

The Formation and Development of Songs of Parting 送別歌行 (Part 3)

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Among the poems on parting by Li Bai 李白, there are some addressed to recluses. Such poems can also be found among the works of contemporary poets such as Wang Wei 王維 and Gao Shi 高適. Their roots lie in the time of Empress Wu 武后, when Sima Chengzheng 司馬承禎 was called to the court and Li Qiao 李嶠 saw him off with other court poets. This tradition was inherited by the court of Xuanzong 玄宗, becoming poems of sending off recluses who return to the mountain and ultimately becoming popular among poets outside the court, as well.

The Issues for Consideration

When compared with the works of other poets, Li Bai's parting poems for recluses are not only more numerous, they also appear to be qualitatively different. That is, "recluses" refers to Buddhist monks, Daoist monks, mountain recluses 山人, and others. Among these various recipients, some appear to have been recluses who took exams to enter into governmental service 逸人之舉. Li Bai himself entered into government service in this way, so it appears that he is projecting his own personal experience onto the image of the recipients.

In that case, the following two problems come to the fore: (1) What are examinations for recluses to enter into government service? What sort of a system is it that brought these people into contact with the world? (2) What sort of world did these people come to interact with? After touching on these issues, this paper aims to consider how the problem of the relationship between the self

身 and the world 世 is projected into these poems and songs 歌行 of parting addressed to recluses.

Preliminary Considerations 1

What are examinations for recluses to enter into government service? The “Xuanju zhi” 選舉志 of the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 broadly splits the selection system into three types. The second of those refers to “*buneng zida*” 不能自達 as a selection process for those who do not have the connections necessary to be recommended as well as “*gaodao youyin*” 高蹈幽隱 as a process for those who have no intention to sit for exams. An edict from the seventh month of the first year of Tianbao 天寶 describes the “Gaodao” 高道 subject, which belongs to the latter category. The existence of this subject, which has gone unnoticed until recently, can be confirmed in the poem of Cen Shen 岑參 and other sources. Li Bai entered the capital and sat for examinations at Wenquan gong 溫泉宮 of Lishan 驪山 in response to this edict. The results of that selection process were made public on the first of the following year in the court’s annual New Year’s Day ritual 元會儀禮 and that edict can be found in the *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大詔令集.

The edicts regarding the administering and results of the examinations for the subject “Gaodao bushi” 高蹈不仕 held in the third and fourth years of Tianbao can be found in the *Dengke ji kao* 登科記考 and are useful in shedding light on this topic. Looking at these sources, we can see that the examinations are connected to the distribution of the *Xiao jing* 孝經. We can surmise that the subjects “Xiaoqin guo ren” 孝勤過人 and “Gaodao bushi” were administered together and were intended to select people who were endowed with the virtues of *xiao* 孝 and *dao* 道. What comes to mind here is that Xuanzong distributed both the *Xiao jing* and the *Daode jing* 道德經 during his reign. It is likely that Li Bai, in responding to the subject “Gaodao,” aimed to be selected as a person who embodied the *dao* of the *Laozi Daode jing* 老子道德經.

Preliminary Considerations 2

About Xuanzong's Daoist faith. At the end of the Kaiyuan 開元 and beginning of the Tianbao periods, policies regarding Daoism came to be reflected in the examination system. In the twenty-ninth year of Kaiyuan, the "Ming sizi" 明四子 subject was administered on par with the "Mingjing" 明經 subject of the standard yearly examinations 常舉. Next, the following year, the "Gaodao" 高道 subject was administered as a selection process designated in an edict set forth by the emperor himself. While the former was intended to evaluate the knowledge regarding Daoist texts, the latter sought after those who embodied the *dao*, so the two appear to have a complementary relationship. The role of the exams for recluses to enter into government service was made clear through the "Ming sizi" subject.

In the intercalary fourth month of the twenty-ninth year of Kaiyuan, Xuanzong encountered Laozi in a dream. The image of Laozi seen in the dream left a deep impression on Xuanzong. His vassals discovered a statue of Laozi just as the message in the dream described. Installing the statue in the Datong dian 大同殿, he ordered the distribution of copies of the sacred image throughout the realm. In the first month of the following year (Tianbao 1), there was a report about the appearance of Xuanyuan Huangdi 玄元皇帝 (a name used for Laozi's deified form). The dream about Laozi served to invigorate the court's policies regarding Daoism. Further, in the second month of that year, the mausoleum for Xuanyuan Huangdi was completed and a white stone statue of Xuanzong was installed there alongside a white stone statue of Laozi. Also, Laozi was repeatedly given honorary titles by the court, gold-plated copper life-size statues of Xuanzong's body were cast, as well as those of both *Shen* 神 and *Fo* 仏. All of this connects to the same consciousness on his part: the ingenuous wish to be brought up to the same level as such gods.

In the first month of the fourth year of Tianbao, Xuanzong himself had an encounter with Xuanyuan Huangdi. When he was about to read a prayer after

ascending to the altar in the Datong dian, he heard a voice speak to him from the sky, saying, “May the life of the emperor last forever . . .” That night, his ministers heard the same voice, saying, “I am protecting the medicine myself . . .” This mysterious experience transformed within Xuanzong into an unshakable faith. It seems that Xuanzong must have had some abnormality in his cognitive functions and we cannot deny the possibility that drugs were influencing him. He probably sought the help of medicines in order to attain eternal life. In the second month, Chen Xilie 陳希烈 reported on a message from Xuanyuan Huangdi that was heard by the Daoist monk Xiao Congyi 蕭從一. That message stated that in the heavens, Xuanzong was a *zhenren* 真人 (a person who had attained insight into the most profound significance of the *dao*) and preparations were underway for him to serve alongside Xuanyuan Huangdi. This declaration proved that Xuanzong had attained the eternal life that he sought after. In this way, the story is completed, but we can sense very careful preparations in its background.

Primary Considerations

From the twenty-ninth year of Kaiyuan to the first year of Tianbao, important measures in the policy toward Daoism were undertaken, there was an edict calling for an examination for recluses to enter the government service, and Li Bai enter the capital, attaining a post at the court. Approximately two years later, the next such examination was held, and in the midst of it, Xuanzong had a second mystical experience where he heard a voice from the sky speak to him. At this time, Li Bai had already left the capital and was in the areas of Liang 梁 and Song 宋.

As for his poems and songs that appear to have been addressed to people who sat for both of these examinations for recluses, we can point to the following four: “Song of the Xiyue Yuntai: Sending off Danqiu” 西岳雲臺歌送丹丘子 for Yuan Danqiu 元丹丘, who took the first exam; “Sending off Cai

shanren” 送蔡山人 was addressed to Cai shanren 蔡山人 before he took the second exam; and “Song of the Minggao: Sending off Cen zhengjun” 鳴皋歌送岑徵君 and “Sending off Cen zhengjun on his Return to Mt. Minggao” 送岑徵君歸鳴皋山 were addressed to Cen zhengjun 岑徵君 after he had taken the second exam. Also, there is a poem by Gao Shi that was addressed to Cai shanren at the same time.

How are the circumstances surrounding Li Bai, both personal and societal, reflected in these poems that were written while he was in the capital and after he left it? In this paper, I consider the process through which the format of these parting poems and songs developed by looking at Li Bai’s poems from before he moved to the capital and his time there, such as “Song of the Xiyue Yuntai: Sending off Danqiuzi.”