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# Chu Guangxi, a Belated Silver Poet of the High Tang

Dominic John Toscano  
*University of Colorado Boulder*, [fubintien@gmail.com](mailto:fubintien@gmail.com)

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CHU GUANGXI, A BELATED SILVER POET OF THE HIGH TANG

by

Dominic John Toscano

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Chu Guangxi, a Belated Silver Poet of the High Tang  
written by Dominic John Toscano  
has been approved for the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations

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Paul W. Kroll

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Antje Richter

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Matthias L. Richter

Date\_\_\_\_\_

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Toscano, Dominic John (M.A., Chinese, Asian Languages and Civilizations)

Chu Guangxi, a Belated Silver Poet of the High Tang

Thesis directed by Professor Paul W. Kroll

The Tang dynasty official Chu Guangxi 儲光羲 was a well-regarded poet with a place in the literary circle of the eighth century, that most famous era of poetic production known as the High Tang, and yet he was not canonized by posterity in the way that many of his contemporaries were. Perhaps as a direct result of this, there exists no modern critical edition of Chu's poetry, and very little has been written about him in Western languages. Thus, I offer here an introduction to the life and poetry of Chu Guangxi, a High Tang poet possessing something of a "silver" status. In the course of examining his poetic corpus, I attempt to challenge the one analytical strain that still persists in the majority of Chinese-language scholarship on Chu, namely that his best poetry shows him to be an epigone of the Six Dynasties poet-recluse Tao Qian 陶潛 and a waypoint in the teleological trajectory of pastoral verse (*tianyuan shi* 田園詩). In my reading of Chu's poems, I find that while some owe an undeniable stylistic debt to Tao Qian, these and many others also evince a strong poetic tension between Chu and his famous reclusive forebear, a tension made manifest in a literary consciousness aswim with the work not just of Tao, but of countless other earlier poets as well. Building on the critical writings of T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom, I analyze Chu's poetry as the work of an author who is both conscious of his place in the grand historical matrix of literary tradition, and also working to forge his own poetic identity.

## Contents

A Silver Poet.....	1
Life and Times.....	3
Rhythm and Meaning.....	12
A Belated Poet.....	34
Bibliography.....	54

## A Silver Poet

When reading Shelley's "Ozymandias"—especially that beautifully menacing and tragic declaration from the stone, "'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'"—who but the most knowledgeable scholars and aficionados of the poet's life and works will remember that the sonnet was written in friendly rivalry with his friend, the poet and stockbroker Horace Smith? Smith too wrote an arguably good sonnet of the same title and on the same theme, published just one week after Shelley's in early 1818, yet he has all but disappeared from a popular literary consciousness in which Shelley still maintains an abiding presence.<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, it may be surprising to learn that Dryden so admired the now relatively unheralded poet Abraham Cowley that he claimed it was his "utmost ambition to be thought [Cowley's] equal."<sup>2</sup> Or, indeed, that Milton apparently esteemed Cowley as highly as he did both Shakespeare and Spenser.<sup>3</sup> What these examples illustrate is that irrespective of their social ties, or of contemporary critical adulation of their works, certain poets will always be relegated by posterity to something of a secondary status, and thus regarded as what we might call "silver poets."

The High Tang official Chu Guangxi 儲光羲 (c. 705-c. 765) is just such a silver poet. Relatively little is known about Chu's life and career—there is no biography for him in either of the Tang dynastic histories—but it is clear that he exchanged poems with many of the more famous High Tang poets, and enjoyed what was apparently a close friendship with Wang Wei 王

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see Eugene M. Waith, "Ozymandias: Shelley, Horace Smith, and Denon," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 44 (1995): 22-28.

<sup>2</sup> John Dryden, "Discourse on Epick Poetry," in *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, Volume 3*, comp. Edmond Malone (London: Baldwin & Son, 1800), 529.

<sup>3</sup> This admittedly comes at second-hand, from Milton's wife when she was asked who were those poets most admired by her husband. See Stephen B. Dobranski, *The Cambridge Introduction to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 50-55.

維.<sup>4</sup> Chu's work was included in Yin Fan's 殷璠 contemporary poetry collections *Heyue yingling ji* 河嶽英靈集 and *Danyang ji* 丹陽集, right alongside that of Wang and other poets still held in high regard today, including Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (691-740).<sup>5</sup> Appraisals of his poetry during the Tang and later periods were adulatory, if a bit fulsome, with a common refrain emerging that Chu's best work—viz. those poems of a pastoral, bucolic cast—shared a close affinity to that of the Six Dynasties poet-recluse Tao Qian 陶潛 (365-427). The Northern Song critic Su Zhou 蘇籀 (d. 1164) provides an essential example of this critical tendency: “The poetry of Chu Guangxi of the Tang is, at its best, similar to that of Tao Yuanming [Tao Qian], and, at its most ordinary, to that of Wang Mojie [Wang Wei]” 唐儲光羲詩，高處似陶淵明，平處似王摩詰。<sup>6</sup>

High praise, surely, yet even with such appreciation for his work, and a place in the social circle of poets who would later become canonized, Chu Guangxi, much like Smith and Cowley, was not granted entry by posterity into their hallowed ranks. Not one of his poems appears in the Qing collection *Tang shi sanbai shou* 唐詩三百首, and apparently as early as the Northern Song, his slide into anonymity had already begun: when the Buddhist monk-poet Canliao 參寥 had his verse compared to that of Chu, he objected, saying, “I have never in my life heard of the name

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<sup>4</sup> Yoshimura Hiromichi 芳村弘道 offers an interesting discussion of how the occasional poems of Wang Wei and Chu Guangxi support the notion that they were more than just friendly acquaintances in “Cho Kōgi no den'enshi ni tsuite” 儲光羲の田園詩について, in his *Tōdai no shinin to bunken kenkyū* 唐代の詩人と文献研究 (Kyōto: Chūgoku geibun kenkyūkai, 2007), 48-59.

<sup>5</sup> Twelve of Chu Guangxi's poems are included in the *Heyue yingling ji*, and he is the only poet anthologized by Yin Fan's collections to be included in both. For a discussion of *Heyue yingling ji* and its importance to the study of High Tang poetry, see Paul W. Kroll, “*Heyue yingling ji* and the Attributes of High Tang Poetry,” in *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry: Text, Context, and Culture*, ed. Paul W. Kroll (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 169-201.

<sup>6</sup> Su Zhe 蘇轍, *Luancheng yuyan* 樂城遺言 (*Congshu jicheng*), 1.4.

Guangxi, much less of his poetry!” 某平生未嘗聞光義名，況其詩乎。<sup>7</sup> Very little has been written about Chu in Western languages, with the important exception of Stephen Owen’s treatment of Chu as a part of his larger work on the poetry of the High Tang.<sup>8</sup> More has been written in Chinese during the past half-century, though most of this consists of attempts to add some flesh to the spare skeleton of Chu’s biography, efforts that span a gamut from the mildly plausible to the wildly speculative. Thus, a discussion of what can be known with some certainty about the life and times of Chu Guangxi follows.

### Life and Times

Yet this discussion must begin with a lament: how frustrating that a figure from the High Tang with such a substantial corpus of extant poems—we have a total of 227 in five *juan*—who has enjoyed some measure of praise from the traditional critical consensus should have such an inscrutable background. With no official biography in the dynastic histories, we are left to rely on short biographical snippets in a few contemporary and later texts, as well as what reliable information can be gleaned from the poet’s own writings.<sup>9</sup> The Chinese scholars Chen Tiemin 陳鐵民 and Ge Xiaoyin 葛曉音 have done the major work of collating this information and

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<sup>7</sup> Zhu Bian 朱弁, *Fengyue tang shihua* 風月堂詩話 (*Congshu jicheng*), 2.14.

<sup>8</sup> *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T’ang* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 63-70.

<sup>9</sup> Information about Chu’s life can be found mainly in Gu Kuang’s 顧況 preface to his poetry collection *Chu Guangxi shiji* 儲光義詩集 (*Siku quanshu zhenben*), “Yuanxu” 原序 1a-1b (hereafter *CGXSJ*); in a short note appended to the entry for Chu’s now-lost *Zhenglun* 政論 in the “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 of *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 59.1513 (hereafter *XTS*); in a biographical note appended to the entry for the poetry collection of Chu’s countryman Bao Rong 包融 in *XTS*, 60.1609; in a short entry in Lin Bao 林寶, *Yuanhe xingzuan* 元和姓纂 (*Siku quanshu*), 2.37 (hereafter *YHXZ*); in the entry for Chu’s poetry collection in Chen Zhensun 陳振孫, *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解題 (*Congshu jicheng*), 19.528 (hereafter *ZZSLJT*); and in Xin Wenfang 辛文房, *Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳 (*Congshu jicheng*), 1.14 (hereafter *TCZZ*).



deriving from it a satisfactory account of Chu's life, and I will refer frequently to this important scholarly contribution in the following pages.<sup>10</sup> However, both authors, perhaps understandably goaded by the same feelings of frustration, engage in quite a bit of wishful thinking, relying much too heavily on literal interpretations of Chu's poetry to add specificity and import to his biographical narrative where it is not warranted. Here one cannot help but recall the words of the eminent physicist Richard Feynman, who reminds us that in scientific endeavor—of which the work of the literary historian, we should not forget, is surely a kind—“the first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, our examination of Chu's life affords an opportunity to apply the principle of “evidence against interest,” to avoid accepting specious reasoning simply because it points to a particularly pleasant or romantic narrative of the poet's background. And so what follows shall be rather more verbose than what the spare facts of Chu's biography might otherwise require; indeed, the known details of his life could be related, regrettably, in two or three sentences of medium length. In the interest, however, of examining how quickly incautious interpretation can derail a literary study of this kind, I will linger over several points on which I believe Chen and Ge have gone astray.

The difficulties in developing an accurate biography for Chu begin with determining his place of birth: sources either have him hailing from Yanling 延陵 in Runzhou 潤州, located near the city of Zhenjiang 鎮江 in modern-day Jiangsu, or from Yanzhou 兗州 or Lugo 魯國, both

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<sup>10</sup> See Chen's “Chu Guangxi shengping shiji kaobian” 儲光羲生平事跡考辨, *Wen shi* 文史 12 (1981): 195-210. Ge then builds on Chen's research, revising several points in “Chu Guangxi he ta de tianyuan shi” 儲光羲和他的田園詩, in her *Han Tang wenxue de shanbian* 漢唐文學的嬗變 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1990), 365-78. More recently, the aforementioned chapter by Yoshimura Hiromichi also offers a summary of the work of both scholars. See “Cho Kōgi,” 48-49.

<sup>11</sup> *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!*, ed. Edward Hutchings (W. W. Norton & Company: New York, 1997), 343.

referring to the same administrative area in what is modern-day Shandong.<sup>12</sup> The bibliographers of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 edition of Chu's collected poems note this contradiction, but refrain from weighing in on the debate.<sup>13</sup> Though there is this disagreement in the available sources, it is almost certainly the case that Yanzhou/Luguo simply refers to the registration place of Chu's clan, and that his actual hometown is Yanling.<sup>14</sup> Chu's poems are replete with autobiographical references to his home being in Yanling and Runzhou, and contain further references to various mountains and bodies of water that are traceable to the region.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the "Arts and Literature Monograph" 藝文志 of the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (hereafter *XTS*) lists Chu as being the countryman of Bao Rong 包融 of Yanling, and both men are included in Yin Fan's collection *Danyang ji* as representatives of that very region.<sup>16</sup> Yin Fan himself hailed from the district of Danyang, which, like Yanling, was part of Runzhou, and thus we can be quite sure that Chu Guangxi was born there in southwestern Jiangsu.

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<sup>12</sup> The blurb accompanying the entry for Chu's *Zhenglun* in the *XTS* "Yiwen zhi" has him as a native of Yanzhou 兗州, and both *ZZSLJT* and *TCZZ* follow this. See *XTS*, 59.1513, *ZZSLJT* 19.528, and *TCZZ*, 1.14. Gu Kuang's preface to Chu's collected poems locates his birthplace in Luguo 魯國. See *CGXSJ*, "Yuanxu" 1a-1b. The Bao Rong biographical note in *XTS* "Yiwen zhi" and the entry for Chu in *YHXZ* have him as hailing from Yanling and Runzhou, respectively. See *XTS*, 60.1609 and *YHXZ*, 2.37.

<sup>13</sup> *CGXSJ*, "Tiyao" 提要 1a-2a.

<sup>14</sup> In this, I follow Chen Tiemin, who was himself building on an earlier supposition by Ma Maoyuan 馬茂元. See Chen, "Chu Guangxi shengping," 195-96.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see his poems "You Maoshan" 遊茅山 (*CGXSJ*, 1.7b-9a), "Fu Fengyi zuo" 赴馮翊作 (*CGXSJ*, 3.3b-4a), "Yi Wang shiyu chutai yuan Danyang" 貽王侍御出台掾丹陽 (*CGXSJ*, 4.3a-4b), and "Ti Maoshan Huayangdong" 題茅山華陽洞 (*CGXSJ*, 5.14a).

<sup>16</sup> For the *Danyang ji* as reconstructed by Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, Chen Shangjun 陳尚君, and Xu Jun 徐俊, see their *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* 唐人選唐詩新編 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996; rpt. 2014), 125-48.

Unfortunately, we cannot be as certain as to when he was born. We only have one solid date in Chu's biography, and that is the fourteenth year of the Kaiyuan 開元 reign period (726), when he passes the *jinshi* examination along with Qiwu Qian 綦毋潛 and Cui Guofu 崔國輔, two other High Tang poets of similar “silver” standing.<sup>17</sup> Chinese-language scholarship abounds with attempts to calculate Chu's birthdate by counting backward from 726 using a variety of more or less tendentious lines of reasoning; much is made of Chu's having been a student at the National University (*Taixue* 太學) before passing the exam, and this fact is often cited alongside the regulation recorded in the *XTS* stipulating that all students entering that institution must be between the ages of fourteen and nineteen.<sup>18</sup> That Chu did indeed enter the National University after failing at least once to pass the examination we know from the poet's own commentary to his “For Recorder Ding Xian on Parting” (貽丁主簿仙別),<sup>19</sup> though even if one were to accept—as both Chen Tiemin and Ge Xiaoyin do—that he was around eighteen or nineteen when he began his studies there (any younger and we begin to indulge in a narrative of rather fantastic precocity), there is absolutely no evidence of how much time might have elapsed between then and his passing the examination.<sup>20</sup> Thus dating Chu's birth to a time frame more specific than the first decade of the eighth century would be unfounded.

After Chu passes the *jinshi* examination in 726, it again becomes extremely difficult to apply credible dates to any of his activity. He resides in Luoyang for some time, likely while the

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<sup>17</sup> See Gu Kuang's preface to *CGXSJ*, “Yuanxu” 原序 1a.

<sup>18</sup> See *XTS*, 44.1159-60.

<sup>19</sup> For the poem, see *CGXSJ*, 3.13a-14a, though the commentary does not appear there. For that, see *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960; rpt. 1992; hereafter *QTS*), 138.1399-1400.

<sup>20</sup> See Chen, “Chu Guangxi shengping,” 196-97, and Ge, “Chu Guangxi he ta de tianyuan shi,” 365-66.

court is there until the end of 727, along with fellow *Heyue yingling ji* poets Meng Haoran, Qiwu Qian, and Li Qi 李頎.<sup>21</sup> From his own notes to poem titles and his entry in *Yuanhe xingzuan* 元和姓纂, we know he held the low-level post of Constable (*wei* 尉) in Xiagui 下邳, Anyi 安宜, and Sishui 汜水, as well as possibly in Fengyi 馮翊, though in what order he held these is unclear.<sup>22</sup> During this period, Chu does at some point return to the environs of his hometown in southwestern Jiangsu, and this is one fact that we can rather safely infer from his poetry. In a five-poem cycle called “Roaming Mt. Mao” 遊茅山, Chu gives us a narrative of rumination on failed political ambition while wandering the area around the titular mountain located to the southeast of Yanling, and the key couplets come from the first poem in the cycle:

A decade ago I took leave of my homeland,  
departing to the west I entered the imperial district.

十年別鄉縣  
西去入皇州

From the Luo in the north I return by that original path,  
to the Jiang in the east I head back to my former hills.<sup>23</sup>

北洛反初路  
東江還故丘

However, both Chen and Ge make the rather startling extrapolation from these poems that Chu must have decided to leave officialdom and live in reclusion during this period, and both take the “decade” of the line above as a hard ten-year time frame that can be used to date when he must have been in Yanling. While it is surely not outlandish to take Chu at his word, i.e. that it was indeed likely about a decade after he “took leave of [his] homeland” that he was making his journey to Jiangsu, to understand *shi nian* 十年 here as exactly ten years is to make the mistake

<sup>21</sup> See Chen, “Chu Guangxi shengping,” 197-200, and Kroll, “*Heyue yingling ji*,” 180.

<sup>22</sup> *YHXZ* gives Sishui 汜水 as one of his constabulary posts. See *YHXZ*, 2.37. The other three come from notes to “Fu Fengyi zuo” (*CGXSJ*, 3.3b-4a), “Dapu de zhangzi yun” 大酺得長字韻 (*CGXSJ*, 5.8a-8b), and “Song Qiuqian zhi zhou chifang zuo” 送丘健至州敕放作 (*CGXSJ*, 3.5a-5b).

<sup>23</sup> *CGXSJ*, 1.7b-8a.

of reading poetry as historical prose, and, more importantly, of ignoring the importance of prosody to the poet's choice of words: perhaps it was really eight or nine or twelve years, but *shinian* simply sounded better to the poet's ear. And to take the tone of failed political ambition as evidence of his having left officialdom to enter reclusion smacks of a retroactive attempt to read the trope of Tao Qian's rejection of official life into Chu's biography. Given that one of Chu's constabulary posts was in Anyi, a district just to the north of his hometown of Yanling, it is equally possible that his visits to Mt. Mao were made during his time of service there.

Chu does, however, go into reclusion subsequent to this period. In another of Chu's own notes appended to the title of his three-poem cycle "Dwelling in Reclusion in Zhongnan, for Attendant Gentlemen Su" 終南幽居獻蘇侍郎, the poet tells us, "At the time, I had been appointed Great Supplicator but had yet to take office" 時拜太祝未上.<sup>24</sup> Thus, at some point after holding his constabulary posts and before taking his new position in Chang'an, Chu lived in reclusion in the Zhongnan Mountains, a popular spot for Tang officials seeking refuge from the intrigue of life at court. Chen and Ge both attempt to place Chu Guangxi in Zhongnan at the same time as Wang Wei, and even to show that Chu must have stayed with Wang Wei at his Lantian 藍田 estate.<sup>25</sup> Offered as evidence are the few poems Chu wrote as companion pieces to some of Wang's, his response poem to Wang's "Waiting on Chu Guangxi Who Never Came" 待儲光羲不至, and a poem entitled "An Engagement with Rectifier of Omissions Wang Wei in

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<sup>24</sup> CGXSJ, 2.2a.

<sup>25</sup> See Chen, "Chu Guangxi shengping," 202-203 and Ge, "Chu Guangxi he ta de tianyuan shi," 370-71. Yoshimura is slightly less sanguine about this, but in the end, he too places the two poets together in Zhongnan. See "Cho Kōgi," 53-59.

My Thatched-roof Cottage in Laotian” 藍上茅茨期王維補闕.<sup>26</sup> This latter poem, the strongest piece of evidence in this argument, does not even appear in any of the editions of Chu’s collected poems, and was most likely written by Qian Qi 錢起.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, there is no reliable evidence that Chu wrote the other poems in question when Wang was in Zhongnan. Though these poems show that Wang and Chu were very likely more than casual acquaintances, they could have been written in the course of social interchange while the two men were serving in the capital.

From his position as Great Supplicator, a ceremonial functionary on the staff of the ministers in charge of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (*Taichang si* 太常寺), Chu is promoted to the post of Investigating Censor (*jiancha yushi* 監察御史).<sup>28</sup> There is no other evidence that he ever rises any higher in the Tang official bureaucracy, and so he is most likely in this relatively low-level position in the Censorate when Chang’an is sacked in 756 by An Lushan’s 安祿山 forces. Chu, like many others, is forced to act as an official for the invaders. Once the rebellion is put down, he returns to the capital. The *XTS* and *Tang caizi zhuan* 唐才子傳 both record Chu as having “returned on his own” (*zigui* 自歸), and in a note appended to the title of his “On Climbing the Qin Mountains” 登秦嶺作, Chu tells us, “At the time, I was returning to the capital after having been captured by the rebels” 時陷賊歸國. Chen Tiemin believes this indicates that

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<sup>26</sup> For the poems written to Wang Wei’s “Ouran zuo” 偶然作 and Chu’s response to “Waiting for Chu,” see *CGXSJ*, 2.4a-6b and 5.4b. Both poems are discussed below. For “An Engagement with Wang Wei,” see n. 27.

<sup>27</sup> The only text that includes the poem among Chu’s other works is *QTS*, 139.1415. Yoshimura considers this misattribution, but surprisingly decides in favor of the poem being Chu’s, basing this decision on tenuous assumptions about Qian Qi’s own biography. See “Cho Kōgi,” 53-54.

<sup>28</sup> This was most certainly a promotion, from rank 9a1 to 8a2, but still a relatively low-level position.

Chu must have somehow escaped his captors at some point before the rebellion had been quelled, and cites the following couplets from Chu's poem as evidence:<sup>29</sup>

At dawn I emerged from the forest of fierce beasts,  
quivering and trembling I ascended the lofty peak.

朝出猛獸林  
躩踞登高峰

Deer roam in the Hall of Great Light,  
fog permeates the Palace of Splendid Purity.<sup>30</sup>

鹿遊大明殿  
霧溼華清宮

I find this to be an exaggeration of the facts and an overreading of the poem. Firstly, there is nothing in the language of the historical sources to indicate that his having “returned on his own” means he had mounted a daring escape: *XTS* reports that “when An Lushan rebelled, [Chu] was captured by the rebels and then returned on his own” 安祿山反，陷賊自歸, while *Tang caizi zhuan* spells out quite clearly that “after the rebels were subdued he returned on his own” 賊平後自歸 [italics mine].<sup>31</sup> Secondly, the opening couplet of Chu's poem is at best simply a metaphor for having come out of a perilous situation unscathed, and the sixth couplet's images of a desolated capital as seen from the Qin peaks seems entirely appropriate even once it had been retaken by Suzong's 肅宗 forces. Given the evidence, and contrary to the romantic narrative of a courageous escape from the enemy's clutches, it is most likely that Chu Guangxi, like many others, simply returned to the capital amid the collapsing scenery of An Lushan's rebellion.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See “Chu Guangxi shengping,” 205-206.

<sup>30</sup> *CGXSJ*, 2.11a-11b.

<sup>31</sup> See *XTS*, 59.1513 and *TCZZ*, 1.14.

<sup>32</sup> See the account of Xuanzong's immediately pardoning many such officials in *XTS*, 5.153. Chu Guangxi, it seems, was not one of those shown forgiveness right away, perhaps because he lacked the family connections of someone like Wang Wei.

Upon his return, Chu is imprisoned for serving the enemy, and then exiled, possibly to Lingnan 嶺南.<sup>33</sup> Some time after this, most likely with the rise to power of Daizong 代宗 in 762, Chu is pardoned, but all extant sources agree that he dies in exile.<sup>34</sup> Chen tentatively dates his death to a year later in 763. Though based on Chu's purported age at the time (which cannot be known with any certainty) and the supposition that he never returns from his place of exile, this estimate is still not completely untenable, and thus, barring any new evidence that might be discovered, I suggest giving as Chu's birth year c. 705 and as his death year c. 765, both choices combining the same plausibility and arbitrariness as the ones given up to this point in scholarship Chinese and Western, but without the pretense of being more reliable than they actually are.

While the desire to add more specificity to Chu's biography and the impulse to romanticize certain of its details is understandable, if ultimately mistaken, we have something that does, in many important ways, provide a much more insightful view of the man—his poetry. Thus, in the following pages, we shall consider a wide selection of Chu's poems, beginning with those on farm life that garnered for him both contemporary praise and the aforementioned comparisons to Tao Qian. Naturally, these poems have been labeled by commentators both traditional and modern as *tianyuan shi* 田園詩, or pastoral poetry, the poetic genre so heavily associated with Tao. Indeed, we will see that Chu Guangxi is intensely aware of Tao Qian in his poetry, and much of his bucolic verse asymptotically approaches homage. But we will also see Chu working to develop his own voice.

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<sup>33</sup> The only source to give Lingnan as the location of Chu's exile is *TCZZ*, 1.14. Chu wrote at least one poem while in prison, "From Prison, for Lords Yao, Zhang, Xue, Li, Zheng, and Liu" 獄中貽姚張薛李鄭柳諸公. *CGXSJ*, 4.2a-2b.

<sup>34</sup> See Chu's poem "Composed in the Garden in Evening after the Rain, Joyful at My Pardon" 晚霽中園喜赦作. *CGXSJ*, 3.4a-4b.



## Rhythm and Meaning

With all of the critical associations of Chu with Tao Qian, it may be tempting when reading Chu's georgic poems to look for a particular symbolism or ethics that he extracts from the pastoral scenes, perhaps one that coincides with Tao's own near obsession with recounting and justifying his decision to leave behind officialdom and adopt the lifestyle of a reclusive farmer. Rather much like all Chinese poets, Chu does indeed read the natural landscapes like a text, translating the inherent patterns (*wen* 文) of the bucolic tableaux into statements of meaning, both personal and universal. Meaning is embedded in the phenomenal world as *wen*, merely waiting to be found by the perceptive individual, not imposed on top of it, a point Liu Xie 劉勰 (465-522) stresses in the opening to *The Literary Mind and Carving of Dragons* 文心雕龍: "The sculpted forms of the sunset clouds possess a subtlety that surpasses the painter's craft, and the refined splendor of the plants and trees relies not on the marvels of an embroiderer. How could these be external ornament? They are simply self-so" 雲霞雕色，有踰畫工之妙；草木賁華，無待錦匠之奇。夫豈外飾？蓋自然耳。<sup>35</sup> But the "self-so" *wen* of these landscapes is tremendously varied, as are the meanings derived therefrom, and we will see Chu coming to very different realizations in poems that all trade in the same kind of imagery. And thus we begin to understand the folly of attempting to discover a single account of what farm life *means* for Chu Guangxi, for the answer itself is "self-so": it means many things. While it will be interesting to see *what* Chu is reading in the patterns of his pastoral scenes, what should be most intriguing to us as students of poetry is *how* he reads them. The structure, composition, and prosody of his poem are the poet's account of how he interprets the world of which he writes, creating his own

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<sup>35</sup> *Wenxin diaolong yi zheng* 文心雕龍義證, ed. Zhan Ying 詹鏗 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989; rpt. 2013), 1.8.

*wen* in the process. Here, then, we can claim something particular for Chu Guangxi, for no matter what meaning the pastoral scenes may evoke for him in each poem, it is always from the natural and very human *rhythms* of farm life that these come forth.

As our first poem, we will take a work from an eight-poem cycle containing some of Chu's most representative georgic verse, entitled "Assorted Stirrings from Life on the Farm" 田家雜興. We will consider several from this cycle in the following pages, along with a few other titles, but let us look first at the eighth and final poem in "Assorted Stirrings".<sup>36</sup>

Assorted Stirrings from Life on the Farm (Eight of Eight)<sup>37</sup>

田家雜興其八

I've planted more than a hundred mulberries;  
I've planted thirty acres of millet.<sup>38</sup>  
With both food and clothing to spare,  
I meet with close friends every now and then.  
When summer comes we have wild rice,  
when autumn arrives we have chrysanthemum wine.  
My wife welcomes them with good cheer,  
and my children know to scamper off.  
As the sun sets we retire to the garden,

種桑百餘樹  
種黍三十畝  
衣食既有餘  
時時會親友  
夏來菰米飯  
秋至菊花酒  
孺人喜逢迎  
稚子解趨走  
日暮閑園裏

<sup>36</sup> As of this writing, there is no modern critical edition of Chu Guangxi's collected works. The bibliographic entry for his collected poems in the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* notes that there were originally seventy *juan* of Chu's writings, among these a few longer works on government and the Confucian classics. However, five *juan* of his poetry is all that remains, and the earliest extant editions of these date to the late Ming. For the purposes of this paper, I use as my base text *CGXSJ*, supplementing with two other texts: the first, the facsimile of a late Ming moveable-type edition of Chu's collection included in *Tang wushi jia shiji* 唐五十家詩集, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 1973-2116; and the second, the text of certain poems as they appear in the *Heyue yingling ji*, specifically the version included in the revised *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian*, 239-44, which offers variant readings as gathered from the several recensions of that collection.

<sup>37</sup> *CGXSJ*, 2.9a.

<sup>38</sup> This couplet is a reworking of the opening line (種豆南山下) of the third poem in Tao Qian's five-poem cycle "Returning to Dwell in Gardens and Fields" 歸園田居. Tao's line itself is an allusion to verses contained in the famous letter of Yang Yun 楊惲 (grandson of Sima Qian 司馬遷) to his friend Sun Huizong 孫會宗, though the sentiment of helplessness Tao seems to be accessing in Yang's lines is entirely absent in Chu's opening. For a discussion of Tao's allusion to Yang, see Xiaofei Tian, *Tao Yuanming & Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2005), 248n25.

circled and shaded by elm and willow.<sup>39</sup>  
 Soused and sodden they return home by night,  
 as a cool breeze blows through my window.  
 I gaze at the River of Stars, shallow and clear,<sup>40</sup>  
 I look to the Dipper, high and low.  
 A few jugs have yet to be opened;  
 shall we drink them tomorrow morn?

團團蔭榆柳  
 酩酊乘夜歸  
 涼風吹戶牖  
 清淺望河漢  
 低昂看北斗  
 數甕猶未開  
 明朝能飲否

[rhyme: *huwX* 厚 / *hjuwX* 有]

We must pause here to mention the obvious: the stylistic debt Chu's poem owes to the Tao Qian mode is inescapable. Chu has captured nicely the quiet discursive ease of Tao's treatment of pastoral settings, but the poem's links to Tao Qian are not merely stylistic. Chu includes direct allusions to several poems from Tao's cycle "Returning to Dwell in Gardens and Fields" 歸園田居. Chu's opening couplet is a double echo of Tao's own "I've planted beans at the foot of south mountain" 種豆南山下. The "shaded by elm and willow" of the tenth line is an inverted reworking of Tao's "Elm and willow shade my rear eaves" 榆柳蔭後簷. But perhaps the most interesting allusion is Chu's use in the thirteenth line of "shallow and clear." Tao employs the same descriptors in the formulaic rendering *qing qie qian* 清且淺, immediately familiar from the tenth of the Nineteen Old Poems 古詩十九首 and its image of the River of Stars, though he couples it with the image of a mountain stream (*shanjian qing qie qian* 山澗清且淺). Chu has obviously picked up on Tao's application of this formula, but interestingly, he has restored the original image of the Milky Way, creating a detoured allusion to Tao via the Nineteen Old

<sup>39</sup> The shade of "elm and willow" here recalls the eleventh line (榆柳蔭後簷) of the first poem in Tao's "Returning to Dwell" cycle.

<sup>40</sup> The "River of Stars, shallow and clear" is an interesting allusion both to the third line (山澗清且淺) of the fifth poem in "Returning to Dwell," and to the fourth couplet of the tenth of the Nineteen Old Poems 古詩十九首, whence the image originally comes. See *Les Dix-neuf Poèmes anciens*, trans. Jean-Pierre Diény (rpt. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010), 11.

Poems. Chu's fondness for referencing the poetry of Tao Qian is clearly manifest in much of his georgic verse, including several of his other poems considered herein, and as they occur, these references have been set down in the notes below.

We must also digress here to notice something else: the opening couplet of this poem is our first taste of Chu's fondness for repetition, sonic flourishes we will continue to see throughout his poems, reminding us that Chu, like all good poets, cares very much about sound. A reminder, more importantly, that for all of his concern with private experience, Chu wrote his poetry to be *heard*, and thus his care for sound is tied up inextricably with his ethics. This is getting at what Joseph Brodsky meant when he wrote of Auden that "his virtues are dictated not by his conscience alone but by prosody, whose voice is more convincing."<sup>41</sup> Reading poetry silently on the page—or, increasingly, the screen—makes it easy to forget that writing is not just done by hand, a fact to which Homer and Shakespeare testify in perpetuity. Chu's interest in the repetitive aural elements in his poems is naturally part and parcel of his sensitivity to the rhythms of farm life, for repetition *is* rhythm, the revolving of sure cycles that allow us to effortlessly follow even the most modally and metrically complex jazz compositions. Matisse gives us the most succinctly profound expression of this confluence: "Jazz," he said, "is rhythm and meaning."<sup>42</sup>

Back to our poem, right away to repetition of language and image. The recounting of active planting in the first couplet is a relaxed sigh in admiration for a job well done, with the double statement serving to emphasize both the amount of work and its pleasantly simple

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<sup>41</sup> "On 'September 1, 1939' by W. H. Auden," in *Less than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), 329.

<sup>42</sup> From a 1952 interview Matisse gave to the writer and artist André Verdet, reprinted in Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 216.

repetitive nature. Work gives way to rest, as Chu details the relaxed scene of home life with the interjecting arrival of guests. A simple statement of the particular food and drink that the speaker and his guests enjoy according to the season emphasizes the cyclicity of this scene, as does the “every now and then” of the second couplet, expressed as it is with its own double-statement of time (*shishi* 時時). Time, then, is always set aside for rest and enjoying the fruits of one’s labors. Accordingly, as the time of relaxation and association comes to an end, with the friends drunkenly stumbling home, the speaker is left alone not with melancholy, but with the pleasantness of a cool breeze wafting through the window. The sure cycle of life on the farm means that his friends will return, that the good times will come again. A time for reflection presents itself in the penultimate couplet, on the sprawling image of the beautiful night sky and the Dipper: one can imagine the striking brightness of the night sky image, “shallow and clear,” unobstructed by the light pollution of the urban centers in which many of us now dwell. How could it not commandeer your complete attention, its broad expanse dwarfing human concerns? But in the final couplet the speaker returns his attention to the earthbound, with an invitation to do it all again, and so Chu concludes his poem with an implicit promise that the cycle will indeed continue. It is also an invitation that extends outside the poem, entreating the reader’s agreement with the sentiment, to think also on the joy that comes from such a life.

Beginning to take shape in this first poem is the particular kind of rhythm that Chu both feels and hears in the pastoral lifestyle, particularly the sequence of work, repose, and reflection. This rhythm, its own kind of *wen*, pulses behind all of Chu’s pastoral verse. Consider the following poem, written in concert with one of Wang Wei’s:

In Concert with Wang Wei’s “Offhand Composition” (Three of Ten)<sup>43</sup> 同王十三維偶然作其三

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<sup>43</sup> CGXSJ, 4b-5a.

This old country soul was always poor and low,  
braving the heat I till my melon field.<sup>44</sup>  
Before reaching the end of the whole plot,  
I rest easy napping beneath a tree.<sup>45</sup>  
Who is that shouldering the weeding basket,  
bright white of head come to rest from his load?<sup>46</sup>  
No need to ask from which villages we hail,  
we meet as if things had only ever been thus.<sup>47</sup>  
Not a single thing in our bellies,  
we speak in high spirits of the years of Fuxi.  
The setting sun looks down on storey's corner,  
while carefree I gaze at streams under fair skies.  
I have my wife carry the silkworm basket,  
then call for my son to row the fishing boat.  
Silently serene I float on the green water,  
heading away to pick lotus in the cove.  
Lotus flowers, so splendid and beautiful,  
they make me unable to return.

野老本貧賤  
冒暑鋤瓜田  
一畦未及終  
樹下高枕眠  
荷蓀者誰子  
皤皤來息肩  
不復問鄉墟  
相見但依然  
腹中無一物  
高話羲皇年  
落日臨層隅  
逍遙望晴川  
使婦提蠶筐  
呼兒榜漁船  
悠悠泛綠水  
去摘浦中蓮  
蓮花豔且美  
使我不能還

[rhyme: *sen* 先 / *sjen* 仙]

As before, Chu's reading of the scene begins with agricultural toil, moves to a scene of rest, which is then followed by reflection, though interestingly here Chu treats the cycle itself with repetition, reintroducing activity in the sixth couplet and following it with another moment of relaxation and reflection in the concluding two couplets. We also see again the introduction of companions and subsequent separation, with the old man shouldering the weeding basket in the

<sup>44</sup> Reminiscent of Shaoping 邵平, Marquis of Dongling 東陵侯, who planted melons in reclusion after the destruction of Qin 秦. See *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959; rpt. 1975), 53.2017. Tao Qian also makes reference to him in his "Drinking Wine" 飲酒 (One of Twenty).

<sup>45</sup> A possible allusion to the *Chuci* 楚辭 poem "Nine Changes" 九辯: "Yao and Shun always had those to whom they could delegate / so they could rest easy and be at peace" 堯舜皆有所舉任兮，故高枕而自適。

<sup>46</sup> In *Analecets* 18:7, Confucius' disciple Zilu 子路 meets an old recluse shouldering a weeding basket, who then rebukes Zilu for his lack of farming skills, but ends up inviting the young man to spend the night in his house.

<sup>47</sup> There is an echo here of the fourth couplet (相見無雜言，但道桑麻長) of the second poem in Tao's "Returning to Dwell."

third couplet and the momentary appearance of the speaker's wife and son in the seventh. The presence of the former plunges the speaker into antiquity, a resurrection of the old man once met on the road by Confucius' disciple Zilu 子路, and who is especially appropriate here since the *Lunyu* 論語 account shows him to be an experienced farmer, a fact evinced by his mild rebuke of Zilu for being someone obviously not so inclined. Their talk, too, is of mythical antiquity, of the glorious days of the sagely thearch Fuxi 伏羲. All of this is primed by the reference in the first couplet to the speaker's tilling of a melon field, an allusion to the Marquis of Dongling 東陵侯 Shao Ping 邵平 of the Qin, who went into reclusion after that dynasty's collapse and planted melons. Even the fact that the speaker could "rest easy" (*gaozhen* 高枕, lit. "pillowed high") in the second couplet may recall a line from the *Chuci* 楚辭 about the sage-kings Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 "resting easy" because of their wisdom in delegation. As the past pushes its way into the present here, the sense of being lost in time is especially palpable, emphasized by the two men conversing with "not a single thing in [their] bellies," their dialogue so engrossing that they either forget about or give no thought to taking a meal. Immersion in the enjoyment of a pleasant activity returns in the final image of picking lotus, the flowers "so splendid and beautiful" as to cause the speaker to become lost in the act of picking them. The repetition of *lian* 蓮 as the final character of the sixteenth line and the first character of the seventeenth is an example of anadiplosis that both again shows Chu's skill for employing repetitive language, and that knits closed this second cycling of Chu's sequence of work-rest-reflection.

In these first two poems, time and rhythm are interlinked. Time is of course the vehicle that moves the repetition and cycles of farm life, but insofar as things repeat, there is the opportunity for losing oneself, a step deeper into the life of a farmer, one that is already quite far

outside the hustle and bustle of civilized life. But, as mentioned before, the way Chu reads the landscape, i.e. rhythmically, is not tied to any one particular realization. Notice the quite different concern with time in the following poem, another from the “Assorted Stirrings” cycle:

Assorted Stirrings from Life on the Farm (Four of Eight)<sup>48</sup>

田家雜興其四

The farmer hurries out to his cultivated fields  
in daytime he closes his neglected gate.<sup>49</sup>  
In the neighborhood there is no hearth smoke,  
the young children all together are at ease.  
The wellsweep hangs in the empty orchard,  
chickens and dogs are everywhere among the mulberry.<sup>50</sup>  
The time comes for a break in the farm work,  
so he picks herbs while strolling famous mountains.  
He speaks only of how much he has picked,  
and does not dwell on the difficulties of the road.  
The life of man is like that of the mayfly,  
once it has gone it can not be pulled back.  
But look, sir, at Queen Mother of the West:<sup>51</sup>  
the fairest visage for a thousand years!

田家趨壟畝  
當晝掩虛關  
鄰里無煙火  
兒童共幽閒  
桔槔懸空圃  
雞犬滿桑間  
時來農事隙  
採藥遊名山  
但言所採多  
不念路險艱  
人生如蜉蝣  
一往不可攀  
君看西王母  
千載美容顏

[rhyme: *srean* 山 / *sraen* 刪]

The same rhythms of farm life can be felt here, though the images of the relative inactivity of the village stand in for more direct statements of labor, the villagers likely all hard at work in the fields, and this is underlined by the allusion in the second and third couplets to Tao Qian’s

<sup>48</sup> *CGXSJ*, 2.8a.

<sup>49</sup> A reworking of the third line (白日掩荆扉) of the second poem in Tao’s “Returning to Dwell” cycle.

<sup>50</sup> The second and third couplets are a loose allusion to the seventh and eighth couplets (曖曖遠人村，依依墟里煙，狗吠深巷中，雞鳴桑樹巔) of the first poem of Tao’s “Returning to Dwell,” which is itself alluding to the image of the idyllic state from the end of the *Daodejing* 道德經, a state whose inhabitants are so simple and unaffected that although they can hear the dogs and chickens of the neighboring state, they will live their whole lives without ever contacting them. See *Laozi Daodejing zhu jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋, ed. Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 80.190.

<sup>51</sup> An ancient goddess of Chinese antiquity, the Queen Mother of the West is often featured in Tang poetry as a symbol of divine transcendence and unfading female beauty. For a detailed exploration of her image in medieval poetry, see Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence & Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993).



“Returning to Dwell” and thus that poem’s own echo of the idyllic image of village life from the end of the *Daode jing* 道德經. The subject’s time of rest and reflection in the fourth and fifth couplets mirrors closely that of the poem just considered above, not only in the image of picking herbs, but also in the focus of the farmer on the important—and simple—things. But while Chu decides in the previous poem to conclude on that sentiment, here he moves to the melancholy existential brooding of the penultimate couplet, and the almost yearning realization in the final couplet that things could be different. In this progression of couplets, we get a window on Chu’s creative thought process, a rather clear example of ideas coming into focus sequentially in the mind of the poet: routine gives way to pause, a pause begets reflection on the fleeting “mayfly”-like nature of life, which then naturally provokes a turn toward the eternal. And what is eternity but the ultimate unfolding of routine? Quite distinct from the previous two poems, here cyclical rhythm causes Chu Guangxi to think through this idea of cyclicity all the way to its logical end, to the obverse of the deathless beauty of the Queen Mother of the West, to man’s final lot: oblivion.

Chu deals with this rather inconvenient realization in a more personal way in the following poem:

Assorted Stirrings from Life on the Farm (One of Eight)

田家雜興其一

Spring arrives as the orioles sing,<sup>52</sup>  
and I hasten toward my fields.<sup>53</sup>  
Unable to work by my strength alone,  
I am obliged to marry a neighbor’s daughter.

春至鶻鷓鳴  
薄言向田墅  
不能自力作  
黽勉娶鄰女

<sup>52</sup> An allusion to the *Shijing* poem “Seventh Month” 七月 (*Mao* 154): “Spring days bring along the sunshine / and there are the singing orioles” 春日載陽、有鳴倉庚。

<sup>53</sup> With the meaning of “to hasten toward,” the term *boyan* 薄言 appears in many *Shijing* poems, but perhaps most noticeably in the poem “The Plantains” 采芣苢 (*Mao* 8) as part of the refrain: “Lavish and luxurious, the plantains, / we hasten out to pick them” 采采芣苢、薄言采之。

Thinking fondly of having sons and grandsons,  
 I consider expanding my fields and orchards.  
 At times of rest we look upon each other smiling,  
 cheerful and glad at the good grains.  
 Night after night I go up Whistling Terrace,<sup>54</sup>  
 and gaze south at the islets of Dongting Lake.  
 The hundred grasses blanketed with frosty dew,  
 the autumn hills echo with the sounds of fulling mallets.  
 And yet I am jealous of the times of bygone years;  
 there is no getting at the way I feel inside.

既念生子孫  
 方思廣田圃  
 閒時相顧笑  
 喜悅好禾黍  
 夜夜登嘯臺  
 南望洞庭渚  
 百草被霜露  
 秋山響砧杵  
 却羨故年時  
 中情無所取

[rhyme: *ngjoX* 語]

The poem opens with allusions to the *Shijing* 詩經, a quick backward glance at the poetry of the past that contrasts with the speaker's own forward motion as he runs out to his fields. Chu is still giving us the same rhythmic turns, though now to the sequence of work and rest he makes the novel addition of the cycle of marriage and having children, of family life. Though this leads to some cheer, it also does not satisfy in the way we might expect. Taking in the pleasant natural images he sees from his perch on Whistling Terrace, listening to the sound of laundry being pounded by fulling mallets (an instance of actual rhythmic beats made text), the speaker seems to be attempting to forestall the dejection that follows in the final couplet. Even with the happy times of the present, he yearns for a bygone era. Which era and why is left unsaid, and with the “there is no getting at the way I feel inside” of the final line, there is even some doubt as to whether the speaker himself could tell us. An interesting admission, for the speaker has told us clearly how he is feeling, and yet insists that his inner emotions cannot be accessed. This is a very sophisticated introspective moment, a paradox of clarity and perplexity that is an essential facet of human emotion. He enjoys the life of the present moment, but has a vague sense he was

<sup>54</sup> Whistling Terrace, located in modern-day southern Henan, was once purportedly the preferred spot of Ruan Ji 阮籍 for evening whistling, he being well-known for the transcendental quality—and high volume—of his whistle. For a representative account, see *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 18.354-55.

born in the wrong time, that a better era has passed him by. Returning here is the rumination of the previous poem on the inevitability of time's cycling onward into eternity, with the personal pathos of the speaker's recognition that there will be a point at which one must step off one's own ride on the cycle, attended by the sobering understanding that it will continue on without you.

And so, pastoral rhythms can lead to readings both pleasant and melancholy. But what happens when those rhythms are disrupted in some way? Notice the following poem:

Assorted Stirrings from Life on the Farm (Two of Eight)<sup>55</sup>

田家雜興其二

The masses are ashamed at the poor and low,  
 in their relations preferring the rich and well-fed.  
 My sensibilities, though, surge forth uncontained,  
 what pleases me lies in hunting and fishing.  
 When the hilly grassland light begins to fade,  
 I return home to dwell at rest for a spell.  
 My garden grows full of mallow and bean leaves,  
 round my house are planted mulberry and elm.  
 The birdlings know I am at rest,  
 so they come flocking, alighting on my hut.  
 What I wish for lies in being freely at ease,  
 yet in the counties none respond to me.  
 The sun retires along with South Mountain,  
 bewildered, I down a whole jug of wine.

衆人恥貧賤  
 相與尚膏腴  
 我情既浩蕩  
 所樂在畋漁  
 山澤時晦暝  
 歸家暫閒居  
 滿園植葵藿  
 繞屋樹桑榆  
 禽雀知我閒  
 翔集依我廬  
 所願在優游  
 州縣莫相呼  
 日與南山老  
 兀然傾一壺

[rhyme: *ngju* 虞 / *ngjo* 魚]

The “poor and low” of the first line is an echo of the “This old farmer has always been poor and low” from the opening of “In Concert” considered above, but we would know very clearly anyway with whom the speaker identifies: the first two couplets here brim with resoluteness, a staunch confidence in the innate value of an occupation others may dismiss as mean. This is brought to the fore by the personal declamations of “what pleases me” in the second couplet and

<sup>55</sup> *CGXSJ*, 2.7b.

later in the sixth of “what I wish for.” Far from simple statements of preference, these are shot through with an ethical spark: while others might indulge in less meaningful activities, “what pleases *me*” and “what *I* wish for” are things of greater import. Almost the entire poem is an argument for the ethics of the farmer’s lifestyle.

Notice that here, though, the standard work-then-rest rhythm has been inverted, the speaker coming home “to dwell at rest for a spell” before telling us of his work, the planted vegetation of the following couplet. This is followed by another inversion: in the fifth couplet, Chu gives us the image of “birdlings . . . alighting on [his] hut,” the natural world intuitively recognizing his restful state, which is really a preemptive rebuke to the sixth couplet’s humans that do not respond in like manner. This is highlighted further by the fascinating image in the penultimate line, of the “the sun [retiring] along with South Mountain.” The speaker is obviously watching the sunset, but instead of only the sun disappearing into repose, he sees the mountain doing something similar. The slow creep of dusk shadows shrouding the rock face against the darkening sunset sky take on a kind of soporific effect, like the sleepy closure of two weary eyelids. This, then, is the ultimate sign of solidarity with the speaker, the heavens and earth themselves following the earlier lead of the birds in mimicking his restful state. But just as we think we have worked out what is going on in the poem, after such a display of confidence in the rightness of his chosen lifestyle, the final couplet introduces a rather stunning turn. Chu gives us the sharp swerve of the final line, the speaker drinking himself away in bewilderment. The force of this line is twofold: not only does the term *wuran* 兀然 (lit. “bewildered, befuddled, transfixed”) immediately signal a deep contrast to the puffed-up confidence of the preceding lines, but the whole line itself subverts the idea of “being freely at ease” immanent in the rest of the poem, the speaker now sitting up restlessly drinking while all else retires. How interesting

that the one poem that breaks up Chu's sequential rhythm of work-rest-reflection is the one in which the speaker is left seeming most confused at the end, a poem veneered with assured resoluteness that concludes with transfixed bewilderment. Here we find Chu exploring another human truism, namely that it is when dwelling on those things about which we are most certain, most single-minded, and most resolute that we naturally begin to reflect on and doubt our own steadfastness. With images of nature stable and solid coupled with his timorous conclusion, Chu captures this doubt in a strikingly serpentine way.

Reflecting on what might be the defining element of Chu's poetry as it sits within the literary milieu of the High Tang, Stephen Owen posits Chu's gift for vignette as a plausible choice.<sup>56</sup> As the foregoing poems demonstrate, Chu does indeed show immense skill for painting in verse a capsular georgic narrative scene, and we will see him bringing this skill to bear in other poems considered in the following pages. Moving a step beyond Owen's observation, though, it is really Chu's sensitivity to and artistry in decoding the beats and cycles of farm life—their “rhythm and meaning”—which makes his poetic vignettes aesthetically pleasing in the first place. If we can say that Chu has some measure of genius, this is where it truly lies.

In fact, as we read poems of his that begin to move away from bucolic themes, Chu seems to have less to hold onto, fewer of the rhythmic and cyclical interests that serve as the underpinning of his best pastoral verse. Like his pastoral poems, fully three quarters of his corpus are in the so-called “old style” (*guti* 古體), which is clearly the mode in which he is most comfortable writing.<sup>57</sup> In these other *guti* poems, we see Chu reaching for the familiar elements

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<sup>56</sup> *High Tang*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Of Chu's 227 extant poems, only fifty-seven are written in *jinti* 近體; all others are *guti*.

of the pastoral setting to make sense of the decidedly different circumstances of Tang official life:

In Imitation of Ancient Style (One of Two)<sup>58</sup>

效古其一

At dawn I ascend the Cool Breeze Terrace,<sup>59</sup>  
and let my eyes run to the Handan Road.<sup>60</sup>  
How fiercely brilliant, the sparkling numen:<sup>61</sup>  
no green grass in the fields all round.  
A great army gathers to the north in Yan,<sup>62</sup>  
the Son of Heaven dwells to the west in Hao.<sup>63</sup>  
The women take up duties in the counties,  
while men of age go to serve in the campaigns.  
Young and old bid them farewell,  
their weeping knows no dusk nor morn.  
Now the harvest work has been cut short,  
the rivers and lakes too have dried up.  
O, to leave behind, to be far from this grief,  
shrouded in shadow like the greyhairs of Mt. Shang.<sup>64</sup>

晨登涼風臺  
目走邯鄲道  
曜靈何赫烈  
四野無青草  
大軍北集燕  
天子西居鎬  
婦人役州縣  
丁男事征討  
老幼相別離  
哭泣無昏早  
稼穡既殄絕  
川澤復枯槁  
曠哉遠此憂  
冥冥商山皓

[rhyme: *hawX* 皓]

Using the place names of a bygone era as euphemisms for contemporary locations, Chu gives us a view of the Tang in which frequent combat at the northern border was the reality of

<sup>58</sup> *CGXSJ*, 1.11a.

<sup>59</sup> A terrace in Chang'an, built during the Han dynasty. See Zhang Yonglu 張永祿, *Handai Chang'an cidian* 漢代長安詞典 (Shaanxi: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 162.

<sup>60</sup> The Handan Road would have led out of Chang'an to the northeast toward Handan in modern-day Hubei, about halfway between the northern Tang border and Chang'an.

<sup>61</sup> An epithet for the sun.

<sup>62</sup> The northern border of the Tang, often the site of military combat, is here referred to euphemistically by the name of the old Zhou dynasty state Yan 燕 that once occupied that territory, and may even be a veiled reference to the rebel army of general An Lushan 安祿山 gathering in Fanyang 范陽 (modern-day Beijing).

<sup>63</sup> Refers to the Tang emperor Xuanzong residing in Chang'an, the location of the old Western Zhou capital of Hao 鎬.

<sup>64</sup> The "greyhairs of Mt. Shang" refers to a group of four ministers of Qin who went into reclusion in Mt. Shang during the collapse of the Qin, so called for their advanced age. See commentary in *Shiji*, 55.2045.

the day. The poem may even be referring in particular to the outbreak of the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion, sometime toward the end of 755. Chu opens by placing himself in Chang'an, using the name for a terrace first built in that city during the Han dynasty, with his gaze pointed at the road leading northeast to Handan (modern-day Hubei), the midpoint between his location and the violent northern limits of the Tang, a site of constant military incursion, as well as An Lushan's military base in Fanyang 范陽 (modern-day Beijing). But these references are less than explicit, and so it is not until we read the third couplet that we realize the desolation of the sunburnt grass fields of the second anticipates the tension of the speaker watching out for the inevitable advance over the horizon of an invading military host. In addition to scenes of desolated nature, we notice that in the fourth, fifth, and sixth couplets, Chu uses images of the disruption of the lives and farm work of country folk to indicate the menacing hum of oncoming war. For Chu, there could be no better reflection of the impending ugliness than this disturbance of the bucolic settings he quite obviously holds so dear. The ending is especially poignant from our latter-day perspective, and not without tragic irony: Chu wishes to free himself from danger by going into exactly the kind of reclusive pastoral lifestyle whose disruption he has just detailed, and we read this knowing that his wish will not be granted, that he will be swept up in the rebellion's violent wake and never fully recover.

Note that the much darker tone here is accompanied by a marked change in diction: while perhaps not ornate, Chu's allusions to ancient capitals, his use of the epithet *yaoling* 曜靈 for the sun, and the rather stiff formality of his lament in the penultimate line (*kuang zai!* 曠哉) reside at far distance from the discursive ease of his pastoral poems. One gets the sense of forced style, of an aesthetic tension in these lines, but it actually works well here. In other *guti*, this darkness, tension, and clinging to simple pastoral images feels more discordant:

Composed when Sent Across Plucked Cithern Gorge<sup>65</sup>

使過彈箏峽作

The little birds know the sky will snow,  
 in flocks flying off, in flocks calling out.  
 The fields have left behind no millet,  
 and the sunset fills the empty city.  
 The learned man frets over current affairs,  
 while the boor thinks of kingly errands.  
 At dawn I cross Plucked Cithern Gorge,<sup>66</sup>  
 horse hooves move with trembling terror.  
 Paired cliffs blot out the numinous radiance,  
 one cannot know if it is day or night.  
 Gleaming and glowing, so white the rigid ice,  
 extending endlessly, how smooth the dark clouds.  
 Now I believe the words of ancient men:  
 “Severe control cannot be practiced with constancy.”<sup>67</sup>

鳥雀知天雪  
 羣飛復羣鳴  
 原田無遺粟  
 日暮滿空城  
 達士憂世務  
 鄙夫念王程  
 晨過彈箏峽  
 馬足凌兢行  
 雙壁隱靈曜  
 莫能知晦明  
 皚皚堅冰白  
 漫漫陰雲平  
 始信古人言  
 苦節不可貞

[rhyme: *tshjeng* 清 / *kaeng* 庚]

Where in “In Imitation of Ancient Style” we had disruption of rhythm, here Chu cannot seem to find it at all, not in the *wen* of the gorge vista nor in the *wen* of his written verse. The “little birds” have returned, but instead of clustering on the speaker’s hut, the direction of their motion is away, harbingers of the impending storm. Fields too appear, in their guise as representatives not of flourishing farm work, but of its absence. The trepidation of the horses’ hooves, the admission of the inability to strictly regulate one’s affairs in the line lifted from the *Yijing* 易經, and the comparison in the third couplet—does the speaker see himself as “the learned man,” or as “the boor”? He is, after all, on a “kingly errand” himself—all convey well the poem’s theme

<sup>65</sup> CGXSJ, 1.10a.

<sup>66</sup> Plucked Cithern Gorge was formed as the Jing River 涇水 flowed through Mount Dulu 都廬山, located near the eastern border of modern-day Gansu, a considerable distance to the west of Chang’an. See Chen Tiemin, “Chu Guangxi shengping,” 205.

<sup>67</sup> A quotation from the chapter for the sixtieth hexagram in the *Yijing* 易經, “Control” 節. The translation of this line relies heavily on the interpretation of Richard John Lynn in *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 518-522.



of uncertainty. But uncertainty of style and composition is perhaps even more pronounced: the narrative cohesiveness that still lingered in “In Imitation” is gone here, interrupted by the somewhat out-of-place ethical statement of the third couplet, and in the fifth, the overly conventional scene of cliffs blotting out the sun (*yaoling*, too, is back, but this time inverted). Compare this latter image to the subtlety of “the sun retires along with South Mountain.” It seems that Chu is now reading the patterns of a world that confuses him and his poetics, and with none of the familiar beats of pastoral rhythm with which to orient himself, the result, while captivating in its own way, is also somewhat tortured.

Though they may not work as well as his pastoral verse, many of Chu’s *guti* are, like those just considered, engaging poems. However, his attempts at the kind of occasional poetry often exchanged between poets residing in the capital—especially in regulated verse (*lüshi* 律詩)—are often stiff and uninspired. Notice this exchange between Chu and Wang Wei, initiated by Wang when Chu did not show up for a previously arranged gathering:

Waiting on Chu Guangxi Who Never Came

待儲光羲不至

My double doors are opened by morning,  
 I sit up to listen for the sound of your carriage.  
 Soon now I’ll hear the clear tinkle of pendants,  
 and right then I’ll go out and meet you at the door.  
 The evening bell rings out in the Supreme Preserve,<sup>68</sup>  
 sparse rains pass over the spring city.  
 Understanding that I will not be seeing you,  
 I approach the hall uselessly retracing my thoughts.

重門朝已啓  
 起坐聽車聲  
 要欲聞清佩  
 方將出戶迎  
 晚鐘鳴上苑  
 疎雨過春城  
 了自不相顧  
 臨堂空復情

[rhyme: *tshjeng* 清 / *kaeng* 庚]

<sup>68</sup> The Supreme Preserve, known also as the Forbidden Preserve (*jinyuan* 禁苑), was the large park area directly to the north of Chang’an. Replete with every kind of plant and animal, the preserve was an enclosed outdoor space both for royal hunting and pleasure excursions, about 120 *li* in circumference. For an excellent account of its history and development, see Edward H. Schafer, “Hunting Parks and Animal Enclosures in Ancient China,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 11.3 (1968): 318-343.

Though treating what is a rather conventional topic, Wang’s poem is quite lovely. Sounds—and their absence—stand in for anticipation. The poem splits in half, with the first two couplets handling the *dai* 待 (“waiting”), and the final two the *buzhi* 不至 (“not arriving”). Combine this with the perfect patterning of level and oblique tones expected in regulated verse, as well as the distinctive parallel second and third couplets, and we have a fine example of *liushi* that nicely demonstrates Wang Wei’s artful artlessness.

Let us look now at Chu’s response:

In Answer to Wang Wei<sup>69</sup>

答王十三維

Your disciple was intent on coming,  
 knowing you were to have me play at floating goblets.<sup>70</sup>  
 Suddenly I was obliged to pay court at the Azure Hall,<sup>71</sup>  
 turning my carriage round, I went into Shangyang.<sup>72</sup>  
 Falling blossoms filled the spring waters,  
 sparse willows reflected in the new pools.  
 That day I did not return home till dusk,  
 and made you go to the trouble of offering such fine verse.

門生故來往  
 知欲命浮觴  
 忽奉朝青閣  
 回車入上陽  
 落花滿春水  
 疎柳映新塘  
 是日歸來暮  
 勞君奏雅章

[rhyme: *yang* 陽 / *thang* 唐]

This exchange itself is an interesting look into occasional poetry, in many cases simply versified communiques on the rather banal topics of everyday life, here a missed appointment for fellowship. Perhaps in light of this, it may seem unfair to state the obvious about Chu’s poem,

<sup>69</sup> *CGXSJ*, 5.4b

<sup>70</sup> The game of “floating goblets” was played by a group of participants sitting on either side of a small, slow-moving stream. Goblets of wine were placed into the water, they being allowed to float on the current, and when one came to a stop, the nearest player was to pick it up and drink, and he was then also likely expected to compose a verse. The practice originated as part of the day’s activities during the Spring Purification Festival (*xi* 禊), celebrated originally on the first *si* 巳 day of the third month, but then regularized to the third day of the third month. The game is famously mentioned in Wang Xizhi’s 王羲之 “Lanting ji xu” 蘭亭集序.

<sup>71</sup> The “Azure Hall” is an epithet for the imperial court.

<sup>72</sup> Shangyang Palace was located just to the west of the Imperial Compound (*huangcheng* 皇城) in the eastern capital of Luoyang, flanked on either side by the branching Gu 穀 River as it flowed into the Luo, as the latter ran along the palace’s southern side.

that it shows a poet working in a style for which he has less talent; was it not, after all, merely meant as an epistolary reply to Wang Wei? But Wang's own poem was meant to be the same, and yet the craftedness and subtlety of his piece places it in a class above Chu's. Chu's rejoinder is stilted where Wang's offering feels effortless. The epithets for imperial court recall the tenor of Chu's *guti*, but here they fall flat, almost like gaudy ornamentation, especially when placed alongside Wang's pared diction. Wang's parallel third couplet marks the emotional turn in his poem, the ringing bell and passing rains skillfully indicating the passage of time, but Chu's couplet is more like an unrelated interlude, and his reworking of Wang's *shu* 疏 into his own line feels forced rather than clever. Chu also finds it more difficult to work within the prosodical strictures of regulated verse, with several inconsistencies in his tonal patterning. Wang's poem reflects the kind of narrative ease present in Chu's best *guti*—especially his pastoral verse—but Chu is for some reason unable to bring that same skill into most of his occasional and regulated verse.

An important outlier in an evaluation of Chu's poetic corpus are his quatrains. In this regulated, though truncated, form, Chu's ear and eye for rhythms are well-suited to the construction of brisk sketches, though the sensation is more staccato than the cyclical deliberateness of his pastoral verse. The shorter length seems to allow Chu to leave aside the forced diction of his other attempts at regulated verse, and apparently makes it easier to follow the rules of prosody. It is also possible that a particular series of quatrains are the earliest of Chu's extant poems. This includes a single quatrain written in pentameter and a cycle of five others in heptameter, all written in exchange with the local Jiangsu official Wu Zhen 武甄 (d. c. 742).<sup>73</sup> Below is the single *wuyan* 五言 poem, and the best piece from the *qiyān* 七言 cycle:

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<sup>73</sup> For his biography, see *XTS*, 119.4293-95.

To Go with “Out on the Lake” by Supernumerary Wu Pingyi

同武平一員外遊湖

Bamboo piping lingers amidst the singer’s fans,  
 lotus perfume wafts into the dancer’s garb.  
 The brook ahead is full of twisting banks,  
 borne on a whim, we simply can’t go home yet.

竹吹留歌扇  
 蓮香入舞衣  
 前溪多曲澗  
 乘興莫先歸  
 [rhyme: *mj* 微]

Five of Five

其五

In Flower Lake a bamboo isle, girded by a quiet path,  
 two painted oars adrift in space go in the evening stream.  
 The water masked by lotus leaves, the boat it moves with strain,  
 we linger at the song and dance, the moon it sets with ease.

花潭竹嶼傍幽蹊  
 畫楫浮空入夜溪  
 菱荷覆水船難進  
 歌舞留人月易低  
 [rhyme: *dzej* 齊]

Ge Xiaoyin argues convincingly that Chu would have likely only had an opportunity to know and exchange poems with Wu Pingyi when in his early teens, and thus these are quite possibly not only Chu’s earliest extant poems, but also pieces of juvenilia.<sup>74</sup> Though both poems are limited to the same set of images, already we see Chu developing his skill for poetic narrative that would later flourish in his longer pastoral *guti*. It is tempting to imagine that it was with the shortened form and broad strokes of the quatrain that Chu honed this skill, though this is admittedly purely speculation.

None of Chu’s quatrains treat bucolic scenes, the slower cycles of farm life replaced by the quick pace and cosmopolitan environs of the eastern and western Tang capitals of Luoyang and Chang’an:

<sup>74</sup> The set of heptametric quatrains bear the same title as the pentrametric one above, save for the addendum, “At the time, Wu had been demoted to Magistrate of Jintan” 時武貶金壇令. We know from Wu’s biography in *XTS* that this demotion happened upon the ascension of Xuanzong 玄宗 (September 8, 712). See *XTS*, 119.4295. Given that Chu was born in the first decade of the eighth century, and that the district of Jintan was only about fifty *li* to the south of Chu’s hometown in Yanling, it seems very likely that Chu was only a teenager when he got to know Wu, perhaps coming to the attention of the older man because of his literary talents. See Ge Xiaoyin, “Chu Guangxi he ta de tianyuan shi,” 365-66.

The Roads of Luoyang (Five Poems), for Director Lü the Fourth<sup>75</sup>

洛陽道五首獻呂四郎中

One of Five

On the Luo River spring ice has given way,  
within Luoyang walls spring trees are greening.  
In morning looking out on the thoroughfare,  
falling blossoms flutter amongst the horse-hooves.

其一

洛水春冰開  
洛城春樹綠  
朝看大道上  
落花亂馬足

[rhyme: *tsyowk* 燭]

Three of Five

The thoroughfare as straight as tresses,  
on a spring day fine air does abound.  
Those noble princelings of Five Barrows,<sup>76</sup>  
in pairs their jade bridle-pieces resound.

其三

大道直如髮  
春日佳氣多  
五陵貴公子  
雙雙鳴玉珂

[rhyme: *ka* 歌]

Five of Five<sup>77</sup>

The Luo waters reflect a thousand gates,  
a thousand gates within the cyan void.  
A young man did not achieve his will,  
so horse at a gallop, he heads to another quarter.

其五

洛水照千門  
千門碧空裏  
少年不得志  
走馬遊新市

[rhyme: *tsyiX* 止]

Though the complete series is not given here, still apparent should be Chu's attempt to work with a longer narrative outline over multiple poems, a move from winter to spring and the attendant increased urban activity. Alluring images are many in this sequence. In the first, the jumble of falling blossoms amidst the bustle of horse-mounted traffic blends the pristineness of the natural

<sup>75</sup> *CGXSJ*, 5.10b-11a. Lü the Fourth is most likely referring to Lü Xiang 呂向, Director of the Bureau of Receptions 主客郎中. See his biography in *XTS*, 202.5758-59.

<sup>76</sup> The Five Barrows were the barrow towns that grew up around the mausoleums of the Han emperors located north of Chang'an, a suburban locale in which many high officials and wealthy families resided. Though Chu's quatrain treats Luoyang, the reference is less one of particular geography, and more one of association, intended to evoke the eminence and wealth of "those noble princelings." For a more detailed discussion of the history of the Five Barrows area, see David Knechtges's notes to Ban Gu's 班固 "Rhapsody on the Western Capital" 西都賦 in *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), 106.

<sup>77</sup> Meng Haoran wrote a companion quatrain to this fifth poem in Chu's cycle, entitled "To Go with 'The Roads of Luoyang' by Chu Guangxi" 同儲十二洛陽道.

with the chaos of the urban. Chu sees something of the human in the landscape of the third poem, the roads “straight as tresses,” an image reminiscent of Shelley’s seeing something similar in “the locks of the approaching storm.”<sup>78</sup> In the fifth poem, one imagines the young man racing along the Luo River as it bisects the great eastern capital, watching the waters reflect all of the gates to the various wards and individual buildings against the blue sky as he rushes by. This last poem is especially captivating, not least because of its rhyme pattern: the final character of line three, *tsyiH* 志, matches the main rhyme of lines two and four, but for its falling tone that contrasts with the rising tone of the surrounding two lines. Could this represent an aural up and down to mimic the vicissitudes of the young man’s not being able to “achieve his will” in the third line? Hard to say, but sound again emerges as an important concern for Chu Guangxi.

The western capital of Chang’an is also treated to a pair of quatrains by Chu:

The Roads of Chang’an (Two Poems)<sup>79</sup>

長安道二首

One

其一

With a cracking whip he passes the wine shop,  
in splendid garb he saunters to the brothel gates.  
A million spent in but a moment,  
yet not a word of feelings held back.

鳴鞭過酒肆  
袷服遊倡門  
百萬一時盡  
含情無片言

[rhyme: *hon* 痕 / *ngjwon* 元]

Two

其二

Due west I traveled for a thousand *li*,  
when the tinge of dusk was born among cold trees.  
In the dark I heard the sound of song and pipe,  
and knew this was the road to Chang’an.

西行一千里  
暝色生寒樹  
暗聞歌吹聲  
知是長安路

[rhyme: *ngjuH* 遇 / *muH* 暮]

<sup>78</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, eds. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 412.

<sup>79</sup> *CGXSJ*, 11b.

These poems do not form much of a cohesive narrative, but both stand as miniature narratives on their own. The final couplet of the first piece gives us the demeanor of the subject without resorting to any kind of descriptive language. The subject holding back his true feelings as he spends away his fortune is a vivid and poignant moment, a sophisticated juxtaposition of action and emotion. The second poem conveys the love the poet has for the city, with the unique sound and feel of Chang'an guiding the traveler home. Both of these quatrains are quite romantic in their own way, and show that Chu's voice is capable of working in registers both detached and intimate.

Though Chu's quatrains and many of his *guti* are fine poems, the strength of his pastoral verse, and especially their stylistic affinity with and many allusions to the poetry of Tao Qian, has caused almost all contemporary critical appraisal of Chu Guangxi's poetry to be consumed with comparing Chu to Tao. Stephen Owen points out that "no High Tang poet has been more strongly linked to the Tao Qian mode than Chu Guangxi," a phenomenon that continues unabated in current Chinese-language scholarship.<sup>80</sup>

### **A Belated Poet**

And so the purpose of the concluding portion of this paper will be to challenge, or, perhaps better said, to complicate, this link. While it should already be plain how much Chu Guangxi is influenced by (and likes!) the Tao Qian mode, it should also be clear that many of Chu's poems are simply unlike anything Tao would have written. Chu does not attempt to coopt completely the Tao Qian persona as other Tang writers were wont to do, such as the Early Tang

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<sup>80</sup> *High Tang*, 63. Wade-Giles spellings have been changed to Hanyu pinyin.

poet Wang Ji 王績 (585-644).<sup>81</sup> Chu's attention to the rhythmic cycles of farm life and the unique meanings he extracts therefrom stand at considerable distance from Tao's treatment of the same scenes, especially Tao's dissatisfaction with official life. There is significant peril in portraying Chu as simply an epigone of Tao Qian, as it runs the risk of collapsing all of Chu's poems that draw upon natural or bucolic imagery into the category of *tianyuan shi*. While the generic distinction of *tianyuan shi* is not a useless one, to link two poets so closely based on their fondness for natural landscape is to make a rather unremarkable claim, for, as Paul Kroll notes, almost all traditional poetry "[draws] deeply on the natural world as a primary fund of imagery," a fact as true for Chu, Tao, and the *Shijing* as it was for Blake, Donne, and the Lake Poets.<sup>82</sup> A simplistic conception of this otherwise helpful generic term establishes Tao Qian as a hard starting point, and then assumes a teleology of pastoral poetry that can mask difference in poets like Chu, resulting in scholarship that reads all of Chu's most well-regarded and interesting works in the context of his affinity with Tao Qian.

A reductive approach to the Tao-Chu connection also beckons toward those facile and clichéd arguments that forever lurk unwaveringly at the fingertips. As an example, in her otherwise well-written and interesting article, Ge Xiaoyin claims that Chu's depictions of farm life indicate that he, like Tao Qian, must have been working from first-hand experience, whereas Wang Wei and Meng Haoran reveal in their verse that they were merely onlookers.<sup>83</sup> Would she

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<sup>81</sup> Just as I argue here for a more nuanced view of the relationship between Chu and Tao, Ding Xiang Warner reminds us of the need to do the same in our reading of Wang Ji, to resist the tendency common in critics traditional and modern to offer a circumscribed view of his poetics in relation to Tao and others. See especially the final chapter of her book *A Wild Deer Amid Soaring Phoenixes: The Opposition Poetics of Wang Ji* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2003), 147-52.

<sup>82</sup> "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High T'ang," *T'oung Pao* 84.1 (1998): 63.

<sup>83</sup> "Chu Guangxi he ta de tianyuan shi," 376. Ge is much better in her considerations of Chu's skill with contrast, particularly that of rich and poor (pp. 374-75).



have found this assertion necessary if the narrative of Chu as imitator of Tao did not already loom large, not to mention the attending view of Tao Qian as the bona fide recluse nonpareil? Drawing connections between poets can be illuminating, but relying on these too heavily can paint one into an analytical corner from which spurious readings more readily flow. As we have shown above, the better path is to point out those spaces in Chu's poetics into which Tao's shadow has cast itself, and then move on to consider how Chu's skill in one particular form of verse might find itself either well-expressed, or indeed floundering, in others.

Hence, following the formulation of Harold Bloom, I suggest we think of Chu Guangxi as the belated poet to his literary forebear and precursor Tao Qian.<sup>84</sup> While the tension between Chu and his Six Dynasties precursor may not be exactly Oedipal, Chu does appear in his poetry to be at once in touch with and moving away from the literary legacy of Tao, both aware of the stylistic debt owed to his precursor and attempting to carve out his own creative space. T. S. Eliot has elegantly described the upshot of this, when, in his discussion of a poet's entering into the great matrix of historical literary tradition, he writes, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."<sup>85</sup> This self-effacement—what Bloom has himself called *askēsis*<sup>86</sup>—merges two disparate concepts of poetic identity: the humble acknowledgment, following Eliot, that one will never say anything that has not already been said before, and the obstinate (perhaps even ascetic) determination of Bloom's belated poet to do exactly that. Thus our belated pastoral poet Chu Guangxi shines brightest in those poems that involve, not an expansion, but an emptying out of his personal identity.

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<sup>84</sup> For the most complete discussion of Bloom's ideas, see *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973). Bloom expounds them further in *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975).

<sup>85</sup> "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 47.

<sup>86</sup> *Anxiety of Influence*, 115-138.

Naturally, Chu's normative occasional poetry is not where one will find such an emptying out, given the genre's heavy social component, and as we have seen, Chu's efforts there are less than successful. We have already considered several poems in which Chu has eschewed the "I" voice for a more detached treatment of a poetic subject, but where we find Chu doing this to greatest effect is in a set of allegorical *yuefu* 樂府 poems on rustic themes, works with titles like "The Herdboy" 牧童詞, "The Fisherman" 漁夫詞, "The Woodcutter" 樵夫詞, and "Shooting Pheasants" 射雉詞. In these poems, Chu employs his skill for discursive narrative verse to play variations on common rustic topoi. He makes them his own without, *pace* Ge Xiaoyin, injecting himself first-hand into the scenes, but rather by masking himself with the presence of the thematic personae, allowing him to create poetic narratives that are often dramatic, and in which he can obliquely make moral statements.

Among Chu's extant poems, there are seven of these allegorical pieces, and for each Chu mines the cache of *yuefu* imagery accreted over time for the persona or activity of its title. Of course, many other medieval poets wrote poems on these same themes, and often with homologous titles; however, in Chu's versions, we find him offering divergent takes on the standard narratives. Though it will not be possible to consider all seven here, in the interest of examining poems that enjoyed acclaim in the poet's time, we will discuss the four that are anthologized in Yin Fan's *Heyue yingling ji*.

We will begin by considering "The Fierce Tiger" 猛虎詞, the most unusual of these poems, both in its peculiar variation and its stylistic distance from Tao Qian. Like the others discussed below, the theme and title of this poem have their *locus classicus* in the *yuefu* of the Wei-Jin-Nanbeichao period, and Tang poets Li Bai, Li He 李賀 (790-816), and Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824) all have versions of their own. While the variations on this old theme that antecede

Chu's poem mostly treat the image of the tiger as a percept of the poem's speaker, Chu takes an alternative approach:

The Fierce Tiger<sup>87</sup>

猛虎詞

Though cold I fret not over snow,  
 though hungry I do not eat men.  
 How could the flesh of men not be sweet?  
 But what I detest is grieving the luminous spirits.  
 Mt. Taishi is my dwelling place,<sup>88</sup>  
 and Mt. Mengmen my purlieu.<sup>89</sup>  
 The hundred beasts are my viands,  
 and the Five Dragons my honored guests.<sup>90</sup>  
 How daunting when we covered the horses!<sup>91</sup>  
 In humaneness we crossed over the river.<sup>92</sup>  
 My colored markings shimmer in the morning sun,  
 my claws and teeth virile as martial men.  
 The lofty clouds dissipate at my breath,  
 and the solid ground quakes at my roar.

寒亦不憂雪  
 飢亦不食人  
 人肉豈不甘  
 所惡傷明神  
 太室爲我宅  
 孟門爲我鄰  
 百獸爲我膳  
 五龍爲我賓  
 蒙馬一何威  
 浮江一以仁  
 彩章耀朝日  
 爪牙雄武臣  
 高雲逐氣浮  
 厚地隨聲震

<sup>87</sup> CGXSJ, 1.3b-4a.

<sup>88</sup> Taishi is one of the two main peaks of the sacred Mount Song 嵩山 located in modern-day Henan, the other being Shaoshi 少室. Both peaks are commonly portrayed as a preferred spot for Daoist recluses and transcendent beings.

<sup>89</sup> Mt. Mengmen is the purported source of the Yellow River, and is associated in the *Lü shi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 with the flooding of the central plains which the Great Yu 大禹 undertook to tame. See *Lü shi Chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1984; rpt. 1995), 21.1463.

<sup>90</sup> According to Li Shan's 李善 commentary on Guo Pu's 郭璞 "You xian shi" 遊仙詩, the Five Dragons are five Daoist transcendent beings with dragon bodies and human faces, each symbolizing one of the five directions and one of the five phases. See Xiao Tong 蕭統, *Wen xuan* 文選, commentary by Li Shan (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 21.1023.

<sup>91</sup> This line is an allusion to the Jin 晉 general Xu Chen 胥臣 draping his chariot horses with tiger skins just prior to his attack on Chu 楚 during the historic Battle of Chengpu 城濮. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), "Xi 28," 461.

<sup>92</sup> This refers to an anecdote regarding Song Jun 宋均 (fl. mid 1st century) and his posting to Jiujiang 九江. The commandery was plagued with tiger attacks, and Song surmised that this was connected to the poor governance of his predecessor. Song issued an edict to this effect, stating his resolve to improve order, and the tigers purportedly crossed over the river and out of the territory in deference to him. See *Xin jiaoben Hou Han shu* 新校本後漢書, ed. Yang Jialuo 楊家駱 (Taipei: Dingwen chubanshe, 1981), 41.1412-13.

You can buy some of my spare valor,<sup>93</sup>  
so that day and night long may you be like me.

君能賈餘勇  
日夕長相親  
[rhyme: *tsyin* 真]

The titular beast of this poem may evoke certain resemblances to Blake’s tiger, or perhaps even Rilke’s panther, but here Chu gives us something quite different, the trumpeting first-person soliloquy of a ferocious animal possessing both strong principles and a keen awareness of its place in the wider world. Readers familiar with other poetic takes on this theme will recognize that Chu has kept the formulaic opening common to almost all versions, one that introduces two parallel statements of the speaker’s ascetic avowal to not sate his hunger, slake his thirst, indulge his fatigue, and so on.<sup>94</sup> Chu again brings repetitive sound to the fore, with the repetition of *yi* 亦 and *bu* 不 here—echoed later in the *wei* 為 and *wo* 我 of couplets three and four—forming a tight parallel *conduplicatio*, a prosodical gesture that lends a sing-song lyrical quality to the poem. Chu Guangxi’s care for and skill in manipulating sound shine brightly in the *yuefu* mode, as we will continue to see in the other poems below.

However, Chu’s opening here is more than just formula. As spoken by the tiger at the beginning of his speech, it is an attempt to put his human reader at ease, an assurance that even when beset by cold and hunger, he refuses to eat human beings. This is a principled abstinence, as he makes known in the second couplet, for though human flesh may be a delicacy, an aversion to offending the “luminous spirits” prevents him from partaking. The tiger’s attention to the

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<sup>93</sup> Here the speaker borrows a phrase recorded as spoken by Gao Gu 高固 of the Qi 齊 army during the Battle of An 鞍. Gao rushes behind the Jin 晉 army lines, captures a soldier and his chariot, then parades him in front of his comrades, calling out to them, “Those who desire to be valorous, come buy some of my surplus valor!” 欲勇者，賈余餘勇。 See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, “Cheng 2,” 791.

<sup>94</sup> An excellent example of this opening can be found in Lu Ji’s 陸機 “Meng hu xing” 猛虎行. Chu’s poem follows Lu’s closely in the compositional structure of these opening couplets, including Lu’s use of *qi* 豈 in his second couplet, though the similarities between the two poems end there. See *Lu Shiheng shi zhu* 陸士衡詩注, ed. Hao Liqun 郝立權 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1976), 1.28-29.

feelings of the gods and spirits of the natural world indicates his consciousness of more than just instinctive urges, and is the first signal to readers that this is no ordinary tiger. Neither are his preferred haunts, as we learn in the third couplet. Mt. Taishi, one of the two main peaks of Mt. Song 嵩山, is a famous retreat for reclusive Daoist transcendent beings, five of whom are the tiger's "honored guests," the "Five Dragons" of the fourth couplet. Roaming about a secluded sacred mountain and socializing with transcendent beings, the tiger clearly has an appreciation for the unfettered life of a Daoist recluse, but there is more to Chu's poem than an appeal to seclusion.

According to the *Lü shi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, Mt. Mengmen, the second of the tiger's dwelling places, was the purported source of the Yellow River and its seasonal flooding of the central plains, subsequently brought under control by the Great Yu 大禹 and his massive public works project of irrigation and dredging. By giving Mt. Mengmen as the other of his abodes, the tiger not only positions himself in the grand historical tradition of the ancient Chinese sage-kings, but more importantly, by association with a site symbolizing the preservation of living beings, he affirms his existence in the realm of earthly concerns. Also, while he may not eat humans, he takes as "viands" the "hundred beasts" of the fourth couplet, reminding us further of his earthly, animal nature. The tiger strikes a liminal figure, one at home both in the reclusive realm of Daoist spirits and hermits, as well as the world of ordinary living beings, repudiating neither. One might wish to read this as the reflection of a possible ideal self in the mind of the poet, one able to straddle the precarious divide between official success and serene seclusion, but Chu seems to be making the more general point that principle and balance are essential to the existence of the powerful individual.

As the tiger's declamation continues into the fifth couplet, he shows that his cognizance of history is not limited only to the world of humans, remarking on some of the finer moments in the history of his own species. He recalls how intimidating it must have been for the Chu 楚 soldiers at the battle of Chengpu 城濮 to see the charging chariot-horses of the Jin 晉 army draped with the skins of his ancestors. Next he reflects on the benevolence of those same ancestors centuries later, when they stopped attacking the people of Jiujiang 九江 and crossed to the other side of the river, in deference to the upright and determined new governor, Song Jun 宋均. Worth noting here is the contrast between the two remembrances, one of fierceness and one of humaneness: again, fairness emerges as a main concern for this impressive beast, and for the poet penning his words.

After all, though, the speaker is still a tiger, and so the sixth and seventh couplets are a celebration of his own ferocity, magnificence, and power, a fine contrast to the gentleness of the opening. The poem then concludes in the final couplet with an allusion to the *Zuozhuan* 左傳. The tiger borrows the words of a fighting man of Qi 齊 who, after having bravely charged into the enemy ranks and captured a soldier and his chariot, parades the captive in front of his comrades, crying out, "Those who desire to be valorous, come buy some of my surplus valor!" 欲勇者，賈余餘勇。<sup>95</sup> The tiger calls on the reader to be like him, powerful and formidable, surely, but also grounded and fair, aware of his place in both history and the world. Via the tiger's speech, Chu reminds us that it requires courage to be like the animal in his poem, to embrace honor and fairness especially when one is possessed of power and talents. Chu's use of allusions to historical texts reveal his own awareness of history, offering us a look behind the

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<sup>95</sup> See n. 93 above.

curtain at the poet's performance of erudition, and showing that, of course, more than just the works of Tao Qian permeate his literary consciousness. By deploying the tiger-speaker to deliver his moral message, Chu is able to suggest to his reader from behind the mask, "If a wild animal can stand as a paragon of principled and balanced existence, why cannot you do the same?"

With its strident rhetor whose oration is directed squarely at the reader, "The Fierce Tiger" assumes an especially strong didactic tone. However, in this set of allegorical poems, it stands as an outlier: Chu's project does not seem to be versified moralizing. As we move to consider the other poems, we find Chu working in a more reflective mode, attempting to tease out the ethical implications embedded in each scene instead of employing the more direct approach of his tiger poem. Interestingly, with this palliation of tone come more markers of Chu's stylistic debt to Tao Qian, and yet at the same time, allusions to the work of poets other than Tao also become more pronounced, as we will see in the following poem:

Shooting Pheasants<sup>96</sup>

射雉詞

In the sun's gentle warmth he sees to the new blind,  
welcoming spring he goes to shoot calling pheasants.  
Champagne fields reach far in a single color,  
fen wetlands range widely for a thousand *li*.  
Distantly he hears the sound of cackling,<sup>97</sup>  
after a moment he sees a pair flying up.  
In a copsy covert spread out neath the wormwood,  
one bristles its feathers, deep within the thicket.<sup>98</sup>  
Looking on the enemy it now pays no heed to life,

曝暄理新翳  
迎春射鳴雉  
原田遙一色  
皋陸曠千里  
遙聞呶啞聲  
時見雙飛起  
纂屨踈蒿下  
毳毳深叢裏  
顧敵已忘生

<sup>96</sup> *CGXSJ*, 1.3b.

<sup>97</sup> The *yíwō* 呶啞 (*jij- 'uwk*) in this line is onomatopoeic of the sound of laughter, which well describes the distinctive cackle of the pheasant.

<sup>98</sup> The rhyming binomes *mili* 纂屨 (*mek-lek*) and *peisai* 毳毳 (*bwoj-swoj*) are taken from Pan Yue's 潘岳 "She zhi fu" 射雉賦, though in Pan's *fu* they are used in quite separate parts of the poem. My renderings of these closely follow those of David Knechtges in his translation of Pan's *fu* in *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 156, 160.

this vying cock has steadied itself for death.  
 A humane heart values such courage and valor,<sup>99</sup>  
 so how indeed could he cause it harm?  
 Into the distance it flies down to the old barrens,  
 far off it wheels toward the lofty mountain spur.  
 That grandee of old, what trouble he went to!  
 To bring forth laughter from his beloved wife.<sup>100</sup>

爭雄方決死  
 仁心貴勇義  
 豈能復傷此  
 超遙下故墟  
 迢遞回高峙  
 大夫昔何苦  
 取笑歡妻子

[rhyme: *tsyiX* 止 / *tsyijX* 旨 / *tsyeX* 紙]

Even before reading the poem proper, a glance at the title will call to mind Pan Yue's 潘岳 (247-300) "Rhapsody on Shooting Pheasants" 射雉賦. Chu's poem owes much to Pan's lengthy *fu*, borrowing images, language, and allusions, but it is far from a simple recapitulation. As David Knechtges points out, Pan's piece argues for the legitimacy of pheasant-shooting as a royal activity, and thus details several pheasant encounters that each end in a kill.<sup>101</sup> Chu's poem, however, takes the same images and presents a single encounter in which the hunter relents and does not shoot the bird. Chu has extracted a different meaning from the traditional scene.

In the first couplet, the hunter is "welcoming spring" as he prepares the accoutrements for the hunt "under the sun's gentle warmth," which sounds an important tonal note: this is a pleasant recreational activity for the poem's subject, a sporting hunt, an outing. This excursive spirit is reified in the scene of pastoral beauty in the second couplet, a relaxed caesura that

<sup>99</sup> Pan's "She zhi fu" has the line, "When this valiant bird goes to meet his enemy. . ." 伊義鳥之應敵, which Chu incorporates loosely in lines nine and eleven, though in Pan's *fu* the line does not refer to the hunted bird, but to the hunter's decoy, a tamed pheasant trained to attract wild ones into the open. For a brief discussion of this practice, see Knechtges's introduction to "She zhi fu" in *Wen xuan*, vol. 2, 153, 155.

<sup>100</sup> This is an allusion to another anecdote from the *Zuozhuan*, one that also appears in Pan's "She zhi fu," but used to very different effect. The "grandee of old" refers to the Grandee of Jia 賈 who was apparently so ugly that when he married a beautiful young woman, she was upset to the point of not speaking or laughing for three years. Only when she sees him shoot a pheasant during a hunt in the Gao 皋 hunting preserve does she laugh and begin to speak. See *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, "Zhao 28," 1496.

<sup>101</sup> *Wen xuan*, vol. 2, 162.



echoes Tao Qian, but one that can just as easily be seen to mimic Xie Lingyun's 謝靈運 (385-433) habit of following an active couplet with descriptions of natural landscape.<sup>102</sup> Importantly, Chu's lines are not completely static: the intransitive verbs *yao* 遙 and *kuang* 曠 propel the reader toward the following couplet, just as the “fields” and “wetlands” themselves “reach” and “range” to the edges of the narrative space. Arriving at the third couplet, Chu has brought us to the hunt *in medias res*, contrasting the onomatopoeic sound of the pheasant's characteristic cackle and the sudden motion of the swift skyward flight of a pair of pheasants. Thus, the second and third couplets taken together carry us through the urgent anticipation of the landscape scene, to the distant heralding of the pheasant call, and finally to the excitement of the burst of movement, a progression that builds up to the poem's next move.

With the fourth couplet, Chu pivots us away from the hunter to the pheasant in its hiding place. The shift is signaled by a bit of prosodical drama, with each line of the couplet beginning with a rhyming binome—specifically, binomes that figure prominently in Pan Yue's *fu*—the first (*mek-lek* 幕歷) describing the “copsy covert” or shrouded hiding-place of the pheasant, and the second (*bwoj-swoj* 穉穉) its tension as the bird describes the hunter. The tension continues to mount in the fifth couplet as the hunted pheasant cock's instinctive courage in the face of sure death is foregrounded by the bird's paying “no heed to life” and its having “steadied itself for death.” All of this suspense, driven forward by the progression of the lines, recalling the imagery and language of Pan's *fu*, primes the reader for the expected violent climax.

But this expectation is ultimately disappointed. Chu introduces a striking, and, indeed, almost jarring, change in the sixth couplet. The poem's narrative momentum comes to a decisive

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<sup>102</sup> See for example Xie's “Guo Shining shu” 過始寧墅 and “Deng Shimen zui gao ding” 登石門最高頂 in *Xie Kangle shi zhu, Bao Canjun shi zhu* 謝康樂詩注、鮑參軍詩注, ed. Huang Jie 黃節 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 2.55, 3.111.

halt as the exterior scene moves to the interiority of the hunter's thoughts, to his struggle with the morality of his activity. How could one who is truly possessed of a "humane heart" cause harm to this bird that has displayed such remarkable "courage and valor"? Again we sense Chu speaking from behind the lines, for the couplet is not merely a narration of the hunter's thoughts, but also an implicit appeal to the reader for agreement. Chu has made the ultimate play on the expectations of those familiar with the pheasant-hunting topos, giving us a reluctant hunter in a poem entitled "Shooting Pheasants" with no actual shooting. This is not simply free play for literary effect. Rather, it is the exclamation point on the ethical thrust of Chu's poem.

The poem enters a *dénouement* in the penultimate couplet, with the pheasant flying away into the distance. We thus have a confirmation that the hunter did indeed refuse to shoot the bird, without Chu saying so directly. This indirectness is realized in another way within the couplet: owing to the vagaries of syntax, it is possible to imagine that it is the hunter himself flying "down to the old barrens," and wheeling "toward the lofty mountain spur." There is a strong sense of the merging of the two main presences in the poem at this point, and thus one apprehends what Chu seems to be getting at. It is only by identifying with his quarry that the hunter realizes what a shame it would be to end its life, a discovery of the human in the animal, a recognition of worthy qualities in an unexpected place. In the course of his activities, the moral man will not lightly bring harm to a being possessed of such qualities. Latent here surely is the classical image of the ruler capable of recognizing worthy ministers, but as in "The Fierce Tiger," Chu again seems to be examining the general tint of this ethical stance, rather than a particular hue. Similar to that poem, Chu closes "Shooting Pheasants" with an historical allusion, also lifted from Pan Yue's *fu*, of the ugly Grandee of Jia, whose very beautiful but very unhappy wife only begins speaking and laughing when she sees him shoot a pheasant in the royal hunting

preserve. While Pan cites the anecdote in celebration of the act of hunting, for Chu it is a negative reminder, as if the hunter—and the poet—only now realizes what a difficult task it was for that grandee to please his wife, having to kill this living being with such an instinctive capacity for courage.

If this first pair of highly allusive poems demonstrates a move from directness to obliqueness in their exploration of moral motifs, “The Herdboy” is an example of Chu operating at a further remove of abstraction. Ethical realizations are derived from the natural scene itself instead of the unfolding of narrative, and in this poem we see an even more obvious awareness of his pastoral precursor, Tao Qian:

The Herdboy<sup>103</sup>

I speak not of how far lies the pasture,  
nor of how deep runs the pastoral hillside.  
What I care for is tending to my oxen,  
nothing disturbs the heart of the herdboy.  
A round bamboo hat covers my head,  
a long palm-leaf coat is drawn over my clothes.  
Just now anxious of the summer rain,  
so too am I fearful of the wintry cold.  
The large ox hides behind the layered slopes,  
the smaller one cuts into the nearby woods.  
All like things sway and swirl with one another,<sup>104</sup>  
and being in touch with these brings me to song.  
I draw joy from these small moments,  
preferring to listen to the voices and sounds.

牧童詞

不言牧田遠  
不道牧陂深  
所念牛馴擾  
不亂牧童心  
圓笠覆我首  
長簑披我襟  
方將憂暑雨  
亦以懼寒陰  
大牛隱層坂  
小牛穿近林  
同類相鼓舞  
觸物成謳吟  
取樂須臾間  
寧聞聲與音

[rhyme: *tshim* 侵]

<sup>103</sup> *CGXSJ*, 1.2b.

<sup>104</sup> This line seems to be drawn from the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 chapter “Tonglei xiang dong” 同類想動. See discussion below. For the chapter itself, see *Chunqiu fanlu xinzhuzhu* 春秋繁露新注, ed. Zeng Zhenyu 曾振宇 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2010), 57.269-71.

Of the four *yuefu* considered in these pages, it is really only “The Herdboy” that one feels might conceivably have been written by Tao Qian himself, were he to have forgone his usual persona for that of a different figure. The serene pastoral setting and relaxed discursive phrasing are those elements of Tao’s style that we have seen Chu adopt to great effect in his bucolic verse, and he employs them deftly here in the lyrical monologue of his young cowherd. However, while this poetic frame—one extolling the value of ease and simplicity—almost begs for the presence of the Tao Qian persona, or indeed of Chu Guangxi himself, Chu decides to forgo these in favor of the stand-in of the herdboy. The consciousness of Chu’s decision as belated poet to remove his personality from this particular poem is especially notable.

Chu opens “The Herdboy” with the same kind of parallel repetition we saw in “The Fierce Tiger,” though here the song-lyric quality mimics the unaffected diction of the cowherd, hinting at the simplicity immanent in the entire poem. As in “The Fierce Tiger,” the opening two couplets here consist of a statement of principle, though the tiger’s stentorian bellow is exchanged for the innocent calm of the young lad. He expresses a singularity of mind, not at all bothered by the distance he must travel to graze his oxen, caring only that they are well tended. The speaker’s sincere dedication to his occupation congeals in his averment that “nothing disturbs the heart of the herdboy.” This statement has a twofold power: it is not only a statement of his own calm, but also a claim about the nature of his work. Again via a gentle ambiguity in the language, Chu shows the young boy to be imperturbable while simultaneously pointing out that the simple but fulfilling work of the cowherd lends itself to an uncluttered mind, a serene simplicity.

The unadorned phrasing of the third and fourth couplets extend this sense of calm. Though “anxious of the summer rain” that threatens to fall, and “fearful of the wintry cold” sure

to follow, the young speaker faces these with a kind of stout resolution, simply donning his hat and coat. In the fifth couplet, the animals hide among the slopes and trees, a reaction that contrasts with the composed preparedness of their young cowherd. The oxen instinctively taking cover also stands in for the unstated rolling in of the storm clouds, their movement, like a peal of thunder, signaling a change to the reader, and more importantly, causing the herdboys to look up. And so, in the sixth couplet, the gaze of the young boy moves away from his pair of oxen to the wider world, where he sees that “all like things sway and swirl with one another.” Chu here is drawing from the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 chapter entitled “Tonglei xiang dong” 同類相動, or, “All like things bestir one another.” The chapter offers a deterministic explanation for phenomena of the same kind giving rise to and attracting each other, arguing that this process is beyond the control of human beings, and as an example, it gives the natural and unavoidable cycles of rainfall.<sup>105</sup> With this line, then, we see Chu thinking through the philosophical implications of the stormy setting, much as the herdboys perceive the “sway and swirl” of this grand dance between all elements of the pastoral scene, recognizing the ease and release that comes with this apprehension. At this the boy breaks into song, which momentarily makes him a double of Chu, mirroring the poet’s own act of lyrical composition.

The poem concludes in the final couplet with the cowherd’s resolve to pay attention to the important things. The joy he takes in “small moments” is afforded by the innocence, simplicity, and solitude of his occupation. Though it may be tempting to read into the “voices and sounds” of the final line some notion of the ritual propriety of the “notes and tones” from

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<sup>105</sup> So, not only does the chapter’s title seem to be the source for the present line, but some of the images in the chapter itself are found in Chu’s poem as well. In addition to mentioning the rains (*yu* 雨) in the context of the summer heat (*shu* 暑) and cold (*yin* 陰), the chapter further discusses the harmonious sounding of voices (*sheng* 聲), echoing the image at the end of the poem. It is difficult to state with certainty whether or not these connections are intentional allusions, but at the very least it is clear the chapter was on Chu’s mind when writing this poem.

early Confucian philosophy, Chu is more likely referring to the natural noises that come forth from the environment.<sup>106</sup> They are the percepts of an uncluttered mind, noticeable to those who, like the herdboys, can find themselves in a place of simplicity and serenity. A quatrain of Valéry's can be helpful here:

Ecoute la nuit  
 Tout devient merveille.  
 Le silence éveille  
 Une ombre de bruit.<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, it is the dark silence that “awakens” the “shadow of a sound,” the way the whiteness of a blank sheet of paper gives immediate and unmistakable form to even the tiniest of marks upon it. Similarly, for Chu and his herdboys, the silence and solitude of both the physical space of the natural scene and the interior space of the pure mind bring into relief those things most worth one's attention, sounds and insights that others cannot perceive over the din of complicated lives. Thus, the classic Tao Qian image of a life of simplicity and ease is here painted with strokes of Chu's own distinctive brush.

The relaxed manner in which Chu negotiates the legacy of Tao Qian in “The Herdboys” becomes a full-on struggle in the final poem we will consider. In “Picking Lotus,” we finally see the anxiety of Bloom's theory of influence come to bear on Chu as belated poet:

Picking Lotus<sup>108</sup>

採蓮詞

<sup>106</sup> Chu's use of the interstitial *yu* 與 in the line under discussion may be the reason that the reading of *sheng* 聲 and *yin* 音 as referring specifically to “notes” and “tones” seems plausible, as if Chu is calling special attention to each word. However, this use of *yu* is more likely a rhythmic choice, and even possibly a stylistic tic, since we find the same construction at the end of “Picking Lotus” (see below) and a poem not considered here, “The Woodcutter.” In the former, *yu* splits the term *xianyu* 賢愚, and in the latter, the term *shifei* 是非. In these two poems, it is quite obvious that no additional meaning is added by this construction, and so it seems best to simply read the end of the final line here as *shengyin* 聲音, “voices and sounds,” or even more simply, “sounds.”

<sup>107</sup> “Listen to the night / All is wonder / Silence awakens / The shadow of a sound.” *Collected Works of Paul Valéry, Volume 1: Poems*, tr. David Paul (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 300.

<sup>108</sup> *CGXSJ*, 1.3a.

In the shallow shoals water-fringe flowers teem,  
 in the deep pond caltrop leaves lay outspread.  
 On my own now, I feel at ease,  
 embarrassed to encounter a Qi River beauty.<sup>109</sup>  
 Along the wide Jiang no roads or paths,<sup>110</sup>  
 the great heath cuts across the whole territory.  
 Among the waves the Sea Lads converse,  
 under the currents the Shark Folk dwell.<sup>111</sup>  
 Spring silvergrass occasionally hides the boat,  
 fresh duckweed again fills the lake.  
 Picking and plucking, borne on till sunset,<sup>112</sup>  
 I think of neither worthiness nor foolishness.

淺渚荇花繁  
 深潭菱葉踈  
 獨往方自得  
 恥邀淇上姝  
 廣江無術阡  
 大澤絕方隅  
 浪中海童語  
 流下鮫人居  
 春荻時隱舟  
 新萍復滿湖  
 采采乘日暮  
 不思賢與愚

[rhyme: *ngju* 虞 / *ngjo* 魚]

This is probably the least successful of the four allegorical poems considered herein. Structured as a series of quatrains each consisting of a scenic couplet followed by an allusive one, “Picking Lotus” reads more like a batch of unrelated bucolic scenes intersected by a jumble of *yuefu* images, and less like the well-constructed narratives of the three explored above. This tendency

<sup>109</sup> In the *Shijing* poem “Sang zhong” 桑中 (*Mao* 48), the speaker’s lover arranges to meet him at the Qi River. On the Qi River as a place for lovers’ trysts, see Paul F. Rouzer, *Writing Another’s Dream: The Poetry of Wen Tingyun* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), 76.

<sup>110</sup> This reads like a loose allusion to a line from the *Chuci* poem “Ai shi ming” 哀時命: “The Jiang and He are wide and bridgeless” 江河廣而無梁. Additionally, Chu again shows a stylistic debt to Xie Lingyun, specifically his use of *shu* 術 in its rather rare meaning of “road” or “path.” See again “Deng Shimen zui gao ding,” *Xie Kangle shi zhu*, 3.111. Chu’s affinity for the poetry of the Xie clan does not end with Xie Lingyun: in one of Chu’s more well-known poems, “Fisherman’s Cove” 漁灣, he borrows from Xie Tiao’s 謝眺 “You dong tian” 遊東田 the image of thoroughwort stirring from the motion of fish underneath. For the former, see *CGXSJ*, 1.2a, and the latter *Xie Xuancheng ji jiaozhu* 謝宣城集校注, ed. Cao Rongnan 曹融南 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 3.260.

<sup>111</sup> The phrases “the Sea Lads converse” (*haitong yu* 海童語) and “the Shark Folk dwell” (*jiaoren ju* 鮫人居) are taken from Zuo Si’s 左思 “Wu du fu” 吳都賦. See Xiao Tong, *Wen Xuan*, 5.208, 229. According to Li Shan’s commentary, these Sea Lads are spirits of the sea to whom transcendent beings must report before making any kind of offering. The Shark Folk are more familiar, beings who live underwater and whose tears become pearls. For more on the Shark Folk, see Edward Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: T’ang Images of the South* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), 220.

<sup>112</sup> The “picking and plucking” (*caicai* 采采) comes from a *Shijing* poem already considered above (see n. 53), “The Plantains” 芣苢 (*Mao* 8), and this may be a double entendre suggesting both the surface meaning for *cai* of “to pick,” as well as a latent sense of “lavish and luxurious growth” in its reduplicated form.

toward pastiche, as Owen shows, is present in much of Chu's occasional poetry,<sup>113</sup> though in this allegorical poem, pastiche becomes the manifestation of the tension between Chu and his precursor, the anxiety over creating something new with skills forged in the poetry of the past.

The classical depiction of the lotus-picking theme is of a male speaker happening upon one or more southern beauties gathering the seeds or flowers of the titular plant, usually in a small boat floating on a secluded pond.<sup>114</sup> Chu opens with *tianyuan* verse locating his poem squarely in just such a setting, though interestingly the lotus itself does not appear among the profusion of water-borne plants. This absence echoes into the second couplet, lines that let us know something else is missing—the southern beauties that feature so centrally in the works of Chu's contemporaries Li Bai and Wang Changling 王昌齡 (698-765) on this same theme.<sup>115</sup> The male speaker is at ease because he is alone, and the only beauties here are in his mind's eye, those who, as depicted in the *Shijing*, bring their lovers to the banks of the Qi River for secret trysts. Yet even this image of feminine beauty is something that causes the speaker embarrassment. Chu is again playing with the expectations of the reader, but here it feels like he is cutting with a dull edge, especially without the kind of build-up we saw in “Shooting Pheasants.”

The third couplet is another static natural scene, though this time pulled back from the immediacy of the pond setting to a wider viewpoint. The first line loosely resembles a line from the *Chuci* 楚辭, and Chu's use of *shu* 術 in its rather rare meaning of “road” or “path” is reminiscent of Xie Lingyun's own similar usage of the word. We could read the insertion of this

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<sup>113</sup> *High T'ang*, 68.

<sup>114</sup> See Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird*, 82-83.

<sup>115</sup> For example, see Wang Changling's “Cailian qu er shou” 采蓮曲二首 and Li Bai's “Cailian qu” 采蓮曲.



scene as a reflection of the speaker's seclusion, the wide stretch of unpopulated space of the second line conveying this just as clearly as the restriction and confinement of the lack of roads in the first, but Chu makes this difficult as he moves into the fourth couplet. Conversing Sea Lads and underwater-dwelling Shark Folk suddenly appear, images pulled directly from Zuo Si's 左思 "Wu du fu" 吳都賦. Chu is obviously attempting to capture the association of the lotus-picking theme with Wu and the south, doing so with allusions to the mythical creatures of Zuo's *fu* instead of rehashing the traditional images. However, when combined with the scenic couplet, the effect is neutralized somewhat in its confusion, and without a narrative connection to the beginning, the poem is robbed of much of the discursive appeal we have noticed so far in Chu's other allegorical works.

Chu returns us to the presence of the speaker in the penultimate couplet with another static scene of watery vegetation, one that clumsily parrots the opening couplet. Perhaps these sets of *tianyuan* lines were intended to act as a kind of refrain—especially since the song-lyric quality of the other three poems is lacking—but that seems unlikely. More plausible is that "Picking Lotus" simply represents a misfiring of Chu's poetics. Were he to have distanced himself more from Tao Qian and *tianyuan* verse, adopting the direct narrative style of "Shooting Pheasants," maybe his play on the reader's expectations would have had more force. Or, if he had chosen to fully embrace the legacy of his precursor, keeping the poem's frame on the natural scene as he does in "The Herdboy," perhaps his image in the final couplet of the lotus-picker absorbed fully in the momentary pleasure of his activity would not have been muddled by the fidgety composition of the poem as it stands.

But this is, of course, the point. "Picking Lotus" is by no means a terrible poem, but even if it is a misfire, it shows—as do all the poems examined in this paper—that Chu Guangxi is a

true belated poet, always in dialogue with his precursor Tao Qian, but not with perfect clarity; constantly navigating new territory, but forever moored to the literary past. And for Chu, this literary past is quite obviously populated by a variety of poets, not only by Tao Qian, and filled with a wide range of texts. Eliot reminds us of the paradox of the historical poet, namely that “we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, if some of Chu’s best efforts show him both adroitly conjuring Tao Qian and setting aside his own individuality, this should not be surprising, nor a reason to discount his poetry. As a silver poet, Chu Guangxi will never receive the same attention as many of his now better-known contemporaries, but his poetic corpus shows him to be much more than simply the second coming of his precursor.

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<sup>116</sup> “Tradition,” 43.

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