

The Far Journey: An Archaic Chinese Poem

Translated and Annotated by
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I

1. Detesting time's deepening decadence,¹
I would rise free, and journey far away;
2. but my substance is unfledged, too weak
to harness for flight and floating upwards.
3. Living in filth I find myself befouled,
and grieve alone, having no confessor.
4. My nights are unquiet; I cannot sleep
with fearful doubts from dark to dawn;
5. I brood on this boundless universe
and the long labors of mortal life;
6. we cannot meet men who lived before
nor question them that come hereafter.

1. "Time's deepening decadence" can refer either to the specific state of the world in which the poet wrote—which could, of course, be the interpretation of the Confucian commentators who attributed the poem to one Ch'u Yuan, a disappointed and disaffected nobleman of the Kingdom of Ch'u—or to the inherent characteristic of "time"; I prefer the latter interpretation, for the Chinese conceive of time's passing as a descent. Thus, "last time" is, in Chinese, "upper time", and "next time" is "lower time". Even in modern Chinese "last week" and "next week" are rendered by "upper week" and "lower week" respectively. It should also be noted that in both Chinese and Japanese the fundamental words for "the world" refer to "time" as much as to "space" (Chinese *shih* and Japanese *yo*). This fundamental metaphysical concept is also contained in the etymology of the English word "world", originally "weorold", i.e. "man-old", or "mankind's age", "weor" being cognate with the Latin *vir*, "man".

7. I pace about; my cogitation roams;
I am lovesick for some lost paradise.
8. My will is inchoate, its course unclear;
my heart is mourning and its sorrows grow.

II

9. My soul plays truant from my body
which shrivels like a withered tree,
10. whilst introspection, tempered sharp and keen,
tracks out the means to rectify my spirit—²
11. poverty, void, peace—thus happiness,
wrought from non-action and finding myself.
12. I hear that Red Pine³ slaked off his dust
and his is the path I must pursue.
13. I value the True Man's⁴ vital valor
and hail the Ancients' heavenward ascent
14. beyond mutability and human gaze,
leaving names that grow lustrous with time.
15. I know strange tales of men that dwell in stars,⁵
and the enviable Han Chung gained Oneness.⁶

2. "Spirit", Chinese *ch'i*: a difficult word to translate, it can also be rendered "breath" and corresponds to the Sanskrit *prāna*, i.e. vital breath, or vital informing spirit.

3. "Red Pine" is a literal translation of *Ch'ih Sung*, the name of a Taoist luminary or *Hsien Jen*, "saint" or "adept", frequently mentioned in Taoist literature.

4. "True Man", Chinese *Chen Jen*: this Taoist term corresponds to the "perfect man" ("*al-insān al-kāmil*") of Sufism.

5. "Men that dwell in stars": the Wang I commentary says: "The accomplished adept's essence (*Ching*) is manifested, after death, in the sky". The specific reference would appear to be to a Minister of the Ch'in Dynasty Emperor Wu Ting who, after death, was translated to a star having an "official" role related to sky-traveling Shamans.

6. Han Chung was the magician employed by the first emperor of the Chi'n Dynasty to seek the elixir of immortality; according to the Luh Hsien Record "he found the elixir for the emperor who, however, declined to drink it; thereupon he drank it himself and became an immortal (*Hsien*)".

16. Bodies insubstantial, subsisting far away,
men's haunts abandoned for holy solitude,
17. ethereally changing, endlessly upborne,
swift as gods in flight, subtle as spirits,
18. tenuously visible from time to time
like essences that glow, and come and go,
19. disdainful of dust and cloud and purged of dregs
they finally forsook this earthly fold,
20. immune from mortality, fate and fear;
the world sees them not, knows not their like.

III

21. I am dismayed by the seasons' passing;
in westward expedition bright suns burn,
22. and fine frosts fall and penetrate the ground
whose perfumed grasses fade untimely.
23. I wished to wander through this far-spread world
but years have fled and I am unfulfilled.
24. With whom shall I share life's final fragrance?
facing the morning wind I weep aloud;
25. Kao Yang⁷ is dead, gone far ahead of me;
alas! with whom shall I shape my course?

IV

26. I say again: if springs and autumns run apace,
can I stand still in my earthbound home?
27. The Yellow Emperor's⁸ path is now remote;
I shall beguile myself with Wang Chiao's⁹ sport,

7. Kao Yang: the legendary divine ancestor of the kingly line of the Ch'u Kingdom.

8. The Yellow Emperor: in the original his name, *Hsien Yüan*, is given; he is considered to be the founder of the Taoist "line" of Spiritual masters; hence his path is "too remote" for an aspirant living in the poet's

28. feast on the six breaths, drink the dews of night,
savor the sun-mist, sip the morning haze,
29. hold fast to what is bright, pure, godlike,
let in the immaterial, exclude the gross,
30. follow the South Wind triumphant in passage,
gain Southern Retreat¹⁰ in a single sigh,
31. see Master “Kingly Child”¹¹ and make obeisance
for the secret of poise in singleness of spirit.¹²
32. The Master says:
“The Way must be accepted,
being no man’s to give;
33. it is smaller than small
and vast without limit.
34. Without turmoil of spirit
let be what shall be.
35. Make the breath single, concentrate;
in the deep night meditate.
36. Wait in all emptiness
till action be stilled

age. He is traditionally linked to Fu Hsi, the legendary emperor of the third millenium B.C. who invented writing and the I Ching’s Eight Diagrams.

9. Wang Chiao: according to the Hieh Hsien Record: “The eldest son of King Ling of the Chou Kingdom, his pleasure was to play on the flute and make the call of the Phoenix.... He finally rode on a white crane to the mountain peaks and then vanished”. According to Huai Nan Tz’u: “He cast off the dust of all impurities, breathed in the harmony of Yin and Yang, feasted upon the essence of Heaven and Earth; with his exhalation he dispelled the old, with his inhalation acquired the new, he trod the void and rose upward, riding on the clouds and traveling through the haze, and thus nourished his true self”.

10. “Southern Retreat”: in the original, *Nan Ch’ao*; possibly the name of a mountain retreat or cave; it is also referred to as being the nest (*ch’ao*), in the South, of the Phoenix.

11. “Master Kingly Child”: in the original, *Wang Tz’u*, literally “King Child”; I have employed this pleonastic translation as a means of indicating the double meaning of the word *Tz’u*, which signifies both “child” and “master”, viz. Lao-Tz’u = “Old Child” or “Master Lao” or “Aged Master”. Certain commentators take Wang Tz’u to refer to Wang Chiao himself, mysteriously still accessible to aspirants.

12. “Singleness of spirit”: this is taken by Far Eastern commentators to refer to the single vital force which, in relation to manifested phenomena, divides into the duality of Yin and Yang.

37. and the states fulfilled;
this is the gate of power.”¹³

V

38. Sublime speech! no sooner heard than understood;
I cannot wait to start my journeying.

39. Winged angels on the Hill of Cinnabar¹⁴
convey me to the Homeland of Deathlessness;¹⁵

40. at dawn I lave my hair in the Valley of the Sun,¹⁶
at dusk dry out my body by the Nine Orbs,¹⁷

41. suck the fine liquid of the Fountain of Flight,¹⁸
press to my lap the Yellow Emperor flower,¹⁹

42. feel face and form grow jewel-bright,
prance like a drunkard, dizzy with strength,

13. “Gate of power”: in the original *Te chih Men*, which could also be translated as “gate of virtue” provided that “virtue” is not understood subjectively or morally but as the “saving power” or “saving virtue” of the Way. The Way, *Tao*, is both goal and means, the truth and the way. The whole of the Master’s words amounts to a very concise statement of the nature of the Way and the principles of inward concentration or “quietism”, i.e. non-action (*Wu Wei*). They indicate that all the tumultuous details of the Far Journey which are now about to be recounted are allegorical descriptions of purely spiritual and inward “journeying”, viz. the title “*sālikūn*”, “travelers” accorded to Sufi adepts. I take the “states” mentioned here to be equivalent to the “states” or “stations” (*maqāmāt*) of Sufism.

14. “Winged Angels on the Hill of Cinnabar”: Taoist saints having the power of flight in a region where “there is light both day and night”; at the beginning of the inward journey angelic influences come to the poet’s aid. Before the ascent, an alchemic purification is undergone (verses 40-45).

15. “The Homeland of Deathlessness”: the changeless land where the spirits (*Ling*) of the Taoist Immortals reside.

16. “Valley of the Sun”: also, in a variant reading, the Valley of the Hot Spring, where the Sun bathes.

17. “The Nine Orbs”: literally, “nine suns”; mythology recounts that there is, to the East of the Valley of the Sun, a sacred tree on whose lower branches are nine sun-orbs and, on its upper branches, one orb.

18. “The Fountain of Flight”: commentators state that this is a symbolic designation for one of the “six breaths” mentioned in verse 28.

19. “The Yellow Emperor flower”: a jewel-like flower, or flower-like jewel, associated with the Yellow Emperor and having the power to “nourish the vital spirit”.

43. my substance fire-refined, clear-shining,
and my mind high-flying, mettlesome.

VI

44. I glory in this Southern Land's clear flame;²⁰
undimmed by Winter, wild cassias climb;²¹
45. no beast prowls on its awesome mountainsides;
and on its empty moorlands no man walks.
46. Curbing my clamoring mind I cleave the air,
embrace a fleeting cloud, float upwards,
47. cry out to Sky Watchman: "Unbar the gate!"
he stares at me and heaves the portals wide.
48. Recruiting Rain-cloud God²² as route-guide,
I ask for Constellation of Great Mystery,²³
49. halt by Heaped-up Suns,²⁴ enter High God's Mansion,²⁵
make for Ten-day Star,²⁶ look on Pure City,²⁷
50. at sunrise set out from Ceremonial Court,²⁸
beneath the setting sun see Mighty Vortex.²⁹

20. The flame-like virtue of the Southern Land is, of course, a reference to the Kingdom of Ch'u itself; in the South the power of Yang is at its most potent.

21. The cassia tree, which blooms in Autumn and Winter, is a symbol of immortality.

22. "Rain-cloud God": in the original his name, *Feng Lung*, is given.

23. "Constellation of Great Mystery": a constellation, the Southern Palace of the Heavenly Emperor in Taoist mythology.

24. "Heaped-up Suns": a designation for the nine upper heavens, each of which has its own sun. cf. note 17 on the "Nine Orbs".

25. "High God's Mansion": *Ti Kung*, a palace of the Heavenly Emperor.

26. "Ten-day Star": a star in the vicinity of the Pole Star.

27. "Pure City": another palace of the Heavenly Emperor.

28. "Ceremonial Court": a palace of the Heavenly Emperor, so-called because it is here that his rites and ceremonies are performed.

29. "Mighty Vortex": *Wei Lü*, the tumultuous waters of the Eastern Sea which the poet is able to view from above.

51. I draw one myriad chariots to my train
and marshal them in ranks to roll in line,
52. harness eight dragons³⁰ that curvet about,
and hoist cloud-banners that twist like snakes,
53. raise a rainbow flag of infinite hue,
whose five colors clash in glassy dazzle.³¹
54. Eager heads of the yoke-steeds rise and fall;
swift hooves of the trace-steeds proudly prance;
55. riders packed together sweep in confused
medley of moving colors, purposing onwards.
56. Seizing hold of the reins, I point my whip
towards the realms of Guardian of the East.³²
57. Skirting Great Radiance³³ we veer to the right;
Wind God³⁴ is sent ahead to open the roads;
58. dawn sun glows weakly, not yet full light;
we are breasting Heaven's Pool,³⁵ broaching the ford.

VII

30. "Eight dragons": eight is a traditionally auspicious number; the dragon is the symbol of strength, will and the transformative power of water as cloud, storm, fecundating rain, life-giving moisture in plants, etc. Hidden in caves or the inaccessible depths of the sea, the dragon emerges at the appropriate moment to re-awaken and revitalize natural forces.

31. The five colors are traditionally red, yellow, blue-green, white and black; to them correspond also the five elements of fire, metal, wood, earth and water, from the interaction of which proceed the five atmospheric conditions, five kinds of grain, five metals, five tastes, etc.; thus all the primal forces are here symbolically mobilized.

32. "Guardian of the East": *Kou Mang*, the tutelary spirit of the East. It will be noticed in what follows that all the cardinal points are traversed and that the tutelary spirit, or Guardian God, of each is involved in the progress of the spiritual journey.

33. "Great Radiance", and "Lesser Radiance" of verse 60, are respectively the sky-glow of the sunrise and sunset, i.e. East and West.

34. "Wind God": *Fei Lien*.

35. "Heaven's Pool": a constellation.

59. Wind Lord³⁶ goes galloping ahead of me
to clear the dust and cleanse and cool the air;
60. my flag is borne aloft by phoenixes,³⁷
by Lesser Radiance we meet Guardian of the West.³⁸
61. I seize the bright Broom Star as banner,
as baton brandish the Dipper's Handle.
62. Sweeping above the land, now high, now low,
we cleave the air with flowing wakes of mist.
63. When daylight fades and darkness rushes down,
into our company comes Guardian of the North.³⁹
64. I station Civil Service Stars⁴⁰ as stewards
to keep the host of gods in marching rank.
65. The road winds onwards, endlessly remote;
the pace relents; we are mounting Heaven's dome.
66. Rain General to the right is route-conductor;
Thunder Lord to the left commands the guard.
67. Let me traverse the universe without return!
let high ambition suffer no restraint!
68. I laugh in my heart, and pledge myself
to pursue delight in whatever pleases.

VIII

36. "Wind Lord": *Feng Po*, an alternative designation for "Wind God".

37. The phoenix is the symbol of spiritual rebirth or renewal; it is the "emperor" of birds as its Chinese designation *Feng Huang* implies. It is the sun-bird and symbolizes the power of the sun as the dragon symbolizes the power of water; the dragon and the phoenix are frequently paired in Chinese mythology.

38. "Guardian of the West": *Ju Shou*.

39. "Guardian of the North": *Hsüan Wu*.

40. "Civil Service Stars": a constellation named *Wen Ch'ang*, consisting of six stars, each of which is accorded the title of a court functionary. The Chinese conceive of the entire hierarchy of imperial government on the earth, or "beneath the Heavens", as having a detailed celestial prototype, a theme developed with great, and humorous, elaboration in certain works of literature, "Monkey" for example.

69. I am trampling blue clouds in mapless flight
when, suddenly glancing, I glimpse my home;
70. my groom is grieved and I grow sick at heart;
the trace-steeds turn about and stare and stop;
71. old memories rise, and images crowd;
I sob and sigh, but wipe the tears aside,
72. rise above attachment, resume my flight,
regain exaltation, steel myself and point
73. at Flame God of the South,⁴¹ and rush to him
set only on gaining the Southern bounds.
74. There beyond formal space lies formlessness,⁴²
like wandering waters afloat on themselves;
75. the Guardian⁴³ threatens us, forbids encroachment.
I ride up to Phoenix: “Bring River Goddess⁴⁴ along!”
76. We descant “Heaven’s Pool” and “Meeting Clouds”;⁴⁵
two Shao goddesses entone the Nine Shao chants;

41. “Flame God of the South”: *Yen Shen*, literally “Flame God”; he is the tutelary spirit of the South, so-called because of the sun’s burning intensity at this cardinal point.

42. “There, beyond formal space, lies formlessness”: this is a somewhat pleonastic translation of “*fang wai chih huang hu*”, literally: “the desolate indeterminacy that is beyond direction” (*fang*); *fang* means “geometric direction”, “two-dimensional extension”, “square”, etc.; the Chinese conceive of the earth as being flat, as do most traditional peoples; it is these “flat” earthly directions that are described as “*fang*”; here they have been traced out on an admittedly celestial level but, with the attainment of the Southern bounds, a transition is about to take place into, and beyond, the three-dimensional (the six-voids) and ultimately beyond describable space altogether. The poet is about to leave the definable, measurable and formal aspect of things.

43. “The Guardian”: *Chu Jung*, attendant of the Flame God.

44. “River Goddess”: *Fu Fei*, goddess of the River *Lo*.

45. “Heaven’s Pool” and “Meeting Clouds” are sacred songs associated respectively with the ancestral Emperor Yao and the Yellow Emperor. The use of divine sound and sacred dance to break through to a higher reality is not, of course, limited to the Chinese tradition. One is reminded irresistibly of similar symbolism in the Vedas, notably the role of Brhaspati (Lord of Invocation) who, by the power of sound, broke open the mountain cave to release the kine, or of Indra releasing the pent-up waters. It should be noted here that the powers of light and regeneration, and of water and transformation, are all involved in the persons of the Phoenix, the sea-monsters (aspects of the dragon), River God, Sea God, the rainbow (sun and water) and the deities of rivers associated with the sacred geography of the Kingdom of Ch’u.

77. I bid Hsiang Maiden make music on the lute
and Sea-God dances with Yellow River God;
78. sea-monsters and serpents advance together
in a sinuous surge that coils like snakes;
79. while Rainbow Lady rolls elegantly round,
Phoenix flexes her pinions, hovering above;
80. the music soars and infinitely penetrates;
I wander abroad on its resonance.

IX

81. In step with its measure I march ahead,
break through the barrier and reach Cold Gate,⁴⁶
82. brave the streaming wind to Immaculate Fountain,⁴⁷
follow God of the North⁴⁸ across the sheeted ice,⁴⁹
83. evade the Guardian,⁵⁰ gain the forbidden way,⁵¹
having traversed the four terrestrial directions
and celestial sixfold space, I gaze behind.
84. I summon Creator God,⁵² look on his face
as he walks before me smoothing my way.

46. “Cold Gate”: *Han Men*; the outermost limit of Heaven and Earth in the Universe’s Northern extremity.

47. “Immaculate Fountain”: *Ch’ing Yuan*, the pure source from which manifestation streams forth, also described, with self-evident symbolism, as the “home of the eight-winds”, i.e. creative aspects of the Divine Spirit (Arabic: *ar-Rūh*).

48. “God of the North”: *Chuan Hsü*, also identified, significantly, with *Kao Yang*, ancestral founder of the kingly line of the Kingdom of Ch’u.

49. “The sheeted ice”: water in its crystalline aspect, i.e. a symbol of the indifferentiation that precedes other aspects of water as liquid, vapor, moisture, cloud, haze, rivers, sea, etc., all of which are mentioned in the course of this poem.

50. “The Guardian”: *Hsüan Ming*, an attendant deity of God of the North. The reference to various aspects of coldness—the deities of the North, the streaming wind, the sheeted ice, the Cold Gate, etc.—remind one of a saying of one of the Sufi saints: “The Spirit (*ar-Rūh*) is the coldest of things, cold as ice or colder”.

51. “The forbidden way”: described by the Chinese commentators as being a narrow oblique path, intensely difficult of access.

85. I have fared through the four directions,
encircled the six voids,
86. ascended the lightning's crevices,
gazed down on the Great Abyss.
87. Below lies infinite depth: no earth;
above is eternal calm: no heaven.
88. I gazed entranced at nothing to see;
I listen amazed at nothing to hear.
89. I have passed through non-action to the Inviolable,⁵³
with the Sublime Principle⁵⁴ I make my home.

Commentary

There are two great anthologies of archaic Chinese verse: the *Shih Ching*, or “Book of Odes”, and the *Ch'u Tz'u*, or “Songs of Ch'u”.

Of these, the more familiar in the West, and the more accessible to translation and popular understanding, is the *Shih Ching*, or “Book of Odes”, beloved of Confucius and gathered and edited by him for the instruction and delectation of his contemporaries because, he said, “there is no guile in them”. Consisting for the most part of folk ballads, they also contain solemn chants to ancestors and longer poems relating the acts of noble and exemplary rulers; they breathe a calm clarity, innocence and sobriety.

The *Ch'u Tz'u*, or “Songs of Ch'u”, however, being mysterious in content and problematic even to the Chinese commentators themselves—most of whom were Confucianists—have remained relatively unknown in the West. It is from the “Songs of Ch'u” that the present poem *Yüan Yu*, “the Far Journey”, is taken.

One could say, at the risk of oversimplification, that the native tradition of China divided, in the sixth century B.C., into two streams: Confucianism, which is broadly exoteric and related

52. “Creator God”: *Ch'ien Lei*; described as the “god of creative transformation” (*tiao hua*). The notion is clearly that the ascent beyond manifestation has to be mediated through that aspect of the Divine from whom manifestation descends.

53. “The Inviolable”: *ch'ing*; “purity”, “clarity”, the state of ultimate refinement; cf. the Quranic concept of *ikhlass*.

54. “The Sublime Principle”: *T'ai Ch'u*; “Sublime Beginning” or “Sublime Origin”; defined by certain commentators simply as *Tao*, the Way itself, or by Lieh Tz'u as “the origin of the spirit (*ch'i*)”, which comes to the same thing.

primarily to the norms of behavior in an ordered, pyramidal society; and Taoism, which is esoteric and related primarily to spiritual realization.

One could likewise say, again at the cost of oversimplification, that the Book of Odes is exoteric and the Songs of Ch'u esoteric, at least in their origins.

Now in any traditional society the exoteric and the esoteric must co-exist, with varying degrees of mutual tolerance and understanding; but it is axiomatic that the various manifestations of the esoteric tradition are far less accessible to precise records and dating, and liable to misunderstanding and misinterpretation on the part of the exoterists. The Tao-Te Ching says: "He who expounds does not know; he who knows does not expound".

There is no doubt that in China the Confucian "expounders" have, in the matter of the written and the printed word, consistently had the upper hand; and this is one reason why the inherent mystery surrounding the Songs of Ch'u has been greatly compounded up to the present day, despite the fact that its verse forms are, in fact, regarded by many Chinese critics as being the ancestor of subsequent Chinese poetry.

Part of the mystery lies in the following facts: The compilation of the Songs of Ch'u into the great anthology that has come down to us did not take place until the second century A.D., many centuries in fact after the unification of China that was carried out by the Ch'in and Han Dynasties in the third century B.C.. But the compiler himself attributed the composition of the greater part of the Songs, including the "Far Journey", to a poet who lived in the fourth century B.C. in the Kingdom of Ch'u,—hence the name of the anthology. Now if this attribution were correct, the composition of the nucleus of poems in the Songs of Ch'u would then be far more recent than that of the Book of Odes, for the composition of the Odes clearly preceded their being edited by Confucius by many centuries.

But this assessment of the comparative antiquity of the two anthologies, which would have the "exoteric" "Book of Odes" precede the "esoteric" "Songs of Ch'u", is belied by their contents. There is apparent in the Songs of Ch'u a mood, and a vocabulary of ideas, that is far more ancient than the accepted attributions would allow. The Kingdom of Ch'u lay outside those trends of Chinese philosophical history that led to the formation of the Confucian canon, and it appears to have been a repository of those spiritual notions that preceded the division into exoteric Confucianism and esoteric Taoism and which are generally described by the not altogether satisfactory terms of Shamanism and Animism. Certainly, we are brought face to face, in the Songs of Ch'u, with an archaic world which appears to predate the sober and ordered innocence of the Book of Odes or, if not to predate it, to belong to a different order of spiritual experience. But this more "primordial" order of things is itself somewhat disguised; it is as if accomplished poets had reshaped a fragmented oral tradition of great antiquity and mystery—and one which they no longer fully understood—into a literary product; or as if the words of ancient rites had, by their sheer beauty and fascination, compelled later poets to perpetuate them in a literary context which partly veiled their meaning.

These observations are intended merely to put the “Far Journey” into context, and there is little point in enlarging here on themes of attribution and dating already pursued with great elaboration by scholars not only in the West but also in China and Japan; it is better to let the poems speak for themselves.

In any case, the “Far Journey” contains its own mystery, because it is not typical of the rest of the Songs of Ch’u: it uses the characteristic language and versification of the Songs, their mood of nostalgia for the otherworldly and the symbolism of the Shamanistic ascent not, as is the case with most of the Songs, in order to describe an almost bitter regret for a vanished era in which there was easy communion between Heaven and Earth and gods and men, but in order to describe a spiritual trajectory from disillusion with the world to full spiritual realization by Taoist techniques; unlike most of the other poems in the anthology it finishes on a note of triumphant achievement.

In brief it describes the following course of psychological and spiritual states:

- Verses 1-8: World-weariness, confusion, aspiration to higher spiritual states without the necessary spiritual strength or will-power.
- Verses 9-20: Bodily exhaustion accompanied by the work of introspection—or intuition—and the dawning of an awareness that the Taoist saints have already achieved the goal and set the pattern.
- Verses 21-28: Reflection on the need for haste as time passes and life grows short.
- Verses 29-38: The practice of Taoist techniques to purify the bodily substance and, on the completion of this, attendance upon a spiritual master and joyous acceptance of his doctrine and method.
- Verses 39-66: The spiritual path is entered upon and its progress—a purely inward one based on “non-action”, i.e. the withdrawal of the senses into the inward—is now described in the allegorical terms of a “shamanistic” journey through the Taoist otherworld.
- Verses 67-73: At this stage, the empirical ego re-emerges accompanied by “spiritual pride”, worldly longing and the dangers of a fall from the previous ascent; this is overcome, and on the impetus of this victory the poet rises beyond the limitations of formal space towards the formless.
- Verses 74-81: The transition into the realm of the formless is mediated by the supernatural power of sound and rhythm, i.e. by Mantric means in which the spiritual powers

of water, the universal symbol of transformation, are particularly associated.

Verses 82-89: The poet, having progressed through the fourfold terrestrial directions, i.e. the cardinal points, and the six voids, i.e. the celestial dimensions including the zenith and the nadir, continues his spiritual journey alone; the accompanying hosts of gods and goddesses are left behind; accompanied only by “Creator God” he has passed beyond all the limitations of heaven and earth, and beyond non-action itself, to union with the Sublime Principle.

This last is an extraordinary claim, and one has the right to wonder how anyone that had achieved this would take the trouble to write a polished poem on the subject; this, indeed, is another of the mysteries attending this work. However, the poem is there and it has stood, on all available evidence, in this form for over two thousand years.

Finally, a few remarks on the translation. Since it is undoubtedly a great poem in the Chinese original, I thought it only right to attempt to translate it as a poem. In order to suggest its archaic quality I have, where possible, used alliterative techniques, but I have not resorted to archaic English because, in the first place I could not do so convincingly without obscuring the sense and because, in the second place, the original is extraordinarily concrete and straightforward; it bounds ahead in an almost jangling rhythm. Each Chinese verse consists of two lines of six characters each; at the end of the first line there is added a constant extra syllable corresponding to “ah!” or “oh!”, which doubtless reflects an ancient convention of chanting; I have not translated it, for it adds nothing to the sense and would sound unbearably monotonous in English. The important thing is to sustain the rhythm in order to suggest the pace of the original. To this end I have used lines of eleven or twelve syllables; if, in the interests of conveying the sense, I have sometimes exceeded this measure, I have warrant for this in the original which occasionally adds an extra meaningful character to the six-character line. Similarly, and doubtless to avoid monotony, the Chinese poem occasionally lapses into briefer lines of only four characters; here I have similarly reduced the length of the corresponding English verse-lines.

I should add that in order to make the text comprehensible with minimum recourse to footnotes, I have generally translated given names by the corresponding descriptive term, e.g. for *Fei Lien* I have written “Wind God”. These instances are, in fact, mentioned in the footnotes I have appended.

There exist many minor variants in the original text; for the purpose of this translation I have followed the text contained in the Japanese work on the Songs of Ch’u entitled “Soshi no Kenkyū” by the scholar Hoshikawa, including his division of the poem into nine sections.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

We must know that we can have two kinds of happiness in this life, according to two different ways, one good, one best, which lead us thereto; one is the active life, and the other the contemplative. The latter (although by the active life, as has been said, we may attain to great happiness) leads us to

