

## THE ROAD TO SHU, FROM ZHANG ZAI TO LI BO

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Among the major “signature” works of Li Bo 李白 (701-762?), the poem “Shu dao nan” 蜀道難 has long held a special place. Its shifting rhythm, irregular metrics, occasionally unusual diction and imagery have helped define certain traits of Li Bo’s poetic persona from the time Yin Fan 殷璠 included it as one of thirteen poems by Li Bo in his anthology *Heyue yingling ji* 河嶽英靈集, completed in the year 753.<sup>1</sup> In his prefatory comments to the Li Bo selections, Yin Fan specifically refers to “Shu dao nan” as representative of the poet’s *qi zhi you qi* 奇之又奇 (“even more singular than singular”)

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<sup>1</sup> *Heyue yinglingji* (The Finest Souls of River and Alp), collecting over 230 poems dating from 714 to 753 by twenty-four of the most admirable contemporary poets, as judged by the compiler, is the only anthology from the High Tang era (the reign of Xuanzong 玄宗, 712-56) now extant in fairly complete fashion. It has come down to us in several different, but largely similar, editions; the text of the poems is relatively stable across these editions, though variants sometimes appear. (There are many more variants to be considered when these texts are compared with the same poems in later anthologies or in later collected editions of individual poets’ works.) This anthology began to attract more attention than previously when published in the omnibus collection *Tangren xuan Tangshi* 唐人選唐詩 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), now superseded by *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* 新編, ed. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996). For an introduction to this anthology and its place in Tang literary history, see the essays by Li Zhenhua 李珍華 (Joseph Lee) and Fu Xuancong in their *Heyue yingling ji yanjiu* 研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1-114, a book that also includes the text of the relatively rare two-juan edition of the work (the edition reprinted by Fu in *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian*). Much other scholarship pertaining to the anthology has appeared in the past thirty years. I hope to publish a complete translation of *Heyue yingling ji* in the near future.

style. The poem is difficult, perhaps impossible, to translate adequately. The rendering below may just hint at the piece's peculiar momentum and lyricism. (Varying indentations mirror the original's changing cadences; stanza breaks reflect changes in rhyme.)

“The Way to Shu is Hard”

Yeee—hooo—syee! How *perilous* ! So *high* !  
                   Hardships of the way to Shu—  
                   much harder than climbing the blue sky!  
                   Cancong it was, and also Yufu,  
                   Who founded this state in the oh so dim past,  
 Thence were four myriad, eight thousand more years  
 Till its homefires were joined up with the Qin frontier.  
 Facing west then from Mount Taibo was a pathway but for birds,  
 By means of which one could cut across to the summit of Emei.  
 There the land crumbled, a mountain collapsed, stalwart men died;  
 Only after came  
                   Sky-strung ladders, edgeways of stone, to clinch the link at last.  
 And above is  
                   The high bough where the six dragons reversed the sun's course,  
 And below,  
                   A backflow of waters where waves crashing swirl and recoil.  
 Even the flight of the yellow crane cannot push on beyond this place;  
                   Long-armed monkeys who wish to cross over fear to swing up here.  
                   Twisted so and tortuous is the Blue Mud Pass—  
                   Nine turnings for every hundred paces to wind round the rugged crest.  
                   Grab onto Triaster! Pass through the Well! Look up and gasp in alarm!  
                   Hold your hand against your panting chest—sit down, catch your breath.

I ask you, sir, as you travel west, when is it you'll come back?  
 One dreads the craggy steep of the route, impossible to scale.  
 There you'll see only disheartened birds, calling in age-old trees;  
 The male takes wing, trailing his mate, circling amidst the grove.  
                   And too, you'll hear the cuckoo's crying—  
                   In the moonlight, sorrowing in empty hills.  
                   *The hardships of the way to Shu—*  
                   *much harder than climbing the blue sky.*  
 It will waste the ruddy features of all who hear of it!

[stanza break]

There linked peaks lie distant from the sky by no more than a foot,  
Where withered pines hang head-downward against sheer walls.

And airborne billows, currents of spray, clash in a deafening din;  
Pounded banks, hurtling rocks, thunder through ten-thousand  
straths.

The cramped hazards of it are just as I say,

Oh! you,

who are on such a distant road, why ever did you come this way?

Loftily lifted, Sword Gallery, so towering and tall—

With one man at its barrier,

Ten thousand cannot force through.

If that guard be any but one of our kin,

He is just as well changed into wolf or dhole.

At morning beware of fell tigers;

At night beware of long snakes.

Their whetted teeth will suck your blood,

They crop people like rows of hemp.

And though the Brocade City is said to be so pleasing,

Better it is to turn back home as quickly as you can.

*The hardships of the way to Shu—*

*much harder than climbing the blue sky!*

Turned to the side, I gaze off to the west, sighing long, alas! oh no!

噫吁嚱危乎高哉，蜀道之難，難於上青天。蠶叢及魚鳧，開國何茫然。爾來四萬八千歲，不與秦塞通人煙。西當太白有鳥道，可以橫絕峨眉巔。地崩山摧壯士死，然後天梯石棧方鉤連。上有六龍回日之高標，下有衝波逆折之回川。黃鶴之飛尚不得過，猿猱欲度愁攀緣。青泥何盤盤，百步九折縈巖巒。捫參歷井仰脅息，以手撫膺坐長歎。問君西遊何時還，畏途巖巒不可攀。但見悲鳥號古木，雄飛雌從遶林間。又聞子規啼，夜月愁空山。蜀道之難，難於上青天，使人聽此凋朱顏。連峯去天不盈尺，枯松倒掛倚絕壁。飛湍瀑流爭喧豗，砢崖轉石萬壑雷。其嶮也若此，嗟爾遠道之人，胡為乎來哉。劍閣崢嶸而崔嵬，一夫當關，萬人莫開。所守或匪親，化為狼與豺。朝避猛虎，夕避長

蛇。磨牙吮血，殺人如麻。錦城雖云樂，不如早還家。蜀道之難，難於上青天。側身西望長咨嗟。<sup>2</sup>

The poem is well enough known that I shall not take time here to explicate its allusions or paraphrase its meaning. Instead, my concern will be to examine the poems on this same theme that preceded Li Bo's, in hope of gaining a better appreciation of what Li Bo owed to his predecessors and also how his peculiar "singularity" reveals itself. Here let me simply remark, among the poem's many excellences, its careful structure. Far from being a random or stream-of-consciousness composition, as often suggested, it is quite neatly and attentively contrived. Consider, as one example, how the famous cry with which the poem begins (or, as I prefer to hear it, a pursed-lip groan) turns at the end of the poem into a head-shaking sigh, both of these exclamations being complemented at the work's midpoint by the out-of-breath exhalation that escapes when the imagined traveler has reached the highest point of his journey. Balance of such detail does not just happen.

There is no convincing proof as to when Li Bo wrote the poem, but it must predate 753 when Yin Fan anthologized and commented on it. (The old claim that it refers to the emperor Xuanzong's inglorious flight from Chang'an to Shu in July 756 is thus impossible and was recognized as such long ago by all mindful scholars.) Various dates prior to 753 have been proposed, including 731, 735, 742, and 743; but this is inconsequential for our present purposes.<sup>3</sup> Whenever it was composed, "Shu dao nan" is reported in

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<sup>2</sup> *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian*, 122-3. Cf. *Li Bo quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping* 李白全集校注彙釋集評, ed. Zhan Ying 詹鈺 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 3.290-300, with extensive comments on pp. 301-15 regarding the reception history of the poem and Zhan Ying's own views; also *Xinban Li Bo quanji biannian zhushi* 新版李白全集編年注釋, ed. An Qi 安旗 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1999), 159-62, comments 163-70; and *Li Bo ji jiaozhu* 李白集校注, ed. Qu Tuiyuan 瞿蛻園 and Zhu Jincheng 朱金城 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 3.199-203, comments 203-10. Separate articles on the poem, its meaning, date of composition, etc., are innumerable.

<sup>3</sup> An Qi argues for 731, Zhan Ying for 742—revising an earlier preference for 743, given in his *Li Bo shiwen xinian* 李白詩文繫年 (Beijing: Zuoji chubanshe, 1958), 29-33—and Huang Xigui 黃錫珪 (1862-1941) for 735—see his *Li Taibo*

a famous anecdote to have had a startling effect on the elder poet and official He Zhizhang 賀知章 (659-744) who, before coming to the end of the piece, is supposed to have tagged its author as an “exiled transcendent” (*zhe xian* 謫仙), an epithet that would forever be associated with Li Bo.<sup>4</sup> As remarkable as Li Bo may have been from early on, both as a person and a poet, he seems to have clinched his reputation as a writer out of the ordinary with the composition of his “Shu dao nan.” Or, at least, this poem came most readily to represent his unusual talents.

The theme and title “Shu dao nan” was not original with Li Bo. The first examples of verses by this name given in the *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 of Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (12<sup>th</sup> c.) are a pair of quatrains by Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503-51; Liang Jianwendi 梁簡文帝, r. 549-51). Each of these begins with a couplet locating places in Shu, followed by a couplet telling of lonely feelings.

## No. 1

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| At Jianping, the road of the Inspecting Intendant; | 建平督郵道 |
| At Yufu, the palace of Abiding Stability.          | 魚復永安宮 |
| When tunes of Ba and Yu are performed there,       | 若奏巴渝曲 |
| Just at that time you shall long for home.         | 時當君思中 |

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*nianpu, fu Li Taibo biannian shi mulu* 李太白年譜，附李太白編年詩目錄 (1906; rpt. Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1958), 38. Other dates have been offered as well.

<sup>4</sup> The story has it that when Li Bo first arrived in the capital from Shu, He Zhizhang, having heard of him, paid a call on the younger poet; finding Li Bo remarkable in his person, He then asked to see some of his writings—“Shu dao nan” being the piece that led to He Zhizhang’s marveling exclamation. The anecdote, along with others regarding Li Bo, is told in the *Benshi shi* 本事詩 (preface dated 886) of Meng Qi 孟榮. See *Benshi shi* (*Tangdai congshu* 唐代叢書, 1806 ed.), 3.13a-b. A different version of the story, recorded in Wang Dingbao’s 王定保 (870-954+) *Tang zhiyan* 唐摭言 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 7.81, has Li Bo paying a respectful call on He Zhizhang to show his work to the *éminence grise*. In this version, upon reading “Shu dao nan,” He Zhizhang says, “Sir, you cannot be from the mortal realm; aren’t you rather the spirit of the star Taibo?” (i.e., Venus, playing on Li Bo’s byname, Taibo 太白).

## No. 2

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Shamanka Mountains—seven hundred leagues;                 | 巫山七百里 |
| Rivers of Ba—triple twisted and turned.                   | 巴水三回曲 |
| There the sound of flutes drops and then rises;           | 笛聲下復高 |
| The gibbons' cries stop, then pick up again. <sup>5</sup> | 猿啼斷還續 |

The places mentioned in the opening couplet of the first poem are not in the heart of Shu but on its extreme eastern margin, near the Shamanka Mountains and Shamanka Gorge (Wu xia 巫峽). If this strikes us as odd, accustomed as we are (thanks mainly to Li Bo) to think of the road to Shu as running from Chang'an south to Chengdu, we must remember that for Xiao Gang, of the state of Liang, the way to Shu ran upstream the Long River and that the area around Wu shan and Wu xia would represent for a westward traveler the gateway to Shu, as well as the most awesome scenery on the route. The “Inspecting Intendant” is on his way to Shu. The “Palace of Abiding Stability” was fashioned for Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223, the First Ruler of [Shu-]Han) and was where he died, Yufu being the old name of the district that Liu Bei changed to Yong'an. The “tunes of Ba and Yu” are the distinctive and stirring, martial songs of the region that accompany local dances. Upon hearing them, someone from elsewhere cannot but long for home.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, in the second quatrain, the wavering sound of local flutes and the eerie calls of the gibbons punctuate the strangeness of a traveler's surroundings.

The quatrain form in which these two poems are written allows virtually no room for development of the topic. The poems seem like little more than pretty exercises, closet pieces on a set theme—this is “Shu dao nan” as palace-style (*gongti* 宮體) verse, the rather

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<sup>5</sup> *Songben* 宋本 *Yuefu shiji* (rpt. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1961; hereafter *YFSJ*), 40.4b; also *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (rpt. Taipei: Wenguang chubanshe, 1974; hereafter *YWLJ*), 42.758; *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (rpt. Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1979; hereafter *WYYH*), 200.11b; *Xian-Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, ed. Lu Qinli 遠欽立, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983; hereafter Lu Qinli), 3: 1919-20.

<sup>6</sup> See *Huayang guozhi jiaozhu* 華陽國志校注, comp. Chang Qu 常璩 (fl. 347-55), ed. Liu Lin 劉琳 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1984; hereafter *HYGZ*), 1.37.

precious style that Xiao Gang was fond of and with which he is indelibly associated in literary history. Of all the “Shu dao nan” poems remaining to us, Xiao Gang’s are the only ones to approach Shu from the east, along the river route. Although Guo Maoqian lists these first in his *Yuefu shiji*, that is more a matter of respect for their author’s royalty than a claim of chronological priority.

Of course, the “Rhapsody on the Metropolis of Shu” (Shu du fu 蜀都賦) by Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250-ca. 305), the first section of Zuo’s “Rhapsody on the Three Metropolises” (San du fu 三都賦), is the greatest verse assemblage of Shu lore and particulars, and was drawn on constantly by later poets writing of Shu.<sup>7</sup> We are fortunate to have Professor Knechtges’s English rendering of it, with extensive annotation, in the first volume of his *Wen xuan* translation. Zuo Si’s work is clearly an influence in another poem by Xiao Gang. This is a poem included in the *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠, where it is entitled “Song of the Kingdom of Shu, in Ten Rhymes, to Stringed Accompaniment” (Shu guo xian’ge pian shiyun 蜀國弦歌篇十韻).<sup>8</sup> Though not done to the title “Shu dao nan,” it is obviously relevant to our subject. It reads as follows.

|   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
|   | The Crossbeams of Bronze point on to Ye Valley,       | 銅梁指斜谷 |
|   | While Sword Road looks to the central district afar.  | 劍道望中區 |
|   | Connected above with the stars, this allotted field,  | 通星上分野 |
| 4 | Making a fastness, serves as a metropolis here below. | 作固為下都 |
|   | Its elegant songs are due to goodly prefects;         | 雅歌因良守 |
|   | Its marvelous dances spring from Ba and Yu.           | 妙舞自巴渝 |
|   | By the yang-wall gate is the spot for glad pleasure,  | 陽城嬉樂所 |
| 8 | With sword-girt riders galloping together in a group. | 劍騎鬱相趨 |

<sup>7</sup> The precursory “Shu du fu” of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (54 BC-AD 18), the authenticity of which has been debated, probably influenced Zuo Si’s work to some degree, but it is the latter composition that writers from the fourth century on evidently knew best.

<sup>8</sup> *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 箋注, ed. Mu Kehong 穆克宏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 7.276-7; also *WYYH* 201.6b-7a and *YFSJ* 30.1a-b, in both collections titled simply “Shu guo yin” 蜀國吟; Lu Qinli, 3: 1902. The translation of the poem by Anne Birrell in her *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Chinese Love Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 188, is, unfortunately, much in error.

- Though five women sent here once could hardly arrive, 五婦行難至  
 Now a hundred carts will make up a wedding procession. 百兩好遊娛  
 Animals are sacrificed to propitiate Emperor Wang, 牲祈望帝祀  
 12 And libations of wine for the Shu Marklord's death. 酒酌蜀侯誅  
 The river nymphs there accept substantial offerings, 江妃納重聘  
 And the Zhuo daughter agreed to be led away. 卓女受將雛  
 Pausing the strings, timely tapping the plectrum; 停弦時繫爪  
 16 Having stilled the song, then I retouch the vermilion. 息吹更治朱  
 In spring my smocks are washed in the Brocade Stream, 春衫湔錦浪  
 And I flutter a fan to keep the sun's crow at bay. 迴扇避陽烏  
 But when I know milord returns bearing a 聞君握節反  
 commissioner's verge,  
 20 This humble handmaid goes down to the bend 賤妾下城隅  
 of the city-wall.

Some of this requires comment. The opening couplet looks north and south, first toward the Baoye Valley 褒斜谷 in the Qinling 秦嶺 mountains that connects the southern border of Shaanxi with the northern border of Shu, Ye being the name of the valley's northern exit (Bao is the southern exit). "Bronze Crossbeams" (Tongliang 銅梁) mountain is in present-day Hezhou 合州, about thirty-five miles north of Chongqing; Zuo Si had mentioned it in line 93 of his *fu* and that is probably why Xiao Gang begins with it here, though it is a long way south of Ye Valley. Matching this line's northern gaze, the second verse of the poem looks south, from the well-known Sword Gallery (Jian'ge 劍閣) pass toward Chengdu, the "central district" (*zhongqu* 中區) referring to the interior of the city, again borrowing from Zuo Si (line 209). Thus, the opening couplet has roughly outlined the "kingdom of Shu," at least as it concerns the poetic speaker. It is then tied to its astral counterparts above, in line three, and in line four the secure position of Chengdu as the Shu capital is noted (the former echoing line 5 of Zuo Si's rhapsody, the latter line 10 of the inscription by Zhang Zai to be examined below).<sup>9</sup> The "elegant" or "decorously proper" (*ya* 雅) songs of the people are a

<sup>9</sup> On the "allotted field" (*fenye*) system, pairing geographical areas with constellations, see, most conveniently, Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T'ang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 75-8.



reflection of the good rule of their governors, matched with the native dances, again, of Ba and Yu.

From here on, the poem becomes even more of a tangle of allusions. The *yang*-wall gate, being the southernmost gate of Chengdu's eastern wall, had also been mentioned by Zuo Si (line 216); and the "five women" of line nine are the famous group of beauties sent from Qin by King Hui 秦惠王 (r. 337-311 BC) who were met by five doughty escorts from Shu, whose encounter with a giant snake caused the collapse of a mountain and the death of them all (Li Bo referred to the five stalwarts, instead of the women, in his poem).<sup>10</sup> The hundred carts that fill out today's wedding processions in the city, for those women who, unlike the five from Qin, do enjoy their nuptials, recall the hundred carriages that escort the bride in *Shi jing* #12 ("Que chao"). We then are reminded of the unfortunate Du Yu 杜宇, also known as Emperor Wang 望帝, whose soul after his abdication from the rulership of Shu took on the form of the cuckoo,<sup>11</sup> and of the Qin prince Yun 惲 (or Hui 輝) who was appointed Marklord of Shu by King Hui of Qin and who was forced to commit suicide in 301 BC after a failed rebellion against Hui's successor, Zhaoxiang 昭襄. Both became the objects of local cults.<sup>12</sup> Matching these two men, we get in the next couplet women—first, river goddesses (cf. Zuo Si, line 356),<sup>13</sup> and then Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, the young Chengdu widow whose elopement with Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 BC) is well known. Mention of Zhuo Wenjun's romance with Sima Xiangru logically calls up images

<sup>10</sup> HYGZ 3.190.

<sup>11</sup> HYGZ 3.182; also referred to by Zuo Si (line 393) and by Li Bo.

<sup>12</sup> HYGZ 3.194, 199; also *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974; hereafter *SJ*), 5.210, 71.2310.

<sup>13</sup> Xiao Gang's *jiang fei* 江妃 is just a graphic variant of Zuo Si's 江婁. Zuo Si's reference is usually taken to be the two nymphs of the Jiang 江 and Han 漢 supposedly encountered once by Jiaofu 交甫 of Zheng 鄭: see Liexian zhuan 列仙傳 [*Daozang jinghua lu* 道藏精華錄], 1.5a-b; also Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan (Biographies légendaires des Immortels taoïstes de l'antiquité)* (1953; rpt. Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, Collège de France, 1987), 96-101, with extensive notes, including comparison with a similar passage from the tenth-century *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記.

of music, for it was by means of zither (*qin* 琴) playing that he won her heart; and the poem at hand is, after all, a song for strings.

In the final six lines, then, the poetic speaker, who had up till now seemed a generalized student of Shu, without identifiable gender, takes on a more specific persona—that of a wife (the self-reference *jianqie* 賤妾, “humble handmaid,” in the concluding line makes this clear) who is awaiting the return of her husband. It appears in the present context that she is the musician behind the song, playing the *zheng* 箏 cithern. This detail is contained in the words *ji zhao* 繫爪, literally “tapping one’s nails,” a phrase that refers to using a deer-horn plectrum to strike the strings of the *zheng*. Note how neatly the literal meaning of the phrase parallels the next line’s “retouching the vermilion,” i.e., the woman’s redaubing of her lip-gloss. This is followed by a couplet picturing the woman, self-absorbed, washing her springtime clothes in the river that famously brightened the brocade that was rinsed in its waves,<sup>14</sup> and fanning herself in the warming season.<sup>15</sup> All of which indicates that her husband is gone from home. However, she will be eager to meet him at the city gates when he comes back with honors from court. The phrase *wo jie fan* 握節反, “to return bearing a [commissioner’s] verge,” is reminiscent both of Sima Xiangru and his later countryman and poet Wang Bao 王褒 (fl. 58 BC) who, after serving at the Han court in Chang’an, were each sent back to Shu as imperial envoys.<sup>16</sup> Here, the poetic speaker hopes for the same result for her husband.

The next two poets writing on our theme were both contemporaries of Xiao Gang. Their poems are titled “Shu dao nan,” but they more

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<sup>14</sup> Zuo Si, line 271; *HYZ* 3.235.

<sup>15</sup> The three-legged crow, here called “the yang-crow,” is of course traditionally associated with the sun (hence my “sun’s crow”), just as the hare is with the moon. Instead of *chun shan* 春衫 to begin line seventeen, *YFSJ* writes *tuo shan* 脱衫, which yields a better parallelism with the opening words of line sixteen.

<sup>16</sup> Sima Xiangru came back on official business twice: the first time, around 131 BC, to arbitrate a dispute between a court-appointed official and the local populace; the second time, a few years later, to oversee the building of a new road in the southwest. Wang Bao’s commission back to Shu ended in his death en route, and will be commented on more fully in the discussion of our next poem.

resemble Xiao Gang's "Shu guo xian'ge" than his pair of "Shu dao nan" quatrains. One cannot help but wonder whether they might all have been composed on one and the same occasion, though each uses a different rhyme. The first of these poets is Liu Xiaowei 劉孝威 (ca. 496-549), younger brother of Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽 who was the great friend of Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531) and probably played some role in the compilation of the *Wen xuan*.<sup>17</sup> Just as Liu Xiaochuo was close to the Heir-designate Zhaoming 昭明太子 (i.e., Xiao Tong), so Liu Xiaowei was close to the younger prince Xiao Gang. He was attached to Xiao Gang from at least the time of the latter's tenure in Xiangyang 襄陽 as governor of Yong 雍 province (523-26), where he was one of the dozen or so men forming Xiao Gang's literary salon known as the "Scholars of the Lofty Studio" (Gaozhai xueshi 高齋學士).<sup>18</sup> And he remained a trusted confidant and official attached to Xiao Gang when the latter became Heir-designate in 531 (after Xiao Tong's death) and occupied the Eastern Palace at the capital, Jiankang 建康. The positions held by Liu Xiaowei<sup>19</sup> were of increasingly important secretarial and scholarly responsibilities in Xiao Gang's establishment, and he was often the drafter of the prince's official communications. More than fifty of his poems have been preserved.

Liu Xiaowei's poem on "Shu dao nan" is a rather dense composition, to an even greater degree than the preceding work of Xiao Gang. Perhaps it was meant to "outdo" that of his royal patron. The text below is that given in Lu Qinli's compendium. But the poem here presented may actually consist just of fragments from two poems, or more. It is probable that what remains to us now is an editorial pastiche. The first fourteen lines, with a rhyme-change after line six that is knit together by "thimble phrasing," are pentametric. The final six lines of the work are heptametric, to a still

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<sup>17</sup> See David R. Knechtges, *Rhapsodies on Metropolises and Capitals*, vol. 1 of *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 50.1246; Knechtges, *ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> See his brief biography in *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 41.595, and *Nan shi* 39.1014.

different rhyme. Although *Yiwen leiju*, our earliest source, followed by *Wenyuan yinghua*, presents this as one poem, both leave out lines nine through fourteen. Guo Maoqian, on the other hand, prints this as two poems divided according to meter; his first poem also is missing lines nine through fourteen below, though he includes as lines nine and ten of it a couplet found nowhere else. Here are all the lines arranged as a single poem, as given by Lu Qinli.

- |    |  |         |
|----|--|---------|
|    | Jade Ramparts there are so tall that they have no end,                         | 玉壘高無極   |
|    | And Crossbeams of Bronze that can't be clambered up.                           | 銅梁不可攀   |
|    | Twin currents surge along the canyoned roads,                                  | 雙流逆巖道   |
| 4  | And Ninefold Slope runs hubbly to Yang Barrier.                                | 九坂澗陽關   |
|    | Marklord Deng whipped his horse onward;  | 鄧侯策馬度   |
|    | But Master Wang gathered his reins and turned back.                            | 王生斂轡還   |
|    | While one, gathering the reins, feared much for himself,                       | 斂轡懼身尤   |
| 8  | Another railed at his charioteer, upholding his prince's orders.               | 叱馭奉王猷   |
|    | If you be chary of the worth of a thousand in gold,                            | 若惜千金重   |
|    | Who would ever earn a title a myriad leagues from home?                        | 誰為萬里侯   |
|    | Let your horse sport in the region where a pearl was swallowed,                | 戲馬吞珠界   |
| 12 | Or sail your vessel down the current where brocade is rinsed,                  | 揚舲濯錦流   |
|    | There, where one sank a rhinoceros to quell the freakish river,                | 沈犀厭怪水   |
|    | Where one takes a mirror in hand to cross the haunted hills.                   | 握鏡表靈丘   |
|    | On Mount Yu were items of metal and jade that cast a shimmering light;         | 禹山金碧有光輝 |
| 16 | In the traffic of the city, carriages and steeds were quite quick and sleek.   | 遷停車馬正輕肥 |
|    | You might well imagine Wang Bao, who came back holding a commissioner's verge, | 彌想王褒擁節反 |
|    | And again call to mind Xiangru, who returned riding a government horse.        | 更憶相如乘傳歸 |
|    | But since Junping and Ziyun withdrew and have not been succeeded,              | 君平子雲闕不嗣 |

20 The finest souls of the Jiang-Han area  
truly have now become few.<sup>20</sup>

江漢英靈信已稀

The Jade Ramparts (Yulei 玉壘) of line one are a mountain range in the west of present-day Wenchuan 汶川 district, northwest of Chengdu;<sup>21</sup> the Bronze Crossbeams of line two we have encountered already. The semantic quality of the names is being played with here. The third line's "paired currents" refers to the two branches of the Min 岷 river, channeled around Chengdu by order of Li Bing 李冰, the famous mid-third-century BC governor.<sup>22</sup> The "Ninefold Slope" (Jiu ban 九坂) of line four is Nine-bends Slope (Jiuzhe ban 九折坂) in the Qionglai 邛崃 mountains northwest of Chengdu,<sup>23</sup> and the Yang Barrier 陽關 is Yang'an Barrier 陽安關 in Badong 巴東 county.<sup>24</sup> With lines five and six, we begin to get into the more interesting local references. "Marklord Deng" is Deng Ai 鄧艾 (197-264), the Wei general who conquered Shu in 263 for the Sima 司馬 house,<sup>25</sup> which was about to replace the Wei with their own Jin 晉 dynasty. "Master Wang" is Wang Ji 王吉, also known as Wang Yang 王陽 (fl. 80-48 BC), a capable and forthright Han minister who, upon journeying to Shu to take up the post of Regional Inspector (*cishi* 刺使) of Yizhou 益州, quailed at the difficult terrain near Nine-bends Slope and resigned his commission.<sup>26</sup>

Some years after Wang Yang's discomfiture, the sterner-hearted Wang Zun 王尊 (fl. 50-26 BC), having received the same appointment, arrived at the same spot and, cognizant of his

<sup>20</sup> Lu Qinli, 3:1874; cf. YWLJ 42.758, WYYH 200.11b-12a, YFSJ 40.4b-5a. In line 16 I read 正 for 尚, and in line 20 稀 for 衰, in both cases following YWLJ and YFSJ.

<sup>21</sup> HYGZ 3.184.

<sup>22</sup> HYGZ 3.202.

<sup>23</sup> *Shui jing zhu shu* 水經注疏, ed. Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 and Xiong Huizhen 熊會貞 (Shanghai: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1989; hereafter SJZS), 33.2739.

<sup>24</sup> HYGZ 1.61.

<sup>25</sup> See *San guo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973; hereafter SGZ), 28.779; also Achilles Fang, *Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (220-265): Chapters 69-78 from the Tzu chih t'ung chien of Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-1086)*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), 2: 407-11.

<sup>26</sup> *Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975; hereafter HS), 76.3229.

forerunner's failure, "railed at his charioteer, saying, 'Drive on! Wang Yang may have been a filial son [and therefore careful of his health], but Wang Zun is a devoted minister!'"<sup>27</sup> This is the incident behind the wording of line eight—not, as an unsuspecting reader might think, a chiasmic reference back to Deng Ai. Such fortitude is necessary if one is to earn renown in territories on the empire's margins. Line twelve's brocade-rinsing stream is familiar to us; its parallel in line eleven, "the area where a pearl was swallowed," requires us to remember the story of Yu's 禹 mother who dreamed of swallowing a holy pearl and gave birth to the future hero on Shiniu 石紐 mountain, also known as Wenshan 汶山 (in the Qionglai range).<sup>28</sup> The rhinoceros referred to in line thirteen was one fashioned of stone and submerged in the river by Li Bing under the Market Bridge 市橋 in Chengdu, to control the river spirit.<sup>29</sup> If there is a specific incident behind line fourteen, other than the well-known practice of taking a mirror with one into untamed mountains to ward off demons,<sup>30</sup> I am unaware of it.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Wang Zun supervised the area successfully for two years, including bringing to heel the unsinicized local tribesmen.

<sup>28</sup> SGZ 38.975, Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372-451) commentary, quoting the *Diwang shiji* 帝王世紀.

<sup>29</sup> HYGZ 3.202, 205-6. Li Bing is said to have had five stone rhinos made, of which one was submerged beneath Market Bridge, two in unspecified portions of the river, and two placed by the *yamen* gates. The verb used by Liu Xiaowei (*yan* 厭, to bring to submission, esp. in conjunction with incantation) is that used by Chang Qu, which suggests—if we did not already have sufficient evidence in the preceding lines of the poem—that HYGZ was indeed the text that conditioned the wording of Liu Xiaowei. See also SJZS 33.2752-3.

<sup>30</sup> It is possible that the *ling qiu* 靈丘 mentioned here is meant to refer to Linguan 靈關, a mountain pass southwest of Chengdu, called by Zuo Si the "gateway" of the capital in line 13 of "Shu du fu," and by Chang Qu (HYGZ 3.182) the city's "rear gateway." *Guan* would have required the change to *qiu* for the sake of rhyme. Another possible identification is with the Lingshan 靈山 mentioned in line 23 of Yang Xiong's "Shu du fu," which stood west of Chengdu, better known as Daxue shan 大雪山; see *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu* 揚雄集校注, ed. Zhang Zhenze 張震澤 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993), 1, 5 n. 19.

The change of meter with line fifteen allows for somewhat more detailed allusions. We begin with the bronze horse and jade cockerel discovered ca. 61 BC on Mount Yutong 禺同 (in present-day Dayao 大姚 district, north-central Yunnan), tokens of supernatural approbation which Xuandi 宣帝 commissioned Wang Bao to acquire and propitiate for the benefit of the imperial house; unfortunately, Wang Bao fell ill and died on the journey.<sup>31</sup> Zuo Si had devoted a couplet (lines 49-50) to these ominous items in his *fu*.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, line sixteen's description of Chengdu's bustling traffic seems to draw on another couplet (lines 258-59) of Zuo Si. This does not strike me as a very fitting parallelism, especially when the following line reverts once more to Wang Bao. Here, as in Xiao Gang's preceding poem, we are encouraged to recall Wang Bao, with verge in hand, coming back to Shu, an imperially favored native son. Line eighteen predictably pairs with him Sima Xiangru, availing himself of a relay of horses from the government's post-stations.

The poem's penultimate line names two more historical figures, Yan Junping 嚴君平 (fl. ca. 40-20 BC, a.k.a. Yan Zun 嚴遵, originally Zhuang Zun 莊遵) and Yang Ziyun 揚子雲 (i.e., Yang Xiong). Yan Junping was a Daoist scholar who told fortunes in the Chengdu marketplace, divining by use of milfoil stalks. Each day he would do business till he had earned a hundred cash, enough to cover his basic needs, and would then close up shop and give instruction on the *Laozi* 老子. One of the students he attracted was the young Yang Xiong.<sup>33</sup> Although Yang Xiong eventually held positions at court in Chang'an and was the most famous poet of his day, he was unassuming in temperament, preferring to avoid public matters.<sup>34</sup> When the two are spoken of together, as they are here, it is their shared inclinations to quietude and scholarship that are foregrounded. They, according to our poet, were the last great

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<sup>31</sup> *HS* 64B.2830; *HYZ* 4.447; *SJZS* 37.3030.

<sup>32</sup> Mentioned also, but more laconically, by Yang Xiong in line 34 of his *fu*; see *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *HS* 72.3056-7.

<sup>34</sup> See especially D. R. Knechtges, *The Han shu Biography of Yang Xiong* (53 BC-AD 18) (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1981).

cynosures from Shu; now the region produces none like them. The final four lines of the poem, mentioning in close order Wang Bao, Sima Xiangru, Yan Junping, and Yang Xiong, are calqued on lines 396-405 of Zuo Si's *fu*, where the same brilliant group is invoked. Zuo Si begins that passage (in Knechtges's translation): "Jiang-Han let its numen blaze, / And every age has produced men of talent" 江漢炳靈，世載其英, a couplet that is clearly the inspiration for the concluding verse here.

We have two more sixth-century contributions to the Shu theme. The first is by Yin Keng 陰鏗 who died in the mid-560s, having been a well-regarded writer since the 540s when he was active in the entourage of Xiao Yi 蕭繹, Prince of Xiangdong 湘東王. He was one of the most important poets who passed from service at the Liang court to the succeeding Chen 陳 dynasty. His writings deserve more attention than they have received. His poem on the topic "Shu dao nan" is in eight lines, and it exhibits perfect tonal patterning of the kind designated as "regulated verse" (*lüshi* 律詩) in the Tang. We shall have no difficulty recognizing the allusions in this poem.

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Wang Zun accepted his charge from the Han court,           | 王尊奉漢朝 |
| And at Spirit Pass was not fearful of being so far away.   | 靈關不憚遙 |
| But the tall mountains of Min always have snow;            | 高岷長有雪 |
| 4 The edgeways of Yin have been torched more than once.    | 陰棧屢經燒 |
| Wheels break apart on the Nine-bends route,                | 輪摧九折路 |
| While horsemen are blocked at the bridges of Seven Stars   | 騎阻七星橋 |
| When the roads in Shu are as hard as this,                 | 蜀道難如此 |
| 8 Can one be expected to do deeds of renown? <sup>35</sup> | 功名詎可要 |

The opening couplet highlights the intrepid official, Wang Zun, unblenched by the roughness of Spirit Pass. But the rest of the poem focuses on just how difficult the Shu roads are. The Min mountains are a particularly tall range, on the northern border of Sichuan, mentioned in line 113 of Zuo Si's *fu*. The "edgeways of Yin" 陰棧 is phrasing original with Yin Keng, referring to the narrow cliffside plank-paths in the Yinping 陰平 region (present-day Zitong 梓潼 county, about a hundred miles northeast of Chengdu); the image

<sup>35</sup> WYYH 200.12a; YFSJ 40.5a; Lu Qinli, 3: 2451.



would later be developed more fully by Li Bo. As the access route into the heart of Shu—used, for instance, by Deng Ai—the perilous catwalks had been the site of much fighting. The Nine-bends Slope on the route from Qin to Shu we have encountered before. The semantically parallel “bridges of Seven Stars” (viz., Changxing 長星, Yuanxing 員星, Jixing 璣星, Yixing 夷星, Weixing 尾星, Chongxing 沖星, and Quxing 曲星), reputedly built by Li Bing, cover the western approaches to Chengdu.<sup>36</sup> Yin Keng’s final couplet, with its despairing rhetorical question, concludes on a note that to us, looking back from Li Bo’s perspective, seems customary but which had not heretofore been sounded so bluntly. In this regard, Yin Keng’s poem, in its concentration on the literal sense of the title “Shu dao nan”—as opposed to a more general commenting on the unique history of Shu—is an important composition. The precision of its acoustic form, mentioned above, is also conspicuous and serves to emphasize the overall tightness of the poem.

Another, later sixth-century poem we should note is by Lu Sidao 盧思道 (535-586). Like his slightly earlier contemporary, Yin Keng, he too is worthy of more study; but the poets of this period, except for Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581), have been largely neglected by literary historians.<sup>37</sup> Lu Sidao interests us in the present context because of his poem entitled “Strings out of Shu” (Shu guo xian 蜀國絃). Although not nominally a “Shu dao nan” poem, it merits consideration beside the works we have been reading.

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Shu in the west is acclaimed as Heaven’s storehouse,  | 西蜀稱天府 |
| Owing to its hegemony of bountifulness and abundance. | 由來擅沃饒 |
| Clouds drift through the evenings at Jade Ramparts;   | 雲浮玉壘夕 |
| 4 The sun glints in the morning at Brocade City.      | 日映錦城朝 |
| To go south, one seeks out the Nine-bends route;      | 南尋九折路 |
| To the east, one ascends the bridges of Seven Stars.  | 東上七星橋 |

<sup>36</sup> These bridges bear other, better-known names; for which, see *HYGZ* 3.227.

<sup>37</sup> The dates 535-586 for Lu’s life reflect current research, replacing those (530-581) given in earlier reference works. An annotated edition of Lu Sidao’s extant works in both verse and prose has recently been published: *Lu Sidao ji jiaozhu* 盧思道集校注, ed. Zhu Shangshu 祝尚書 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2001). For our poem, see pp. 61-2.

If the zithered heart might be easily understood, 琴心若易解  
 8 Would the esteemed visitor find it hard to have his way?<sup>38</sup> 令客豈難要

The opening allusion recalls the speech of Zhang Liang 張良 (d. 185 BC) to Han Gaozu 漢高祖 (r. 202-195 BC) in 202 BC, clinching the argument of Lou Jing 婁敬 that the capital of the newly founded Han dynasty should be sited at Chang'an instead of Loyang. Part of Zhang Liang's rationale referred to the "bountiful" (沃) fields of the Guanzhong 關中 area extending to the "abundance" (饒) of Ba and Shu in the south, all to be summed up as "Heaven's storehouse" (天府).<sup>39</sup> Although the latter phrase actually refers in the context of Zhang Liang's disquisition to Guanzhong, it was often taken—as here by Lu Sidao—to describe Shu. The parallel wording and imagery of the second and third couplets are compounded of now standard terms. It is surprising, however, to see the seven bridges located in the east of Chengdu; this is a geographical error (see above). Did Lu Sidao not know where exactly they were located, or was he simply chary of again using the word *xi* 西 (west) to start a line, as he already had done in his first verse, and so was willing to sacrifice accuracy to variation? The concluding couplet calls up the old story of Sima Xiangru wooing the young widow Zhuo Wenjun by playing his zither: once she understood the feelings expressed in his music, she could hardly refuse him. This seems also to give special point to the "strings" of the poem's title (if that is indeed the correct title of the piece).

Finally, we should note that this poem, like Yin Keng's, adheres closely to principles of tonal euphony, including alternation of *ping* 平 and *ze* 仄 tones in the all-important second and fourth syllables of each line. This, along with the strict syntactic parallelism displayed in the second and third couplets, shows again how the *lüshi* was not—as sometimes supposed—a *de novo* invention of Tang poets. The formal similarities of these two poems are deepened further by the fact that Lu Sidao uses the same rhyme category, and even two of the same rhyme-words, employed by Yin Keng. One cannot keep from speculating that if they were not written on the

<sup>38</sup> WYYH 201.7a, titling it "Shu guo yin" 蜀國吟; YFSC 30.1b; Lu Qinli, 3: 2630-1.

<sup>39</sup> SJ 55.2044.

same occasion, Lu Sidao must have been writing his poem to “match” that of Yin Keng.

The last of the extant *shi*-poems on “Shu dao nan” before Li Bo is from the early Tang poet Zhang Wencong 張文琮 (fl. 630-656). This piece, also in *lüshi* form (except for a missed tonal alternation in line three), is a concentrated exercise on the rugged route through the Liangshan range:

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Crossbeams Mountain safeguards the land's<br>rough terrain,   | 梁山鎮地險 |
| With its heaped rocks blocking the tag-ends<br>of the clouds. | 積石阻雲端 |
| Its deep vales descending in infinite abysses,                | 深谷下廖廓 |
| 4 With tiered cliffs rising in clustered windings;            | 層巖上鬱盤 |
| Soaring plank-paths yoke the steep passes,                    | 飛梁駕絕嶺 |
| As edgeway tracks link up precipitous tors.                   | 棧道接危巒 |
| Tugging at the reins, sighing long and alone,                 | 攬轡獨長息 |
| 8 Now I realize how hard this road is. <sup>40</sup>          | 方知斯路難 |

Zhang Wencong's official biographies do not indicate that he ever held office in Shu.<sup>41</sup> This poem may be, like some others we have seen, simply his version of the literary theme, not the result of first-hand experience of the road. Its opening couplet in particular

<sup>40</sup> WYYH 200.12a; YFSJ 40.5a; *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 39.503-4. In the fifth line I read 駕 (“yoke”) with YFSJ, rather than 架 (“frame”) with WYYH and *Quan Tang shi*; both images are possible, but the simpler graph was more likely substituted at some point for the more complex one, rather than vice versa. In terms of etymology, these are actually the same word.

<sup>41</sup> *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 85.2816; *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 113.4187. Zhang Wencong's brief biography is appended to that of his elder brother Wenguan 文瓘 who attained the position of chief minister (*zaixiang* 宰相) during the latter half of Gaozong's 高宗 reign (649-83). Wencong made his name especially owing to a eulogy he wrote following the death of Taizong 太宗 (r. 626-49), for which see *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (rpt. Taipei: Datong shuju, 1979), 162.6a-b. According to *Jiu Tang shu*, Zhang Wencong left behind twenty *juan* of writings; but now only the Taizong eulogy and five other poems, in addition to his “Shu dao nan” poem, are preserved.

owes much, as we shall see, to the work we will consider next. But the poem holds together better than any of those that preceded it, having a tautness in its diction that is quite satisfying. It would be difficult to go much farther than Zhang Wencong does in a short *shi*-poem on “Shu dao nan.” And indeed when Li Bo turned to the subject, he exploded it beyond its previous bounds.

However, we have not yet examined the most important—for Li Bo, as for Zhang Wencong—of the verse compositions on the topic. For this we must leave the genre of *shi* poetry, and we must go back to the third century, a decade or so before even Zuo Si’s famous *fu*. The piece in question is “The Sword Gallery Inscription” (Jian’ge ming 劍閣銘) written by Zhang Zai 張載 (d. ca. 304) in the early 280s. Nowadays Zhang Zai’s elder brother, Zhang Xie 張協 (d. 307), is better known to us, being read for his fine landscape verse. However, Zhang Zai was a notable poet too, as can be seen from the half dozen *fu* by him that are preserved in whole or part, plus two verse inscriptions, and more than a dozen *shi*-poems. His inscription for the Sword Gallery Pass was written on traveling to Shu, where his father Zhang Shou 張收 was serving as prefect of Shujun 蜀郡. The ostensible purpose of the composition was to warn against the propensity of the men of Shu (only recently conquered by the Jin) to rebel against their overlords, advising them that the natural defenses of the region would not protect them from the might of the emperor. We are told that Zhang Min 張敏, prefect of Yizhou 益州, forwarded the text to the emperor (Sima Yan 司馬炎, Wudi 武帝) who then commanded that it be incised for all to see at Sword Gallery itself.<sup>42</sup> Although Zuo Si’s “Shu du fu” was a much grander work, with a different aim, it is indebted in several places to Zhang Zai’s inscription. The “Jian’ge ming” was later selected by Xiao Tong for inclusion in the *Wen xuan*. It is in forty-four tetrasyllabic lines (plus an ending couplet giving the emperor’s order), with six changes of rhyme. Historical allusions are numerous and will need to be discussed following the translation. For the poets writing on the “Shu dao nan” theme before Li Bo, it was Zuo Si’s “Shu du fu” that was the classical touchstone, as we have seen. But for Li Bo, it was this inscription of Zhang Zai that was most prominently in mind

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<sup>42</sup> *Jin shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 55.1517.

when he applied himself to writing of the hard road to Shu. The composition reads:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Ruggedly ribbed, the Crossbeams Mountain,<br/>With rocks heaped upborne and abrupt;<br/>Joined afar to mounts Jing and Heng,<br/>4 Linked more nearly with the Min and Bo ranges;<br/>Communicating south with the Qiong and Bo realms,<br/>Reaching northward to the Bao and Ye valleys;<br/>Pressing in more tightly than the Peng and Jie alps,<br/>8 In height overpassing mounts Song and Hua.</p>  | <p>巖巖梁山<br/>積石峩峩<br/>遠屬荆衡<br/>近綴岷嶓<br/>南通邛樊<br/>北達褒斜<br/>狹過彭碣<br/>高逾嵩華</p>                   |
| <p>Here verily is the gateway to Shu,<br/>As much a fastness as a stronghold.<br/>It is this that is called Sword Gallery,<br/>12 Its cliffs standing tall a thousand fathoms;<br/>With as many defiles as the land can hold,<br/>And pinnacles to the farthest end of the road.<br/>When the times are muddied, passage here is balked;<br/>16 When the Way is seen clear, one moves through freely.<br/>Closed off, it was due to revert to Shu-Han;<br/>Opened up, it then fell to those who held Jin.</p> | <p>惟蜀之門<br/>作固作鎮<br/>是曰劍閣<br/>壁立千仞<br/>窮地之險<br/>極路之峻<br/>世濁則逆<br/>道清斯順<br/>閉由往漢<br/>開自有晉</p> |
| <p>“In Qin, two could oppose a hundred,”<br/>20 And the feudal lords be devoured altogether;<br/>“In Qi, two could oppose ten”—<br/>All as calculated in Sir Tian’s submission.</p>   | <p>秦得百二<br/>并吞諸侯<br/>齊得十二<br/>田生獻籌</p>   |
| <p>It is so even more with this tight-cramped pass,<br/>24 A tract of earth in the back of beyond.<br/>If just one person wield a halberd here,<br/>A myriad men will be put off.<br/>In a land of such strategic terrain,<br/>28 If he be not our kin, let him not preside here.</p>   | <p>矧茲狹隘<br/>土之外區<br/>一人荷戟<br/>萬夫趙起<br/>形勝之地<br/>匪親勿居</p>                                     |
| <p>Long past, Wei was held by the Martial Marquis,<br/>Who halfway downstream showed his delight;<br/>But “the fastnesses of mountains and rivers”<br/>32 Were otherwise regarded by general Wu Qi.<br/>To him, dominance lay truly in moral force,<br/>Rough terrain itself was no sure guarantee.</p>   | <p>昔在武侯<br/>中流而喜<br/>山河之固<br/>見屈吳起<br/>興實在德<br/>險亦難恃</p>                                     |

when he applied himself to writing of the hard road to Shu. The composition reads:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Ruggedly ribbed, the Crossbeams Mountain,<br/>With rocks heaped upborne and abrupt;<br/>Joined afar to mounts Jing and Heng,<br/>4 Linked more nearly with the Min and Bo ranges;<br/>Communicating south with the Qiong and Bo realms,<br/>Reaching northward to the Bao and Ye valleys;<br/>Pressing in more tightly than the Peng and Jie alps,<br/>8 In height overpassing mounts Song and Hua.</p>  | <p>巖巖梁山<br/>積石峩峩<br/>遠屬荆衡<br/>近綴岷嶓<br/>南通邛樊<br/>北達褒斜<br/>狹過彭碣<br/>高逾嵩華</p>                   |
| <p>Here verily is the gateway to Shu,<br/>As much a fastness as a stronghold.<br/>It is this that is called Sword Gallery,<br/>12 Its cliffs standing tall a thousand fathoms;<br/>With as many defiles as the land can hold,<br/>And pinnacles to the farthest end of the road.<br/>When the times are muddied, passage here is balked;<br/>16 When the Way is seen clear, one moves through freely.<br/>Closed off, it was due to revert to Shu-Han;<br/>Opened up, it then fell to those who held Jin.</p> | <p>惟蜀之門<br/>作固作鎮<br/>是曰劍閣<br/>壁立千仞<br/>窮地之險<br/>極路之峻<br/>世濁則逆<br/>道清斯順<br/>閉由往漢<br/>開自有晉</p> |
| <p>“In Qin, two could oppose a hundred,”<br/>20 And the feudal lords be devoured altogether;<br/>“In Qi, two could oppose ten”—<br/>All as calculated in Sir Tian’s submission.</p>   | <p>秦得百二<br/>并吞諸侯<br/>齊得十二<br/>田生獻籌</p>   |
| <p>It is so even more with this tight-cramped pass,<br/>24 A tract of earth in the back of beyond.<br/>If just one person wield a halberd here,<br/>A myriad men will be put off.<br/>In a land of such strategic terrain,<br/>28 If he be not our kin, let him not preside here.</p>   | <p>矧茲狹隘<br/>土之外區<br/>一人荷戟<br/>萬夫趑趄<br/>形勝之地<br/>匪親勿居</p>                                     |
| <p>Long past, Wei was held by the Martial Marquis,<br/>Who halfway downstream showed his delight;<br/>But “the fastnesses of mountains and rivers”<br/>32 Were otherwise regarded by general Wu Qi.<br/>To him, dominance lay truly in moral force,<br/>Rough terrain itself was no sure guarantee.</p>   | <p>昔在武侯<br/>中流而喜<br/>山河之固<br/>見屈吳起<br/>興實在德<br/>險亦難恃</p>                                     |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Even with Dongting Lake or Mount Mengmen,<br/>36 Two states yet had to give up their litations.</p> <p>From of old and to the present day,<br/>“Heaven’s Decree has never been easy.”<br/>Trusting natural defense in prompting sedition<br/>40 Leads nearly always to “disgraceful defeat.”<br/>Gongsun Shu, he was annihilated;<br/>The last of the Liu surrendered abjectly.<br/>44 Let no one follow in those same tracks.<br/><i>Be it inscribed on stone on the mountain’s side,<br/>As a pronouncement to those of Liang and Yi.</i><sup>43</sup></p> | <p>洞庭孟門<br/>二國不祀</p> <p>自古迄今<br/>天命匪易<br/>憑阻作昏<br/>鮮不敗績<br/>公孫既滅<br/>劉氏銜壁<br/>覆車之軌<br/>無或重跡<br/>勒銘山阿<br/>敢告梁益</p> |
|---|---|

Zhang Zai begins his inscription with reference to Liangshan, and this explains why some of the poems we have looked at also do so. It is worth saying here that “Crossbeams Mountain” is, in this context, a reference to Sword-gate (Jianmen 劍門) Mountain, deriving from the high plank-bridges that threaded the famous pass.<sup>44</sup> The early Tang commentator Li Shan 李善 (d. 689) notes that Yang Xiong’s “Exhortation to [the Pastor of] Yizhou” (Yizhou [mu] zhen 益州牧箴) contains the lines “Ruggedly ribbed, the Min Mountains. / Called of old Liangzhou” 巖巖岷山,古曰梁州. In fact these are the opening lines of Yang Xiong’s piece;<sup>45</sup> Zhang Zai begins his own exhortation in similar manner. It is interesting too that the binome *yanyan* 巖巖 was glossed in the Mao 毛 commentary to *Shi* 詩 #191 as *ji shi* 積石 (“heaped rocks”),<sup>46</sup> the phrase that begins Zhang Zai’s second line (and which was also found in Zhang Wencong’s poem, there borrowed from Zhang Zai). We can begin to see here the links of

<sup>43</sup> *Wen xuan* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1986), 56.2411-12; also *Jin shu* 55.1516, *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文, 85.5b, in *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, ed. Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762-1843) (Canton: Guangya shuju, 1887-93).

<sup>44</sup> Some scholars prefer to locate Zhang Zai’s Liangshan in southwestern Shaanxi, near present-day Nandeng 南鄧 district (Zhoujiaping 周家坪), but this does not seem to fit the context.

<sup>45</sup> *Yang Xiong ji jiaozhu*, 334.

<sup>46</sup> *Mao Shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (*Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏), 12A.444a.

diction and imagery with which Zhang Zai is constructing his work. Further, we discover that the trigger for his second couplet, with lines beginning “afar” (*yuan* 遠) and “nearby” (*jin* 近), probably was the eleventh line of Yang Xiong’s exhortation, beginning “Afar and nearby” (*yuan jin*), which followed immediately a line referring to the Min 岷 and Bo 嶓 ranges—a geographical pairing used by Zhang Zai in his fourth line. Without Yang Xiong’s examples, Zhang Zai’s inscription might not have gotten off the ground. But after these initial couplets, Zhang Zai finds his own way.

The geographical plotting of the place in the first stanza, connecting it with other mountains, ranges, and valleys in the cardinal directions, is not unusual in *fu*; and Zuo Si begins his “Shu du fu” in much the same way. (It has been suggested that Zuo Si even consulted Zhang Zai regarding some facts about Shu, besides drawing occasionally from his inscription.) Among those spots in the opening stanza that we have not encountered in our discussion of other poems are mounts Jing 荆 and Heng 衡 in the central Yangtze area, which here furnish the outer terminus of the ring of valleys and ranges centering on Jianmen. The Qiong and Bo realms mentioned in line five are Linqiong 臨邛 and Bodao 樊道 in the south of Shu. The two snugly closed alps used for comparison in line seven are Pengmen 彭門 in the Min range in northwestern Shu and the better-known Jieshi 碣石 overlooking the East China Sea.<sup>47</sup> Song 嵩 and Hua 華 in line eight are of course the famous central and western marchmounts, respectively, often paired together in poetry to refer to tall and awesome peaks.

The second stanza focuses us tightly on Sword Gallery, with several lines of description leading finally to the reference in line seventeen to Liu Bei’s closing off of the passage during the Sanguo period and, in line eighteen, the Jin forcing of the passage under Deng Ai which ended Shu’s third-century independence (and resulted later in Zhang Zai’s own journey). The third and fourth stanzas move us

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<sup>47</sup> Jieshi is mentioned often in early texts, one of its more memorable appearances being in Cao Cao’s 曹操 (155-220) poem “Bu chu Xiamen xing” 步出夏門行 (for which see Lu Qinli, 1: 353), often regarded as one of the first successful landscape descriptions in early *shi* verse—but its precise location has been disputed or there is more than one Jieshi.



back to the beginning of the Han dynasty, recalling and in part quoting the words of Tian Ken 田肯 to Han Gaozu, when Tian Ken advised the new emperor about how to ensure the military security of both the western (Qin) and eastern (Qi) regions of his rule.<sup>48</sup> Emphasizing the geographical advantages of the two areas, which facilitated their defense, Tian Ken noted that when faced with an attacking force, “In Qin two could oppose a hundred” and “In Qi two could oppose ten.” Zhang Zai expands on this view in the fourth stanza, some of the phrasing of which (in lines 25-28) was to be memorably echoed by Li Bo in lines near the end of his “Shu dao nan.”

Next, Zhang Zai underscores the point that it is moral authority (such as that possessed by the contemporary ruling house of Jin), not the apparent impregnability of natural terrain (such as that relied on by potential separatists in Shu), that will be decisive in any conflict. Here he calls up the early fourth-century BC incident in which the ruler of Wei (Wei Wuhou 魏武侯, r. 397-371 BC), while once drifting downriver, exclaimed that the “fastnesses of mountains and rivers” were the treasure of his state, only to be corrected by his general Wu Qi 吳起 (d. 381 BC) who showed with numerous illustrations from history that strategic advantage was no match for moral force (*de* 德).<sup>49</sup>

The concluding stanza sums up the lesson to be learned, quoting from the *Shang shu*<sup>50</sup> and *Zuo zhuan*,<sup>51</sup> and leaving us with the baleful examples of Gongsun Shu 公孫述 who could not hold the kingdom of Shu against the forces of Guangwudi 光武帝, founding emperor of the Latter Han,<sup>52</sup> and Liu Shan 劉禪, last of the Shu-Han

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<sup>48</sup> See *SJ* 8.382-83, *HS* 1B.59. The ultimate point of Tian Ken’s address is that the area of Qi is so crucial that it must be administered only by a brother or son of the ruler himself. This sentiment is the immediate source of Zhang Zai’s lines 27-8.

<sup>49</sup> *SJ* 65.2166-67. See the translation and discussion in Chauncey S. Goodrich, “Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s Biography of Wu Ch’i,” *Monumenta Serica* 35 (1981-83): 200-1, 205.

<sup>50</sup> *Shang shu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed.), “Jun Shi,” 18.223b-c; words attributed to the Duke of Zhou.

<sup>51</sup> *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan zhu* 春秋左氏傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 186-7 (Zhuang gong 11); anent the phrase *baiji* 敗績.

<sup>52</sup> Gongsun Shu had declared himself King of Shu in AD 24 and then Emperor a year later (ruling under the five-phases aegis of metal, hence the

sovereigns, who surrendered to the Jin.<sup>53</sup> Zhang Zai's verse inscription is as distinctive in its own way as Li Bo's poem is in its. The two compositions, in their different fashions, bracket nearly five hundred years of versifying on the hard road to Shu. The poems written in the centuries between these two works seem, when compared with them, in most cases rather pale.

If, after reviewing all these earlier treatments of the topic, we now turn again to Li Bo's "Shu dao nan" and read it through once more with them in the background, we can see just how unusual, how uniquely crafted a poem it is. Even in those few places where it draws upon previously traded images, it makes something quite new of them. And the poem as a whole is less a culmination—in any developmental sense—of its precursors than it is a personalizing and total refashioning of the *yuefu* tradition in which it was written.<sup>54</sup> But so much is the "Shu dao nan" theme now identified with Li Bo that we hardly register those who wrote on it before him.

After Li Bo's rendering of "Shu dao nan," no other versions are recorded. His was the definitive, seemingly final handling of the subject. Following this, it was both impossible to return to the flatter, more regular form of earlier versions and unthinkable to try to surpass the quiddities of his composition—to do so would merely have been to ape his singular genius. Instead, we find in the early

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popular title Baidi 白帝). He was Guangwudi's final opponent, not being defeated till December of 36. He was killed in the climactic battle for Chengdu. His biography in *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 13.534, notes that he relied on the "rugged terrain of his territory and on those who attached themselves to him, in order to secure his ambitions."

<sup>53</sup> Liu Shan's surrender in 264 to the Jin general, Deng Ai, is described in *San guo zhi* (Shu 3), 33.900, as being done in the most humiliating manner: bound at his own behest, he went to meet Deng with an open coffin (indicating his acceptance of death). Zhang Zai's wording partakes of similar imagery, literally "with a jade-circlet in his mouth"—it being customary to place a *bi* 璧 in the mouth of the noble dead.

<sup>54</sup> Li Bo took up the theme of seeing someone off to Shu, and what lay in store for such a traveler, in other poems as well. Besides the famous *yuefu* of "Shu dao nan," he also treated the topic in a *lüshi* and in a small-scale *fu*. For these poems, see the appendix to this article.

ninth century one Lu Chang 陸暢 (*jinsshi* 806) composing a parody. When paying a formal visit to Wei Gao 韋皋, then governor of Shu, Lu Chang sought to praise Wei's administration by countering the standard sentiment about Shu topography with a poem called "Shu dao yi"—that is, "The Way to Shu is Easy"—the only lines of which to be preserved say: "Shu roads are easy, / Easier than treading the level ground!" 蜀道易，易於履平地。<sup>55</sup> Thus, all that was left for this later poet was to win a moment's amusement by contradicting the standard theme, through a weak reversal of the phrasing used by Li Bo in the refrain of his famous poem.

### Appendix

Both of the poems below are plausibly suggested as being written during one or another of Li Bo's stays in Chang'an. However, one cannot be certain of the exact date (which has not stopped scholars from speculating). Some of the wording in the *fu*, especially, recalls that found in "Shu dao nan," and it might be argued that those two works, at least, were composed near in time. It is appealing to imagine that the unnamed friend of the *lüshi* is the same person to whom the *fu* is addressed, and the same person who is the impending traveler in "Shu dao nan," but we do not know this for sure.

#### "Seeing Off a Friend to Shu" 送友人入蜀

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| I've seen the so-called route of Cancong:              | 見說蠡叢路 |
| Jaggedly jolting, it is not easy to travel.            | 崎嶇不易行 |
| There, mountains rear up before one's face,            | 山從人面起 |
| 4 And clouds come forth nigh your horse's head.        | 雲傍馬頭生 |
| Yet sweet-scented trees enfold the edgeways from Qin,  | 芳樹籠秦棧 |
| When springtime's currents wrap round the city of Shu. | 春流遶蜀城 |

<sup>55</sup> *Shang shu gushi* 尚書故實 (*Tangdai congshu*), 9b-10a; also *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, ed. Li Fang 李昉 (925-96) et al. (Taibei: Guxin shuju, 1976), 496.1050b; *Xin Tang shu* 158.4936. Thirty-seven of Lu Chang's poems are recorded in *Quan Tang shi*, *juan* 478. Another anecdote in *Taiping guangji* 256.530c, portrays him as a ready counter-puncher in verse.

Whether you'll rise or sink must already be decided: 升沉應已定  
 8 There is no point in visiting the diviner, Junping.<sup>56</sup> 不必訪君平

Cancong, mentioned also in Li Bo's "Shu dao nan," is the legendary first king of Shu who taught his people to grow the mulberry trees necessary for silkworm cultivation (hence the name he carries, which means "Silkworm Tussock"). The city of Shu around which the river's currents wrap is, of course, Chengdu, girdled by Li Bing's channels. Junping is Yan Junping, the Chengdu fortune-teller and Daoist sage whom we have also encountered before. It is the friend's "rising or sinking" in political terms that Li Bo suggests is already determined—no need to worry about it once he reaches Shu.

The next poem, "Jian'ge fu," is a little gem. Spare of allusions, its focus is on the hard road facing Wang Yan and the sadness felt by the poet at their parting. The rhyme-scheme of this work is highly interesting. Lines 2, 4, 6, 9, and 11 rhyme, while lines 7 and 8 (highlighting the crashing waterfalls) intrude an interjected rhyming couplet amidst this first stanza. The second stanza is an octet, with lines 12, 13, 15, 17, and 19 rhyming. I do not include the extrametrical, lead-in phrases *shang ze* 上則 and *pang ze* 旁則 in the line-count. As in "Shu dao nan" and some other poems translated above, the varying indentations reflect the varying line-lengths of the original text.

"A *Fu* on Sword Gallery: To See Off My Friend,  
 Wang Yan, to Shu"

劍閣賦，送友人王炎入蜀

|   |   |           |
|---|---|-----------|
|   | South of Xianyang, looking straight off | 咸陽之南直望五千里 |
|   | five thousand <i>li</i> ,               |           |
|   | One catches sight of cloudy peaks,      | 見雲峰之崔嵬    |
|   | towering and tall.                      |           |
|   | Sword Gallery is there in front,        | 前有劍閣橫斷    |
|   | cutting across,                         |           |
| 4 | Propped against the blue sky,           | 倚青天而中開    |
|   | opening in the middle.                  |           |
|   | Up above:                               | 上則        |

<sup>56</sup> *Li Bo quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping* 15.2497; *Xinban Li Bo quanji biannian zhushi*, 158; *Li Bo ji jiaozhu* 18.1053.

- A pine-tree wind soughs and rustles,  
wails and whistles,  
And there are the gibbons of Ba—  
lamenting to one another.  
To the side:  
Gusting cataracts race down the straths,  
8 Spraying the stones, spattering  
the Gallery,  
Rushing and dashing with a harrowing thunder.  
Now I see off my Seemly One—here taking  
his leave:  
When will be the time—that you come  
back again?
- 12 Gazing after you far, my lord—to what  
final sight?  
Sunk in my heavy thoughts—with sighs  
escaping.  
Beholding the waves of watchet-blue  
pouring eastward,  
I grieve for the white sun's withdrawal  
to the west.
- 16 A swan-geese parts from Yan—the voice  
of autumn,  
As clouds bring sadness to Qin, with  
gloaming hue.  
But when the luminous moon emerges  
from out Sword Gallery—  
You and I, over wine in separate places,  
shall remember one another.<sup>57</sup>
- 松風蕭颯瑟颯  
有巴猿兮相哀  
旁則  
飛湍走壑  
灑石噴閣  
洶湧而驚雷  
送佳人兮此去  
復何時兮歸來  
望夫君兮安極  
我沉吟兮歎息  
視滄波之東注  
悲白日之西匿  
鴻別燕兮秋聲  
雲愁秦而暝色  
若明月出于劍閣兮  
與君兩鄉對酒而想憶

<sup>57</sup> *Li Bo quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping* 25.3906; *Xinban Li Bo quanji biannian zhushi*, 1666; *Li Bo ji jiaozhu* 1.28; *Quan Tang wen* 347.15a-b.