006, on which was an inscription stating that Chang Jian and his clan lived in Xingtai, Hebei Province for generations (http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_57036a6b0100fbu7.html). Chang Jian passed the imperial examination in 727, the same year as Wang Changling, a poet also included in this collection. Chang went on to work in the lower ranks of officialdom, serving for a few years as the sheriff of Xuyu County, now in Jiangsu Province. Since no poems Chang has left describe anything about the An-Shi Rebellions, it's reasonable to assume that he died before 755, the year the rebellions began.

Poshan Monastery 破山寺, originally known as Xingfu Monastery, was built during the Southern Qi Dynasty (479–502). Its name was changed to Poshan during the reign of Emperor Taizong (626–649). Chang Jian's poem made the temple famous, and Mind-Cleansing Tarn 空心潭 is named from a line from the poem. The place is now a tourist hotspot, mostly owing to Chang Jian's poetic genius.

Passing the examination in the same year, Chang Jian and Wang Changling became life-long friends. It's probable that after retiring from his sheriff post, Chang Jian traveled northwest along the Yangtze River for about a hundred and fifty kilometers to visit the cottage where Wang Changling had lived in seclusion before he finally passed the examination at the age of thirty-seven. But when Chang Jian visited that cottage, Wang was no longer a hermit; he was serving at a low rank similar to that of Chang. That's probably why, determined to live in seclusion, Chang Jian implicitly invited his friend Wang Changling to turn his back on officialdom as well and join him and the immortal cranes in the "West Mountain" in Ezhou, Hubei Province, about five hundred kilometers further west.

It seems that Chang Jian found the peaceful and leisurely lifestyle he had been looking for in the West Mountain. The poem of that title shows that he has merged his body with a small, leaf-like boat that helped connect him with the mighty stream, the long sky over the Yangtze, the egrets and geese on the sandbars, and the reeds and bulrushes along the banks.

In the last poem translated below, the Tang poet's experiment with returning to nature was going through its ultimate test. Kongling Mountain, also known as Kongling Gorge or Kongling Bluff, is located sixty kilometers southwest of Xiangtan County seat and therefore about five hundred kilometers southwest of the West Mountain where Chang Jian lived in reclusion. The far south is the limit of Chang Jian's environmental imagination and, when confronted with truly wild and unfamiliar peoples, the advocate of nature was frightened and resorted to ethnocentrism in order to cope with the unknown. Turning his back on the wild southwest he walked homeward, staff in hand. Though Chang Jian's limitations were shared by some of the Tang poets who chose nature as an alternative to the empire, not all were as narrow-minded. The poet Du Fu saw the same place in a different light. In his poem "Mooring near the Banks at Kongling," Du Fu admired the way the setting sun highlights the rugged cliffs, realizing that the green season of spring has no selfishness, for the brilliant sun lights up the remote corner of the central kingdom as it does elsewhere (Du Fu, "Mooring near the Banks at Kongling," *Quan Tang Shi*. Vol 223, poem# 24; paraphrase mine).

《题破山寺后禅院》（《全唐诗》卷 144）

清晨入古寺，初日照高林。
竹径通幽处，禅房花木深。
山光悦鸟性，潭影空人心。
万籁此都寂，但余钟磬音。

Written on the Wall of
Poshan Monastery

In early morning when sun rays
gild the top of trees,
I walk into this ancient temple.
The bamboo-lined path leads me deep
into the grove
where flowers and leaves hide the simple
Zen room.

The mountain light pleases the birds.
Reflections in the tarn
empty my mind and heart.

Thousands of trees and bamboo stand in
silence,
letting me hear bell chimes echo in the
valley.

《宿王昌龄隐居》（《全唐诗》卷 144）

清溪深不测，隐处唯孤云。
松际露微月，清光犹为君。
茅亭宿花影，药院滋苔纹。
余亦谢时去，西山鸾鹤群。

Spending A Night in the Old Cottage Where My Friend
Wang Changling Used to Live in Seclusion

The creek, pure in its unknown depth,
led me far into the mountains to your old cottage,
where the only resident now is a lingering cloud.

Through pine needles, the moon cast its pure beams on the house.
The flowers you planted slept by the thatch-roofed pavilion.
Streaks of moss grew across the herbal garden.

I too have bade goodbye to the impetuous world
to befriend cranes and herons in mountains of the west.

《西山》（《全唐诗》卷144）

一身为轻舟，落日西山际。
常随去帆影，远接长天势。
物象归馀清，林峦分夕丽。
亭亭碧流暗，日入孤霞继。
渚日远阴映，湖云尚明霁。
林昏楚色来，岸远荆门闭。
至夜转清迥，萧萧北风厉。
沙边雁鹭泊，宿处蒹葭蔽。
圆月逗前浦，孤琴又摇曳。
泠然夜遂深，白露沾人袂。

The West Mountain

My body unites as one with the tiny boat,
the sun merging with mountains in the west.
I follow the shadows of the flying sails
along the Long River* and the longer sky.
In the remaining hours the clear stream collects all scenes
along its banks, reflecting in sharp contrast
evening beauties of hills and trees.
Soon the sun falls lower, touching the bar of sand,
illuminating the clouds that linger over the lake.
When the woods become darker, showing the true
colors of south, they close the gate at the castle
that guards the river city on the bank.

The wind from the north swirls sharply in the night,
cleaning everything in the rotating sky.
On a sandbar geese and herons fall asleep,
sheltered by bulrushes and reeds.
I play my harp alone to the shining stream.
The moon dances on water to my beat.
We entertain each other all night through,
my coat moistened by the morning dew.

*In China, the Yangtze is better known as the Long River.

《空灵山应田叟》（《全唐诗》卷144）

湖南无村落，山舍多黄茆。
淳朴如太古，其人居鸟巢。
牧童唱巴歌，野老亦献嘲。
泊舟问溪口，言语皆哑咬。
土俗不尚农，岂暇论肥饶。
莫徭射禽兽，浮客烹鱼鲛。
余亦罾置人，获麋今尚苞。
敬君中国来，愿以充其庖。
日入闻虎斗，空山满咆哮。
怀人虽共安，异域终难交。
曳策背落日，江风鸣梢梢。

**In Response to Old Man Tian at
Kongling Mountain**

South of Dongting Lake
villages are unknown to local tribes.
They live in houses of yellow thatch
perched on tree-tops like nests of birds.
People are honest and simple here
as they were in remotest antiquity.
Cow-herds would sing barbarian ballads.
Wild elders would offer satirical songs.

I moor at the river-mouth and ask
for directions but I don't know
a word of their gibbering dialect.
Then I meet Old Man Tian who too
is from the Central Kingdom. He says
people here grow no crops
nor distinguish the fertile from the barren
land.

The Yao barbarians hunt for food,
the River Wanderers boil the fish.

He too is a hunter, better than any locals,
offers me an elk, kept fresh in dewy
leaves:

"I respect you," he says, "a man from the
Central Empire
and want to present the elk to you and
your beloved ones."

With gratitude I leave the old man, and
turn
my back to the setting sun. I hear tigers
roar in woods,
mountains echo the wild commotion.
With good faith I could live with people
here in peace,
but talking to barbarians is beyond my
scope.

I can cleanse my heart with clear water.
I can quench my hunger with wild herbs.
But I have to turn my back to the setting
sun
over this place, staff in hand against the
howling winds.

Zhang Ji 张籍

Zhang Ji was born in 766 in Suzhou City, now in Jiangsu Province, then moved with his family a hundred and eighty kilometers northwest to the town of Wu, in what is now the County of He (Harmony County), Anhui Province. He went to Shandong to study the classics and there he met twenty-year-old poet Wang Jian, who became his life-long friend. They would thereafter continue to send poems in support of each other, in good years and in bad. I don't think it was by mere coincidence that Zhang didn't take the imperial examination until the year 799, at the age of thirty-three, in the same year that Wang Jian left his mountain life and became a secretary in the military.

Zhang Ji was friendly with many other poets of his time. The famous "chilly" poet Meng Jiao finally passed the imperial examination at the age of forty-six in the year 797, and, as he traveled by the County of He he visited Zhang Ji in Zhang's river cottage by the Dock of Peach Blossoms (yet another allusion to the famous work of the fifth-century poet Tao Qian). There they wrote several poems and Meng Jiao later recommended Zhang Ji to the poet Han Yu. Zhang Ji would also become close friends with the famous younger poets Bai Juyi (Po Juyi) and Yuan Zhen. The Dock of Peach Blossoms thereby became a well-known literary gathering place. Hundreds of years later, in the Song Dynasty, He Zhu wrote a poem in remembrance of this poetic meeting. And more than a thousand years after Zhang Ji, the Qing Dynasty writer Xiao Mu wrote this about that literary place:

walking out of the Grand West Gate of the county seat, we followed the stream for about two *li* (a *li* being about a third of a mile) and crossed a large bridge, which was called Peach Blossom Bridge. Walking scores of steps we came to open land of an acre or two, where peaches came into full bloom and hills rolled higher up. Next to the bridge lay the ruins of the Dock of Peach Blossoms. . . . I tried to envision poets Zhang Ji and Meng Jiao, their smiling faces and their wine glasses, yet couldn't get a clear picture (quoted in Luo Liantian, *Tangdai Shi Wen Liu Jia Nianpu*, Taipei, 1986, p. 167. Translation mine).

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Zhang Ji was known as a realist and preferred the poetic form of ancient times to the more stylish *lüshi* 律诗 ("regulated verse") popular in the Tang. In his time, many poets celebrated the mountain man's life, exploiting the structure of the Chinese character *xian* (仙 immortals, gods) which is made up by combining the radical (the significant element of a Chinese character) for mountain 山 and the radical for man 人: immortal gods live in the mountains and people go to the mountains to get away from the sordid reality of the human world to achieve a more fulfilling life. In contrast to his contemporaries, Zhang often dwelled on the harsh life of the working people, especially those who live in the less fertile, mountainous areas to avoid heavy taxation. As Zhang shows in this poem, taxes followed people wherever they went. Critics commended the seeming lack of transition between the main body of the poem and the final two lines, for the conspicuous absence effectively dramatizes the gap between the haves and the have-nots. It is interesting to notice that Henry David Thoreau celebrates a "natural" lifestyle by informing the reader that a part of his diet comes from berries and nuts; yet Zhang Ji's mountain man eats acorns not because he prefers the natural diet but because his meager harvest was taken away by an unjust government. More than twelve centuries ago, Zhang Ji was already asking a question that now concerns twenty-first century environmentalists: can we really talk about environmental harmony without addressing the issues of social justice? In the next poem, Zhang Ji continues this theme by de-romanticizing the scholar's fantasy of the pastoral life of a cowherd boy.

Zhang Ji's family remained in their homeland for generations; after his death, they stopped entering officialdom and became full-time farmers until his great-grandson five generations down, who again took the examination and became a scholar-official. His great-grandson seven generations after him, Zhang Xiaoxiang, became a famous poet in the Song Dynasty.

《白鼃鸣》（《全唐诗》卷 29）

天欲雨，有东风，南溪白鼃鸣窟中。
六月人家井无水，夜闻白鼃人尽起。

When White Alligators Bellow

No family in June of this year
has a well that's not gone dry.

the white alligators in muddy holes
on the banks of the South Creek.

People get up in mid-night
on hearing loud and deep bellows –

Ah, relief!
The east wind is stirring.
The rains are coming.

《野老歌（一作山农词）》
（《全唐诗》382）

老农家贫在山住，耕种山田三四亩。
苗疏税多不得食，输入官仓化为土。
岁暮锄犁傍空室，呼儿登山收橡实。
西江贾客珠百斛，船中养犬长食肉。

A Mountain Peasant's Song

An old peasant with a poor family
I live on the rocky terrace
cultivating my half-acre plot.

I pay taxes upon taxes with grain
leaving little for myself and mine.
They dump my grain into the Imperial
Silos
to rot away like dirt.

Late in the year, by my empty house,
I still till my meager plot,
my sons sent to the mountain top
to collect acorns and nuts.

They say that the merchants on the West
River
trade jewels by the bushel.
They feed their dogs in the boat
with choicest meat all year round.

《牧童词》（《全唐诗》卷 382）

远牧牛，绕村四面禾黍稠。
陂中饥鸟啄牛背，令我不得戏垅头。
入陂草多牛散行，白犊时向芦中鸣。
隔堤吹叶应同伴，还鼓长鞭三四声。
牛牛食草莫相触，官家截尔头上角。

An Ox-herd's Song

To herd the oxen I walk many miles
away from fields around the village
where crops are growing thick and well.

At the lakeside hungry crows land on the
back
of my lead ox to peck at the spine –
impossible for me to play on the field
ridge.

I shoo the birds away to let
oxen disperse. They disappear
in the tall reeds on the marsh.

I know where they are
Listening to the pale calves moo.

Boys on the other side of the lake
blow shrilly on reed leaves,
I respond with three cracks of my whip,
holler with all my might –

Oxen and calves behave yourselves.
Make sure you graze the tender grass.
I will tolerate no fight among you beasts.
If you push each other with your horns
The Emperor's men will catch you and
saw them off.

《惜花》（《全唐诗》卷 386）

山中春已晚，处处见花稀。
明日来应尽，林间宿不归。

Love of Flowers

The beginning of spring is already late
spring.
It always is in mountains this deep.
Late spring flowers are always sparse,
especially so in mountains this deep.

I don't want to come again in another day
to find petals scattered on the ground.
I camp right here among the trees
instead of going home for a night of sleep.

《山中酬人》（《全唐诗》卷 386）

山中日暖春鸠鸣，逐水看花任意行。
向晚归来石窗下，菖蒲叶上见题名。

Sent from the Mountain

Deep in the mountains
turtledoves coo in warm sunshine.
I view flowers along the river
wherever my fancy guides my feet.

Late in the evening
I finally get home, pleasantly surprised
to see your name on a bulrush leaf,*
attached to my stone window sill.

* Zhang Ji believes that bulrush has twelve joints in every inch of its stem, and the stems and leaves are longevity foods that keep a person's face spotless and hair black. See Zhang Ji, poem # 61, volume 382 in *Quan Tang Shi (The Complete Tang Poems)*.

《山禽》（《全唐诗》卷 386）

山禽毛如白练带，栖我庭前栗树枝。猕猴半夜来取栗，一双中林向月飞。

White Pheasants

A pair of mountain birds,
feathers whiter than a satin ribbon,
have made a home in the branches
of the chestnut tree in my yard.

At midnight the rhesus monkeys come
to fetch their dinner from my trees.

They frighten the couple in their sleep –
the pheasants whirl out of the twigs
into the silver moon.

Wang Jian 王建

Wang Jian is an interesting anomaly among the Tang poets. Born in 766 into a clan that had been declining both in power and in number, he had no interest in joining the officialdom and held a general contempt for those who spent long years preparing for the imperial examinations in order to acquire a position in the government. In the year 783, a general in the army rebelled and took Chang'an. Just seventeen, Wang Jian now left his home in the fertile Guanzhong plains surrounding the capital and went east to Confucius' homeland in Lu, now part of Shandong Province, to study with masters of the Chinese Classics. There, three years later, he met the young poet Zhang Ji, who "followed him around on Mount Que and along the River Zhang" in what is now Hebei Province (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 385, Poem #25. Translation mine). Zhang became his life-long friend, sympathetic with both his poetic pursuit and his critical worldview. After about five years of study and travel, Wang Jian decided to search for an alternative to worldly pursuits, and for the decade between 789 and 799 in the mountains around the River Zhang he experimented with Daoist ways of achieving immortality through a disciplined life and a diet taken from legend. When a friend and fellow practitioner left the mountain to take the examination in the capital city, he "burned the thatched hut" they had shared and declared that he never again wanted to see that man, who, he believed, had betrayed their ideals (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 297, Poem #22. Translation mine). It was during these years in the mountains that he wrote the first and second poems translated below. Unfortunately, at the end of his ten-year experiment, he ran out of money to support his life in voluntary poverty, and had to serve as a military secretary on the northern frontier so as to feed himself.

A couple of years after he joined the military, in 801, he moved to the far south, crossing the notorious Grand Yu Ridge to serve in the military staff there. On his way to Grand Yu Ridge, he stopped by Jingzhou on the mid-reach of the Yangtze River and wrote many poems reflecting pleasant sceneries on the southern bank of the mighty river, including the third poem translated below..

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But Wang Jian's poetic talent caught the attention of Hong Zheng, a marshal in charge of the northern frontier who happened to be a moderately talented poet himself, and invited Wang Jian back to the north. Wang was grateful for this opportunity to leave the "barbaric south" and willing to settle for the rest of his life on the bank of River Zhang in central China, where he and his friend Zhang Ji had spent their best years together. Ironically, at this moment Hong Zheng and another important official, Pei Du, recommended him to the emperor and he was promoted to the office of a county magistrate near the capital where Hot-Spring Palace was located. It was a lower-rank but important position from which he climbed up the official ladder and eventually ended up in a upper-middle rank position of *Shanzhou Sima*, the chief of staff for a general who guarded the key pass between the East Capital, Luoyang, and the West Capital, Chang-an. Wang retired from that position to his home area on the Guanzhong plains and wrote, among other things, *Thirteen Poems about My New House on the Terrace*.

I find it amusing to contemplate the limited power of voluntary poverty, and how the non-conforming Wang Jian was forced by what Thoreau called the "necessities of life" to give up his ideals and in the end join with the bureaucrats. But considering the circumstances under which he had left his home in Guanzhong, one may easily understand his disappointment with officialdom and its lack of ability to protect people and their homes. Could this be the reason why Wang Jian refused to take examinations but was willing to serve in the military?

《雨过山村》（《全唐诗》卷 301）

雨里鸡鸣一两家，竹溪村路板桥斜。
妇姑相唤浴蚕去，闲看中庭栀子花。

Passing a Mountain Village in Rain

Behind the bamboo grove,
across the plank bridge,
at the end of the mountain path –
cocks crow to reveal
a handful of houses in misty rain.

Girls, sisters-in-law, holler back and forth
to start on the road to silkworms selection,
leaving the jasmine blossoms
to the empty courtyard.

《山居》（《全唐诗》卷 299）

屋在瀑泉西，茅檐下有溪。
闭门留野鹿，分食养山鸡。
桂熟长收子，兰生不作畦。
初开洞中路，深处转松梯。

Mountain Dwelling

My hut is to the west of the waterfall.
A creek meanders under my thatched eaves.

I close the gate to keep in my yard
elk and deer, my neighbors, my guests.

I open my kitchen and share my meals
with ruffed mountain grouses.

I gather laurel blossoms when they're full,
let the orchids grow in their own wild patterns.

I open a path leading to the cave of immortality –
to go farther from there I build
stone steps around ancient pines.

《饭僧》（《全唐诗》卷 199）

别屋炊香饭，薰辛不入家。
温泉调葛面，净手摘藤花。
蒲鲊除青叶，芹齏带紫芽。
愿师常伴食，消气有姜茶。

Offering a Meal to a Buddhist Monk

I wash my hands extra clean to pick
for you tender blossoms of wisteria,
mix them with wheat flour,
adding warm spring water.

Then I make pancakes in a shed outside –
no smoke would come into the house
where I offer the meal to you with care.

I wrap the salted fish with bamboo leaves,
then take them out and pick the leaves off,
the fish's green, having absorbed the bamboo fragrance.

I cut from my garden celeries, chives
with a fresh, purple tint, toss them in a bowl,
offer the meal simple and clean.

After you eat, over a cup of ginger tea,
I beg of you to bless me more often
with your sage company.

《原上新居十三首 其一》

(《全唐诗》卷 299)

新占原头地，本无山可归。
荒藤生叶晚，老杏著花稀。
厨舍近泥灶，家人初饱薇。
弟兄今四散，何日更相依。

Thirteen Poems about My New House on the Terrace

No. 1

Unlike the ancient hermits
I have no mountain house
where I can return.

I claim a plot on the terrace
to build a humble cottage.

In wilderness vines
grow ever so slowly,
old plum trees have
few flowers on their twigs.

With terrace clay I build
an earthen fireplace.
It helps feed my family
with cooked herbs and roots.

My only remaining wish
is how my brothers,
scattered over the country,
would come here to live
with me.

We'll make a home on this land
in mutual dependence.

《其二》

一家榆柳新，四面远无邻。
人少愁闻病，庄孤幸得贫。
耕牛长愿饱，樵仆每怜勤。
终日忧衣食，何由脱此身。

**Thirteen Poems about My
New House on the Terrace**

No. 2

Surrounded by young
elms and willows,
my house stands without
any neighbors near or far.

My concerns grow
into sadness
when one of the few
family members falls ill.

To have this lone farm
to live in poverty
is my choice,
my good fortune.

My wish
is to be able to
feed the ox
until he's full.

My firewood servant
works hard
to keep the house
and my heart warm.

My worry
is how to feed and clothe
my family and those
who work for me.

In what ways can I
free my heart and mind
from the needs of
this body?

《小松》（全唐诗）卷 301）

小松初数尺，未有直生枝。
闲即傍边立，看多长却迟。

A Young Pine

A tiny sapling –
not three feet high –
grows not a single branch
straight.

I spend my leisure time
standing by its side.
I watch a lot.
It grows little.

《园果》（《全唐诗》卷 301）

雨中梨果病，每树无数个。
小儿出入看，一半鸟啄破。

Fruits in My Orchard

Incessant rains
make my pears
and apples sick.
No tree bears more
than a hand can count.

My young son examines
the trees going out,
re-examines them coming in.
Of the few sickly fruits
half are broken
by the pecking birds.

Yu Hu 于鹄

Yu Hu probably grew up in what is now eastern Hebei Province. It is unknown when he was born or when he died, but he wrote the bulk of his poetry between 766 and 804. In his early years he studied under a well-known scholar in Shandong Province, and Fan Ze was a fellow student. It seems that Yu Hu never took the imperial examination and therefore had no regular access to officialdom. However, his schoolmate Fan Ze later became a high ranking official – the head of an important government department – and was for a few years in charge of the fertile area of the mid-Yangtze. It was Fan Ze who invited Yu Hu to work in his staff, but when Fan was transferred to another strategically important area, Yu Hu didn't follow him to the new office, choosing instead to retire to semi-poverty in his mountain cottage between the Han and the Yangtze Rivers.

Yu Hu spent most his life living in the mountains of Hanyang, on the north bank of River Han. There he probably worked in the field himself at least on a part-time basis – thus his poetic familiarity with farm work. Yu lived near his contemporary poet Zhang Ji and they were well acquainted. Both wrote poems about a woman who did not eat food for years yet lived a healthy, if not physically strong, life. Perhaps because neither Zhang Ji nor Yu Hu was well off, they were fascinated by the possibility of being free of food. In Yu Hu's poem, however, he is resigned to the fact that a supernatural ability to live independent of food is something one is born with, or not. When Yu Hu died, Zhang Ji came to his tomb to bid him goodbye and wrote a poem, "Weeping for the Loss of Yu Hu," in which he tells Yu's family that when Zhang Ji began to write poetry, Yu Hu was the only poet who appreciated his effort and wrote poems in response to encourage him. According to this poem, when Yu Hu died farmers dropped their ploughs in the field and firewood in their kitchen to come to his funeral. According to Zhang Ji, the poet "feels the Grand Empire becomes suddenly poor because of the loss of such a free mind in the green mountains" (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 383, poem #10. Translation mine). With twenty-first-century hindsight, we can see that Yu Hu was able to keep his mind free because he didn't get himself too involved in the imperial ideology dominating the officialdom; after a brief period of service in the staff of an old friend, he left the official world to face what Thoreau called the essentials of life. The price Yu Hu paid was living on the brink of poverty for many years. His life and poetry reveal an amazing fact: people who live in or near poverty still love to share with their neighbors, be they humans, birds, or rhesus monkeys.

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《买山吟》（《全唐诗》卷 310）

买得幽山属汉阳，
槿篱疏处种桃榔。
唯有猕猴来往熟，
弄人抛果满书堂。

Purchasing a Mountain Lot

I bought a small hill in trees
on the northern bank of River Han.
I used wild rose bushes as a fence
planting sugar-palms in its gaps.

My visitors are few – they soon get too
familiar.
The rhesus monkeys tease my children,
throw fruits all over my hall of books.

《南谿书斋》（《全唐诗》卷 310）

茅屋往来久，山深不置门。
草生垂井口，花落拥篱根。
入院将雏鸟，寻萝抱子猿。
曾逢异人说，风景似桃源。

My Studio by the South Creek

I built a thatched hut a long time ago
in mountains so deep that it needs no door.
Around the well weeds grow rampant
like tassels dangling over the well bricks.
When flowers fall they cover the base of the fence
which offers no barrier for mother birds –
they lead their chicks into my yard for food.
Apes with their young climb up the cliff
along vines that crawl up the wall of my house.
A mysterious stranger once told me:
your hut resembles a house by Peach Blossom Creek.*

* For the legend of Peach Blossom Creek, please see the note to Wang Wei
and his poem of that title – drawing upon the fifth century Tao Qian –
included in this selection.

《种树》（《全唐诗》卷 310）

一树新栽益四邻，
野夫如到旧山春。
树成多是人先老，
垂白看他攀折人。

Planting a Tree

I plant a sapling and know it's something
good,
something neighbors share in the east and
west.
What a wild man like me would love to
have
is the sense of home my old hut used to
afford
in my mountain abode many springs ago.

I know that I'll be old before the tree is
grown.
I'd like to watch it when my hair turns
white,
watch my neighbors pick twigs from the
tree
to kindle the supper fire in their house.

Han Yu 韩愈

Han Yu (768–824) was born in Heyang, now Meng County, Henan Province, to a family distinguished for the high positions they had held in various dynasties in Chinese history. One of his early ancestors was a lord during the Western Han (202 BC–9 AD); his great-great-grandfather six generations before had been the chief officer in charge of a southern prefecture, a position usually held by a prince; when his father was in charge of Wuchang County, all the lower rank officers and local rich and powerful families stood in awe of their strict, just, and honest magistrate. As for Han Yu himself, in 801, in response to a severe drought around the capital, he made a plea to the emperor for a deduction of taxes, and thereby offended higher officials who took care that he was demoted to magistrate of Yangshan County in the southern “barbarian” regions of China. This demotion was actually an exile, as we see in a poem written to Han Yu by a friend and fellow official demoted to the same area, who in the poem describes his fear of even getting out of his bed in the official residence because of the snakes, not to mention going out the door into the often-deadly disease-laden humidity. In response to that poem, Han Yu wrote a poem-letter, which, when read in juxtaposition with his poem “Rocky Mountain,” reveals an ambivalence towards nature and court generally shared by scholars, poets, and officials of his time. But despite his unpleasant experience in the officialdom, he achieved amazing feats: when demoted to Chaozhou in the far south, he freed the slaves, founded schools, and built irrigation-drainage systems; in 822, he went without any guards to the headquarters of a general plotting a rebellion and convinced the agitated army to give up their plan. When he died, he was given the title Lord of Culture 文公.

Han Yu’s poetic form, considered “original” by his contemporaries but also somewhat “peculiar,” was especially influential to the poets of the next major dynasty, the Song (960–1279). The two poems selected here, however, were written in the well-established *jueju* 绝句 form, short lyrical poems of four lines with seven or five syllables in each line. The first one is a satire of Princess Taiping, the favorite daughter of Empress Wu Zetian and aunt to the crown prince who later became Emperor Xuanzong. Love of the outdoors is regarded in the Chinese cultural tradition as a noble and wise emotion, but Han sees a greed in the Princess’s love of the spring landscape, a desire to wall it off within her own private garden. Han Yu also loved nature, but in contrast to Taiping, found pleasure in experiencing rather than possessing it. As a busy official, he couldn’t always find time to go on excursions like the one that provided him with subject matter for his famous poem “Rocky Mountain.” And so he buried an earthen bowl in the ground to create a miniature lake. With a few frogs, fish, and lotus shoots in it, the bowl offered him a microcosm, containing plants, animals, insects, rains, and stars. For the twenty-first-century nine-to-five too busy to enjoy “grand nature,” Han Yu’s idea of the “small nature” could be a pleasant substitute, playing a similar role as did Thoreau’s hut and Leopold’s sandy farm.

《山石》（《全唐诗》卷338）

山石荦确行径微，黄昏到寺蝙蝠飞。
升堂坐阶新雨足，芭蕉叶大支子肥。
僧言古壁佛画好，以火来照所见稀。
铺床拂席置羹饭，疏粝亦足饱我饥。
夜深静卧百虫绝，清月出岭光入扉。
天明独去无道路，出入高下穷烟霏。
山红涧碧纷烂漫，时见松栢皆十围。
当流赤足蹋涧石，水声激激风吹衣。
人生如此自可乐，岂必局束为人鞿。
嗟哉吾党二三子，安得至老不更归。

Trip On A Rocky Mountain

Among the craggy rocks the narrow path
is hard to see. Following it with
stubornness
I finally arrive at the temple at dusk.
Bats begin to dart in evening flight.
Ascending stairs to the hall, I'm pleased
to see
banana leaves and jasmine buds fattened
by the new rain.

A monk receives me. In torchlight he
shows
a treasure on the wall – he rightly praises
the frescoes of Buddha, something few
have seen.

To quell my hunger he prepares a meal
of brown rice and cabbage grown wild.
He sweeps the mat and makes a bed for
me.

The moon beyond the ridge rises soon,
and sends in its light through the open
door.
Its silver rays keep me awake
until all the insects cease to chirp.

I leave in morning mist, alone, unable
to see the path. I wander up and down.
The sun rises to paint the mountains red,
aglow against the winding azure streams.

Several times I see oaks and pines –
gigantic girth that take ten men to hold.
I step bare-foot on slippery boulders
to cross the roaring stream, inspired
by torrent force and the wind that tugs my
shirt.

A life like this indeed is pleasant.
Why do we enslave
our hearts and minds to men of power?

I ask my best friends, two or three: can't
we
return to nature before we grow too old?

《雉带箭》（此愈佐张仆射于徐，从猎而作也）》

（《全唐诗》卷338）

原头火烧静兀兀，野雉畏鹰出复没。
将军欲以巧伏人，盘马弯弓惜不发。
地形渐窄观者多，雉惊弓满劲箭加。
冲人决起百馀尺，红翎白镞相倾斜。
将军仰笑军吏贺，五色离披马前堕。

Pheasant with an Arrow

They start the fire to chase the birds
from the plain that's quiet as death.
Pheasants fly out of burning woods
to land again in fear of circling hawks.
The general bids his men to hold
their bows and arrows as he pleases.

Then the general lifts his hand.
The men surround the prey and shoot
a hundred deadly barbs.
A bird is hurled a hundred feet
by missiles shot into the sky.

Scarlet feathers scatter –
a rainbow falling on hunting horses.

The general laughs among his men,
The men praise their great lord
for the subtle arrangement
of his ambush strategy.

《游太平公主山庄》

（《全唐诗》卷344）

公主当年欲占春，故将台榭押城闉。
欲知前面花多少，直到南山不属人。

Visiting the Mountain Villa of Princess Taiping

The great princess in her great past
wanted to possess the whole spring.
She built pavilions on terraces
higher than the castles on city walls.

The traveler wanted to know
how many flowers were out there
between the city and the South Mountain.
Every single one belonged to Her Highness
alone.

《盆池》（《全唐诗》卷343）

《其一》

老翁真个似童儿，汲水埋盆作小池。
一夜青蛙鸣到晓，恰如方口钓鱼时。

**Five Poems on a Washbowl Pond,
No. 1**

An old man I'm really a boy at heart.
Burying a washbowl in my yard,
I fill it with water to make a pond.

Frogs make their home there and chant all
night,
the same chant I heard when I was a
fishing child.

《其二》

莫道盆池作不成，藕稍初种已齐生。
从今有雨君须记，来听萧萧打叶声。

No. 2

They say a bowl of water doesn't make a
pond
until I plant a single lotus shoot.
It soon sends up discs of leaves.

From now on, gentlemen, you come here
whenever it rains, to listen to drops on
leaves –
a hundred little drums.

《其三》

瓦沼晨朝水自清，小虫无数不知名。
忽然分散无踪影，惟有鱼儿作队行。

No. 3

The water in bowl-pond is so clear in the
morning.
It doubles the nameless bugs on its
surface.
The insects suddenly disappear in air
to reveal the fish swimming in rows.

《其四》

泥盆浅小讵成池，夜半青蛙圣得知。
一听暗来将伴侣，不烦鸣唤斗雄雌。

No. 4

The earthen bowl's so small, you say,
that it can't make a decent pond.

Frogs know this better than you, Sir –
they meet and mate here at mid-night
croaking louder than any sage.

《其五》

池光天影共青青，拍岸才添水数瓶。
且待夜深明月去，试看涵泳几多星。

No. 5

The shining water in my bowl-pond
shares the blue of the shining sky.

I send tidal waves to its banks
by adding three bottles of water.

I can't wait to count the stars
held in the pond when the moon
disappears behind a passing cloud.

Pei Du 裴度

Pei Du was one of the most successful bureaucrats among Tang poets and because of that his life is well documented in official history. He was born in the year 765 and died on the fourth day of the third month (lunar calendar) of 839. He grew up in Wenxi, now a county in Shanxi Province, and passed the imperial examination in 790. From then on, his career was mostly an upward swing. In seven years he became the prime minister of the empire and an army marshal in charge of bringing under control the upheavals in the area west of the Huai River. It's interesting that a politician with military experience was also a poet passionate about nature. His friend and fellow poet Han Yu was with him during the Huai River Campaign and wrote a poem when they passed Nüji Mountain ninety kilometers southwest of Luoyang. In that poem Han Yu asked the marshal to take his officers, Han included, on a hike after their sure triumph on the west bank of Huai River (see Han Yu in *Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 344, poem #14). In another poem, Han Yu praised the artificial rockery in Pei's garden and the prime minister's genuine love for mountains:

The minister really loves mountains so
he watches them from morning until eve.
It's not enough just keep them in the eyes –
he wants to experience the rocks with feet.

(*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 342, poem #21. Translation mine.)

As a powerful politician, Pei Du had his enemies, one of whom was fellow poet Yuan Zhen. At the peak of his career, Yuan Zhen was able to remove Pei Du from the position of prime minister. Nevertheless, Pei Du was able to remain a good friend to Yuan Zhen's best friend, Bai Juyi. As witnessed in the crane poem below, Pei Du and Bai Juyi were good friends in their years of retirement.

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《白二十二侍郎有双鹤留在洛下予西园多
野水长松…请之》

(《全唐诗》卷335)

闻君有双鹤，羁旅洛城东。
未放归仙去，何如乞老翁。
且将临野水，莫闭在樊笼。
好是长鸣处，西园白露中。

**Undersecretary Bai Has Two Cranes in
Luoyang And My West Garden Has
Plenty of Wild Water as Well as Tall
Pine Trees,**

*So I Write This Poem to Ask Him
for the Cranes*

I heard that you keep two cranes,
in your garden east of the capital.

Since you haven't set them free
to join their real companions,

the legendary immortals,
why don't you let this old man

beg you for their adoption?
Don't shut them in your cages.

Let them live by the wild water
in my West Garden.

Let their extended honk
shake the white dew off my plants.

《溪居》（《全唐诗》卷 335）

门径俯清溪，茅檐古木齐。
红尘飘不到，时有水禽啼。

My Dwelling on the Creek

The path to my gate overlooks the creek.
My thatched roof is tall as the top of the pines.

No worldly dust reaches my window.
Water fowl honk to break the silence.

《傍水闲行》（《全唐诗》卷 335）

闲余何处觉身轻，暂脱朝衣傍水行。
鸥鸟亦知人意静，故来相近不相惊。

A Stroll by the Waterside

Ah, my body feels so light!
Where am I, in this leisurely mood,
with my official gown taken off?

I'm strolling by the pond.

Gulls and herons seem to share my inner
peace –
they come closer to enjoy my company.

Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元

Liu Zongyuan's ancestors lived for many generations on the northern frontier, in Yuxiang township, in what is now Yongji County, Shanxi Province, on the northeast bank at the great bend of Yellow River (Wu Wenzhi, *Liu Zongyuan Pingzhuan*. Zhonghua Press, Beijing, 1962, p. 7). But as Liu wrote in an essay, although the Great River that flowed by Yongji had inspired many scholars and poets, as did the close-by Zhongtiao Mountains, he himself had never been to his family's frontier homeland (see *Liu Zongyuan Ji*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1979, p. 606 . My paraphrasing). Liu Zongyuan himself was born in the great metropolis of Chang'an, in the year 773, while his father served the empire in a low-ranking post on the south bank of the Yangtze. His grandmother raised and educated him in the family garden, a few acres that provided them with fruits and vegetables.

In the year 793, when he was twenty years old, Liu Zongyan passed the imperial examination together with his best friend Liu Yuxi. Three years later he was appointed to be an editor in the Imperial Secretariat, and in 801 was promoted to the position of the County Sheriff in Lantian County near the capital. Two years later he became an imperial inspector, an internal-affairs post of relatively low rank but a great deal of power. Idealistic in politics, he hoped to help revive the aging empire. He was promoted to the position of undersecretary of an important ministry in the first month of 805, yet his power made him as many enemies as friends and in the ninth month of the same year he was demoted to Yongzhou, a remote county in what is now southern Hunan Province, next to Guangdong Province and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a region of "barbarian" climate and landscape. At the beginning of his service in Yongzhou, he lived in a Buddhist temple; after he built a house for the family, it burnt down a couple of times. His life in Yongzhou was not easy. After four years or so, he apparently developed a case of rheumatoid arthritis so severe that he described himself in a poem as unable to walk to the gate of his courtyard, even with the help of a walking stick. Despite pressure from the court he would not change his political position, instead turning his interest from politics to nature. After ten years in Yongzhou, Liu Zongyuan was further demoted to Liuzhou, in what is now Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. There he helped local people drill wells and freed indentured slaves by helping them pay off their debts. He died in Liuzhou in 819. In a short life of forty-six years, he wrote over six hundred excellent pieces of prose and poetry.

The poems translated here were written during his demotion in the south. The first one demonstrates a strong case of what Lawrence Buell calls the "aesthetics of relinquishment." As Liu wrote in a letter to a friend in Sichuan, he was so sick that when he stood up his knees trembled and when he sat down he couldn't feel his legs. He was nevertheless unwilling to cut a few sticks from a rare tree whose nature and name he loved. The second poem shows how he set up an example for the local people to learn and love a tree to which they had been indifferent. That kind of teaching, Liu admits, is not easy, yet he is happy for having succeeded in sharing that kind happiness, regardless of its difficulty. The last poem is a fine example of the tradition of *fangshengshi* 放生诗, or poems about setting captured animals free. A poem by his contemporary Lü Wen about freeing a goose includes explanation of the reasoning in the human's mind. Liu's poem, on the other hand, tries to imagine how the francolin – a Southern Asian partridge – feels at the moment of regaining its freedom. He also criticizes the scheming men who train birds to be live decoys in order to capture more birds of the same kind, which were known for their fat, sweet meat. In this sense, Liu is more humane than Lü. What he didn't know, however, is that in general, animals enjoy a longer lifespan in captivity than in the wild. Is that why a bird is willing to be turned into a lure? What can we make of Liu's moral judgment on the bird as well as man?

《溪居》（《全唐诗》卷352）

久为簪组累，幸此南夷谪。
闲依农圃邻，偶似山林客。
晓耕翻露草，夜榜响溪石。
来往不逢人，长歌楚天碧。

My Dwelling on the Creek

The burden of keeping my rank
has long bent my back.

In secret I congratulate myself
for demotion to the barbarian South.

Like a genteel hermit of the woods,
I enjoy freedom and leisure, and lean
against my neighbor's garden fence.

Tonight I plan to hoe the plot
by the rocky, gurgling stream.
At dawn I'll till the dewy field.

I come and go but see no "civilized" man.
I feel free to sing loud and long
to the azure sky of the South.

《秋晓行南谷经荒村》
（《全唐诗》卷352）

杪秋霜露重，晨起行幽谷。
黄叶覆溪桥，荒村唯古木。
寒花疏寂历，幽泉微断续。
机心久已忘，何事惊麋鹿。

**Passing a Deserted Village in the South Valley
Early in an Autumnal Morning**

I get up early in the morning
and walk through a secluded valley
in the chilly frosts of late fall.

The board bridge over the creek
is covered with yellow leaves.
The path leads to a village
peopled by ancient trees.

The stream cuts through the ville
disappears in a deep ravine,
on the edge of which
cold chrysanthemums, a few sparse rows,
in seclusion, stand still.

I thought I had long been freed
from the scheming tricks of society –
why does my presence here
disturbs this elk or that deer?

《江雪》（《全唐诗》卷352）

千山鸟飞绝，万径人踪灭。
孤舟蓑笠翁，独钓寒江雪。

River Snow

In hundreds of surrounding mountains
– not a flying bird to see.

On thousands of winding trails
– not a footprint to show.

I, an old man,
in bamboo hat and rush cape,

fish alone
on the river of floating snow.

《植灵寿木》（《全唐诗》卷353）

白华照寒水，怡我适野情。
前趋问长老，重复欣嘉名。
蹇连易衰朽，方刚谢经营。
敢期齿杖赐，聊且移孤茎。
丛萼中竞秀，分房外舒英。
柔条乍反植，劲节常对生。
循玩足忘疲，稍觉步武轻。
安能事翦伐，持用资徒行。

Planting a “Soul-Longevity” Tree

Your white blossoms reflected in the cold
tarn
you sooth me with a matching wild mood.

I go and ask the elders –
they tell me of your propitious name.

Tricks in politics have
frustrated me. Exile
away from the court
has aged my body and soul.
I’d cut no branch from you,
as ancient books suggest,
to make a walking stick.

I transplant a single sapling
to the plot near my house.
As the soft thing starts to grow
it develops hard, symmetrical joints.
When it blooms its pistils compete
with stamens –
a contest, a beauty-show.

I limp and hobble around it
never feeling tired, my steps
“springier” and lighter than before.

What idiot would cut a tree dead
and use the sticks to help himself walk?

《自衡阳移桂十馀本植零陵所住精舍》
(《全唐诗》卷353)

谪官去南裔，清湘绕灵岳。
晨登蒹葭岸，霜景霁纷浊。
离披得幽桂，芳本欣盈握。
火耕困烟烬，薪采久摧剥。
道旁且不愿，岑岭况悠邈。
倾筐壅故壤，栖息期鸾鷟。
路远清凉宫，一雨悟无学。
南人始珍重，微我谁先觉。
芳意不可传，丹心徒自渥。

**Transplanting from Hengyang a Dozen
Laurel Trees to My Study in Lingling**

Demoted to the southern frontier
I wander by the clear River Xiang
that winds its way around
the spirit of South Mountain.

In the morning I step on the bank,
frost on bulrushes reflecting the sun.
I push my way through the jungle
to find a single laurel by the path.
Its girth barely a handful, how
did it survive the ax and fire?

I hate to see such a noble tree
left by the side of a trail.
How can I leave it here
in deep, barbarian hills?

So I fill a bamboo basket
with the soil at its root
to transplant it near
my hut of scholarship.
I hope some day the phoenix
would nest among its fragrant branches.

The Daoist heaven may be far away,
yet the philosophy of Nature can be
learned
in one rain.
So southerners begin to value laurels
as they see me transplant it with care.

The laurels may have feelings of their
own.
They hardly communicate with men.
After all that I do and say
I might in vain have tried to share
the love from my beating heart.

《放鹧鸪词》（《全唐诗》卷 353）

楚越有鸟甘且腴，嘲嘲自名为鹧鸪。
徇媒得食不复虑，机械潜发罹罟罟。
羽毛摧折触笼籓，烟火煽赫惊庖厨。
鼎前芍药调五味，膳夫攘腕左右视。
齐王不忍觳觫牛，简子亦放邯郸鸠。
二子得意犹念此，况我万里为孤囚。
破笼展翅当远去，同类相呼莫相顾。

Setting Free a Francolin

In the jungles of the southern wild
lives a bird known for its fat meat.
Chuck, chuck it sings in trees;
People say it's calling its own name.

One is captured by a man.
He trained the bird to be a decoy.
Now it's well fed and thinks of none
but himself, satisfied in the cage.
It obeys the man and lures fellow birds
into a hidden trap where their feathers break
as they struggle, frightened of the kitchen smoke,
of spice bottles beside the boiling pot.
Eager is the cook who looks left right.

I've heard that the King of Qi State
took pity and let go the trembling cows,
and the Lord of Zhao State
who set the turtle-dove free.
They both were lofty and powerful,
yet they both seem to understand those in distress.
Now on exile thousands of miles away from power,
how can I afford to be callous to the bird?

I break the cage. He spreads the wings:
far away he should fly, never turn around
in response to songs of fellow partridges.