From Protest to Eulogy: Poems of Saunters in Sylphdom from Pre-Qin to the Late Six Dynasties

Fusheng Wu*

Abstract

This essay examines the literary evolution of youxian shi (poetry of “saunters in sylphdom”) from a form of social protest to a form of courtly eulogy between the pre-Qin and late Six Dynasties (about 300 B.C. to A.D. 587) periods. It explores the formation of its generic conventions, and how they were carried on and subverted in its later development. Through a close analysis of five groups of poems, it demonstrates youxian shi originated from Qu Yuan’s (“Yuanyou”), which established the genre’s fundamental features as colorful descriptions of a celestial journey aiming to transcend human sufferings and frustrations. Later when the youxian motif was transferred to shi or lyric poetry it underwent some changes. The extravagant descriptions in Qu Yuan’s poem, characteristic of the fu genre, were greatly toned down because unlike fu, shi is generically more suited for self-expression. As a corollary of this stylistic change, its thematic focus also shifted. The lyric subject and his human

* Dr. Fusheng Wu (吳伏生) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages and Literature at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, U.S.A.
I. Introduction

Youxian shi, or poems of “saunters in sylphdom,” is a poetic mode that flourished during the Wei-Jin period, an era of great chaos and suffering in Chinese history. In the mostly secular context of Chinese culture, this mode, heavily influenced at its early stage by shamanism and Taoism, provided the world gradually assumed a larger role. By the Six Dynasties youxian shi became a poetic mode not dissimilar to eremitic poetry where the poet’s feelings and thoughts, not transcendent and their activities, became the central concern. At yet another phase of this evolution, the function of youxian shi underwent a most significant transformation when it was introduced into court literature: it was no longer a form of social protest as during its early stage, but a panegyric on the status quo.

Key Words: poems of saunters in sylphdom, transcendent, imitation, parody, generic conventions

I. Introduction

Youxian shi, or poems of “saunters in sylphdom,” is a poetic mode that flourished during the Wei-Jin period, an era of great chaos and suffering in Chinese history. In the mostly secular context of Chinese culture, this mode, heavily influenced at its early stage by shamanism and Taoism, provided the world gradually assumed a larger role. By the Six Dynasties youxian shi became a poetic mode not dissimilar to eremitic poetry where the poet’s feelings and thoughts, not transcendent and their activities, became the central concern. At yet another phase of this evolution, the function of youxian shi underwent a most significant transformation when it was introduced into court literature: it was no longer a form of social protest as during its early stage, but a panegyric on the status quo.

Key Words: poems of saunters in sylphdom, transcendent, imitation, parody, generic conventions


2 I am using Wei-Jin mainly in the sense of literary history, and as thus it spans from the years of Jianlàn (AD 196-220) to the end of the Jin in AD 420.

ed poets with a means to express their transcendent desires and imagination. The goal of this essay, however, is not to explore anew the religious significance of this poetic mode. Instead I will examine its literary evolution from a form of social protest to a form of courtly eulogy during the pre-Qin to late Six Dynasties (about 300 B.C. to 587 A.D.) periods. Specifically I will examine the formation of its generic conventions, and how they were carried on and subverted in its later development. Through a close analysis of five groups of poems, I will demonstrate that youxian shi originated from Qu Yuan’s 屈原 (340-278 B.C.) “Far-off Journey” (“Yuanyou” 遠遊), a fu 赋 or rhapsody that

especially 368-417, and Wang Yonghao 汪涌豪 and Yu Haomin 俞藻敏, Zhongguo youxian wenhua 中國遊仙文化 (Beijing: Fahu, 1997), passim.

4 There is debate about the authorship of this poem. Because some lines of this poem are taken directly from “Li sao” 楚辭, some scholars have suspected that it was composed by an anonymous Han imitator. See David Hawkes, trans., The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets (Penguin, 1985), 191-93. However, Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. A.D. 114-19), the Han scholar who compiled Chuci zhangju 楚辭章句, an anthology of Chu ci poems by Qu Yuan and others, did not seem to have any doubt about Qu Yuan’s authorship of this poem. See Wang Yi and Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 (fl. 1111-17), eds. and anns., Chuci buzhu 楚辭補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 163-75. Jiang Liangfu 黃良符 argues forcefully for the view that this poem was written during the pre-Qin period, mostly likely by Qu Yuan; see his “Quzi you yu” 齊子遊遊, in his Chucixue lunwenji 楚辭學論文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji), 507-44.

Some scholars have pointed out, without offering detailed discussions, the connection between Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-222) and Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324) youxian shi, to be considered in detail later, with “Yuan you.” See Huang Jie 黄節, ed. and ann., Cao Zijian shizhu 曹子建詩注 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1957), 79, and the remarks by He Zhuo 何焯, Yao Fan 姚范, quoted in Wei-Jin Nan-Bei-chao wenxueshi cankao ziliao 經典的推介和研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), 331. Also see Deng Shiliang 鄧士良, Liang-Jin shilun 兩晉詩論 (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1972), 144-45. However, both Yiwen leiju 藝文類聚, and Chuxue ji 初學記, two Tang compendiums, fail to mention Qu Yuan 顔 in their separate entries on 仙道 and 仙, where, especially in the more comprehensive Yiwen leiju, some representative works in youxian literature were quoted. Chuxue ji begins its poetic illustration of the entry with Guo Pu’s poems, whereas Yiwen leiju begins its with a youxian poem by Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226), and its fu section with Sima Xiangru’s 司馬相如 (179-118 B.C.) “Daren fu” 大人賦. See Chuxue ji (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), v. 3, chap. 23, 549-51, and Yiwen leiju (Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1965), v. 2, chap. 78. 1326-46;
established its fundamental features, which can be characterized as colorful descriptions of a celestial journey aiming to transcend human sufferings and frustrations. Later when the youxian motif was transferred to shi or lyric poetry it underwent some changes. The extravagant descriptions in Qu Yuan’s poem, characteristic of the fu genre, were greatly toned down because unlike fu, shi is generically more suited for self-expression. As a corollary of this stylistic change, its thematic focus also shifted. The lyric subject and his human world gradually assumed a larger role. By the Six Dynasties youxian shi became a poetic mode not dissimilar to eremitic poetry where the poet’s feelings and thoughts, not transcendants and their activities, became the central concern. At yet another phase of this evolution, the function of youxian shi underwent a most significant transformation when it was introduced into court literature: it was no longer a form of social protest as during its early stage.

5 I am following the Han categorization of Chu ci. See “Yiwen zhi” 莊文志 in Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), Han shu 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), v. 6, 1747. As You Guo’en 邱國恩 demonstrated in “Qufu kaozuan” 曲阜考源, fu and ci are interchangeable terms during Han. See his You Guo’en xueshu lunwenji 邱國恩學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 1-36. Wen xuan 文選, ed. by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-31), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), separated Qu Yuan and other works in the Chu ci genre from fu and put them in the category of sao 郑. 6 That fu is best suited for description is a conventional view accepted by scholars throughout the classical tradition. This characteristic is often differentiated from the expressiveness of shi, as was stated memorably by Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) in his “Fu on Literature” 文賦: “shi originates from feelings and is exquisite; fu describes the object and is lustrous” (詩緣情而绮靡，賦體物而流藻); see Wen xuan, v. 1, chap. 17, 239-44; for an English translation of this work, see Cyril Birch, ed., Anthology of Chinese Literature (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 1:252-75, and Stephen Owen, ed. and trans., Readings in Chinese Literary Thought (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 73-118. For studies on fu, see Cheng Tingzuo 程廷祚, Sao-fu lun 郑賦論 (Taipei: Lihang, 1970), Ma Jigao 馬積高 Fu shi 詩史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1987), Jiang Shuge 姜書閣, Hanfu tongyi 漢賦通義 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1988), Wan Guangzhi 萬光治, Hanfu tonglun 漢賦論 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1989), David R. Knechtges, The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the Fu of Yang Hsiang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Burton Watson, Chinese Rhyme-Prose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), and Dore J. Levy, “Constructing Sequences: Another Look at the Principle of Fu 詩 'Enumeration,’" Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 46 (December 1986): 471-93.
established its fundamental features, which can be characterized as colorful descriptions of a celestial journey aiming to transcend human sufferings and frustrations. Later when the *youxian* motif was transferred to *shi* 詩 or lyric poetry it underwent some changes. The extravagant descriptions in Qu Yuan’s poem, characteristic of the *fu* genre, were greatly toned down because unlike *fu*, *shi* is generically more suited for self-expression. As a corollary of this stylistic change, its thematic focus also shifted. The lyric subject and his human world gradually assumed a larger role. By the Six Dynasties *youxian shi* became a poetic mode not dissimilar to eremitic poetry where the poet’s feelings and thoughts, not transcendents and their activities, became the central concern. At yet another phase of this evolution, the function of *youxian shi* underwent a most significant transformation when it was introduced into court literature: it was no longer a form of social protest as during its early stage.

---

5 I am following the Han categorization of *Chu ci*. See “Yīwen zhì” 詩文志 in Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), v. 6, 1747. As You Guo en 游國恩 demonstrated in “Qufu kaoyuan” 屈賦考源, *fu* and *ci* are interchangeable terms during Han. See his *You Guo’én xueshu lunwenji* 游國恩學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 1-36. *Wen xuan* 文選, ed. by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-53), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), separated Qu Yuan and other works in the *Chu ci* genre from *fu* and put them in the category of *sao* 隨.

that the subsequent sections of the poem are merely the products of wishful thinking.\textsuperscript{10}

These two lines establish an intense human presence that will inevitably color our reading of the entire poem. Wang Yi, for example, argues that because Qu Yuan was misunderstood and persecuted, in this poem he “uses the transcendents to embody his deep thoughts and roams [in his mind] with them to every corner of the universe. However, he still cannot forget Chu his country and his folks at home. Such is the sincerity of his loyalty and the depth of his virtue.”\textsuperscript{11} Wang even extends this allegorical interpretation to Qu Yuan’s style, for he regards the magnificent diction in “Yuan you” as a rhetorical counterpart of his steadfast moral character.\textsuperscript{12}

Equally influential to youxian shi of later periods is the description of the “far-off journey” itself, which forms the bulk of the poem. Qu Yuan therein not only provides later poets with the pattern of this journey, but also the vocabulary to portray it. I will dwell on these two aspects in some detail.

The journey undertaken by the author of “Yuan you” can be best described as cosmic, in keeping with the generic characteristic of fu that tends to include every aspect of the subject in question.\textsuperscript{13} In an effort to travel “far-off” in his mind, the poet takes his readers to the edges of the universe, accompanied by his dazzling, half-human and half-supernatural entourage, as in the following passage:

---

\textsuperscript{10} I thus believe that Hawkes’ rendering of this word as “wanted” is inadequate. The same graph is repeated at the beginning of line 23, right after the mention of Red Pine the alleged transcendent. It introduces a similar wish, that he would love to model himself after the example of Red Pine 願乘風乎遙則. Another slightly different word, but with the same meaning and function, \textit{yu} 欲, is used in line 127, 欲度世以忘歸兮.

\textsuperscript{11} 「...遂敘妙思，託配仙人，與俱遊戲周歷天地，無所不到。然懷念楚國，思慕舊故，忠信之棄，仁義之厚也。」\textit{Chuci buzhu}, 163.

\textsuperscript{12} 「是以君子珍重其志，而瑜其辭也。」Ibid, 163.

\textsuperscript{13} Hawkes links this cosmic nature of the “far-off” journey to the practices of shamanism during Qu Yuan’s time. See his “Quest of Goddess.”
In the morning I set off from the Court of Heaven,
93
In the evening Wei-lū\textsuperscript{14} came in sight below.
96
I marshalled in order my ten thousand chariots,
And moved slowly forwards in splendid procession.
Eight dragons drew my car, coiling and curvetting,
Over it a cloud-banner flapped upon the wind.
The standards we carried bore rainbow devices:
Five contrasting colors, dazzling to behold.
Splendidly the yoke-horses bowed and tossed their heads;
Proudly the trace-horses arched and curved themselves.
As our colourful, many-assorted train began to move.
I grasped the reins, and, with my whip, I signalled the direction:
The first part of our journey should be to visit Gou Mang.\textsuperscript{15}

The poet, who has claimed at the beginning of the poem to have “Fallen on a time of foulness and impurity,” now embarks on a fantastic journey of freedom in a realm of utter beauty and purity. This magnificent celebration of human will and imagination, enacted in an equally magnificent, powerful verbal medium, echoes strongly “Li sao” or \textit{On Encountering Sorrow}. However, unlike “Li sao” which ends with the poet’s declaration of commitment to human world, “Yuan you” manages to overcome the poet’s nostalgia for his country and concludes with a passage in which the human world is transcended:

I toured the Four Outlands, \textsuperscript{16}
Traversed the Six Regions.

\textsuperscript{14} “According to the ‘Autumn Floods’ chapter of \textit{Zhuang zi} (Ch. 17), this was the name of a great vortex in the Eastern Sea where the waters of the ocean drained away through as sort of gigantic plug-hole, without, however, any apparent diminution in their volume.” Hawkes, \textit{Songs of the South}, 202.

\textsuperscript{15} Gou Mang was guardian god of the East. Chinese text in \textit{Chuci buzhu}, 169-70; English translation by Hawkes, \textit{Songs of the South}, 196-97.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 169 and 193.

\textsuperscript{17} See lines 131-39, where the poet was grieved to see his country below, but “brushed the tears away” and was “in control once more.”
In this short passage the key Taoist word wu (nothing or nothingness) is repeated four times. The four realms modified by wu, wudi (no earth), wutian (no sky), wujian (no seeing), wuwen (no listening), together create a quintessential Taoist world. This is reinforced at the end by the phrase taichu (The Great Beginning), which echoes an identical phrase in Zhuangzi. In fact, as many scholars have pointed out, Taoism and Shamanism, prevalent in the Chu region during Qu Yuan’s time, are the strongest and most visible influences on Qu Yuan’s work, especially on “Yuan you.” They not only helped to shape the cosmic journey described in this and other Chu ci poems, but also supplied this and later youxian shi some stock images and vocabularies. The supernatural animals summoned to service by the poet, the splendid processions of his entourage, the names of various transcendents mentioned in the poem, such as Chisong (Red Pine), Han Zhong (another variation is 韓眾), Wang Qiao (王喬), Yuren (feathered men), the places where they live, such as Danqiu (Cinnabar Hill), Gou Mang (句芒), Qingdu (Clear City), and the activities they engage in, such as “I supped the Six Essences, drank the Night Dew; Rinsed my mouth in Sun Mist; savoured the Morning Brightness”

---

20 See You Guo’en, “Qufu kaoyuan,” and Hawkes, “Quest of Goddess.” You has further traced this back to the Yin and Yang school of thought.
21 David Hawkes has discussed this in detail in his essay “Guest of the Goddess.”
3. The Youxian Motif in Han Yüefu

The graph xian 仙 was also written as 僧, which literally means to rise to reach an eternal life. During the Han dynasty searching for immortality gained wide popularity partly due to Emperor Wu’s obsession, which encouraged various kinds of immortality cults to pervade society. Under such circumstances the emphasis of youxian shi became more preoccupied with describing imaginative journeys to join transcendents in their eternal bliss. Because the bulk of “Yuan you” portrays such a journey, it became the source of inspiration and reference for the poets dealing with this topic. However, when the youxian motif in “Yuan you” was adopted by yuefu or music bureau poems a few noticeable changes took place. The extravagant descriptions of the cosmic trip in “Yuan you” are mostly omitted, and in the few yüefu poems that treat this theme the tristia section is entirely left out; what remains, in a much shortened form, is the itineraria. In these poems we find no profound sorrows over the sufferings of the world, but merely a wish for longevity that has been removed from specific social contexts. The following is an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long Song</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>長歌行</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>仙人騏白鹿</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>髪短耳何長</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>導我上太華</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>得芝獲赤幢</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>來到主人門</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>奉藥一玉箱</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 A Long Song
2 The transcendent rides on a white dear.
3 His hair is short, but his ears are long.
4 He guides me toward Taihua Mountain.
5 We pluck lingzhi herbs, get red-feathered banners.
6 We arrive at the master’s door.
7 And present him with drugs in a jade box.

---

22 Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 defines 僧 as ‧ to ascend to an eternal life; 長生僧去; see Shuowen jiezi zhu 説文解字注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji. 1988), chap. 8, 383. Shiming 釋名 explains xian 仙 as ‧ not to die when one gets old; 老而不死曰仙; cited in Chuxue ji, v. 3, chap. 23, 549.
When the master takes these drugs,
His health will improve day by day. 8
His grey hair will become black,
His life will reach longevity. 24

The extraordinarily plain and colloquial language in this poem, characteristic of most poems in the yüefu genre, nearly eliminates the heavenly aura in “Yuan you.” Gone are the transcendents found in those “far-off” places at heaven’s ends; instead the “master” (zhuren 主人) is seen by his “door” (men 門) 25 at Taihua Mountain, the Western Peak near Chang’an. There is nothing celestial about him, whose wish is merely to improve his health and enjoy a long life. This marks the first attempt in a long tradition to bring transcendents and their world down to the human realm. 26

This simple yüefu poem nevertheless signals a shift in the theme of you-xian shi. Qu Yuan is not unconcerned with brevity of human life in “Yuan you.” He makes it clear, however, that the reason he “came to be fearful of the passing of seasons” (恐天時之代序兮) is that he “had gone through the length of years with nothing yet achieved” (永歷年而無成). 27 His primary concerns are social and his transcendents and their world are presented as an alternative

25 The stock phrase for this in “Yuan you” and “Li sao” is changhe 門闕, heavenly gate.
26 Other yüefu poems treating this theme are 上陵, 王子喬, 董道行, 步出夏門行; all in Yuefu shiji.
   It should be noted that all these poems evince similar characteristics, although to different degrees. Ge Xiaoqin 葛曉音 has argued that the worldly descriptions of godly realms in yüefu poetry resulted from the fact that they are modeled after the artistic and architectural designs in temples and palaces built throughout the country during the Han dynasty, when the nation was obsessed with various religious cults and practices, the most prevalent of which was the search for longevity. See “Lun Han yüefu xushishi de fazhan yuanyin he biaoxian yishu” 讀漢樂府敘事詩的發展原因和表現藝術, in het Han-Tang wenxue de shanbian 漢唐文學的嬗變 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1990), 11-14.
27 Chuci buzhu, 165; Songs of the South, 195.
to the corrupt society. But in this poem society is bracketed out, and the search for longevity becomes the only motif. The transcendents and their world come to represent a de-contextualized alternative to an equally de-contextualized human life. This is an important shift, because when removed from its original socio-political context, the youxian motif can be appropriated by other poets for different purposes, as we will see later in our discussion.

4. Youxian shi’s Heyday, the Wei-Jin Period

The interest in immortality gained a new intensity during the Wei-Jin period. Large scale social destruction brought about by wars and natural disasters, and cruel political struggles that led to the death of numerous famous literati made the poets of the time keenly aware of the fragility and transience of human life. Even though many of them had strong doubts about the validity of the immortality cult and practice, they were nonetheless drawn to the youxian motif because it provided them with at least a temporary relief from the pressing tragedies of human existence. Cao Zhi (192-232) and Guo Pu (276-324) are the best-known figures of this poetic mode during its heyday.

Cao Zhi was the first poet to use youxian to name one of his poems. His youxian shi further developed the thematic shift that occurred in the yüefu poem discussed earlier. Stylistically, however, they are much closer to “Yuan you” because Cao Zhi adopted Qu Yuan’s diction and imagery in portraying his transcendent and their activities. The poem that bears the name of this

---

28 Among those who lost their lives in political struggles is Guo Pu, whose poetry will be considered in detail in this essay. He was executed by Wang Dun 王敦 for trying to persuade him not to start a coup against the government. See the biography of Guo Pu in Jin shu 晉書 (Beijing: 1974), v. 6, chap. 42, 1839-1910.

29 Cao Zhi, for example, vehemently denounced them in his “Biandao lun” 辯道論, and poem 7 of “Zeng Baima Wang Biao” 赞白馬王彪. See Cao zhi ji jiào zhù, 186-89, and 300. Later in his life, though, his view on immortality cult seemed to have moderated somewhat. See Donald Holzman, “Ts’ao Chih and Immortals,” Asia Major 1 (1988): 15-57, especially 52-57.
poetic mode also consists of two parts, a *tristia* and an *itineraria*, although greatly reduced in scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>遨仙</th>
<th><em>Saunters in Sylphdom</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>人生不滿百</td>
<td>Our life is not a hundred years long,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>歲歲少歡娛</td>
<td>The years come and go and give so little pleasure!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>意欲奮六翮</td>
<td>I would like to spread my six feathered wings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>排霧陵紫虛</td>
<td>And clearing the fog about me, I’d head up straight to heaven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>蟲蛻同松喬</td>
<td>Like Red Pine and Wang Qiao, I’d give up this old cicada shell,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>翻跡登鼎湖</td>
<td>And sail through the sky to the great Tripod Lake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>鼎翔九天上</td>
<td>I’d hover above the Ninth Heaven,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>賦盡遠遊行</td>
<td>Then ride to take a far-off journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>東觀扶桑曜</td>
<td>To the East — to see the Sun rising from Fusang,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>西臨弱水流</td>
<td>To the West — to stand by where Ruoshui flows,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>北極登玄渚</td>
<td>To the North — to attain the Dark Isle,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>南翔陟丹邱</td>
<td>To the South — to climb the Cinnabar Hill.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poem begins with a statement of *tristia*, not about the “parlous state” of the world, but about the brevity of human life. In line 3 the poet adopts a similar rhetorical gesture *yiyu* (I would like) to introduce his wish to undertake a heavenly journey, which in line 9 is further described as *yuan-xingyou* 远行游 (journey far away). The pattern of the trip, portrayed in a language strongly echoing that of “Yuan you,” is also cosmic, as is stressed by the mention of all four directions in the last two couplets. The poet calls upon transcendent Red Pine and Wang Qiao and travels to celestial places located at every corner of the universe. The poem ends on a transcendent note where the grief over human transience expressed at the outset is suppressed.

“A Journey in the Fifth Direction” 五遊詠 looks even more like a scaled-down version of “Yuan you,” but, like the poem above, is also devoid of its socio-political dimension. In this poem of greater length, Cao Zhi even adopted

---

30 “Tripod Lake” 鼎湖 is where Yellow Emperor was said to have ascended to heaven. See “Fengshan shu” 封禅書 in *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), v. 4, chap. 28, 1394.

31 The places named in the last four lines all refer to legendary places where transcendants reside; see *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 265, my translation.

32 Cao Zhi wrote another poem entitled □ A Far-off Journey □ 遠遊篇. See *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 402.
the ornate diction and celestial imagery that have become a trademark of works in the *Chu ci* repertoire:

- **九州不足步** Even the length and breadth of China cramps my stride, 1
- **願得凌雲翔** I would like to hover upward on clouds; 2
- **逍遥八極外** To roam at ease, beyond the edges of the earth, 3
- **遊目歷遐荒** And cast my eyes across infinite wilderness. 4
- **披我丹霞衣** Clad in my robe of morning cloud, 5
- **襲我素霓裳** Dressed with my clothing of pale rainbow; 6
- **華蓋濛濛露** My chariot’s painted canopy bright amongst dark mist, 7
- **六龍仰天驅** Hauled by six dragons, heavenwards. 8
- **曜靈未移景** The sun’s shadow has not moved, 9
- **候忽遙萬巖** At a glimpse I find myself in space. 10
- **闇闇啟丹扉** The cinnabar gates of heavenly palaces switch open, 11
- **雙闊曜朱光** Their twin columns radiate rosy light. 12
- **徘徊文昌殿** I’m strolling around the Wen Chang Temple, 13
- **登陛太微堂** And ascending the Tai Wei Hall. 14
- **上帝休西墉** The heavenly god is resting by the western lattice, 15
- **群后集東廬** His retinue assembles in the eastern room 16
- **帶我瑤枝佩** Decked in pendants of jade, 17
- **漱我沆瀣漿** Drinking the dew of midnight air, 18
- **翩翩玩靈芝** I wander up and down, twirling with lingzhi herbs, 19
- **徙倚弄華芳** I pace back and forth, admiring the beautiful flowers. 20
- **王子奉仙藥** Wang Qiao presents celestial medicine, 21
- **茂門進奇方** Xian Men**33** offers exotic prescriptions. 22
- **服食享遐紀** Let us eat and take them so that we may enjoy long life! 23
- **延壽保無疆** May we extend our life to eternity! 24

The activities described here not only resemble those of “Yuan you,” but are presented in nearly identical vocabulary. The graph *yuan* appears similarly at the beginning of the second line, the poet’s chariot is also hauled by dragons, and he too is clad in shining jewelry, drinking midnight dew, and playing with divine herbs. The only difference is the condition that prompted this supernatural journey: the profound sorrow over human sufferings in “Yuan you” is...

---

33 Xian Meng is the name of another transcendent; see ibid, 401n. 15.
34 *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu*, 401-02, my translation.
replaced by an ennui that once more has been generalized and rendered vague.\(^{35}\)

These two verses demonstrate the overpowering influence of Qu Yuan. Even for a great poet like Cao Zhi the presence of this archetypal figure is so strong that he had to struggle, often unsuccessfully, to make his voice heard. This is particularly striking in light of Cao Zhi’s great achievement in almost every other poetic sub-genre.\(^{36}\) His main contribution to youxian shi is that he successfully transplanted the transcendent, “far-off journey” motif in “Yuan you” and its stylistic features to his shi poetry. In addition to this, he gave this poetic mode a name that became a permanent part of nomenclature in Chinese literary history.

The Wen xuan 文選 edited by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-31) recognized you-xian as a distinct mode of shi poetry. In this category it included eight poems by two Jin dynasty poets, one by He Shao 何劭 (d. AD 391), seven by Guo Pu. In fact, Guo Pu’s reputation as a poet lies entirely in his fourteen youxian poems,\(^{37}\) the first of which is the most anthologized poem of this mode:

---

\(^{35}\) It should be pointed out that traditional readings of Cao Zhi’s youxian shi aim to supply the socio-political context that has been bracketed out by the poems. Thus like most other poems by Cao Zhi, his youxian shi have been interpreted allegorically as expressions of the poet’s personal frustrations. For examples of this most common view, see the remark on this poem by Chen Zuo Ming 陳作明 cited in Huang Jie, Cao Zijian shizhu, 82, and the general observation on Cao Zhi’s youxian shi by Li Baojun 李寶均 in his Caoshi fazi he jianlan wenxue 曹氏父子和建安文學 (Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1962), 45. Yu Guanying 余冠英 maintains that the wishing for longevity at the end of this poem shows that this might in fact be a drinking poem. See his San-Cao shixuan 三曹詩選 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1979), 55. Donald Holzman states that Cao Zhi uses the youxian motif “no longer only as allegory for his disappointment in politics, but also as a release in fantasy from the narrow confines of his fief and prison.” See “Ts’ai Chih and Immortals,” 56.

\(^{36}\) Zhong Rong 鍾嵘 (468-518) ranked Cao Zhi as a first class poet and said that Cao Zhi to literature was like Duke Zhou and Confucius to human kind. See Shi pin 詩品. The edition I am using is Cao Xu 曹旭, ed., Shi pin jijie 詩品集解 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1994), 97.

\(^{37}\) Xian-qin han-wei-jin nan-bei chao shi 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983) ed. by Lu Qinli 魯欽立 includes 19 youxian poems by Guo Pu, but only 10 are non-fragmentary. See v. 2, 865-87. For a very general study of Guo Pu’s life and his youxian shi, see Cao Dao heng 曹
This verse marks an important shift in youxian shi. Unlike the poems discussed earlier, its locus is “mountains and forests” (shanlin 山林) acting as an antithetical counterpart to “capital” (jinghua 京華) in the opening couplet. Such antithesis immediately suggests an eremitic theme where the simple life of integrity in nature is contrasted with the corruption in society. This brings back the social dimension in “Yuan you.” The next couplet reinforces this, as “vermilion gates” (zhumen 朱門), symbolic of power and wealth, is contrasted with Penglai Mountain (Penglai 蓬萊), a conventional place for transcendents. Because Penglai and shanlin are placed in parallel positions and their counterparts both refer to vainglory and corruption, we are led to believe that they signify the same location, i.e. “mountains and forests,” where one may escape such vainglory and corruption.

Lines 5 and 6 describe two conventional activities in eremitic literature. Note that there are no cosmic flights, no supernatural creatures, no transcen-

---


38 Wen xuan 文選. v. 3, chap. 21, 1019. English translation in Frodsham, Anthology of Chinese Verse, 92-93, with my modifications.
dents such as Red Pine and Wang Qiao. Drinking from clear streams and gathering plants (albeit that “cinnabar buds” *danyi* 丹黃) can be naturalized,\(^3^9\) especially in a mountainous setting. Both the editors of *Wei-Jin Nan-Bei-chao wenxue shi cankao ziliao* and Frodsham maintain that the subject of this couplet is the hermit.\(^4^0\) I believe the subject is the poet, who, after stating in line 4 that he would rather lead a life of seclusion in “mountains and forests,” goes on to imagine in this couplet the life he may have had there. This is a significant difference because it demonstrates the change that Guo Pu tries to initiate in *youxian shi*, namely, to shift the focus away from transcendors to the lyric subject or the poet himself. This interpretation also makes the reading of lines 9 and 10 less abrupt. After imagining the reclusive life he may enjoy in mountains, the poet is moved to announce its sufficiency: “Magic Stream is a good place to withdraw to” (靈谿可潛盤), and to renounce the need for any transcendence: “What need do I have for climbing the cloud-ladder?” (安事登雲梯). According to Li Shan, “Magic Stream” (*lingxi* 靈谿) is the name of an actual river, whereas to “climb the cloud-ladder” (*deng yunti* 登雲梯) refers to searching for transcendence.\(^4^1\) This is the first example that a *youxian* poem explicitly renounces the necessity of *youxian*, the longing and quest for transcendors.

Lines 9 and 10 use two allusions, not however to transcendors, but to historical figures. The haughty official in Lacquer Garden refers to Zhuangzi who refused to serve in the court of a Chu King.\(^4^2\) The story of Master Lai’s wife is

---

\(^3^9\) Li Shan, quoting the *Bencao jing* 本草經, says that *chizhi* 赤芝, also named *danzhī* 丹芝, can prolong one’s life. *yī* 赤 refers to young herbs. *Wen xuan*, v. 3, chap. 21, 1019.

\(^4^0\) *Wei-Jin Nan-Bei-chao*, 324; Frodsham, 92.

\(^4^1\) *Wen xuan*, v. 3, chap. 21, 1019. A contemporary Chinese critic argues that this phrase is a metaphor for political advancement, because if it were referring to the search for immortality it would have clashed with the poem’s title. See the interpretive essay on this poem by Yuan Qing 元靑 in the *Han-Wei Liuchao shi jianshang cidian* 漢魏六朝詩壇賞辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu, 1992), 439-41. I believe Li Shan’s interpretation is correct, but Yuan’s uneasiness shows that Guo Pu’s poem represents a significant change in this mode.

\(^4^2\) *Shi ji*, cited in *Wen xuan*, v. 3, chap. 21, 1019.
taken from *Lienu zhuan* 列女傳, *Biographies of Exemplary Women*. It is said that Master Lai, a hermit, was once tempted by an offer of service from the king. His wife then left him in anger and shame, which prompted Master Lai to follow his wife’s footsteps. These two allusions help to highlight the poet’s desire to withdraw from society. The reference to historical figures is another important innovation that Guo Pu brought into *youxian shi*. It gives the poem a historical dimension that further emphasizes the human aspect of this seemingly transcendent mode of poetry.

The last four lines state once again the poet’s determination to leave society, where one is trapped in either advancement or failure. The mention of Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊, two Confucian models for filial piety and loyalty, suggests that such traditional virtues are mere obstacles to the poet’s retreat to a Taoist world of freedom. The penultimate line, "Let me leave this wind and dust far behind", is the only place in the entire poem where a journey is implied, but the poet has made it clear that it points toward mountains and forests.

This change did not escape the attention of critics. Zhong Rong noted that Guo Pu’s *youxian shi* “teem with strong sorrows (kangkai 倔慨) and stray far from religious thoughts (xuanzong 玄宗).” Lines such as ‘What about the manners of tigers and leopards’ (奈何虎豹姿) and ‘Gathering wings to nest in brushes’ (戢翼棲榛梗) in fact express his heartfelt frustrations (坎壈詠懷). They are not at all interested in transcendent.

Li Shan observed that “Generally speaking, *youxian shi* tend to fault [the world’s] dusty web and belittle official service. [In them the poets] sup on morning clouds in the highest heaven and dine on jade in a heavenly paradise. But in Guo Pu’s poems one finds

---

43 Ibid.
44 I am following the reading of lines 11 and 12 by the editors of *Wen-Jin Nan-bei-chao wenshuishi cankao ziliao*, 325. Li Shan holds that to advance (jin 進) refers to the search for transcendent.

See *Wen xuan*, v. 3, chap. 21, 1019.
45 The poems from where these two lines were taken are no longer extant.
46 *Shi pin jijie*, 247.
a great deal of self-expression (zixu 自敘). The phrases yonghuai 詠懷 (heart-felt chanting) and zixu 自敘 (self-expression) are often used to describe lyric poetry, which in the Chinese tradition is defined as the poet’s response to historical events. Yonghuai in particular alludes to Ruan Ji’s eighty-two “Poems Expressing My Feelings” 詠懷詩 where he meditates on history, contemporary events, and life. That these phrases were used to describe Guo Pu’s youxian shi demonstrates that Guo Pu lyricized this mode. After Guo Pu youxian shi no longer simply describes heavenly journeys aiming to transcend human sufferings and mortality; rather it becomes a form of lyrical expression.

My analysis of the poem above illustrates that compared with yüefu and Cao Zhi’s youxian shi Guo Pu’s uses a less straightforward structure and dense texture. The parallels and contrasts between capital and mountains/forests, Taoist simplicity and social corruption, the presence of numerous historical allusions, and the poet’s personal feelings conveyed via these devices make a reading far richer than the one offered by the earlier works, where the focus is on the description of transcendent.

To further demonstrate this significant change let us take a look at the third verse of the group. There the shift from the transcendent’s heaven to the human world is equally remarkable:

斐翠戲蘭苕 Feicui birds are playing among orchid flowers,
容色更相鮮 Together their colors look more brilliant,
綠羅結高林 Green vines twine around tall trees,
蒙蘊蓋一山 Their luster envelops the entire mountain.

48 See “The Great Preface to The Book of Songs” 詩大序, in James Legge, trans., The Chinese Classics: IV The She King, or The Book of Poetry (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1960), 34-37; for a discussion and another translation of this document, see Stephen Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, 37-49.
49 For the text of these poems, see Lu Qinli, Xian-Qin Han-Wei-Jin Nan-Bei-chao shi, v. 1, 497-510; for a study of Ruan Ji’s poetry, see Donald Holzman, Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi, AD 210-263 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
There one finds a hermit
Who, hands on clear strings, is quietly chanting.
His feelings hover above the clouds,
He chews flower buds, drinks from flying fountains.
Up there Red Pine roams about,
And rides his crane on purple clouds.
On his left he holds on to Fu Qiu’s sleeve,
On his right he pats Hong Yai’s shoulder.
Ask those ephemera-like people:
How can they know the years of turtle and crane?

This poem can be viewed as an illustration of lines 7 and 8 of the first poem, where the poet proclaims the self-sufficiency of life in nature and renounces the need of searching for transcendence. It is set in a mountain, where a hermit dwells. The first four lines portray its lustrous beauty: colorful birds are dancing among orchid flowers in a mountain wrapped by green luster. The realistic nature of this description has prompted one critic to consider this poem as one of the earliest harbingers of landscape poetry. There is none of the supernatural aura that one finds in Yuan you and Cao Zhi’s poems, and it is against this backdrop of a natural location that the hermit and transcendents are introduced.

The striking difference between this and earlier youxian shi is that not only is the itineraria abandoned altogether, but the transcendents are also brought down to join the hermit in the mountain. Red Pine may still be riding his crane on clouds, but the poet has made him come to accompany the hermit in his life of reclusion. No longer standing in stupefied admiration in front of...
the transcendents, the hermit treats them as equals as he frolics with them in lines 11 and 12. This suggests that there is no difference between dwelling in Taoist freedom and searching for immortality. The rhetorical question in the last line sets up a contrast between transience and longevity, represented respectively by ephemera-like people (fuyou bei 蝴蝶蜚) and turtle-crane years (guihe nian 龜麟). It reinforces the poem’s Taoist theme, that a reclusive existence is more conducive to a healthy, long life.

It must be noted that among Guo Pu’s ten non-fragmentary youxian poems there are two that do describe heavenly itinerarias that resemble the ones in “Yuan you” and Cao Zhi’s poems. They do not, however, represent the main thrust of his youxian shi. In fact, these two pieces are often excluded in later anthologies. They are certainly not what Zhong Rong and Li Shan had in mind when they commented on the lyrical and lack of transcendental qualities of his poems. Rather than going through another such journey, I will invite the readers to look at poem 5 where the “far-off journey” has been invested with a different meaning:

I spread my wing and want to fly on clouds, 1

Ephemera (fuyou 蝴蝶) is an insect that is born in the morning and dies in the evening, hence a conventional image for transience. Cranes and turtles are conventional Taoist symbols for longevity, because, according to Yangsheng yaolun 養生要論 cited by Li Shan, cranes bend their necks when they rest, turtles hide themselves when they are choked, and these two methods are followed by those who try to nourish their nature through breathing exercises. See wen xuan, v. 3, chap. 21, 1021.

They are poems 6 and 10. Liu Xie 劉勰 might have them in mind when he remarked that Guo Pu’s youxian shi 恰恰 hover above the clouds 飄飄而凌雲矣. See Wenxin diaolong [zhu] 文心雕龍 [注 ], ann. by Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 (Beijing: Rennin wenxue, 1978), v. 2, 701.

Xiao Tong included poem 6 in his Wen xuan, but not poem 10 which is the most celestial piece in the entire group. Most other pre-modern anthologies followed his step in selecting Guo Pu’s works; see for example Shen Deqian 沈德潛, ed., Gushi yuan 古詩源 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1963), and Wang Shizhen 王士禛 and Wen Rentan 閻人俊, eds., Gushi jian 古詩箋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1980). The previously cited Han-Wei Liu-chao shi jianshang cidian, comprehensive as it is, does not include these two pieces.
迅足疾遠遊  With quickening feet I wish to go on a far-off journey.
清源無壘瀾  But there are no high waves in the clear streams,
安得運香舟  How can they carry the fish that can swallow a boat? 4
瑤珠難特達  The Gui and Zhang jade may be special passes,
明月難暗投  Bright pearl is hard to throw in the dark.
潛嶺怨青陽  Hidden flowers complain about Spring,
陵葭衰素秋  Outstanding blossoms sorrow over Autumn. 8
悲來愴丹心  My heart is grieved by such sadness,
零淚緣縷流  As tears stream down my tassels.57

The poem opens with the poet’s wish to embark on a “far-off journey,”
thus evoking Qu Yuan and Cao Zhi’s works. The next couplet, however, takes
a very unexpected twist. Instead of moving up toward clouds, we are led down-
ward, on the surface of “clear streams” (qingyuan 清源), and are told that they
are not deep enough to carry a big fish. This alludes to a passage in Hanshi
waizhuan 韓詩外傳 where Mencius said that “a boat that can swallow a fish
will not reside in a shallow moor, and a man of great ambition will not live in a
foul world.” 58 Li Shan interprets this couplet as a metaphorical statement that
“the dusty customs [of the world] are not enough to sustain the transcendents.”
59 After this one might expect the poet to turn his attention away from the
stream and move upward, but this is not the case at all. The poem still focuses
on human world. The jade and bright pearl in lines 5 and 6 are metaphors of
virtue and talent.60 Line 5 in particular is a paraphrase of Confucius’ following
words: “Gui and Zhang are special passes [because they represent] virtue.”61
This couplet seems to suggest that people of outstanding virtue may cause mis-
understanding and even be persecuted if they encounter unfortunate situations.

57 Wen xuan, v. 3, chap. 21, 1021-22; Xian-Qin Han-Wei-Jin Nan-Bei-chao shi, v. 2, 865-66, my
translation.
58 Cited in Wen xuan, v. 3, chap. 21, 1021.
59 Ibid.
60 Gui and Zhang are jade tools used in court and ritual ceremonies and services. Bright pearl (明
月之珠) refers to a passage by Zou Yang 鄒陽 which says that if one throws a bright pearl in
front of people in the dark, it will cause them to hold their swords in alarm; ibid.
61 Li ji 祭記; cited by Li Shan; ibid.
It may also suggest, as Li Shan points out, that those with transcendent ambitions are usually misunderstood by the world. This is an important connection because with its help the poet may use youxian and its conventions to express his personal and worldly sentiments.

This, I believe, is exactly what he does in the remaining part of the poem. The two situations described in lines 7 and 8, that sorrow accompanies both Spring and Autumn, two seasons symbolic of different circumstances, indicate that people of outstanding virtue may suffer the same fate. It must be this painful realization that causes the remarkable display of grief in the last couplet, an emotional outpouring that has hitherto been unseen in the endings of youxian shi. The “far-off journey” proposed in the first two lines never materializes in the poet’s mind. His attention remains concentrated on the human conditions that the “far-off journey” is conventionally assumed to transcend.

Guo Pu’s poems have retained the original socio-political thrust of Qu Yuan’s “Yuan you” because they likewise represent an alternative to a corrupt society, except that one no longer need to search for it in a transcendent realm. In essence, the youxian shi discussed so far, including those of Cao Zhi, are situated in alienating socio-political backgrounds and human conditions. Their function is to express symbolically the poets’ longing for integrity and freedom.

---

62 Ibid.

63 Li Shan holds that this couplet talks about the people of the world who, doubtful of the validity of the search for transcendents, nevertheless complain about the unfair distribution of natural favor in the Spring and the early arrival of Autumn. See ibid. He Linhu 何林輝, who wrote the essay on this poem in Han-Wei Luochao shi jianshang cidian, believes that this poem is entirely an allegory of poet’s personal frustrations. However, in his discussion he completely ignores the conventions of the genre. For example, he fails to mention its connection with “Yuan you.” See pages 447-48. I agree that this poem in fact talks more about the poet’s feelings and thoughts, but it must be noted that he is doing so through the generic characteristics of youxian shi. This is a crucial point.

64 The only other poem where such a strong emotion is described is “Yuan you,” but it occurs at the beginning and is erased or transcended toward the end. This is a significant difference, as it suggests a change in the function and purpose of youxian shi. It is to express, not to transcend.
that are denied by society and human lot. What would happen if the youxian motif is taken up by court literature whose chief function is to entertain, and whose writers are mainly concerned with glorifying the status quo?

5. The Courtly Revision of Youxian shi in Late Southern Dynasties

That court literature should show any interest in the youxian motif may be puzzling at first look. After all, youxian shi aims to transcend social corruption of which the court and its culture are often thought to be the main representatives. But as I have stated earlier, the de-politicization of youxian motif already takes place in the youxian poems of yue fu and Cao Zhi because in these works it no longer constitutes a socio-political alternative as it does in “Yuan you”; instead it comes to represent an escape from human transience. Indeed, since searching for immortality transcends particular socio-political contexts, the youxian motif always has the potential to be appropriated for different purposes. Sima Xiangru, for example, adroitly deleted the socio-political aspects of “Yuan you” and turned it into “Fu on the Great Master” (大人賦) to entertain Emperor Wu’s fantasies of immortality. The court poets of the late Six Dynasties followed Sima Xiangru’s lead and used the youxian motif merely for decorative purposes. In their works youxian became a trope for courtly glory and a rhetorical means to flatter their patrons. Thus courtly youxian shi is no longer a social protest; rather it is turned into a social panegyric and decoration. Here is a poem by Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>和鳴陵王</th>
<th>Two Poems of Saunters in Sylphdom, Written to Match</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>遊仙詩二首之一</td>
<td>Prince Jingling: Number 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>天縫承鑕仙</td>
<td>The crimson transcendents ride on the heavenly mountain pass,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>威衣方陸離</td>
<td>How brilliant are their dragon robes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>玉蠱隱雲霧</td>
<td>Jade chariots are concealed in mists and clouds,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>滑滑紛上弛</td>
<td>Striding upward in magnificent grandeur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

65 For a text of this work, see Zhu Yiqing 朱一清 and Sun Yizhao 孫以昭, eds. and anns., Sima xiangru ji jiaozhu 司馬相如集校注 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue, 1996), 67-69.
In this poem the diction and conventions of youxian shi are applied to a courtly excursion; as a result the prince and his retinue are turned into transcendentals. For example, in the opening line the prince and his entourage are described as jiangxian 褰仙 (crimson transcendentals), an allusion to the renowned transcendent Wang Ziqiao, who is described as wearing crimson clothes in Shuijing zhu 水經注. The yuluan 玉鑣 or jade chariots that are moving upward along the mountain path in line 3 reinforce this because they refer to royal vehicles. Now that the prince and his retinue are established as the locus of description in the first two couplets, the celestial places that appear in the next three lines, namely Yaotai 瑤臺 (Jade Terraces), Chishui 赤水 (Red Stream), and xuanpu 玄圃 (Dark Orchard), are to be understood in the same vein, as celebratory compliments. There is no tristia, and the poem gives no hint at all of the poet’s emotional state. The entire poem consists of a condensed, elegant itineraria, and it is important to note that this itineraria is presented as an independent entity, not an alternative, either to social conditions or to human transience, as in the verses discussed earlier.

In addition to function, another important factor that helped to bring about this transformation of youxian shi in court literature is the context of its composition. In previous periods it was written under private circumstances.


68 The “Yufu zhi” 女服志 in Hou-Han shu 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965) notes that jade is used to decorate imperial vehicles; v. 12, chap. 29, 3643. For an earlier example of this usage in poetry, see yuwang (玉幌) in Cao Zhi’s “Xiji fu” 喜濟賦; Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu, 211.

69 All three places are said to be located on Kunlun Mountain.
Even during the Jian’an 建安 era (196-220) when group composition on certain topics was in vogue, the youxian subject was left alone. A private context ensures the personal nature of youxian shi because it enables poets to use this motif to contemplate issues in life and society that are of special importance to them. Thus in the poems discussed earlier we sense the personal involvement of the poets, who use writing poetry in this particular mode as an occasion to express their personal hopes and frustrations. In court literature this changes entirely. Personal expressions have to be sacrificed in order to conform to public rules or decorum, and in a courtly environment that accentuates entertainment and conformity, personal frustrations and fears, two key elements in earlier youxian shi, are particularly irrelevant. However, the description of splendid processions of transcendents in youxian shi is nevertheless welcomed by court poets because it is consistent with the grandeur of courtly activities; in addition, comparing one’s patron to a transcendent is always a compliment. Shen Yue’s poem demonstrates that this is its only aspect that interests him, as its sequel further illustrates:


70 The authorship of yüe fu poetry was a very thorny issue. In my opinion, the fact that they were performed in public certainly does not rule out the possibility of their being written in private situations. For studies on this topic, see Xiao Difei 蕭德菲, Han-wei Liu-chao yüe fu wenxueshi 漢魏六朝樂府文學史 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1984), chaps. 1, 2, and Zong-qi Cai, The Matrix of Lyric Transformation: Poetic Modes and Self-Presentation in Early Chinese Pentasyllabic Poetry (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1996), chap. 2.

Banners emerge and submerge now and then.
Blue birds shuttle to and fro,
Clouds from Gaotang Gorge never cease.
By Ruohua trees there remains lingering light,
Where we loiter and dry our hair.\textsuperscript{72}

The echoes of Qu Yuan’s “Yuan you” are heard throughout the poem. The first couplet employs not only its diction, such as \textit{Changhe} 長河 and \textit{Qingdu} 清都,\textsuperscript{73} both referring to heavenly locations in the original contexts, but also one of its most noticeable rhetorical devices: the juxtaposition of morning (\textit{zhao} 朝) and evening (\textit{mu} 暮) as a way of portraying the sequence of activities.\textsuperscript{74} After further describing the pompous processions of this excursion in lines 3 to 6, the poet inserts in lines 7 and 8 two allusions to royal adventures that help to accentuate the courtly nature of the excursion. Blue birds (\textit{qing-niao} 青鳥) alludes to the story in \textit{Hanwu gushi} 漢武故事 where the Queen Mother of the West 西王母 is said to have sent two blue birds to carry a message for Emperor Wu of Han.\textsuperscript{75} “Gaotang Gorge” (\textit{gaotang} 高唐) refers to the sexual encounter between King Huai of Chu and the goddess of Wu Mountain recounted in Song Yu 宋玉 “Gaotang fu” 高唐賦.\textsuperscript{76} After what must have been an orgy, implied in line 8 by the phrase \textit{yun buxie} 雲不歇 “the clouds [of sexual pleasures] never cease,”\textsuperscript{77} the prince and his entourage are portrayed in the last two lines as taking a rest at another celestial location, “Ruohua” 若華.

Once more the language of these two lines echoes that of \textit{Chu ci},\textsuperscript{78} but such

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Yiwen leiju, v. 2, chap. 78, 1335. Also in Xian-Qin Han-Wei-Jin Nan-Bei-chao shi, v. 2, 1636.
\item \textsuperscript{73} See “Yuyou,” 命天閣其閣閣兮，排闥闇而望余; and 集靈陽入帝宮兮，遊司始而觀清都：\textit{Chuci buzhu}, 168, 169.
\item \textsuperscript{74} See for example the following two lines in “Yuan you,” 朝發 İstanbul 夕息於微閣 \textit{Chuci buzhu}, 169. There are numerous similar examples in “Li sao.”
\item \textsuperscript{75} See Ciyuan, 1824.
\item \textsuperscript{76} See Wen xuan, v. 2, chap. 19, 875-82.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Before leaving King Huai, the goddess of Mount Wu said that “in the morning I will be morning clouds, and in the evening I will be evening rain.” Ibid, 876.
\item \textsuperscript{78} 若木 (here referred as 若華) are trees said to be located where the sun sets. “Li sao” used this reference in the following two lines: 折若木以拂日兮，繚望遙以相羊；\textit{Chuci buzhu}, 28, Xifa
\end{itemize}
echoes are only superficial, because Shen Yue uses the stylistic features of “Yuan you” and Chu ci to describe a very different activity.

6. Conclusion

Courtly youxian shi abandons the protesting character of earlier youxian shi and thereby turns itself into an encomium. This transformation provides us with an occasion to reflect on the principles behind the evolution of a literary archetype in the Chinese tradition. I propose to use “imitation” and “parody” to describe the two stages in this process.

Imitation may characterize the development of youxian shi from Qu Yuan to Han yüefu, Cao Zhi, and Guo Pu because an apparent continuity exists between them. In this stage “Yuan you,” the model of emulation, and identification with it are crucial in interpreting a poem in this poetic mode because its value and style are constantly invoked and maintained. The result is that even though the focuses of these four groups of poems vary, they nonetheless share a common spirit and purpose, which is to express the poets’ frustrations with society and life and to protest against evils and imperfections therein. The shift toward describing a de-contextualized search for immortality that occurred in the yüefu genre is still within this general framework. The same is true for Guo Pu’s poems. Although they are different from “Yuan you” in many aspects, they do not constitute a revision of it because the values of the former can be directly applied to the latter without causing any sense of incongruity. Compared to the youxian shi of Han yüefu and Cao Zhi, Guo Pu’s are more “original” in that they added more dimensions to this poetic mode, thereby enriching it.

Shen Yue’s courtly youxian shi evidently demonstrates a different thrust. It may be characterized as a parody because it is clearly a “twist or reversal of
those cultural values embedded in the source-text. In his poems what is invoked is merely the “Yuan you” style, but it has been “misprised” to subvert the original message in the source-text. Shen Yue’s youxian shi therefore constitutes a revision of its precursor, “Yuan you.” Here Harold Bloom’s notion of “metalepsis” or “transumption” may help to illustrate rhetorically this process. According to Bloom, a metalepsis is a rhetorical act of troping on, alluding to a precursor text, and then turning it toward a different direction or making it take in another sense. Similarly we may regard Shen Yue’s two youxian poems as a trope. They trope on, via allusion, “Yuan you” the source-text, and by this rhetorical “turn” force it to acquire a different meaning, as a panegyric on the status quo.

One must note, however, that Bloom’s general description of poetic influence and revision as a psychological battle of survival is not as helpful as his illustration of some particular rhetorical acts therein. The “anxiety of influence” that Bloom perceived in the history of Western literature is certainly not as important an issue in the Chinese tradition. Cao Zhi, for example, is without question a “strong poet,” but our analysis has shown that he is not much concerned with competing with Qu Yuan for literary immortality. Instead he seems content with partaking in the tradition established by Qu Yuan the precursor and articulating his feelings and thoughts in that tradition. Shen Yue’s revisionist misprision of Qu Yuan’s “Yuan you” is carried out more with humor than with anxiety, as is suggested by the light-hearted tone of his two poems discussed in this essay, and his misprision is determined more by the socio-historical circumstances of composition than by his desire to overthrow Qu Yuan.

David Lattimore’s comments on the different type of literary immortality sought by Western and Chinese writers may help to clarify this issue:

---

“...Roman and Renaissance poets envisaged chiefly the immortality of their own literary ‘monuments’ (which would, in turn, confer immortality on the subjects of the monuments), whereas the Chinese envisaged chiefly a corporate immortality, devolving upon the individual poet from his participation in a continuing tradition.”81 The evolution of youxian shi I have delineated so far is not without its turns, but they are certainly not enough to break its continuity. After all, parody is still an imitation,82 albeit an ironic and subversive one.

由抗議到禮贊：
先秦至南朝遊仙詩的演變

吳 伏 生

摘 要

本文探討遊仙詩這一文體從先秦至南朝的演變過程。通過對此期間五組作品的細微分析，它力圖證明遊仙詩最初作為一種對社會邪惡的抗議，濫觴於楚辭中的「遠遊」。此後遊仙的主題從賦遊離到詩中，個人抒情的成分逐漸增加，對仙境的描寫則逐漸減少。在「遠遊」中遊仙的目的在於超越人世，而在後來的作品中它卻被詩人用來吟詠人世的情懷。在南朝宮廷詩人沈約的筆下，遊仙更成為對朝廷歌功頌德的藉口。這一演變過程揭示了中國詩歌史中文體變化的兩個規律，即模仿（imitation）和滑稽模仿（parody）。前者是對原形作品的繼承和發展，後者則是對它的篡改與修正。

關鍵詞：遊仙詩、仙、模仿、滑稽模仿、文體準則