

仲昭



Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡

Liu Yuxi was born in 772, the same year in which Bai Juyi and Lü Wen were born. To help readers put the lives of Tang poets into perspective, we can see 772 as ten years after Li Bai had died and two years after the death of Du Fu, when Han Yu was five years old and Meng Jiao twenty-two. Unlike his fellow poets, Liu Yuxi found his life important enough to justify an autobiography, in which he traced his ancestry to Prince Zhongshan of the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220). Included in the autobiography is an account of Liu Yuxi's seventh-generation great-grandfather, who had settled the family in the northern suburbs of Luoyang.

Liu Yuxi was a sickly child – he remembered well when, as a five-year-old, he was taken by his nurse to the witch-doctors to undergo painful therapy. At the age of seventeen, in order to protect himself from such painful and questionable treatment, he started to study Chinese herbal medicine, which he later prescribed for himself. In 792 he went to Chang'an to take the imperial examination. Passing at the first try he made a moderate reputation for himself, and became friendly with Liu Zongyuan – who passed the exam in the same year – and other poets in the capital city. After spending a short term with his father back at the ancestral home near Luoyang, he was appointed to be an editor of the imperial library. With Liu Zongyan he became involved in politics and in 803 was promoted by the prime minister, Wang Shuwen, to the low-rank but high-power position of Imperial Inspector. In the same month, however, he was with Liu Zongyan demoted and banished to the far south: Liu Zongyuan to Yongzhou, Liu Yuxi even further south to Lianzhou. While crossing the Yangtze, however, Liu Yuxi received a new order changing his place of demotion to Langzhou, on the west bank of the famous Dongting Lake, much closer to home and two hundred kilometers north of Yongzhou where his unfortunate friend Liu Zongyuan had been sent.

Liu Yuxi seemed to have a more positive attitude towards his demotion than Liu Zongyan, during that period learning many local folk songs on which he based new songs of his own, of which the “Bamboo Twig Song” translated below is a good example. His positive attitude is also shown in his poem praising autumn, a season symbolic of decay and death for many of his contemporary poets. For him, however, autumn inspired a feeling of soaring high with the cranes.

While Liu Zongyuan died in his place of demotion, Liu Yuxi survived and in the end was called back to the court. He gradually climbed to higher and more powerful positions, eventually retiring from a position as head of an important ministry in Luoyang, Tang's eastern capital and his own hometown. He wrote a medicine book – *Chuan Xin Fang* 传信方 (*Prescriptions That You Can Believe and Distribute*) – and many poems in correspondence with Bai Juyi during his retired years. Liu Yuxi died in 842, at the age of seventy (see Luo Liantian, *Tangdai Shiwen Liujia Nianpu*. Taipei, Xuehai Press, 1986, pp. 257–462).

《春日寄杨八唐州二首 其一》
(《全唐诗》3 5 5)

淮西春草长，淮水逶迤光。
燕入新村落，人耕旧战场。
可怜行春守，立马看斜桑。

Sent to Yang the Eighth

On the west bank of the River Huai
the grass grows long and green,
through which, from time to time, I see
The Huai River winds and shines in
spring.

The peasants have started to till the field –
battle field of the recent war.
The swallows have returned with people
to build their nests in new villages.

I, the magistrate of the prefecture,
have no power to enforce the seasons.*
I only sit on the back of my horse
to watch the shadow of the mulberry trees
grow dark, slant, and long.

* The main job of an imperial
official is to make sure that farmers
do their work according to what the
seasons dictate.

《竹枝词九首 其九》
(《全唐诗》卷3 6 5)

山上层层桃李花，
云间烟火是人家。
银钏金钗来负水，
长刀短笠去烧畲。

A Bamboo Twig Song

On terraces beyond terraces, peach
and plum blossoms mix with clouds
and breakfast's smoke from every house.

Girls wearing silver bracelets and gold
hairpins come to river for their morning wash.

Boys with swords and round bamboo hats
ascend the hills to slash and burn.
In ashes, they till the fields.

《伤愚溪三首》

(《全唐诗》卷365)

溪水悠悠春自来，
草堂无主燕飞回。
隔帘惟见中庭草，
一树山榴依旧开。

Mourning Liu Zongyuan

Never stopping yet never in a hurry
flows the Southern Spring.

Your thatch-roofed hut,
now absent of its master,
still houses the swallow couples.

Through the curtain I see only weeds
rampant in the yard.

The mountain pomegranate blooms
as it did in olden days.