

Article

A Constant Cascade: Ancient and Medieval Verse on the Four Waterways

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Abstract: The literary representation of China's great rivers has repeatedly been transformed by changes in religious belief and ritual. In the *Book of Songs*, rivers figure primarily as political boundaries and figures of separation. Though they may already play a role in religious rites, their geographical identity is paramount. However, in the "Nine Songs" of the *Elegies of Chu*, they appear in a new guise as sites of divine encounter and shamanistic flight. Their treatment in later works may be regarded as a peculiar synthesis of these two traditions. Once the Four Waterways were designated as the object of state ritual in the Western Han, their divine status was widely accepted, along with explicitly political ramifications. For instance, the god of the Yellow River was honored as a participant in flood control and imperial governance writ large. Meanwhile, the tradition of the epideictic *fu* also celebrates the awesome scale of China's waterways, reaching a culmination not long after the fall of the Han in Guo Pu's (286–324) "Rhapsody on the Yangzi River". However, it is noteworthy how often the *fu* tradition eschews material description of rivers in favor of celebrating their numinous powers and divine inhabitants. Because of this turn towards the divine in the medieval literary tradition, it is no accident that one of the most prominent subjects of fluvial verse in the Tang is not body of water at all but rather the Sky River, or Milky Way.

Keywords: early Chinese poetry; medieval Chinese poetry; rivers; *fu* (rhapsody); Milky Way



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1. A Land of Rivers

There is a rich scholarly literature on China's sacred mountains, with landmarks in Western sinology, including Edouard Chavannes' monograph on Mount Tai 泰 and James Robson's work a century later on Mount Heng 衡.¹ As Jia Jinhua has recently reminded us (Jia 2021), the veneration of mountains in China was only established through a long historical process, one that included state designation of certain mountains as objects of worship, alongside certain bodies of water as well. The emblematic role of China's rivers needs no introduction since the distinctive ways in which the Yellow and Yangzi rivers sustained millet and rice agriculture, respectively, have shaped and determined much of China's history. In modern times, the drama of the Yellow River's incessant floods served as the central metaphor of the 1988 documentary "River Elegy" (He shang 河殤), with its critical reflections on China's traditional culture.

From a comparative point of view, rivers such as the Nile, the Ganges, and the Rhine are not just geographical landmarks but sites of civilizational resonance. The rivers that divide and demarcate our landmasses, while also providing an indispensable means of communication and exchange, are natural objects of attention, devotion, even reverence. When Melville's narrator Ishmael is attempting, in the course of his self-introduction, to explain his own lifelong itch to ride upon the waves, he asserts self-assuredly: "why is almost every robust, healthy boy with a robust, healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea? Why, upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity and make him the own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. Still deeper

is the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. However, that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life, and this is the key to it all" (Melville 2002, pp. 19–20).

Though the prompt to Melville's discussion here is of course the appeal of the ocean, to explain this phenomenon he conceives of bodies of water in general as the images of something desperately desired. The mirroring surface of a body of water, which conceals depths that are inaccessible and dangerous, acts as a physical correlative to human narcissism, in which we find the images of our own desires and aspirations in the natural world.

China's great rivers too have provided an "image... of life" throughout the ages, a concentrated reflection of some of the abiding concerns of the times. However, what is striking as one looks through early Chinese verse on rivers is how abruptly the preoccupations of the writers shift and how rarely they linger on any facet of the rivers themselves. Instead, China's rivers have from the beginning served primarily a symbolic, and later a religious, role. In ancient times, their significance was tied to their actual geographical role, demarcating the key territories of the civilized world. However, increasingly in imperial China they would take on an explicitly religious function in the culture, as signified *inter alia* by the inclusion of the Four Waterways as objects of state sacrifice in the Western Han. In keeping with this increasingly divinized role, by the Tang dynasty they come to figure most prominently not as terrestrial rivers at all but as the counterparts of that great celestial body, the Milky Way.

The Four Waterways (*sidu* 四瀆) are the Yellow River (He 河), Huai 淮 River, Ji 濟 River, and Yangzi River (Jiang 江). They had been designated as the object of state ritual in the Western Han, along with the Five Sacred Peaks, and their cultural importance was echoed in literary representation long after (Jia 2021, p. 4). However, their specific appeal to the literary imagination would evolve over time, and by the Tang had shifted beyond their terrestrial extension to encompass their intimations of celestial bodies as well. Three of the waterways already figure prominently in the *Book of Songs* (the exception is the Ji river). Typically, they are employed as symbols of the vast and unattainable, and the ninth poem in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs), "The Han Is Broad" or *Shijing* 9, already refers to the Han and Jiang rivers in its powerful chorus. The Han 漢 is technically a tributary of the Jiang 江 or Yangzi River. I will generally refer to the Yangzi as the Jiang, in order to maintain consistency in discussing these rivers by their contemporary names. The two terms Jiang and He 河 would later become generic terms for waterways, but that in early China they were simply proper nouns, and it is important to recognize that they have never been generic rivers but singular toponyms. "The Han Is Broad" is essentially about the Jiang, the great southern river which, from the perspective of the *Shijing* poets, marked the remote south (Mao et al. 2000, pp. 1C.63–67; Nie et al. 2009, pp. 20–23):²

The Han Is Broad 漢廣

南有喬木	In the South there are tall trees,
不可休思	But you may not rest there. ³
漢有游女	On the Han there are ladies roaming
不可求思	But you may not pursue them there!
漢之廣矣	For the Han is broad indeed,
不可泳思	You cannot dive across it.
江之永矣	For the Jiang is vast indeed,
不可方思	So you cannot navigate it.
翹翹錯薪	Overgrown above is the wood,
言刈其楚	I would prune its brambles.
之子于歸	This girl is going to be wed,

言秣其馬 I would get fodder for my horse.
 漢之廣矣 For the Han is broad indeed,
 不可泳思 You cannot swim across it.
 江之永矣 For the Jiang is vast indeed,
 不可方思 So you cannot ford it.
 翹翹錯薪 Overgrown above is the wood,
 言刈其蕒 I would prune that mugwort.
 之子于歸 This girl is going to be wed,
 言秣其駒 I would get fodder for my stallion.
 漢之廣矣 For the Han is broad indeed,
 不可泳思 You cannot swim across it.
 江之永矣 For the Jiang is vast indeed,
 不可方思 So you cannot ford it.

There are multiple levels of meaning and more than one plausible interpretation to this famous poem, but here I would like to focus simply on the role of the rivers, the Han and the Jiang.⁴ One view of the significance of these rivers is that of Marcel Granet (1884–1940), that the poem is describing marriage rituals located on the riverbanks (Granet 1919, pp. 129–42). However, this misses the key point that the rivers are being referred to as a metaphor for other kinds of barriers and cannot be interpreted as solely physical landmarks. There may or may not have been contemporaneous worship of these rivers, but it is clearly not the point of the song. Similarly, the Lu 魯 and Han 韓 school interpreted the roaming ladies as water goddesses, which again is a possible undertone but hardly evinced in the poem itself (Wang 1987, p. 151).

The Han and Jiang rivers lay beyond the southern borders of the central Chinese states in which the poems were authored and thus marked the boundaries among human domains. This dimension of the poem is key to one of the earliest interpretations of the poem, that of the preface in the Mao 毛 version of the anthology, variously attributed to Confucius' disciple Zixia 子夏, to Mao Heng 毛亨 (early Western Han), or other Han scholars (for an overview see van Zoeren 1991, pp. 90–93). The Mao preface offers a Confucian interpretation that also better suits the literary rhetoric of the poem: "It tells of how far the breadth of virtue attained" 德廣所及也 (Mao et al. 2000, p. 1C.63). This is closer to the spirit of the poem since it is evidently using the impassable breadth of the river as a symbol of other vast expanses. Though Zhu Xi was of course sometimes critical of the Mao commentary, he accepted this same interpretation here. Morally speaking, the Mao preface seems to miss the point that the poet's sympathies are likely to lie with the thwarted lovers, but as a matter of literary representation, rivers' primary significance was as a symbol of separation. In the vast territory that shared in the culture of the Zhou, substantial geographical and political barriers pertained, and the Han and Jiang were two of these.

As so often within the *Shijing*, the proper way to examine these lines is in dialogue with other poems of the anthology. *Shijing* 61, "The He Is Broad" 河廣, almost appears to have been composed as a response to "The Han Is Broad", merely substituting for the southern Han rivers the northern Yellow River or He 河 (Mao et al. 2000, pp. 3C.282–84; Nie et al. 2009, pp. 127–28):

The He Is Broad 河廣
 誰謂河廣 Who says the He is broad?
 一葦杭之 A single raft may navigate it.
 誰謂宋遠 Who says that Song is far?
 跂予望之 On tiptoes I may gaze at it.
 誰謂河廣 Who says the He is broad?

曾不容刀 It could not even hold up a light vessel.⁵
 誰謂宋遠 Who says that Song is far?
 曾不崇朝 It is not even a full day's journey.

According to the Mao commentary, this is a poem about how “The mother of Duke Xiang of Song had married into Wei. Longing for her home without cease, she thus composed this poem”. 宋襄公母歸于衛，思而不止，故作是詩也。 A refinement of this interpretation is proposed by Zheng Xuan, who states that the mother had for some reason been expelled from Song and longed for her son there. Alternatively, Hung Kuo-liang argues (Hung 2015) that even though by the reign of Duke Xiang (d. 637 BCE), the capital of Wei had moved south to the same side of the Yellow River as that of Song, Zheng Xuan's interpretation remains correct because the Yellow River is used purely as a metaphor. Though different scholars may disagree with the historical identification, the basic nature of the poem seems clear: a speaker employing the Yellow River as a symbol of political barriers that make travel impossible. The speaker tells of the bittersweet knowledge that the home she misses is not physically far, and yet there is no way to travel there.

In the contrast of these two poems on rivers and longing, we see an outline of a fluvial diagram of ancient China, a great realm both unified and divided by its network of rivers. Rivers figure frequently throughout the *Shijing* in similar fashion, demarcating what belongs inside and what beyond the borders of the political realm. From this point of view, it is possible to interpret more obscure cases such as *Shijing* 208 (Mao et al. 2000, p. 13B.942; Nie et al. 2009, pp. 398–400; Chen 2007, pp. 242–43):

Striking the Bell 鼓鍾

鼓鍾將將 Strike the bell, clang!
 淮水湯湯 The waters of the Huai are churning.
 憂心且傷 I am anxious and sick at heart.
 淑人君子 That honorable one, that gentleman,
 懷允不忘 How I long for him and do not forget.
 鼓鍾噤噤 Strike the bell, cling clang,
 淮水潛潛 The waters of the Huai are murmuring.
 憂心且悲 I am anxious and sad at heart.
 淑人君子 That honorable man, that gentleman,
 其德不回 His virtue does not go astray.
 鼓鍾伐鼗 Strike the bell, beat the great drums,
 淮有三洲 There are three islets in the Huai.
 憂心且妯 I am anxious and despairing.
 淑人君子 That honorable man, that gentleman,
 其德不猶 His virtue is beyond compare.
 鼓鍾欽欽 Strike the bell, ding dong,
 鼓瑟鼓琴 Play the zithers, play the zitherns,
 笙磬同音 The organ chime in harmony.
 以雅以南 Playing the canons, playing the anthems,⁶
 以籥不僇 The transverse flute is not discordant.

The Mao preface interprets this as a critique of King You 幽 performing the royal music away from the capital, on the Huai river, and some modern scholars affirm this interpretation (Nie et al. 2009, p. 399). King You completed the covenant (*meng* 盟) ritual at Taishi 太室 (modern Songsshan 嵩山, Henan province), upon which the Rong and Di tribes revolted (Zuozhuan, Duke Zhao, Year 4; Durrant et al. 2016, p. 1373). Taishi is located near the Ying 潁 river, which feeds into the Huai (Zhu 2002, pp. 4.20a/b, also cited by

Nie et al. 2009, p. 399). So, this interpretation is not impossible but does seem strained. Perhaps Xu Wenjing 徐文靖 (1667–?) offers a better explanation, showing that King Xuan 宣 actually did make a campaign to the Huai (Xu 1998, p. 7.127).⁷

What seems evident is that the latter half of each stanza is celebratory, praising the virtuous man and the royal music fitting to him, in particular the *ya* 雅 and *nan* 南, which are central to the *Shijing* itself. Yet, the first three stanzas all express the speaker's sorrow and concern, which goes unexplained in the poem except, perhaps, for the reference to the Huai River. Thus, we see the Huai presented as a signifier of the marginal region on the borders of the realm. Throughout the commentarial tradition, readers have found different ways of making sense of the poem's contrasting elements, but they all rely on the significance of the Huai River at the bounds of the realm and yet within the territory traversed by certain of its kings.

2. The Yellow River and Its God

Although the three poems discussed above present rivers as key components of the natural landscape and correlative elements of the cosmos, they do not quite describe them as objects of veneration. Yet, at least some of China's rivers were already inhabited by deities in antiquity, as already alluded to briefly in regard to "The Han Is Wide". Though there have been attempts to identify aquatic rites in the *Shijing* itself, I believe that in general these are misplaced. There is no need to assume that there was some discrete object of analysis that can be identified as "early Chinese religion". Instead, we ought to distinguish the different cultural strata represented by different corpora. In particular, the *Shijing* and *Chuci* represent different religious backgrounds and should not be assimilated to one another.⁸

The religious culture of Warring States Chu as represented in the *Chuci*, and not only there but also in recently excavated materials from Warring States Chu, foregrounded shamanistic elements (Guo 1997; Yan 2010; Williams 2020). The *wu* 巫 figure would by means of special rites impersonate the divinity and, in a spiritual form, fly off into the Heavens or traverse the four directions at will. In the *Chuci* anthology, at least, it was possible to divide the soul into two, the earthsoul (*po* 魄) and skysoul (*hun* 魂), and this soul duality has also been common in other shamanistic religions (Paulson 1958).⁹ The latter of these is a term that does not occur in the received text of the *Shijing* yet is prominent in several of the *Chuci* poems, representing the soul that can be detached from the physical body and rapidly traverse the realm. Fittingly, the Chu religion features a distinctive pantheon, including the goddesses of the Xiang 湘 river and the god of the Yellow River, the Hebo 河伯, all of which are honored in the "Nine Songs" 九歌 (Waley 1955).

Hebo is mentioned in the oracle bones and the "Heavenly Questions" 天問 in the *Chuci*, and appears in an episode in the *Shiji*, in which official Ximen Bao 西門豹 ends an old custom of throwing women into the Yellow River as brides of Hebo (Sima 1963, pp. 126.3211–13). However, he appears again, somewhat contravening geographical logic, in the "Nine Songs", as an alluring partner in romantic encounter. In his classic article "Looking for Mr. Ho Po", Whalen Lai presents a Jungian, comparative interpretation of these myths, in which Ximen Bao is literally a leopard (*bao*) god meeting the Hebo in mythic union (Lai 1990). However, the point of interest here is simply that our perspective is orthogonal to that of the *Shijing* poems examined above. Our speakers do not stand on one side or another of rivers that demarcate the territory of a vast realm; they do not stand in a horizontal plane at all but rather are arrayed vertically, with their primary trajectories being upwards to the highest peak, or deep below the waves (text Huang 2007, pp. 3.932–48):

Sire of the Yellow River 河伯

與女遊兮九河	Together with you I will roam—the Nine Rivers,
衝風起兮橫波	While the gale wind raises—torrential waves.
乘水車兮荷蓋	Let us ride a water carriage—with lotus canopy,
駕兩龍兮驂螭	Driving twin dragons—and triple wyverns.

登崑崙兮四望 Ascending Mount Kunlun—and looking in all four directions,
 心飛揚兮浩蕩 My heart flew up—exhilarated and alive.
 日將暮兮悵忘歸 Now as day nears dusk—I am bitter and unwilling to return.
 惟極浦兮寤懷 What longing I feel—nostalgia for the farthest shore.
 魚鱗屋兮龍堂 Your chambers are of fishscales—in dragon sanctums,
 紫貝闕兮朱宮 towers of violet molluscs—in vermilion palaces:
 靈何為兮水中 What is that god about—here beneath the waves?
 乘白龜兮逐文魚 Riding a white sea tortoise—chasing the dappled fish,
 與女遊兮河之渚 Together with you I will roam—on the reefs of the Yellow
 River;
 流漸紛兮將來下 Adrift in the currents—coming down together.
 子交手兮東行 Clasp your hand—to depart for the East,
 送美人兮南浦 I will send you off, my Beauty—to the southern shore.
 波滔滔兮來迎 The waves surge and swell—in welcome,
 魚鱗鱗兮媵予 fish shoal upon shoal—escorting us home.

The Nine Rivers in the first line sound like they might be designating a kind of fluvial net that covers some large expanse of China's plains but instead appear to refer to the subterranean rivers beneath Mount Kunlun (Chūbachi 1989, pp. 20–22; identified as “mythical geography” in Waley 1955, p. 47). The remainder of the poem traces a love affair that takes place in “dragon sanctums” and with the “fish shoal upon shoal” but also atop Mount Kunlun. It is the prerogative of the shaman to fly to so many remote places with unmatched freedom.

We are thus in a totally different speculative universe from that of the *Book of Songs*. But for Han readers and scholars, it was necessary to make sense of all of these texts. Just like modern scholars peering back at remote antiquity, they did not receive these fragments of the past properly dated and classified but all at once in a totality. Thus, the commentary of the *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句, the Han version of the anthology that is the primary source of all our received texts, glosses the first line of this poem as follows (Huang 2007, p. 3.932): “The He is the leader of the Four Waterways, so its status is regarded as like that of a grandee. Qu Yuan was a grandee of Chu, and wanted to befriend an official, so he calls him ‘you’” 河為四瀆長，其位視大夫。屈原亦楚大夫，欲以官相友，故言女也。¹⁰ This explanation is so fanciful and irrelevant to the original poem that it required a high degree of creativity in itself and in my view should not be considered an interpretation of the original line so much as a response to it. What is clear is that, without directly repudiating the traditional lore regarding the Hebo, the Han commentary reframes the poem entirely in yet another context: that of the Four Waterways.

The Four Waterways are significant in that they impose hierarchy on the diverse forms of aquatic ritual and symbolism that pertained in antiquity. The *Chuci zhangju* identifies the Yellow River not just as one of the four but the supreme one. The hierarchy of rivers then serves as a model for the relations of Qu Yuan with other courtiers. This transitivity of symbolism does not make much sense as synchronic belief system, but it does represent a clever attempt at converting the mythico-shamanic symbolism of the “Nine Songs” into a bureaucratic schema appropriate to a Han scholar.

As Jia 2021 shows, even though sacrifices had been offered to the rivers in various specific contexts, many of the ancient classics do not refer to the Four Waterways as such, and they seem to have been established in the Warring States and Han period, together with five-phase theory. This is more obvious with regard to the Five Sacred Peaks, which match the five phases explicitly, but applies *eo ipso* to the Four Waterways as well. Jia identifies the first datable mention of both the Five Peaks and Four Waterways in the *Xinyu* 新語 of Lu Jia 陸賈 (240–170 BCE) (Jia 2021, p. 4). One of the earliest sources to identify the

Four Waterways is a quotation from the *Book of Documents* in the *Shi ji* 史記, which is absent from the received text of the *Documents* (Jia 2021, p. 5). The full passage reads:

In ancient times, Yu 禹 and Gaoyao 皋陶 labored long in the exterior. They had achievements for the people, and the people were thus at peace. In the east was the Jiang, in the north was the Ji, in the west was the He, and in the south was the Huai. Once the Four Waterways were constructed, the myriad people then had a place to abide. Lord Millet brought down the way of planting, and agriculture nourished the hundred grains. The Three Dukes all had achievements for the people, and so the Sovereign was established. Long ago Chi You 蚩尤 and his ministers caused trouble for the common people, and the High Lord did not approve of such a situation. The past kings said: one must strive!

古禹、皋陶久勞于外，其有功乎民，民乃有安。東為江，北為濟，西為河，南為淮，四瀆已修，萬民乃有居。后稷降播，農殖百穀。三公咸有功于民，故后有立。昔蚩尤與其大夫作亂百姓，帝乃弗予，有狀。先王言不可不勉。(Sima 1963, p. 3.97)

Here, the Four Waterways are placed explicitly in context of great rulers and culture heroes of the past and understood as one important phase in the establishment of Chinese civilization. This passage helps to contextualize the commentary to “Sire of the Yellow River” as well. The Yellow River had been relocated to a position within the official hierarchy of historic names, whether personal or geographic.

If the Four Waterways had in earlier times been viewed in two different religio-cosmological perspectives (either geographically, in relation to the realm as a whole, or as the sites of shamanic flight), one might at first expect that the establishment of the Han sacrificial system would mean that the values reflected in the *Shijing* had triumphed: the rivers had become elements within a bureaucratic geography of the realm. In reality, though, an examination of the later literary tradition suggests the opposite. It was the vertical conception of the rivers as the site of spiritual flight that became more dominant in the literary tradition. That is to say, whether because of the official rites established in the Han, or due to other correlative cultural transformations, medieval poetry on rivers continues to be explicitly religious, even if not quite in the same manner as the “Nine Songs”.

The Sire of the Yellow River himself appears in one memorable historical episode from the Western Han. The Calabash Dike (Huzi 瓠子, south of Puyang 濮陽 county, Henan) was breached in 132 BCE, early in the reign of Han Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140–87 BCE). According to the *Shiji* 史記, in 109 BCE Emperor Wu personally went to lead the construction to repair the dike and even had his high officials participate in filling the gap (Sima 1963, pp. 29.1412–13; see also Li 1989, pp. 24.2027–30). Then, fearing the work would not be completed, Emperor Wu sang the following two songs:¹¹

Calabash Song I

Now the Calabash has been breached—what to do?
With tremendous, immeasurable force—the village lanes are utterly made rivers.
Utterly made rivers—so the earth cannot have peace,
The labor has no finishing point—till Mount Yu is leveled.¹²
Mount Yu is leveled—and Lake Juye is overflowing,
The fish teem in multitudes—the waters near the winter sun.
The proper channels all opened up—departing the standard current,
Flood dragons ride—free in their far roaming.
Returning to the old riverbed—divine indeed its torrential flow,
Without the enfeoffment and succession sacrifices—who knows what else will come?

Tell me of the Hebo—why is he not kind,
 Permitting the flood not to cease—causing sorrow to our people?
 Niesang is floating—the Huai and Si rivers are full,¹³
 A long time till it was restored—and the waters ease again.
 瓠子決兮將奈何？咭咭吁吁兮閭殫為河。
 殫為河兮地不得寧，功無已時兮吾山平。
 吾山平兮鉅野溢，魚沸鬱兮柏冬日。
 正道弛兮離常流，¹⁴蛟龍騁兮方遠遊。
 歸舊川兮神哉沛，不封禪兮安知外。
 為我謂河伯兮何不仁，泛濫不止兮愁吾人。
 蓄桑浮兮淮泗滿，久不反兮水維緩。

Calabash Song II

The Yellow River's waters are turning, churning—rapidly gushing and rushing forth,
 The northern crossing is muddied—and hard to clear the flow.
 Carrying over the long grasses—and sinking the precious jade,
 The Hebo will permit us—but the wood is not sufficient.
 The wood is not sufficient—and the people of Wei are to blame,
 Scorched dry and scarce—alas! How can they block the waters?
 The ruined forests of bamboo—the beams and rocks ruined,
 Only when the dam is completed—will the myriad blessings come.
 河湯湯兮激潺湲，北渡污兮浚流難。
 奉長茭兮沈美玉，河伯許兮薪不屬。
 薪不屬兮衛人罪，燒蕭條兮噫乎何以禦水。
 積林竹兮榿石菑，宣房塞兮萬福來。

These two poems are in the Chu song form, with lines of two three-character hemistiches divided by the rhythmic particle *xi* 兮 (represented by the en-dash in my translation), joined together in rhyming couplets. Unlike most other forms of Chinese poetry, all the lines rhyme, but the rhymes change with each couplet. This happens to be very close to the rhythm of the “Nine Songs”, though it is more regular than those.

The first poem opens with a description of the He's unstoppable force, represented by the evocative but very rare (almost a *hapax legomenon*) alliterative compound *haohan* 咭吁, further reduplicated as *haohaohanhan*. When the dike is restored and the river returns to its old path, its flow is described in the memorable expression *shen zai pei* 神哉沛, which may call to mind the third of the “Nine Songs”, “Lady of the Xiang River” 湘君: “Swiftly I ride—on my osmanthus-scented vessel” 沛吾乘兮桂舟. In the earlier piece, the deity is careening down the river, but in Emperor Wu's song the river itself has become the subject.

The second poem is less dramatic, scolding the people of Wei for burning too much of the local forests to provide wood for dams. It also opens with an evocative description of the river's force: “The Yellow River's waters are turning, churning—rapidly gushing and rushing forth” 河湯湯兮激潺湲. The reduplicative compound *shangshang* describes rapid torrents, just as in *Shijing* 208 above. *Chanyuan* 潺湲 similarly describes the gushing flow of rivers as in “Mistress of the Xiang River” 湘夫人 in the “Nine Songs”. Collectively, the two songs borrow from an already well-established conventional rhetoric of fluvial potency. The scale of the Yellow River then implicitly affirms the power of the Emperor, who is able by his command and personal involvement to tame even the Hebo, the Sire of the Yellow River.

The songs attributed to Emperor Wu and other Han rulers form an interesting corpus, particularly when one reflects on the thorny problems of attribution that afflict most early Chinese poetry. As Knechtges notes, this song is singular even among these pieces because “it is the only piece of Wu-ti’s poetic corpus in which the poet actually speaks in the imperial voice” (Knechtges 2014, p. 67). Thus, in these two songs we have a well-documented piece composed by a known, historical figure at a specific location and date but addressed to the God of the Yellow River. The “Calabash Songs” thus resemble the “Nine Songs” in meter and also in their treatment of the river itself as a personified deity and yet emerge from an utterly different cultural universe. While the “Nine Songs” seem to be liturgical texts dealing in shamanistic encounters that rise out of the terrestrial plane into other realms, the “Calabash Songs” are documents of political persuasion composed within a distinct hierarchy of governance. They reflect the imperial standardization of rites that has already occurred, even while borrowing from the more open-ended religious materials as the “Nine Songs”.

The breaching of the Calabash Dike recurs not too long afterwards in a *fu* 賦 poem from the Jian’an 建安 (196–220) period by one of the Jian’an Pleiades, Ying Yang 應瑒 (d. 217). This piece may be the first *fu* taking the Yellow River as its subject. As with the *Shijing* poems discussed above, it may originate in a military campaign, that of Cao Cao 曹操 against Liu Bei 劉備, in the course of which he would have crossed the Yellow River in 208. The poem survives only in fragments, but the title is already clear enough: the poem is about a river that possesses divine capabilities:

On the Numinous He 靈河賦

Truly the numinous stream has a source far away—On the sacred mount of Kunlun.

Crossing the dark crannies of the Tiered Palisade—¹⁵Relying on the subterranean flows of Sovereign Earth.

Swallowing up the gathered boulders, precipitously piled—Splitting the mountain foot and further overflowing.

The Yellow Dragon surges up and proceeds southward—Coiling its great swan-like form and following the current.

Crossing the ford at Luo to Banquan—¹⁶It disseminates the nine circuits from the central province.

Flooding forth pell-mell and charging onwards—Ever progressing, ever proceeding, it continues forth.

From the first riding loftily and traveling rapidly—The Marquis of Yang is timid and startled by it.

But during the middle era of the Han,

The Gold Dike crumbled and the Calabash collapsed.¹⁷

Leading ten thousand chariots and personally laboring,

He led the various lords and came for the construction.

They brought low the lush bamboo of the Lacquer Garden,

And threw in the jade discs, and sank the very stars.¹⁸

And there are also

the tall conifers and towering catalpas,

verdant juniper and fragrant oak.¹⁹

Adventitiously arrayed, densely distributed,

Shimmering in the waters, they shade the dike.

When those full branches stir and are refreshed in the breeze,

The bright sun appears and shows an unlike radiance.

咨靈川之遐原兮，于崑崙之神丘。凌增城之陰隅兮，賴后土之潛流。銜積石之重險兮，披山麓而溢浮。蹶龍黃而南邁兮，紆鴻體而因流。涉津洛之阪泉兮，²⁰播九道乎中州。汾潁涌而騰驚兮，恆豐豐而徂征。肇乘高而迅逝兮，陽侯怖而振驚。有漢中葉，金隄隕而瓠子傾。興萬乘而親務，董羣后而來營。下淇園之豐篠，投玉璧而沈星。若夫長杉峻櫓，茂栝芬樞，扶疏灌列，暎水蔭防。隆條動而暘清風，白日顯而曜殊光。(Zhao and Yang 2010, pp. 30–34)²¹

During the course of the Han, then, we see a cultural transformation working in two opposite directions at once. On the one hand, the great waterways of the empire are tamed, in some cases literally by means of dams and dikes, but also by means of the proper ritual sacrifices instituted by Emperor Wu. At the same time, the imperially-sanctioned worship of these deities also seems to augment their power, insofar as it is reflected in the textual record, at least.

This can be seen in the supreme masterwork of the poetic tradition on rivers, Guo Pu's 郭璞 tremendous "Rhapsody on the Yangzi River" 江賦. This poem, which does survive in full, sums up the vast scale of the river in numerous sections. Beginning by placing it within the geography of the realm, the poem then describes its gushing rapids in a flood of onomatopoeia, and then goes on to catalog the fish, shellfish, and amphibians that populate its depths. Further cataloging the rocks within it and the birds that play over and upon its surface, the poem then details the flora along its shores and finally describes the human fishermen who make their living upon it. This gradual progression from the river itself, through the flora and fauna of it, up to the human realm, then leads naturally beyond that to describe the Daoist immortals who vanish submerged in its depths.

The great poem concludes (translation Knechtges 1987, pp. 349–51, notes omitted; text Xiao 1986, pp. 12.572–73):

The spiritual essence of the Min Mountains cast its luster into the Eastern Well,
 Lord Yang concealed his form in the great waves;
 Qixiang obtained the Way and lodged her spirit here,
 To match her numinous clarity with the Xiang beauties.
 The frightful yellow dragon that lifted the boat
 Understood Lord Yu's sighs to heaven.
 Bold was Jing Fei who captured the krakens!
 He generated his power from the Taie sword
 Magnificent the forms that flow from the Great Clod,
 Which blends the myriad things, returning them to a single hollow.
 To ensure that its water is never depleted and ever constant,
 It receives a great pneuma from numinous concord.
 If we examine the most wondrous sights among rivers and waterways,
 Truly none is more illustrious than the Jiang and the He.
 若乃岷精垂曜於東井，陽侯逖形乎大波。
 奇相去得道而宅神，乃協靈爽於湘娥。
 駭黃龍之負舟，識伯禹之仰嗟。
 壯荊飛之擒蛟，終成氣乎太阿。

 煥大塊之流形，混萬盡於一科。
 保不虧而永固，稟元氣於靈和。
 考川瀆而妙觀，實莫著於江河。

The great Jiang originates from the "spiritual essence" (*jing* 精) back at Mount Min 岷, and its brilliance extends to the Eastern Well of Heaven. According to the weft text

Hetu kuodi xiang 河圖括地象 quoted by Li Shan, Mount Min's essence literally ascended to become the Well constellation. However, the deity Lord Yang also hides under the waves, and the goddess Qixiang 奇相 abides within. Yet, all of these are just the individual manifestations of the power arising from the Great Clod, the shaper of all the transformations, all of which meet in "numinous concord", in the harmony of the spirits.

In other words, the diverse sources of river lore and worship of river deities together flowed into the deification of rivers in Han literature and its immediate successor in the poetry of the erudite Guo Pu. The "Rhapsody on the Ocean" 海賦 by Mu Hua 木華 (fl. 290) likewise portrays the ocean primarily as the habitat of the transcendents. Throughout this literature we can see the gradual triumph of a vision of these great bodies of water as "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life", as objects of worship and as divinities having their own agency and power, champing at the bit to escape their terrestrial confines. It is not a coincidence, then, that in the later literary tradition, one of the outstanding guises in which rivers appear is not aquatic at all but rather as the form of the Milky Way.

3. River to the Sky

In the ritual etiquette established in the Han, we have seen the Five Sacred Peaks paired with the Four Waterways, and speaking of Chinese poetry we often refer to the literature of "mountains and waters", 山水. However, this collocation obscures the essential difference between a mountain and a river. Even though both look similar in being geographical markers that are stable and long-lasting (if not actually permanent), in fact it is only mountains that remain the same, while rivers are always in flux, as Confucius remarked beside a river: "The transience of things is such as this!" 逝者如斯 (*Analects* 9/17). A mountain remains the same mountain, but a river is never the same river. This distinction is reflected in the literature, as mountain lore accretes gradually, filling out a rich tradition that spans the boundaries among religious traditions (Robson 2009), but rivers seem instead to be wax and wane, to be inhabited in succession by different deities and to change their shape even while preserving the same name.

Considering the even greater expanse of the Tang's cosmopolitan empire, one might expect to see a flood of new compositions in the vein of Guo Pu's *fu* poem. However, if we take the great Song anthology *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 as a guide, we find that out of a total of 150 *juan* of *fu* poetry, including nine full *juan* on aquatic topics (numbered 32–40), very few of these are devoted to rivers *per se*. Prominent themes include seasonal transformations such as droughts or water freezing into ice; the metaphor of "like a stone falling into water" 如石投水; and various notable springs and ponds; but few rivers. Only a single *juan*, number 34, is explicitly devoted to oceans and rivers, and primarily for allegorical purposes, such as the "Myriads Waterways All Return to the Ocean" 衆水歸海賦 by Fan Yangyuan 樊陽源 or the traditional theme of the clear and muddy rivers, such as the "Jing and Wei Rivers Merge their Streams" 涇渭合流賦 by Dugu Shou 獨孤綬. In other words, it is immediately clear that neither Guo Pu's nor even Ying Yang's more modest example originated a broader tradition of fluvial poetry in the Tang. Rivers were rarely regarded in their own right as a natural topic for poetry.

However, the 34th *juan* of *Wenyuan yinghua* does contain a clue as to how rivers were most prominently represented in Tang literature. This is the "The Wei River Resembles the Sky River" 渭水象天河賦 by Liu Xun 劉琨. Far from being a picturesque fancy of a single poet, it is the correspondence between terrestrial rivers and their celestial counterpart that dominates the fluvial imagery of Tang poetry. While the torrential flow of China's rivers had remained as impressive as ever, their interest for Tang poets had shifted onto a new axis, so that one "river" that garners particular admiration and figures in several exquisite poems is not a river at all but the Autumnal River (Qiuhe 秋河), another name for the Milky Way.

The correspondence of the Milky Way and China's rivers was ancient and well attested. The Milky Way was already described as the "Cloudy Han [River]" 雲漢 in *Shijing* 258. As Edward Schafer has noted, "By Han times, at least, the sky river was regarded as a

mysterious emanation from the great rivers of China, congealed on the celestial dome” (Schafer 1974, p. 403). Moreover, according to a famous story, a man traveled so far on the ocean that he ended up with the Weaving Maid and the Oxherd in Heaven. He returned home and asked astronomer Yan Junping 嚴君平, who told him that on the exact date he had reached that foreign destination, a traveling star had trespassed on the Oxherd constellation (Schafer 1974, pp. 404–5; source in Zhang 2014, p. 10.111). This story recurs frequently in all varieties of Tang poetry, and it is the Sky River rather than the terrestrial ones that is the source of inspiration for Tang poets.

As we have seen, the *Wenyuan yinghua* barely contains any *fu* poetry on specific rivers or the Four Waterways. However, among its twenty *juan* of *fu* on celestial phenomena, the tenth *juan* alone contains several poems devoted entirely to the Milky Way. We may conclude this study with just one representative piece among these. The poem belongs to the Tang efflorescence of the regulated *fu* (*lü fu* 律賦), one of the most neglected areas of Chinese literature.²² Probably much of the prejudice against the genre is based in its close relation with the examination *fu*, and it is fair to say that many of the shorter *fu* compositions of the mid- and late Tang were shaped by the expectations of the civil service examinations, in which *fu* compositions played a large part: by the assumption of a large audience, and the goal of impressing the official examiners. If we relax our requirements for authenticity or protest and turn in other directions, we soon find moments of literary brilliance in the minor *fu* of the ninth century. Moreover, they show not divergence but continuity with the grand tradition going back to the *Book of Songs* and the *Elegies of Chu*, finding in the natural world an “image of life” worth exploring. Even while the scale of *fu* poetry narrowed from the classic pieces on the imperial capitals, the genre retained symbolic and structural connections to the origins of the form. For instance, the regulated *fu* continues to employ certain extrametrical phrases to arrange the structure of the piece, dividing a text into distinct paragraphs that focus on distinct topics. Beyond these more tangible echoes of the Han *fu*, the regulated *fu* also delights in symbolically abbreviated representations of more grandiose scenes, whether mythological, celestial, or imperial.

The following regulated *fu*, while it may appear to stand outside the tradition of Tang poetry with which we are most familiar, can from another perspective be seen as the natural successor to the fluvial verse examined in this paper. In eight delicately balanced stanzas, it limns the Milky Way as the image of terrestrial rivers transported to the Heavens, as a symbol of celestial permanence and also of human ambition to ascend those heights:

Fu on Observing the Autumn River at Dawn 曙觀秋河賦²³

by Wang Sunzhi 王損之 (*jinshi* 798)

Remote is that slanted sheet, the Han,

Fixed in the midst of the Heavens.

At this moment when the fair evening has already ended,

It combines in brightness with the pure sunlight.

Its contour is that of luminosity revolving,²⁴

Now lying askew and reflecting from afar;

Then just when all is still and silent,

It floods forth and yet is suspended aloft.

Limpidly it splits far off,

Wistfully I peer up towards it.

Brilliantly glittering and gleaming, those wafting colors,

Concealed in the cerulean sky but drawing forth its radiance.

The lone stars drift far away,

Forming pearls sunken in pristine shallows.²⁵

The decrescent moon nears it obliquely,

Like the fishing hook hanging in the azure waves.
Its soft radiance forms a dense veil,
The far-off sunlight sparse and scant.
Some hues are hidden and others are refracted,
Its light concentrated in the infinite expanse;
Modeled on the “sheet of spray” (waterfall) but not falling;²⁶
Resembling the weightless clouds about to disperse.
The night’s illumination (the moon) about to part,
The clear radiance (the sun) is about to dawn.
Enfolded in the Cyan Net, whirling without cease,²⁷
Fading in the sunny skies, it is indiscernibly distant.
Clambering upwards you cannot reach it,
Separated by a single water that makes the heart distant;
Gazing far off in vain effort,
It is distant as the Nine Heavens and one’s yearnings are as remote.
Originating where there is no border,
It crosses the void without tilting.
Collecting the clear and bright dawn colors,
It contains the brisk air, chill and refreshing.
Is it a sheet of silk stretched taut in a form far away?
How awesome that vanishing rainbow with gossamer body.
Conceiving of the oxherd in its separate location,
Gradually I lose sight of that far-off shape;
Elsewhere I think of that weaving maid,
But do not hear her loom’s click-clacking.
That luminescent energy gradually being revealed,
The fog and dust are swept utterly away.
It would rather take up its shape upon the earth,
Overflowing Heaven till it hangs up its shadow.
It might play with the pure light,
And dally with the lingering brilliance.
Its divided halo is clean and bright,
Facing the dawn’s colors, it stands up straight;
Its distant force runs rampant,
Encircled by an autumn gleam that is resplendent.
How glorious, these suspended images,
How lofty, that blue empyrean!
Reflecting the astral transit in its pristine precision,
Departing from the nubilous road with its brilliant gleam.
Imagining it has just begun to bore a hole,
It is remote and hard to measure;
Investigating the very beginning of its streams,
They are as faraway as can be.
Thus, we know that it does not originate from human work,

Truly was it set down by Heaven.
 Forming the mental image out of pure absence,
 Defining its vast contours so that it could shine distinctly.
 When the idea pours forth at the very margin of Heaven,
 It is as far off as a rippling wave;
 Imagining the surreptitious flow within the sky,
 It is remote as a guttural sobbing.
 You must approach that transparency,
 Decant that limpidity:
 If the road to Heaven can be ascended,
 Then you can match the purity of those pristine undulations!

邈彼斜漢，麗於中天。遇良宵之已艾，與清景而相鮮。勢則昭回，既闌干而遠映。時方蕭瑟，亦汎濫而高懸。

的爾遙分，淒然仰眺。澄奕奕之浮彩，隱蒼蒼而引耀。孤星迴泛，狀清淺之沉珠。殘月斜臨，似滄浪之垂釣。

輕暉幕幕，遠景蕭蕭。色分隱映，光凝沆寥。擬瀑布而下落，似輕雲之欲銷。

夜景將分，清光向曉。縈碧落以迴薄，澹晴空而縹緲。躋攀不及，限一水以心遙。曠望空勞，邈九霄而思杳。

發跡無際，凌虛不傾。積曙色之牢落，涵爽氣之淒清。疑曳練而勢遠，訝殘虹而體輕。遠想牽牛，漸失迢迢之狀。遙思弄杼，無聞軋軋之聲。

景氣潛昭，氛埃遠屏。寧在地以為狀，信滔天而掛影。可以翫清光，狎餘景。分暉爽亮，向曉色而亭亭；遠勢縱橫，帶秋光之耿耿。

偉茲垂象，倬彼青霄。映星躔之的的，出雲路以昭昭。想穿鑿之初，悠然莫測。稽源流之始，邈矣方遙。

則知匪自人功，實惟天設。自虛無而想像，界寥廓而昭晷。意天邊之橫注，遠若波瀾；想空裏之潛流，遙疑鳴咽。宜其臨清泚，挹澄澈。儼天路之可昇，與清漪而比潔。

The entire poem revels in the double nature of the sky river. Right in the opening stanza we read: "It floods forth and yet is suspended aloft": it is a flood of water in motion and also a pattern fixed in the sky. And again in the second stanza, the moon's approach is compared to "the fishing hook hanging into the azure waves". In the third stanza, it is compared to waterfall that does not fall; in the fourth, it is a river of separation in the sky just as it is far removed from the viewer below as well. The poet pointedly asks why he does not hear the sound of the loom with which the Weaving Maid works, as if to remind us that these are playful resemblances, and in the sixth stanza the poet imagines that the river has rinsed away the dust and grime from the sky, even while recognizing that it is all a pattern of light. Finally, "How glorious, those suspended images!" The poet sighs in awe at the spectacle of the Milky Way vanishing into the dawn radiance.

Finally, as the poet observes the Sky River rushing past the edge of the sky and beyond, he suggests it is also a pattern of the imagination while also wishing nonetheless that he might rise up into Heaven and let his fingers play in the rippling waves. In these lines, there is implicit hope that the poet will "ascend" to higher position in the official hierarchy as well, with the recurring identity of the celestial and imperial realms. Ultimately, both river and Milky Way are identified as decorative motifs within the all-encompassing background of Heaven, fixed and unmoving. The figure of the celestial river, scintillating in place but never moving, "set down by Heaven" from time immemorial, is a sort of inversion of the Indian myth in which the river Ganges has a celestial origin.²⁸ The Yellow River and its counterpart in Heaven remain in place, mirroring and echoing one another. However, it would not be fitting for the Milky Way to descend to earth, since it belongs to the ever

immobile court of the Emperor as well. One of the main elements of verbal play in this *fu* is the gentle encomium to the Son of Heaven, glorious and glittering with starlight.

There is more to be said about the contours of the celestial realm in Tang literature, but for our purposes here it is enough to observe how far we have wafted away from the *Shijing* poems with which we began. Rather than markers of territorial divisions across the realm, we have turned our gaze upwards to the Heavens, and the poet devotes much ingenuity to describing the simulacrum of rippling waves that he finds in the great pathway between the stars. At the same time, though, we have sketched the trajectory of cultural development that has led from terrestrial waterways to their celestial counterparts. Even the *Shijing* rivers were imbued with symbolism of the unattainable, so it was not so much of a surprise to find the Sire of the Yellow River lurking within them. It is surprisingly hard, in fact, to find naturalistic description of the Four Waterways because they are so frequently divinized, being seen as sites of spiritual ascension. Additionally, it is that religio-cultural context, so evident in the use of rivers within the grand epideictic *fu*, that makes our concluding piece on the Milky Way seem a logical outflow of the earlier poetic tradition. Rivers seem to be accorded less of the calm, abiding devotion with which Chinese people long worshiped their sacred mountains; throughout the medieval verse tradition, we do not hear the same loving detail about the bends of the Jiang and He that we do regularly of each of the Sacred Peaks, of Kunlun, of Tiantai. A river is not so fitting a symbol of fidelity to one's liege or of imperial grandeur. Yet the Four Waterways also loom large in traditional Chinese cosmology: rather than making a frontal assault on the empyrean and poking their crests directly through the cloud barrier, rivers suggest a more cunning route of ascension, arriving in Heaven by means of an instantaneous transformation, as subtle as a simile. As Goethe wrote, "Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis": everything that does not last is merely a likeness. The course of rivers, though constantly shifting across the landscape, leads ultimately to the stars.

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Notes

- ¹ (Chavannes 1910; Robson 2009). For the literary representation of mountains, see (Kroll 1983; Knechtges 2012).
- ² In that sense, this poem anticipates the medieval literary discourse of the Southland, as discussed from various points of view in (Wang and Williams 2015).
- ³ Text follows Han 韓 variant of the rhythmic particle *si* 思 for *xi* 息.
- ⁴ See also the insightful discussion of the hermeneutical tradition surrounding this poem in (Hu 2012), *passim*, arguing that the Mao interpretation has dominated the discussion of this poem precisely because it preserves the conflict inherent in the poem.
- ⁵ *Dao* 刀 may be a loan for *dao* 舢, a small boat.
- ⁶ *Ya* 雅 and *nan* 南 are key terms for the *Shijing* as a whole, of course, but here appear to be used in older, musicological meanings. For more on both, see (Chen 2007), *passim*.
- ⁷ Arthur Waley suggests tentatively: "It is possible that this song is a lament for someone who lost his life during the southern campaigns of the late western Zhou. But this is very uncertain" (Waley 1996, p. 193).
- ⁸ This is my fundamental objection to the otherwise highly stimulating study, (Chow 1986).
- ⁹ Recent scholarship has also emphasized the variety of alternative views on the soul that existed in early and medieval China, which should not be overlooked. Apart from the discussion in (Williams 2020), see, e.g., (Brashier 1996; Lo 2008).

- This is followed by an identification of the Nine Rivers based on the *Erya* 爾雅. The commentary is attributed to Wang Yi 王逸 but may have included text by other scholars as well, so I consider its authorship undetermined.
- (Knechtges 2014, pp. 66–67) introduces these two songs in context of Emperor Wu’s extensive production of poems in the Chu song form. His translation of two key passages has also been helpful. An earlier survey of the role of poetry in Han historiography is (Kern 2004), treating these curious textual artifacts in light of the artificial dichotomy of the “written word” vs. “song culture”.
- Perhaps suggesting that the only way to fill the breach would be to level the nearby hills.
- Niesang 鬻桑 is a location in modern Shanxi province, west of Ji 吉 county.
- Here, I follow the *Shuijing zhu* text of 正 for 延 in *Shiji*.
- One of the peaks of Mount Kunlun.
- Banquan is prominent in mythic geography as the site where the Yellow Emperor vanquished the Fie Emperor (Yandi 炎帝).
- Two famous dikes of history. The former was located east of modern Hua 滑 county, Henan, and the latter south of Puyang 濮陽 county, Henan.
- In the same passage of the *Shiji* mentioned above, it is said that Emperor Wu sank “white horses and jade discs” 白馬玉璧 into the Yellow River as offerings to the river god. Here, Ying Yang refers to stars perhaps because he is conflating these actual white horses with the Heavenly Horses of the constellation Wangliang 王梁 (Schlegel 1875, p. 329). Alternatively, Zhao and Yang read 星 as a phonetic loan for 牲, but I find this an overly aggressive emendation of the *lectio difficilior*.
- For these trees see (Stuart 1911).
- Yiwen leiju* variants are 洛:路 and 阪:峻.
- There is also a quatrain apparently from another part of the *fu*, which simply describes the boats filling the river:
- Dragon skiffs and white carp,
Yue ships and Shu vessels.
Sailing back up they cover the waters,
Sails and rudders like a forest.
龍艘白鯉，越艇蜀舸。泝游覆水，帆柁如林。
- A recent anthology, (Zhan et al. 2015), has also made the field more accessible than ever in the 20th century. The untimely death of Professor Zhan Hanglun 詹杭倫 last year was a great loss for the field. The best survey in English remains (Kroll 2000–2001), though it barely allots a few pages to this subgenre of the Tang *fu*.
- For text, see (Li et al. 1966, pp. 10.57b–8a; Jian and Li 2011, pp. 22.2027–28; Zhan et al. 2015, pp. 80–81).
- “Brilliance revolves” 昭回 comes from *Songs* 258/1 on the Milky Way.
- The “pristine shallows” (*qing qian* 清淺) is a term for the Milky Way as well. See the “Old Poem”, “The He and Han are pristine and also shallow” 河漢清且淺. See (Lu 1983, p. 331).
- For this literal translation of *pubu* 瀑布, normally “waterfall”, see (Kroll 1998, p. 70).
- For this rendering of *biluo* 碧落, a Daoist term for the heavens, see (Bokenkamp 1991).
- According to a popular version, it “... fell from heaven to earth in order to restore the bodies of the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara who had all been burned to ashes by the fierce gaze of the sage Kapila” (Eck 2012, p. 138).

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