

Southern Identity and Southern Estrangement in Medieval Chinese Poetry

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Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
www.hkupress.org

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ISBN 978-988-8139-26-2

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Liang Yu Printing Factory Ltd. in Hong Kong, China

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Southland as Symbol

Ping Wang and Nicholas Morrow Williams

China's southeastern coastal provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong have been at the forefront of its modern revolution, leading economic expansion and cultural engagement. It has been Shanghai and Hong Kong, not the political capital of Beijing, that have served as the cradles of innovation and gateways for foreign ideas. But China's southern regions have not always been closely integrated into its arc of development; to the contrary, they were once exotic and intimidating to Han Chinese. The ancient origins of the Chinese script, of traditional thought, of art and music, all lie to the north: for the Shang dynasty centered in Henan province, and for its successor the Zhou in Shaanxi. By contrast, the settlement and assimilation of the southern regions into Han China was a millennium-long process that has been fundamental to the formation of Chinese culture and society.

This book approaches this subject through its representation in poetry. The South has borne a disproportionate importance in Chinese literary history, particularly during China's medieval period: roughly the first millennium CE, following the Qin-Han foundation of the empire, and leading up to the transitional period of the Song. This is the era including the long Period of Disunion, 220–589, followed by the reunification of the Sui and Tang dynasties. Throughout the medieval period, the South has a dual significance for Chinese writers. It is on one hand associated with the ancient state of Chu and that great poet-statesman Qu Yuan 屈原 (late 4th–early 3rd century BCE), and hence with one of China's central literary traditions; on the other hand, it is seen as a threatening, marginal zone beyond the borders of the civilized world. In particular, the southern frontiers are the site of exile for a number of major writers, beginning with Qu Yuan himself; yet political exile is poetic inspiration, as removal from the centers of power occasions some of the finest writings in the Chinese tradition.

The boundaries of the South in literature are fluid and evolving, and for the purposes of this study we focus not on the geographical “south” but on the cultural “Southland” or “Jiangnan” 江南 (literally “south of the Yangtze River”). The Southland is a relative concept, on the margin of the Chinese empire. It is materially exotic, with strange fruits and animals unknown to the northerners, and it is the home of foreign peoples like the Miao and Yue. It is physically and culturally estranged, and yet in the creative and subjective realm of literary expression, also the place where Chinese writers of the medieval period carved out

new identities for themselves. In this mutual interaction of southern identity and southern estrangement lies a substantial part of the elite culture of traditional China, leaving behind a legacy of which modern southerners from the Bund to Kowloon are still conscious today. The symbolism of the Southland remains potent, though it can be invoked in many different forms. The authors of this volume trace different iterations of southern symbolism from the Han dynasty through the Tang and beyond, without attempting to define it in any unitary way. As a popular song by Hong Kong lyricist Keith Chan 陳少琪 argues: “Only lovers by their love deranged believe the Southland’s passions stay unchanged” 迷途戀人們以為江南情不變.

The Ancient State of Chu

The cultural memory of the South in Chinese literature is delineated most vividly in the poems of the *Chu ci* 楚辭 (Songs of the South). Though some poems in the anthology date to the Han dynasty, the central impetus for the anthology comes from the culture of the Chu kingdom, independent till it was conquered by Qin in 223 BCE.¹ Chu was not far south relative to modern Chinese geography, being centered around modern Hubei and Hunan provinces, and its territory even extended at its height into parts of modern Henan, Shandong, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces. But it was the southernmost of the Warring States, and though constantly in contact with other states, retained a sense of cultural distinctiveness that was associated with its southern orientation. In the mind of medieval China, the South was a part of the realm both strange and familiar at the same time, belonging to the Chinese cultural sphere yet permanently and irrevocably distinctive as well.

During the medieval period, Chu itself was not the primary geographical referent of “the South,” whose scope was constantly shifting, though generally bounded to the north by the Yangtze River and its tributaries. The primary terms used to signal these cultural values did not refer directly to Chu itself, but rather to the more elusive “Southland.” The term “Nanguo” (southern country) occurs, for instance, in the poem “Ode to the Tangerine” (*Ju song* 橘頌), traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan:²

Splendid tree of his Royal Majesty,
The tangerine comes to make obeisance—
According to mandate it moveth not,
Growing in the Southland—
后皇嘉樹，橘徠服兮。受命不遷，生南國兮。

The tangerine here is allegorized as the virtuous courtier, but it is also concretely identified as the sour-peel tangerine, native to the south, and so implicitly the virtues of the

1. For a comprehensive survey of ancient Chu, see Cook and Major, eds., *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China*.

2. *Chu ci* buzhu 4.153.

noblemen are associated with this southern heritage. Here the term for the “Southland” is “Nanguo” 南國, literally the “southern country.” We can see this sense of southern identity confirmed in the traditional conception of the *Chu ci* as a kind of local anthology of Chu lore.³ If this generalization does not reflect the full variety of the anthology’s contents, it certainly applies well to the poem celebrating the southern tangerine.

Though it is hard to know if this poem was actually composed by Qu Yuan himself, it was certainly understood in later centuries as his own composition, so that the tangerine represents not just any virtuous nobleman, but the great culture hero of Chu who remained loyal to his sovereign even in exile. Qu Yuan is the representative, though, not just of the “southern country,” but of exile from it as well. Indeed, one of the most important mentions of the Southland in early literature is the identification of Jiangnan as Qu Yuan’s place of exile.⁴ This “Jiangnan” would probably not mean “south of the Yangtze” or the Southland in general, but a specific geographical region on the southwest frontier of Chu’s territory, also known as Qianzhong 黔中 commandery (the western part of modern Hunan province).⁵

Just as Qu Yuan was a dual figure of both culture and dissent, so, as Chu was incorporated in the unified empire of the Qin-Han, did it retain an ambivalent role in the consciousness of the realm. Though still possessing the exotic flavor of the southland, Chu cultural traditions were of prominent, often central, importance throughout the empire. Chu was the native place of the ruling family of Han; the language and the songs of Chu were widely known; its material culture, particularly well preserved and known today through the southern tombs that have been excavated recently, embodied the prosperity of early China. At the same time, however, it was the Southland, never fully assimilated to the center of Chinese culture in the Yellow River valley. There is thus an ambivalence in the relation of the South to the center that was shaped in medieval times, from the Han to the Tang, and endures in China today.

Perhaps part of the singularity of Chu lay in the alternate history that might have been—the nearest contender to Qin in the great contest of the Warring States, an empire unified under Chu provided a tantalizing scenario. The famous traveling persuader Su Qin 蘇秦 (?–317 BCE), for instance, once told the King of Chu:⁶

Chu is the mightiest of states under Heaven; you, great king, are sageliest of kings under Heaven. To the west you have Qianzhong and Wu commandery; to the east Xiazhou and Haiyang; to the south Dongting and Cangwu; to the north the border of Fen and Xing, and Xunyang. With territory five thousand *li* square, one million armored men, a thousand chariots, ten thousand cavalry, and grain supplies to last a decade, you have the resources to become hegemon.

3. “They are all written in the language of Chu and composed in Chu sounds, recording the places of Chu and naming the objects of Chu, and so they are called *Chu ci* ‘Chu words.’” See Huang Bosi, “Jiaoding *Chu ci xu*,” *Dongguan yulun*, B.77a–b.

4. According to Wang Yi’s 王逸 (2nd century CE) preface to the “Li sao,” *Chu ci buzhu* 1.2.

5. On this identification of Jiangnan, see Jao Tsung-i, *Chu ci dili kao*, B.79–83.

6. *Zhanguo ce*, Chu 1/17, in *Zhanguo ce jianzheng* 14:787.

楚，天下之強國也。大王，天下之賢王也。楚地西有黔中、巫郡，東有夏州、海陽，南有洞庭、蒼梧，北有汾陰之塞、郢陽。地方五千里，帶甲百萬，車千乘，騎萬匹，粟支十年，此霸王之資也。

Su Qin praises the vast expanse of Chu territory. On the west it extends to Qianzhong and Wu Commandery (reaching into modern Sichuan and the western reaches of Hunan), while on the east it includes Xiazhou (in modern Wuhan, Hubei) and, after the conquest of its eastern neighbor Yue in 334 BCE, even extended to the border of the ocean: Haiyang, at the mouth of the Yangtze east of modern Yangzhou. To the south it included the vast lake Dongting, and its territory even penetrated to the distant Cangwu, at the very southern tip of modern Hunan bordering on Guangxi. Its northern frontier, heavily contested by its rivals Qin, Han, Wei, and others, pressed against Fenqiu 汾丘 and Mount Xing 陘 (both near modern Xuchang 許昌, Henan, in Xiangcheng 襄城 and Yancheng 鄆城 counties respectively), as well as toward Xunyang (modern Xunyang 旬陽 in southern Shaanxi). Originally one of the mightiest of the separate states, Chu had had the potential to unify the realm in place of Qin, and hence retained a certain significance as a kind of symbolic alternative to the current regime.

It is important to note that Chu, despite its connections with remote southern regions, was also one of the central states, and its territory actually extended quite far north of the Yangtze.⁷ Its rival Qin advanced rapidly on Chu's western frontier in the early third century, conquering its capital at Ying in 278. From this point on the territory of Chu shifted to the north and east. Indeed Pei 沛 county, the hometown of Han founder Liu Bang 劉邦 (247–195 BCE), was located near modern Xuzhou 徐州, Jiangsu, and only came within Chu's sway after the fall of the state of Song 宋 in 286 BCE. Map 1.1 illustrates the scope of Chu's territory in the fourth century, a vast expanse of land around the middle reaches of the Yangtze.

Any number of geographical terms could be distinctively southern. In the "Ode to the Tangerine," the "southern country" is identified by commentator Wang Yi 王逸 as an equivalent for Jiangnan "the Southland." Jiangnan literally appears to mean "the region south of the Yangtze River," but its area often encompasses Yangzhou and other places on the north side of the river, so it might be more accurate to translate it as "the Yangtze River region in the south," or more loosely as the "Southland." Here it is southern relative to the state of Chu, but Chu was itself the southernmost of the Warring States. As the Han empire expanded, however, its borders extended further south than those of pre-Qin Chu, and the South grew to encompass the region of modern Fujian and Guangdong.

The origins of a southern consciousness lie in Chu itself. This sense of pride in the value of southern products, language, or people was also an assertion of difference, in opposition to central or northern culture. The *ci* of *Chu ci*, though sometimes meaning simply everyday "words," was in the pre-Qin era usually a specifically motivated, argumentative, or ritualistic kind of speech. In comparison with the canonical *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), the *Chu ci* was

7. Arthur Waley points this out in an appendix to his book, *The Nine Songs*, 59.



Map 1.1

Chu in the Warring States era, ca. 350 BCE

Key:

Independent states: Qin 秦, Han 韓, Wei 魏, Song 宋, Qi 齊, Lu 魯, Yue 越, Chu 楚

Cangwu 蒼梧: Commandery on southern frontier, located in eastern Guangxi province

Haiyang 海陽: Region east of modern Yangzhou 揚州, Jiangsu

Luoyi 洛邑: Capital of Zhou dynasty, modern Luoyang 洛陽, Henan

Mt. Xing 涇山: Marker of northern frontier of Chu territory

Pei 沛: hometown of Liu Bang 劉邦, founder of Han dynasty

Qianzhong 黔中: Commandery to southwest of Ying

Wujun 巫郡: Commandery surrounding Mt. Wu on the border of modern Sichuan and Hubei provinces

Xianyang 咸陽: Capital of Qin; northeast of modern Xi'an 西安, Shaanxi

Xiazhou 夏州: Area of modern Wuhan, Hubei

Xunyang 旬陽: Modern Xunyang 旬陽 county, Shaanxi

Ying 郢: Capital of Chu, modern Jiangling 江陵, Hubei

described as Yin, the feminine counterpart to the mainstream Yang, the heterodox opposite of the mainstream and canonical—yet in its centrality and ubiquity forming a canon or counter-canon of its own. The South was thus seen as the responsive partner to the creative force of northern culture.

The Yin force took visible form in the geography of the South, which was distinguished particularly by water: from the great Yangtze River, in this period referred to simply as the Jiang 江, later becoming the common noun “river,” to the Dongting 洞庭 lake, origin of the modern names of the provinces Hubei and Hunan (meaning “north of the lake” and “south of the lake” respectively). Water was associated with the Yin principle in traditional Chinese cosmology, and this was another attribute of Chu’s Yin identity. By the Tang dynasty the area around the Yangtze River would become the site of some of China’s great cities, particularly Suzhou, located on the Taihu 太湖 lake, and Jiangnan itself came to refer primarily to the scenic lake region. In the Warring States and Han, though, the watery south was more likely to be regarded with distrust or fear, as signified by Qu Yuan’s own demise, suicide by drowning in the Miluo 汨羅 River, with all its mythic significance.

There was also a religious dimension that distinguished Chu and the *Chu ci* from the rest of the pre-Qin states. The *Chu ci* poems frequently employ the persona of a shaman who calls out the souls of the deceased, converses with deities, and embarks on spiritual journeys throughout the universe. An assortment of fragrant plants native to the southern marshland and an array of precious gemstones, in their natural or worked forms, lure beautiful goddesses in their full attire to descend. Early historians such as Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) disparagingly attributed this to the people of Chu’s superstitious belief in spirits and their “excessive” rituals to soothe them.⁸ In spite of these moralistic critiques, though, the spiritual powers and religious ramifications of Chu songs were part of its distinctive power for Chinese readers up to the present day.

The South more broadly was seen throughout much of Chinese history as a forbidding, disease-ridden, and barbaric place, and troublesome officials were often dispatched there in exile. At the heart of *Chu ci* poetry was the figure of Qu Yuan, the Chu nobleman exiled to Jiangnan for his loyal dissent.⁹ According to the tradition that is preserved in numerous *Chu ci* poems, Qu Yuan drowned himself in protest and thus became a martyr to the ideal of the loyal courtier, his name forever preserved in song. But this exile also holds the possibility of a kind of redemption, as Qu Yuan finds a way to affirm his integrity and preserve his name in spite of his worldly defeat. Though exiled from the seat of power, his status as culture hero far transcends that of any king of Chu itself. This victory on the level of culture would become increasingly important when, after the fall of the Western Jin, the Chinese court retreated to the Yangtze valley. Throughout the Southern Dynasties whose capitals were located at Jiankang 建康 (modern Nanjing), it seemed as if elite Chinese culture as a whole had shared in Qu Yuan’s exile, and been relocated southward. This sense of identification

8. *Han shu* 28B.1666.

9. The precise location of Qu Yuan’s exile is a matter of dispute. See, e.g., discussion in Chapter 6 of this volume.

between Qu Yuan and the scholarly elite in general persisted afterwards as well: "Implicit throughout the Ch'ü Yuan lore is a sweeping analogy between the exiled official and the exiled high culture itself."¹⁰

More precisely, though, the *Chu ci* preserved a particular dimension of the high culture, one that stood in tension with the classical tradition of the *Odes*. In fact, the *Chu ci* is generally kept separate from the Classics altogether in traditional bibliography, and instead placed first among the literary collections (*ji* 集). Yet precisely because it is displaced from the other classics, the *Chu ci* assumed the mantle of pure literature, representing the estranged voice of pure longing better than the classical tradition of the *Odes*.¹¹ Poets who found themselves yearning for the Southland while lingering outside it resemble Qu Yuan in the sense that they fail to find their place in the world. The Southland, real or imagined, inspires such poetic expression in which poets augment their personal angst with beautiful words.

The Southland thus encompasses several possibilities in the historical imagination of medieval China: as a label of regional identity, or the site of exile from that place, but most remarkably, the cultural triumph over that exile and its undying preservation in textual form (*Chu ci*). Each of these elements remains relevant to the literary representation of the South, though one may appear dominant at a particular moment. The meaning of the *Chu ci* anthology was frequently transformed, as in the popular later editions identified as collections of Qu Yuan's poems, rather than the writings of Chu. As the borders of political control expanded southward and westward, the geographical location of the Southland shifted southward also.¹²

This book traces shifts in the literary representation of the South throughout the medieval period, from the fall of the Han through the Period of Division into the reunification of the Tang. The historical alternation of pride in the distinctiveness of southern culture and anxiety over the exotic and alien qualities of the southern frontier produced many of the distinctive features of medieval Chinese literature. Approaching the subject from this original perspective sheds new light on the historical development of Chinese poetry, as we see regional conflict beyond polite conventions, conscious refashioning of traditional motifs to suit new situations, and the enduring power of the symbolic associations of the South. The inspiration of the South frequently jumps backwards and forwards in time, between and across genres. The whole point of the literary cult of Qu Yuan is to persist after the ruler's defeat and the kingdom's fall—the loyalty of the heroic official is remembered long after.

Joining the Han Empire

The disjunction between the geographical and cultural significance of the Southland is already evident in the Han dynasty. Though China had been unified by a true northerner,

10. Laurence A. Schneider, *A Madman of Ch'u: The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent*, 13.

11. Cf. Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: The Omen of the World*, 254–63.

12. See Paul Kroll's discussion in this volume of how Jiang Yan found Fujian unbearably remote and uncivilized.

the First Emperor of Qin, the Han which actually sustained the unification had southern origins. Liu Bang founded the Han dynasty in 206 BCE, and the Liu family remained on the throne for nearly four hundred years. Han is the name of the longest tributary of the Yangtze, which originates in the Qin mountains and flows south through the old Chu territory, joining the Yangtze at the old Chu capital. Liu Bang held the Han river basin as his base from which to resist Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 BCE), a formidable opponent who claimed to be a scion of the Chu king. Since Liu Bang's hometown of Pei was also part of the Chu territory and actually not far from the hometown of Xiang Yu, the great duel traditionally dubbed the "Contest between Chu and Han" to seize the empire of Qin was actually one between two Chu men. The Chu commoner who had declared himself King of Han would win and make Han the new name of the empire that he had wrested from the hand of his fellow countryman.

There are two songs remembered from this famous competition, one by the victor and future emperor, and the other by the noble loser before his death. In parting with his battle horse and favorite concubine, Yu 虞, Xiang Yu intoned the following words:¹³

My power shook the mountain—my spirit dominated the world;
 But with fate not on my side—even my thoroughbred can run no more.
 When my steed can run no more—what can I do?
 Ah, Yu, ah Yu—what will happen to you?
 力拔山兮氣蓋世，時不利兮騅不逝。騅不逝兮可奈何，虞兮虞兮奈若何。

Yu slashed her own throat with Xiang Yu's sword upon hearing this sad song. On the other hand, on Liu Bang's celebratory return journey to his hometown of Pei, he performed a song, which was echoed and repeated by 120 children:¹⁴

The great wind has risen—and clouds are scattered;
 My might covers the world within the seas—now I have returned in triumph.
 Where may I obtain brave men—to guard the four corners of my empire?
 大風起兮雲飛揚，威加海內兮歸故鄉。安得猛士兮守四方。

What the new Han emperor does not realize while singing this song is that the meter of his song is in the Chu song form, the same pattern which his opponent had used before committing suicide. The similarity is indicated in the translation by the dash —, which represents the particle *xi* 兮 in the original songs. This particle, which seems to indicate a kind of breathing pause or prolongation, is also used frequently in the *Chu ci*, and itself became a marker of southern music. The relevance of southern music and poetry to the imperial culture is demonstrated vividly by the use of the Chu song form to capture the voices of the imperial founder and his great opponent, at the most dramatic moments of their careers.

13. *Shi ji* 7.333.

14. *Shi ji* 8.389.

Yet Chu's distance from the centers of imperial power at Chang'an (modern Xi'an) and Luoyang meant that it retreated in the Han imagination to become a marginalized inferior, typified by the barbarity of its boundless marshland. Or so it appeared to the northerners sitting in the high halls of the capital, but the Chu words were never banished, and instead proliferated. Not only were they studied diligently by those princes stationed in the South, they were also presented at the central court. As a matter of fact, the majestic literary form called *fu* 賦 that Han court poets employed to celebrate the glory of Han was heavily influenced by the *Chu ci*. They tended to be long epideictic pieces, full of praise for the empire, all the possessions within its domain, and above all for the man who governed it. Ironically, though, linguistic opaqueness or otherness was probably an important reason why the *fu* was enjoyed, given the many expressive sound words and dialectal phrases used by the mostly southern poets.

One essential element from its Chu ancestor that would have been missing in the eulogistic *fu* was the plaintive tone, which became the defining feature of works supposedly written by an individual author who wrote in privacy and at moments of frustration. The marriage of authorship and a wistful if not vengeful persona, earlier articulated by the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BCE), broadened the appeal and significance of poetic lyricism, which probably had a long existence in folk songs. There are many examples of this expressive and melancholy persona in both the *Odes* and Han banquet songs. But when an individual writer assuming the author-persona sings his innermost thoughts to an audience that is sometimes projected into a different time and space, lyrical poetry comes into being, as seems to have happened toward the end of the Han. The birth of lyrical poetry is the beginning of a long process in which the southern spirit is revived and the South as a place is reconstructed in and through poetry. As one scholar has observed, “Chinese civilization seems not to have regarded its history as violated or abused when the historic monuments collapsed or burned, as long as those could be replaced or restored, and their functions regained. . . . The only truly enduring embodiments of the eternal human moments are the literary ones.”¹⁵ This literariness of Chinese civilization was often construed as specifically southern.

Though the origins of this southern strain lay in the ancient state of Chu, as we have seen, it was under the Han empire that Chu traditions were codified and canonized. As a genre of literary production central to the self-conception of literati, the tradition of the *Chu ci* was not solely one of exile but also of positive affirmation. We can see this particularly in the imitations of *Chu ci*, written in the same meters, employing similar imagery, and often even adopting the voice of Qu Yuan himself. Some Han pieces of this type are even included in the *Chu ci* anthology, and writers continued to compose works of this type throughout later dynasties. In her essay “Echoes of Return: Geographical Discourses and Imagined Homelands,” Cheng Yu-yu 鄭毓瑜 has examined some of the early poems of this type,

15. Frederick Mote, “A Millennium of Chinese Urban History: Form, Time, and Space Concepts in Soochow,” 51.

from the Han as well as the Wei and Jin dynasties.¹⁶ She shows how poets facing exile from the political center used various means to negate their own sense of alienation by constructing an opposing identity of “counter-exile.”¹⁷ For instance, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) uses the enjoyment of mountains and rivers to create a literature of counter-exile, grounded in his own family tradition. Cheng also points out the intriguing overlap between literature of exile and “geographical treatises” (*dili zhi* 地理志). Precisely because exiles were sent to relatively unfamiliar locales, their writings would then provide important sources of information for the geography of empire. Beginning with Qu Yuan himself, the literature of southern exile was constantly finding ways to reassert its own authority vis-à-vis the center.

Southern Identities after the Fall of the Han

Chu defined the literary contours of the South for ages to come. But various locations could take on the aegis of southern identity relative to the North; they share in various forms a sense of alienation from the center of power, and often allude to Chu culture and history even if actually geographically distant. After the fall of the Han, when the Three Kingdoms vied for control of the entire realm, the kingdom of Wu 吳 was the main representative of southern China, with its primary capital at Jianye 建業 (modern Nanjing), and controlling the southern and southeastern provinces. After its ultimate defeat and the reunification of the Western Jin dynasty, some natives of Wu retained a certain loyalty to their lost dynasty, a topic discussed in the second and third chapters of the book. For one writer in the fifth century, an appointment in Fujian seemed an exile to a distant and barbarous place, equaling the disappointments of Qu Yuan himself.

Through the four centuries of Han empire, regional differences in China had been submerged by the emphasis on cultural and political unity among the elites. But as the empire collapsed in civil war toward the end of the second century CE, the era of the Three Kingdoms ensued. Though the Wei 魏 state of the Cao 曹 family was dominant, it was opposed by Wu in the Yangtze valley and Shu 蜀 in Sichuan. Though tripartite division lasted only a few decades before the Sima clan overturned the Wei and conquered Wu and Shu, the rivalry of the three states retained a dramatic symbolism for later ages as well.

It is possible to trace the formation of regional identities in the literature of this period. One prominent attempt along these lines is the essay published in 1992 by Lin Wen-yueh 林文月 of Taiwan National University, “Southern Consciousness in the Poems of Pan Yue and Lu Ji.”¹⁸ Professor Lin bases her comparison of the two major poets, one northern and one southern, on a close analysis of their use of the word “South” in poetry. David R. Knechtges pursued a closely related argument in his article “Sweet-peel

16. “Guifan de huiyin: dili lunshu yu jiaguo xiangxiang” 歸返的回音——地理論述與家國想像, in *Xingbie yu jiaguo: Han Jin cifu de Chu sao lunshu*, 55–113.

17. Cheng borrows this term from an essay by Claudio Guillén, “On the Literature of Exile and Counter Exile.”

18. “Pan Yue Lu Ji shi zhong de nanfang yishi.”

Orange or Southern Gold? Regional Identity in Western Jin Literature,” published in 2003. Both Lin and Knechtges make clear that Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) retained a strong sense of southern identity as a scion of the state of Wu, only recently conquered by Jin in the wars of the Three Kingdoms. Though he journeyed to the capital of Luoyang to make his career, he felt uneasy with some of the cultural trends there, such as eccentric departures from Confucian etiquette, or the abstruse philosophizing of *qingtan* 清談 “pure conversation” and *xuanxue* 玄學 “studies of the Mystery.”

The first two studies in this book develop this line of inquiry. David Knechtges returns to the topic of his seminal article to examine other facets of Lu Ji’s attachment to his native place of Wu. Here the specific southern region is not Chu at all, but what was both in the Warring States era and during the Three Kingdoms campaigns a rival of Chu. But the North/South polarity here is parallel to that of Chu versus the North. In fact, Lu Ji’s northern acquaintance and poetic rival, Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300), plays with the image of the orange tree from the *Chu ci* to tease Lu Ji, comparing Lu to the “sweet-peel tangerine” (*gan* 柑), said in ancient sources to become the “trifoliate orange” (*zhi* 枳) when relocated to the North. Lu Ji himself asserts his longing for home and strong Wu identity in a number of pieces, often indirectly through colorful images of his own. Knechtges calls attention, in particular, to Lu Ji’s *fu* on the “feather fan,” a unique product of the Wu region. Lu Ji sets his *fu* in the context of King Xiang’s 襄王 court in Warring States Chu, the setting of the classic *fu* attributed to Song Yu 宋玉. In the *fu*, “the fan made of white crane feathers is the favored accoutrement at the southern Chu court,” an “anachronistic” literary innovation that melds the traditional Chu setting with the contemporary material object. This anachronism is an assertion of cultural difference, which attests to the broad significance of “regional identity” for the interpretation of Western Jin literature.

Tian Xiaofei’s chapter examines the same topic from a diametrically opposite perspective. While she agrees with Knechtges’s conclusions, she finds that Lu Ji’s identity as a southerner was accompanied by an admiration of Luoyang and its prominent figures, like the Cao family. While Lu Ji figures himself as a feather fan from the South, then, he is himself a “fan” (i.e., admirer) of northern culture. The interaction of these two sentiments is actually key to understanding the literary productions of both Lu Ji and his brother Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303). The Lu brothers expended much effort in rewriting northern *yuefu* 樂府 songs in a more refined style, thereby appropriating them. Their motivations in doing so were surely shaped in part by their special status as southerners relocated to the capital. Tian follows the development of the “Song of Oars” tune as Southern Dynasties poets composed new poems to it. Originally a song of martial pomp, and rewritten along similar lines by Lu Ji, it became a popular title among poets at the Liang court, though there the content had shifted to a pastoral scene of lotus-picking on a river. In this new guise, and infused with *Chu ci* allusions, the song now signified “the cultural supremacy of the southern court of the Liang.” This kind of transformation and reworking of the literary tradition was used to assert, create, and magnify perceptions of regional identity. These later elaborations of *yuefu*

themes are particularly striking insofar as they show how the sense of regional identity in the Western Jin did not simply disappear after the great southward migration at the beginning of the fourth century, but rather ramified into new configurations. Tian's argument here is elaborating on her analysis of the binary opposition between North and South in her book on the literary culture of the Liang, in which she discusses "northern" frontier poetry and "southern" love chants in relation to the historical background in which they arose.¹⁹

The fall of the Han and the advent of political disunion did not result in cultural fragmentation, but rather in new attempts at creating a synthesis of regional cultures. Here regional identity, whether located in Wu, the South, or elsewhere, was often a way of contributing to a larger whole, as in the southern orange tree offered up to the king, or for Lu Ji writing about Luoyang as a fan from the South. But the southern frontier regions retained their exoticism, and the literary resonance of the South as the land of exile and estrangement remained. Lu Ji's celebration of the feather fan does not neglect to describe the sacrifice made by the crane which provides the feathers:

Burdened by being prized for its beautiful plumes,
It has its thousand-year span reduced by a single arrow.
Its body is offered to receive fashioning,
Its two wings are presented to make a fan.
累懷璧於美羽，挫千載乎一箭。委曲體以受制，奏雙翅而為扇。

In Lu Ji's case, pride in his Wu heritage was fraught with constant reminders of Wu's military defeat and submission. Like the crane, he could find esteem at court only after losing a part of himself. That personal defeat could result in cultural triumph is a central part of the heritage of Chu and the Qu Yuan legend.

Aside from ancient Chu itself, perhaps the key period in the definition of the South was the series of short-lived southern dynasties—the Eastern Jin, Liu-Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen—all of which had their capitals at Jiankang. After the fall of Luoyang in 311 to Xiongnu forces, the rulers of the Western Jin fled south of the Yangtze River to reestablish their civilization there. Dominant themes of the new culture that developed in the South were nostalgia for their northern homes, and pride in the cultural sophistication that could survive in exile from its original home. It was in this period that the South gained a new claim to identity as the center of Chinese culture. Map 1.2 on the facing page illustrates the boundaries of the reduced Eastern Jin state after the flight southward.

The new identity of these transplanted elite is perhaps best suggested by the famous remark attributed to Zhou Yi 周顗: "The scenery is not too different, but when you look around, you see how the mountains and rivers are distinct."²⁰ Zhou is said to have made this remark after the fall of the Western Jin. Though writers in different parts of China might

19. Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502–557)*, 310–66.

20. *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 2/31 (2.92). Cf. translation in Richard B. Mather, *A New Account of Tales of the World*, 47.



Map 1.2

Eastern Jin Territory ca. 317 CE

Key:

Dotted line signifies approximate territorial border of Eastern Jin (317–420)

Chengdu 成都: Modern Chengdu, Sichuan; capital of Shu 蜀 kingdom during Three Kingdoms period

Chiting 赤亭: Modern Fuyang 富陽, Zhejiang

Gusu 姑蘇: Modern Suzhou, Jiangsu

Jiankang 建康: Modern Nanjing, Southern Dynasties capital

Luoyang 洛陽: Modern Luoyang, Henan; capital of Wei and Western Jin dynasties

Nanjun 南郡: Modern Jiangling 江陵, Hubei

Wuxing 吳興: Site of Jiang Yan's 江淹 exile, near modern Pucheng 浦城, Fujian

Ye 鄴: Court of Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220)

conform to a standard dialect and subscribe to a shared culture, there remained something distinct about the Southland, whether the mountains and rivers or something more ineffable. This perspective on Chinese literature as mediated by a geographic region is illuminating because the Southland had precisely this function throughout the history of Chinese culture. It was never merely a topographical or geographical designation, but always a *topos*,

a commonplace of expression that carried with it conventional associations and complexly allusive referents.

Chu and Qu Yuan continued to cast a long shadow over the literary culture of the Southern Dynasties, and literati felt a renewed affection for Qu Yuan as they were themselves transplanted southward. Ping Wang's chapter takes an innovative look at the Chu origins of the poetic tradition. The classic treatise ranking pentasyllabic poets into three grades, Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 (468–518) *Shi pin* 詩品 mentions a "Han consort" (*Han qie* 漢妾) in its preface. Zhong Rong mentions this Han consort in tandem with the "Chu vassal" as archetypal figures of loss. But while the Chu vassal must be Qu Yuan, the Han consort might indicate either Lady Ban 班 or Wang Zhaojun 王昭君, two Han ladies both associated with the literature of "plaint" (*yuan* 怨). As Wang shows, this is actually a false choice, because these women are just two out of a set of stereotyped figures of female plaint, all associated with some kind of exile or bereavement. These various figures were all constructed, perhaps deliberately, by the Ban family, in particular by Ban Gu through his compilation of the *Han shu* 漢書. There is a striking parallel here to Sima Qian's role in editing the biography of Qu Yuan in his *Shi ji* 史記. Sima Qian's emphasis on Qu Yuan's authorship of his poems as an expression of personal frustration, whether or not historical, certainly seems tendentious. Wang shows that the presentation of female plaint in the *Han shu* is equally artificial, and even more significant for the future of pentasyllabic verse. This chapter reveals a tradition in the making, a tradition that builds throughout on the heritage of Chu songs and the mythology of Qu Yuan.

Paul Kroll's chapter "Farther South: Jiang Yan in Darkest Fujian" looks at the Southern Dynasties official Jiang Yan 江淹 (444–505), who was dispatched to a magistracy in Fujian province between 474 and 477, after a dispute with his patron. As Kroll points out, by this time the displaced Chinese aristocracy had become entirely accustomed to the Jiangnan region it inhabited, and a place had to be "farther south," indeed as far as Fujian, to evoke the same sense of danger that Jiangnan once did. Kroll examines a number of Jiang's compositions, primarily *fu*, that date to this period, in which Jiang describes his distress and dismay at arriving in such an inhospitable and alien land. One of the most striking features of these compositions, brought out with remarkable precision by Kroll's translations, is how Jiang adapted the language of the *Chu ci* to this new Southland. At the same time, Jiang also recognized the novelty of Fujian, in particular of its flora, which he describes in a set of fifteen poems. Even though he continues to bemoan his transplantation, in fact, Jiang indicates here that he is beginning to make some emotional accommodation with his southern abode, as he appreciates the special beauties of the flowers and trees he has discovered.

Southern Motifs in the Tang

By the Tang dynasty (618–907), different southern regions were beginning to develop new poetic identities rather different from those of Han times. The Jingzhou region (in modern

Hubei and Hunan), linked with Chu in ancient times but never receiving as much literary distinction, developed a distinct identity in Tang poetry (explored in the seventh chapter of this book). The novel experiences of Tang literati dispatched to the Lingnan 嶺南 region of modern Guangdong and Guangxi have been covered in depth in *The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South*, Edward H. Schafer's masterful study, and a major source of inspiration for this book. Meanwhile Jiangnan was becoming more and more central to literati culture, to the point that it could be the site of ennui. By the Tang, the Jiangnan area of Suzhou and Yangzhou had shifted from an exotic and remote place, as it had once seemed to the men of the central plain, to the enchanting site of pleasure quarters and comforting vistas of lakes and hills. Map 1.3 on the next page illustrates the locations of the Jiangnan East and Jiangnan West Circuits in the High Tang era. As an administrative matter, Yangzhou belonged to the Huainan Circuit, although it was felt to belong to the cultural "Southland" as well.

The Chu region, though, and the Southland more broadly understood, remained a powerful source of inspiration for Tang literati, even though their travels might take them far beyond the region of Qu Yuan's exile. Nicholas Morrow Williams's chapter "The Pity of Spring" traces the impact of *Chu ci* language and imagery on later poetry. In particular, a close reading of two understudied *fu* by Li Bai 李白 (701–762) shows that they can be understood as commentary on a few lines in the "Summons to the Soul" 招魂 from the *Chu ci*. Behind what might appear conventional lines on the passage of spring lies the undiscovered depths of Qu Yuan mythology, in particular the ancient belief in the division of the soul. This is an aspect of the Qu Yuan legend that contributed to its continuing power during and after the Tang. References to the "Chu vassal" and to various *Chu ci* poems are not just references to the historical episode of Qu Yuan's exile and suicide, but to timeless conceptions of life and death. Two other poems by Li Bai complement this analysis by representing other southern traditions of springtime angst.

Like Kroll's chapter, Williams's study of Wang Bo and Li Bai traces how certain expressions in the *Chu ci* tradition continued to retain their resonance centuries after their original composition. Meanwhile, Jiangnan itself, once the archetypal site of exile and abandonment, had become a cultural center. While great poets could revive the language of the *Chu ci* in appropriate circumstances, some of the familiar topoi had become pure conventions. The final two chapters of this book address the gradual shift in literary representations of the South during the Tang dynasty. Though reflecting major transitions in the social and political geography of China, literary transformations do not always proceed quite in tandem with them.

Jie Wu's chapter "The Stele and the Drunkard: Two Poetic Allusions from Xiangyang" discusses two new conventions of Tang poetry, which developed around particular places in Xiangyang 襄陽. In hindsight, neither convention seems to possess any historical inevitability, but they formed gradually as later poets selected and reshaped certain elements. The stele of Yang Hu 羊祜 became an especially potent image in part because it combined



Map 1.3

Tang China ca. 741 CE

Key:

Circuits (*dao* 道) are identified in italics on map.

Huainan 淮南 Circuit: Literally meaning “south of the Huai River,” encompassing parts of modern Jiangsu, Anhui, and Hubei

Jiangnan East 江南東 Circuit: Encompassed modern Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Fujian province in the south

Jiangnan West 江南西 Circuit: Encompassed modern Jiangxi and Hunan provinces, as well as part of Hubei and Anhui

Jiannan 劍南 Circuit: Area south of modern Jiange 劍閣, Sichuan

Lingnan 嶺南 Circuit: Encompassing modern Guangdong and Guangxi provinces

Qianzhong 黔中 Circuit: Area encompassing ancient Chu's Qianzhong commandery

City names are identical with modern ones, with the exception of Chang'an 長安, modern Xi'an 西安, Shaanxi

so many important topoi. The pond of the Xi 習 family was not the actual site of feasting or composition for many poets, but somehow became extremely popular as literary reference belonging to the realm of the imagination. The way that certain allusions become euhemerized, and ultimately reduced to clichés taught to school children, is reminiscent of how the legend of Qu Yuan likewise simplifies some of the contradictions inherent in the original story. During the Han dynasty, Qu Yuan was a controversial figure often criticized for committing suicide needlessly.

Stephen Owen's chapter "Jiangnan from the Ninth Century On: The Routinization of Desire" concludes the volume by presenting Jiangnan as the "routinized," commonplace figure of desire, long-since stripped of its original rhetorical significance. In late Tang *shi* 詩 and early *ci* 詞, Jiangnan is a conventional figure for pleasant scenery and drunken festivities. Figures of protest and plaint still exist, but have become attached to other geographical sites and literary references. Owen details the new representation of Jiangnan, which contains its own curious aporias and erasures. Finally he describes a *ci* by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101), leading us onward into the literature of the Northern Song, in which "the Southland is best" survives only as a quotation, a quotation with a heavy freight of associations that is invisible in the simplicity of the statement." This routinization and simplification of rhetorical terms that had taken on "heavy freight" was itself one necessary task in the continuation of the literary tradition. Here Owen suggests that "defamiliarization" was often a necessary step toward making old literary conventions newly relevant to contemporary experience.

Over the course of history the identity of the South has taken on various meanings, for natives and exiles, as for poets and courtiers. But throughout this book we see how the imagery of the southland is also grounded in real experiences, some of them so vivid that they continue to be meaningful centuries after their historical occurrence. Edward Schafer's study *The Vermilion Bird* is focused on the concrete reality of the South as depicted in Tang poetry, but also refers to this interaction of sentiment and reality:²¹

The cry of a magpie or a swallow made the medieval northerner's heart swell with happiness; the call of a langur or chukar made him weep with homesickness. It was the writing of southerners like Chang Chiu-ling which made it possible for later generations to see nature in all of its local manifestations without sentimental or parochial distortion. Perhaps, after all, the vermilion bird of the south might lose its ancient symbolic role and become a happy reality.

In Owen's chapter we see one example of the South changing from "ancient symbolic role" to "happy reality" in the present. What Owen shows, though, as do other writers in the volume, is how easily the "happy reality" slips back into a "symbolic role," becoming another topos of cultural significance that may elide its original meaning. So for medieval Chinese poets reasserting regional, or individual, identity is an effort made in the face of greater historical forces. It is a recapturing and appropriation of traditional symbols for their

21. Edward Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South*, 47.

own purposes. Ultimately the depiction of the estrangement, whether foreignness or exile, of the South itself plays a role in the assertion of identity. But this identity is not necessarily “southern,” however much allusions to Qu Yuan or the South may be ingredients in its composition. It is the identity of the scholar-official, particularly in the aggrieved role of the loyal dissident. The poet’s identification with the moral system and literary heritage of the ages is only intensified by exile and isolation, a way of confirming one’s own purity and virtue. In this sense the Southland becomes synecdoche for the Chinese poetic tradition as a whole.

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