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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines sites that were situated in nature (mountains and rivers, temples), modeled after nature (parks and estates), inspired by nature (urban sanctuaries such as private gardens and temples), or defined by their distance from the capital court (roads leading away from the political or cultural center). Writings on these sites commonly treated the themes of exile from the capital, retreat from court life, personal cultivation, or the beauty and mystery of nature. Sites in nature and the political center at times converged in these writings whereby these sites could reinforce or augment the authority of imperial power (the imperial park or the temples of previous dynastic founders).

Keywords: nature, mountains, rivers, parks, gardens, temples, roads, court

THIS chapter surveys sites that were by and large associated with nature and defined in part by their distance from the capital court (urban sanctuaries such as private gardens or temples, roads that led away from the cultural or political center, gentry estates, and mountains and rivers). Writings about these sites are thus often associated with the themes of retreat from court life, personal cultivation, the beauty and mystery of nature, or exile from the capital. The seat of political power and sites in nature, however, converged at times in such a way that these sites were used to reinforce or enhance the authority of imperial power (as with the imperial park or the temples of previous dynastic founders).

Parks and Gardens

Circumscribed, cultivated, or engineered forms of nature came in different sizes, bearing different purposes and significances in early and medieval China. Among the earliest, and certainly the grandest, kind that figured centrally in Chinese literature was the imperial

park. The Shanglin Park 上林苑, an estimated 167-kilometer-long hunting preserve used by the Former Han emperors, was the subject or setting of the most famous examples of the epideictic rhapsody (*fu* 賦). Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE) "Rhapsody on the Shanglin Park" ("Shanglin fu" 上林賦) showcases the magnificent pomp and splendor of the emperor's miniaturized domain through a seemingly interminable description of mountains and rivers, flora and fauna, rocks and minerals, terraces and palaces: the imperial park, which seems to have everything, is a synecdoche for the larger empire, which does have everything (on the remonstrance function of the epideictic rhapsody, see also Chapters 28, 30). The comprehensive cataloguing of things and resources characteristic of such Han rhapsodies also had political and economic implications: the ruler's legitimacy is demonstrated by the identification, classification, and taking stock of all things in his empire, which the imperial park represents in (p. 439) microcosm. When read alongside its antecedent and companion piece, "Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous" ("Zixu fu" 子虛賦), which describes what will turn out to be by comparison lesser royal parks in the states of Chu 楚 and Qi 齊, this work also performs the symbolic subjugation of regional cultures under the single authority of the Han imperial center, which ultimately is shown to be sanctioned by the emperor's greater possession: a command of the classics and rituals. In a later work set in the Han imperial park, "Barricade Hunt Rhapsody" 校獵賦 (or "Plume Hunt Rhapsody" ["Yulie fu" 羽獵賦]), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) describes a militarized hunt that took place in 10 BCE intended to awe envoys from Central Asia through lengthy lists of game animals from land and sea, and his tribute culminates in a glorification of the sage-like emperor, whose civilizing influence spreads to neighboring tribes (Knechtges 1976: 63–80).

Large gentry estates in early medieval China conveyed a significant agricultural and economic utility: the largest were self-sufficient and equipped to carry out a complete set of enterprises ranging from farming and clothes-making to paper manufacturing. In addition, they at times functioned as pleasure parks for the estate owners and their associates, making them a fertile site of literary production. For instance, Shi Chong's 石崇 (249–300) "Golden Valley Garden" 金谷園 served as the setting for a lavish party in 296, during which his guests toured the grounds, climbing hills or sitting by the stream, listening to music or composing poems (Knechtges 2014: 530–34). In the only poem remaining from this occasion, Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300) describes a scene of winding hills and a meandering stream, a limpid pond and hanging willows, roaring rapids and sounds of musical instruments, and concludes with a meditation characteristic of excursion poetry on the impermanence of things.

In another example, the Shining 始寧 Estate of the great landscape poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) became a significant site and source of his poetic meditations on withdrawal from court life and communion with nature. His monumental work about his estate,

“Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains” (“Shanju fu” 山居賦), describes touring the various mountains and waters on his property and lists the animal, vegetal, and herbal varieties found therein, thereby appropriating the trope (developed by Han court rhapsodists on behalf of the ruler) of cataloguing and proclaiming the emperor’s sovereignty over all things in his land. In Xie Lingyun’s estate, there were even parks and gardens designed to replicate the actual sites of Buddha’s sermons, such as Deer Park and the mango grove of Amrapāli, in order to create the right environment for the voice of Buddha to be carried on by Xie’s monk guests in their sermons, all of which presumably help channel a complete, organic experience of Buddhist learning, perhaps even a facsimile of the original lessons (Swartz 2015).

Some of the recurring themes associated with literati parks and gardens can be seen in a famous Tang example, *Wangchuan ji* 輞川集 (*Wang River Collection*) by Wang Wei 王維 (699 or 701–761) and Pei Di 裴迪 (b. 716): the leisure and freedom gained in a retreat from court life, an aesthetic appraisal of natural scenes and things, and a religious or otherwise spiritual awakening (Yu 1980: 165–69, 201–205; Warner 2005: 57–72). In a country villa previously owned by the Early Tang court poet Song Zhiwen 宋之問 (ca. 656–712), the new owner Wang Wei composed quatrains to mark each of the twenty (p. 440) notable sites on his estate. In the best-known quatrain, “Deer Fence” (“Luzhai” 鹿柴), *kong* 空, a term saturated with Buddhist significations, describes a mountain in terms of an emptiness of a physical kind (being devoid of human appearance) as well as of a spiritual order (being devoid of human concerns). Poetic attention, then, is directed to the play between the dark moss in the deep woods and the back cast light that illuminates the green moss again at dusk, bringing to the foreground Wang Wei’s trademark interests in the repetition of natural cycles or events, a second gaze or observation, a nature that is in constant flux, and the limitations of perception (Chapter 27).

Gardens were frequently the focal point in medieval writings on reclusion as a source of sustenance or a sanctuary from worldly concerns. The first major poet to write extensively about his rustic garden in these contexts was the recluse-farmer Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427), giving rise to the classification of his style as “fields and gardens poetry” (*tianyuan shi* 田園詩) (Chapters 27, 30). Throughout his writings, the garden from which he plucks greens and in which he strolls daily for pleasure symbolized a claim of independence from office, both economically and emotionally. Conversely, the lack of harvest described in some of his works illustrated the material hardships of reclusion (Swartz 2008).

In the Tang, the literati garden became a private space in which the owner could control and shape a miniaturized version of nature to his will and taste (Owen 1996: 83–106). Private urban gardens came to represent for their owners a compromise between the attraction of eremitism and the demands of social responsibility. For instance, Bai Juyi’s 白

居易 (772–846) private garden provided the grounds for him to develop his concept of “middle-of-the-road reclusion” (*zhong yin* 中隱) in a number of poems. The contents of such gardens were the subject of many poems and essays. The most interesting was the large rock, which inspired collection and connoisseurship (the uglier and weirder the better). The aesthetic obsession with a material object such as the rock, which happened to be an expensive habit to maintain (enormous rocks transported from the south to the north required the toil of many laborers), gave rise to discourses in the Tang and Song on the fetishism of rocks and its moral implications. Bai Juyi’s “Account of the Lake Tai Rock” (“Taihu shi ji” 太湖石記) defends the minister Niu Sengru’s 牛僧儒 (780–ca. 848) addiction to rock collecting by likening the recognition of a good rock to the discernment of human talent. In contrast, the Song scholar Wen Tong 文同 (1018–1079) condemned Niu’s political rival Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850) for his obsession with rocks, which was judged to be the root cause of his self-centeredness and broader official corruption (Yang 2003:11–50; 91–148).

Temples

The earliest literature associated with temples had ritual and religious significance. Odes from the oldest layer of *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) were composed within the context of the ancestral temple. The Zhou Hymns 周頌 (*Maoshi* 266–296) were addressed (p. 441) to the Zhou ancestors in dynastic rituals and were sung as liturgies that both described and enacted the sacrificial rites. The main tropes (some of which are interconnected) are glorification of the Zhou ancestors (e.g., *Maoshi* 268, 285), supplication for the continuity of rule and injunction to descendants to keep in line (e.g., *Maoshi* 267, 270), and preparation for or performance of sacrifices (e.g., *Maoshi* 266, 272, 278, 290). Some hymns were performed in the temple during the inauguration of a new king (*Maoshi* 286, 287, 288), whereas others with a strong martial theme seem to enact ritually the Zhou conquest of the Shang (*Maoshi* 271, 285, 293, 294, 295, 296) (Shaughnessy 1997: 165–195; Kern 2010: 22–28).

The worship of deities in suburban temples also occasioned the composition of ritual songs. In an early case, Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) commissioned “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices” (“Jiaosi ge” 郊祀歌) around the same time he instituted sacrificial rites to Sovereign Earth 后土 and Grand Unity 太乙. In the nineteen pieces preserved in *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han*), invocations are made to deities such as the Five Emperors 五帝 (each associated with one of the Five Phases and a direction) to partake of the sacrificial offerings and to confer their blessings;

contemporary auspicious occurrences, such as the discovery of a holy tripod (113 BCE) and the capture of a white unicorn (122 BCE), are commemorated (Birrell 1988: 29–44).

Temples dedicated to dynastic founders or famous historical personages inspired pilgrimages and commemorative writings. An especially good example is “Making Offerings at the Temple of the Han Exalted Emperor” (“Han Gao miao sai shen” 漢高廟賽神) by the Liang 梁 prince Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551, later Emperor Jianwen 梁簡文帝, r. 549–551) and the five matching poems by his principal courtiers, including Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–583) and Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾 (ca. 487–551), which memorialized a visit to a temple dedicated to Liu Bang. More than simply paying tribute to the founder of the Han Dynasty in a long-established autumn rite, this ritual performance and its literary commemoration represented a symbolic act of tapping into the political capital of the great former dynasty to bolster the legitimacy of the new Liang dynasty (Tian 2014: 256–266). Claims of legitimate inheritance of a certain tradition were made on a smaller scale than dynastic rule. Visiting shrines erected for important historical figures and documenting the event allowed one to identify with a particular figure of the past and to write oneself into the cultural memory surrounding that figure. For instance, with the poem “The Minister of Shu” (“Shu xiang” 蜀相), which was composed upon a visit to the Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) shrine in Chengdu 成都, the failed official Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) celebrated the famous minister and positioned himself as an heir to the former’s brand of loyalty, if not his heroism.

Poems commemorating visits to Buddhist temples, a burgeoning literary subgenre in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, quickly multiplied over the course of the medieval period. Following the introduction of Buddhism to China in the second century, there was a steady growth in the number of temples erected, with periods of rapid increases under certain imperial patrons during the medieval period. For instance, during the reign of Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502–549), over five hundred Buddhist temples and monasteries were built or renovated from residences in the (p. 442) capital region. Before the large-scale persecution of Buddhism by Emperor Wuzong of Tang 唐武宗 (r. 840–846), a fervent Daoist, in 845, the number of temples in just the two capital cities of Chang’an and Luoyang had reached many thousands. The search for a religious experience, spiritual elevation, serenity, beautiful scenery, or plain amusement on temple grounds prompted numerous occasional poems, resulting in a large body of literature on temple visits. The tenth-century anthology of medieval literature *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 (*The Flower of the Garden of Letters*) includes seven chapters (233–239) of poems on Buddhist temples and hermitages. Some of the most famous examples come from the brush of Wang Wei, a lay Buddhist whose pilgrimages to mountain temples, from quest to arrival at a serene setting to meditation or insight, are recorded in oft-anthologized poems such as “Visiting the Temple of Gathered Fragrance” (“Guo Xiangji si” 過香積寺) and “Ascending to the Temple of Awakening” (“Deng Bianjue si” 登辨覺寺). Wang’s contemporary Meng

Haoran 孟浩然 (689–740) also marked his visits to mountain temples or the dwellings of his monk friends with poems that blend descriptions of the natural scene with Buddhist images, symbols, or concepts, thereby infusing the landscape with religious hues characteristic of High Tang poems of this subgenre (Kroll 1981: 117–130).

Temples functioned not only as religious sanctuaries but also as cultural centers, concrete embodiments of a society's cultural memory. When the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–534) official Yang Xuanzhi 楊銜之 (fl. sixth century) set out to compile a memoir commemorating the former capital city of Luoyang, once in full splendor but in ruins by the time he was writing, he anchored his account of the city life (architecture, history and legends, political events, social figures, and economic conditions) with descriptions of its major Buddhist temples. His *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 (*Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang*, ca. 547) is the earliest extant account of a Chinese city, providing valuable information about this critical place and transitional time in early medieval Chinese history (Chapter 28).

Temples, whether Buddhist or Daoist, became over the course of the medieval period contested sites where political, economic, or ideological battles were waged. The rise and fall of the fortunes of temples of one orientation or another often depended on the religious beliefs or financial needs of the emperor or other important patrons. Among the likely motivations for Emperor Wuzong's persecution of the Buddhist establishment, chief was a shortfall in state revenues: secularizing and reclaiming the extensive landholdings of Buddhist temples was an obvious solution, since the strategy had worked a number of times in the fifth and sixth centuries. A well-known narrative poem by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), "The Girl of Mount Hua" ("Huashan nü" 華山女), sardonically recounts the competing strategies by Buddhist and Daoist temples to attract patrons. The poem is set during a period when Buddhism was ascendant, a phenomenon that Han Yu attributes in no small measure to their sermons that scared people with notions of karma and retribution. Daoist temples had very little business until a pretty girl from Mount Hua came along, dolled up in heavy makeup and Daoist garb, to steal from Buddhist temples all their patrons, who now shed their gold and jade ornaments for her.

(p. 443) Urban temples provided a study in contrast between the serenity of the temple grounds and the clamor of the surrounding city life. A notable example is "On the Temple of Chan Wisdom in Yangzhou" ("Ti Yangzhou Chanzhi si" 題揚州禪智寺) by the Late Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852). The poet depicts a twilight scene in which the only audible sounds come from nature (a cicada's buzzing, the wind's whistle), a tranquility displacing the sounds of musical entertainment, familiar to the poet, that can be heard down the street in a city known for its many pleasures.

Not all poems set in temples convey a mood of serenity. Temples were a site of disappointment for some. The medieval tradition for recent examination graduates to throw a party at a Buddhist or Daoist temple in the capital leaves traces that embitter those who did not or could never qualify. In a remarkable example by the best-known poetess from the Tang, “Visiting the Southern Tower of the Exalted Truth Temple, Seeing Where Recent Graduates of the Examination Signed Their Names” (“You Chongzhen guan nanlou du xin jidi timing chu” 游崇真觀南樓睹新及第題名處), Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (844–868) describes her envy of the successful candidates who left inscriptions of their names at the temple and her frustration over the fact that her sex was excluded from taking the examination (“I regret that my silk dress conceals my poetic lines” 自恨羅衣掩詩句; Chapter 7).

Mountains and Rivers

Throughout Chinese history, mountains were viewed as sites of numinous power and gateways to the divine. Emperors ascended sacred mountains to perform sacrifices; for instance, the processions of the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE) and Emperor Wu of Han to Mount Tai 泰山 and the nearby Mount Liangfu 梁父 to perform the Feng 封 and Shan 禪 sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, respectively, were a common reference in Chinese texts. Great rivers, considered to be powerful forces of nature and cradles of civilization in an agrarian society, were also designated for sacrificial offerings, a cultic practice standardized by the First Emperor. Both mountains and rivers were regarded as the residences, even incarnations, of deities, and supernatural encounters at such sites between a human and a deity, often female and sometimes sexual, were common scenes in literature (Chapter 30).

Specific mountains and rivers have figured extensively in literature and lore and are thus imbued with specific cultural or historical meanings. For example, the “Five Marchmounts” (*Wuyue* 五嶽), associated with the imperial cult, was a collective term for the most sacred mountains in China, the most exalted being the aforementioned Mount Tai in the east, where things originated. Mount Kunlun 崑崙山, home to the Queen Mother of the West 西王母, was associated with immortality and transcendence, since its location in the far west is where the sun sets and where the earth connects to the heavens (Lewis 2006: 258–259). An allusion to the Xiang River 湘江, where the two (p. 444) wives of the sage-king Shun 舜 were said to have died from grief after the death of their husband, could signify pain and devotion.

Early textual models of the world used mountains and rivers (or seas) as basic structuring elements. The “Tribute of Yu” (“Yu gong” 禹貢) chapter of *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Classic of*

Documents) describes the journey of the sage-king Yu 禹 to tame the great flood that inundated China and to assess the soil of each region to determine appropriate tribute. It begins with how he divided the land into regions, tracked through mountains, and marked the courses of rivers. In the earliest cosmography of China, *Shan hai jing* 山海經 (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*, ca. third century BCE), these two geographic features demarcate space—as chains of mountains or as land in between seas that is filled by flora and fauna, demigods, strange creatures, and foreign peoples—in a scheme of concentric zones that correlate with a gradual decline as one moves away from the center of civilization. In its earliest reception, this text was regarded as a geographical work by some and dismissed as absurdity by others (hybrid beasts such as a fish with a snake’s tail resembling an ox, and the omens they supposedly signal or diseases they are said to cure, fill the world of *Shan hai jing*). Still others saw it as a source of political or cultural power: proper knowledge of the esoteric could well position a courtier to aid the emperor in governing the empire (Campany 1996: 133–137). And many others viewed it as a fascinating book (with both text and images) of all things strange. For example, Tao Yuanming wrote thirteen poems for the series “On Reading the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*” (“Du *Shan hai jing*” 讀山海經), a testament to the poet’s imaginary journey through the world mapped by this classic.

Mountains and rivers have various distinct meanings and applications as a compound idea. In early medieval discourse, *shanchuan* 山川 (mountains and streams) had geopolitical implications: the phrase not only named geographical features of the land, but was also a marker of political sovereignty, denoting territorial space that can be divided and occupied. In contrast, *shanshui* 山水 (mountains and waters) came to signify a site for roaming in the natural landscape, for pleasure or as an expression of eremitic values, and in many cases became a shorthand for untamed nature (Cheng 2007: 193–203). There is a large body of texts that are considered to be *shanshui* literature: they range from rhapsodies and poems that depict the landscape to travelogues and geographic texts that describe features of various mountains and waters.

The early development of *shanshui* poetry is associated with reclusion or quietist ideals (Chapter 30). Radical changes had taken place in the conception of nature by early medieval times: in the world of *Chuci* 楚辭 (*Verses of Chu*), nature was portrayed as inhospitable and dangerous for the prince in “Summoning the Recluse” (“Zhao yinshi” 招隱士), but it would be embraced as a safe haven from the world of human affairs in a poem of the same title by the Western Jin poet Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305). *Shanshui* not only represented a physical space situated apart and far from the court, but also a conceptual space defined by freedom from the restrictions and tedium of official life as well as safety from the vicissitudes of politics, if only temporarily. Xie Lingyun, generally considered to be the patriarch of *shanshui* poetry and a most enthusiastic sightseer, wrote extensively about his tours of mountains (p. 445) and waters on his estate and beyond

during his periods of exile or withdrawal from court and developed an influential poetic habit of seeing both philosophical and personal significance in nature's workings. His *shanshui* works include over forty poems (nearly half of his extant poetic collection), a rhapsody of approximately ten thousand characters (the aforementioned "Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains"), and a travelogue detailing the locations and features of various mountains he had visited in the south, "A Record of My Tours of Famous Mountains" ("You mingshan zhi" 遊名山志). Later developments of *shanshui* poetry in the Tang merged with a farmstead style that can be traced back to Tao Yuanming, creating a rich repertoire of images, themes, and rhetorical strategies for the discourse on nature and reclusion. The best-known writers of this type of nature poetry, such as Meng Haoran, Wang Wei, and Chu Guangxi 儲光羲 (ca. 706–ca. 762), represented nature as affording the frustrated or tired courtier a sense of simplicity, leisure, and detachment (Owen 1981: 27–51, 63–70, 71–88).

Mountains and rivers were as much a sanctuary for withdrawn men as they were a staging area for ambitious ones. During the medieval period, recluses "hiding" in nature became sought-after commodities, some gladly trading their lofty position for an official post. In such cases, mountains and rivers served as the best place from which one could enter, rather than escape, the political sphere. This practice first took shape during the Wei and Jin eras and gained popularity in the Tang, earning the label of "Zhongnan shortcut" (*Zhongnan jiejing* 終南捷徑): the quickest path to the court is through Mount Zhongnan, home to many recluses. A famous example is the Tang poet Li Bo 李白 (701–762), who was known as one of the Six Recluses of Zhuxi during his youth but sought patronage for office throughout his life. He eventually gained an audience with the emperor and was appointed to the Hanlin Academy, thereby circumventing normal bureaucratic channels (Swartz 2008: 70–71).

During the early medieval period, *shanshui* also became the objects of the aesthetic gaze and philosophical meditation. Poets such as those on the famous Lanting 蘭亭 outing in 353 wrote in awe of nature's many wonders: mountains and waters and all that dwell in and around the "two marvels" (*er qi* 二奇), as one poet called them. A growing obsession with nature took hold of early medieval writers; it was expressed physically by frequent excursions (group or solitary), and literarily by poetic observations of details in the natural world and contemplation of their significance. Xi Kang 嵇康 (or Ji Kang, ca. 223–ca. 262) was one of the earliest poets to treat nature and its working as the embodiment of the Dao in a set of tetrasyllabic poems 四言詩. Nature yields revelation of the patterns and laws that govern all living things, and therein lie the workings of the Mysterious Dao. *Shanshui* provided material access to this Mystery. For Xi Kang and poets who wrote in this tradition, such as the Lanting poets—including Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371), Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), and Xie An 謝安 (320–385)—and Xie Lingyun, reading the landscape, decoding nature's workings, and understanding their significance involved using

interpretive keys, most notably concepts from arcane learning or metaphysical learning (*xuanxue* 玄學), an admixture of early medieval Lao-Zhuang and Buddhist thought.

(p. 446) **The Road**

In classical Chinese literature, the road disproportionately functioned as a marker that established distance, rather than bridged it; that divided people, rather than connected them. The road figured most prominently in poems on parting, official missions or military campaigns, and exile. Through such usages, this site became imbued with the sentiments of sadness, weariness, and frustration. Yet the road was not only a physical passageway, commonly designated by the terms *lu* 路 or *tu* 途, but also a trope for the path to enlightenment: the term *dao* 道 signified a physical way as well as a spiritual one. The Dao, or Way, represented the ultimate attainment of the ethical or spiritual journeys as prescribed by texts of various persuasions, including those from the Confucian, Daoist, and Chinese Buddhist traditions (Graham 1989).

In parting poems, the road signaled a trajectory that led one away from another, pointing from here (the site of parting) to there (destination of the traveler, often away from the capital). One of the most interesting examples comes from the Early Tang poet Wang Bo 王勃 (649–676). In “To Defender Du, On His Way to Assume a Post in Shuzhou” (“Du shaofu zhi ren Shuzhou” 杜少府之任蜀州), Wang tries to rally his friend’s spirit by bidding them both not to cry like children at the crossroad, from which each will go in different directions. In Wang Wei’s famous parting poem “Sending Off Yuan the Second on His Mission to Anxi” (“Song Yuan er shi Anxi” 送元二使安西), Yang Pass 陽關 in the far northwest is represented as leading his friend from the security of a social network in the Chinese sphere to aloneness in alien territory (Chapter 27). The road is often described as long and difficult in a subgenre related to parting poetry, poems written while separated. In an early example, the first of the “Nineteen Old Poems” (“Gushi shijiu shou” 古詩十九首), the one who is left behind laments the great distance (symbolically and hyperbolically set at 10,000 leagues) paved by prohibitive roads that separate her and her loved one. In other examples of separation poetry, the road is depicted as impossible for man to traverse. Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) wishes he could send a message to a loved one in the south along with a migrating goose in the first of his “Miscellaneous Poems” (“Zashi” 雜詩). Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–499) longs for the patron and friends he recently left behind in Jingzhou and laments that he sees only paths for birds between him and his friends in “Traveling Down to the Capital on a Temporary Assignment, Starting Out at Night from Xinlin and Reaching the Capital City: Presented to Colleagues at the Western

Garrison” (“Zan shi xia du ye fa Xinlin zhi jingyi zeng xifu tongliao” 暫使下都夜發新林至京邑贈西府同僚).

In poems by civil officials sent on government missions, the road traveled or to be traveled often evoked comment. In an example from one of the most famous envoys in early medieval China, “In Imitation of ‘Singing My Cares’, Tenth Poem” (“Ni ‘Yong huai’ qi shi” 擬詠懷其十), Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581), who was sent to the Western Wei 西魏 capital of Chang’an by the Liang court in the south, likens himself to the Han general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE), who left through the Yang Pass to fight the Xiongnu (p. 447) in Central Asia and never again returned to China (Chapters 27, 30). Long stretches of roads or passes were a common feature in frontier or war poetry, symbolizing incessant traveling or continuous campaign. A High Tang poet known for frontier verse (Chapter 28), Wang Changling 王昌齡 (ca. 690–ca. 756), wrote poignantly about the hardships of war, especially when the present military lacked talent as great as the Han generals, in “Going Out to the Frontier” (“Chu sai” 出塞): soldiers who marched 10,000 leagues through the frontier passes have not returned. In an earlier example, “Joining the Army” (“Cong jun shi” 從軍詩), Wang Can 王粲 (177–217) describes trudging along seemingly endless roads covered with weeds and witnessing the ravages of war while following the warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) on a military campaign against the state of Wu 吳. In contrast to Wang Changling’s critique, Wang Can’s poem celebrates the military efforts of Cao Cao to unify China and create a “happy land” for all.

The road that leads away from the capital was often described as long and arduous in exile poetry. One of the earliest examples is Cao Zhi’s “Presented to Cao Biao, The Prince of Baima” (“Zeng Baima wang Biao” 贈白馬王彪). As Cao Zhi leaves the capital, he grieves over the recent assassination of one brother and the forced separation from another, implicitly holding his eldest brother Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) (Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝, r. 220–226) responsible in both cases. Cao Zhi tarries and wavers in a desolate landscape, reluctant to leave his former home, yet he must bitterly look ahead to the long road to his fief. In a variation on the theme of exile poetry, a former official of the vanquished state of Wu, Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303), describes his journey to the Jin 晉 capital in “Poems Written on the Road to Luoyang” (“Fu Luo dao zhong zuo shi” 赴洛道中作詩), emphasizing the anguish and pain he felt over leaving his native south. In these poems the road is depicted as long, barren, and unpopulated by other travelers, which sets into relief the sentiments of desolation and alienation the poet expresses in the poems.

Long journeys on the road for officials often found expression in travel writings in longer form, such as the rhapsody and the diary. In the three examples of travel rhapsodies included in the *Wen xuan* 文選, the influential sixth-century anthology of refined literature, the writers Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54), his daughter Ban Zhao 班昭 (fl. 90s–110s; also known as Cao Dagu 曹大家), and Pan Yue describe in detail the historical sites each encountered, as

well as the resultant meditations on the past and their relevance to the present. The earliest extant travel journal, “Diary of My Coming to the South” 來南錄 (809) by Li Ao 李翱 (774–836), maps the various geographical sites the sojourning official and his family traversed, even documenting in certain entries the distance in leagues traveled. Although Li recounts his travails (e.g., his illness, his wife’s illness, the birth of their daughter en route), his travel diary does not offer much description of scene or observation of people, events, and things, features that would become commonplace in examples of the genre from the Southern Song onwards (Strassberg 1994: 127–131).

The road figured as a crucial narrative element in medieval tales, a prose genre that had by the eighth and ninth centuries acquired a distinct set of narrative formulas and themes that allowed writers to adapt, vary, and play with their conventions. One common formula consisted of four parts (encounter, interaction, separation, and discovery) (p. 448) and two main characters (traveler, stranger). A typical story collected in a late-tenth-century anthology of 500 scrolls, *Taiping guang ji* 太平廣記 (*Extensive Records from the Taiping Reign*), might recount how a young scholar, who has recently failed his examinations, is journeying home. He strays from the road and meets a stranger that is more than meets the eye: he might discover after their parting that the beautiful woman he had spent the night with was in fact a ghost, an animal, or a fabulous creature. The would-be scholar-official made good protagonists for such tales, since they constituted liminal figures, being between commoner and official, and situated between home and capital. And the road became an apt vehicle for the medieval writer to stage this liminality, for it could be believably represented to connect this world to the other (Allen 2014: 119–198).

Metaphoric renderings of the way appear throughout classical Chinese literature. One of the earliest instances blends the physical meaning with the symbolic one: in *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*), the second Yang (unbroken) line statement of Hexagram 10, “Treading” 履, describes the even and level way of the recluse, signifying both a path free from dangerous obstacles and the Dao. Writers could indicate disorientation or error in one’s way, so to speak, with language describing the state of being lost on a road, meant to be taken figuratively. Significant examples include the fifth poem in the sequence “Singing of My Cares” 詠懷 by Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), who cryptically wrote about losing one’s way and feeling bewilderment during the power struggles between the reigning Cao family and the insurgent Sima 司馬 clan during the Wei-Jin transition, and Tao Yuanming’s “Verses on Returning Home” (“*Guiqulai xi ci*” 歸去來兮辭), a work that celebrates returning to rustic seclusion after previously traveling down the wrong road (of officialdom).

The medieval period represented one of the most remarkable growth spurts in Chinese literary history. It witnessed the formation and development of new genres (e.g., rhapsody, travel diary, short tale), new topics (e.g., visiting a Buddhist or Daoist temple,

the culture surrounding the civil service examinations, various forms of reclusion and detachment), and new repertoires (e.g., discourses on nature, the strange or otherworldly). These developments were often tied to particular sites, which over time became infused with certain themes, images, and sentiments. If place has no meaning until it is populated, then meanings become intelligible once they are read within the context of specific sites. The four sites treated in this chapter served as setting, source, or subject for a wealth of literary writings that meditated on the various facets of nature vis-à-vis the capital and what it represented. Themes of center and periphery, power and authority, withdrawal and quietism, the orthodox and the strange were richly explored in works set or represented in these four sites.

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