

The Formation and Development of Songs of Parting 送別歌行 (Part 4)

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Between the twenty-ninth year of Kaiyuan 開元 and the first year of Tianbao 天寶, there were important policy initiatives and divine messages, such as the creation of Xuanyuan huangdi miao 玄元皇帝廟 and Chongxuanxue 崇玄學, the establishment of Daoju 道舉 and Xuanzong's 玄宗 dream of Laozi 老子. When an imperial edict for the Gaodao 高道 examination for recluses was issued, Li Bai 李白 came to the capital and became a Hanlin gongfeng 翰林供奉. Between the third and fourth year of Tianbao, the next Gaodao bushi 高蹈不仕 examination for recluses took place, in the midst of which Xuanzong received a divine message in the form of a congratulatory voice in the sky. By this time, Li Bai was no longer in the capital and was in the regions of Liang 梁 and Song 宋.

Among the works which Li Bai is believed to have sent to examinees taking these two exams are the following: concerning the former Gaodao examination, there is the “Xiyue Yuntai ge song Danqiuzi” 西岳雲臺歌送丹丘子 to Yuan Danqiu 元丹丘: concerning the latter Gaodao bushi examination, there are “Song Cai shanren” 送蔡山人 to Cai shanren 蔡山人 before the examination and the “Minggao ge song Cen zhengjun” 鳴臯歌送岑徵君 and “Cen zhengjun gui Minggao shan” 送岑徵君歸鳴臯山 to Cen zhengjun 岑徵君 after the examination. At the same time, there was also a work by Gao Shi 高適 for Cai shanren.

How are Li Bai's personal circumstances and that of his age reflected in his works from the time he was in the capital and the time after he left the capital? In this paper, I focus on his works after he left the capital, especially the

development of his songs of parting from the time he left the capital to those composed during his trip to Liang, Song and eastern Lu 東魯 as well as the “Mengyou Tianmu yin liubie” 夢遊天姥吟留別 written when he left for Jiangdong 江東.

First, concerning the poems that Li Bai and Gao Shi sent to Cai shanren at Kaifeng 開封. In this poem, Li Bai, as can be expected from a person who has taken the examination for recluses to enter government service, cautions Cai shanren, who is about to take the examination, that it is no easy task to pluck a jewel from under a dragon’s chin. In contrast, in his work, Gao Shi expresses his envy the recipient’s path to success. Both works reflects the authors’ circumstances.

Next, concerning the poem to Cen zhengjun. The song 歌行 is a pictorial depiction of a preliminary trip headed to a site of reclusion. In contrast, the five character poem describes the recipient’s profile and the spiritual state which he has reached. Expression such as “delve into the foundation” and “contemplating changes” can be cited as evidence that both of these examinations for government service for recluses, are addressing those who have embodied the *dao* 道 in the *Laozi Daode jing* 老子道德經.

The “Mengyou Tianmu yin liubie” describes how Li Bai, after entering the capital, settled his affairs and started out of a journey to Jiangnan 江南 that he had yearned for. In the song, he describes his failed attempt to climb a mountain in a dream in order to encounter immortals and receive a message from them. The content of this song is almost like a negative picture of a report of a vision of Xuanyuan huangdi 玄元皇帝 by Xiao Congyi 蕭從一. It is possible to understand this to mean that Li Bai awoke from the ideology of Xuanzong’s court which valued communication with the gods. This work is the culmination of the songs of parting that Li Bai attempted since his entry into the capital.

Li Bai’s songs of parting probably influenced the composition of songs by Du Fu 杜甫, who was associated with Li Bai for a while around this time.