

Songs for the Gods: The Poetry of Popular Religion in Fifth-Century China

The forty-seventh chapter of *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 樂府詩集, the great anthology of popular ballads compiled by Kuo Mao-ch'ien 郭茂倩 at the end of the eleventh century, contains a group of eighteen short poems. They are distributed under eleven titles, but as a group are called "Shen-hsien ko" 神弦歌, literally "Songs for the Gods Accompanied by String Instruments." It is my aim in this paper to introduce and translate these works, which, to my knowledge, have not been studied before in a Western language. The poems are very simple and straightforward, but they are often difficult to interpret because the popular religious cults they accompanied are so poorly known.¹

Yüeh-fu shih-chi was compiled over five hundred years after the time when the poems are thought to have been written, but there is no reason to doubt their authenticity. Kuo Mao-ch'ien quotes *Ku-chin yüeh-lu* 古今樂錄 as his source, and this work, published in 568 by the monk Chih-chiang 智匠, is one of the earliest and best for the study of popular ballads.² The poems are placed by Kuo Mao-ch'ien at the end of the category called "Wu sheng" 吳聲 ("Music of Wu").³ The other poems in this category, found in chapters 44-47, are charming quatrains in pentameter verse that describe the joys and sorrows of young people in love in the Wu area, that is, in the lower Yangtze basin around the capital of Nanking, then called Chien-k'ang 建康 (or Yang-chou 揚州). The "Songs for the Gods" are not all pentameter quatrains, but the place names mentioned in them show that they also

¹ I have based what follows mainly on the excellent chapter by Wang Yün-hsi 王運熙, "Shen-hsien ko k'ao" 神弦歌考, in his *Liu-ch'ao yüeh-fu yü min-ko* 六朝樂府與民歌 (Shanghai: Ku-chi wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1955; 2d edn., 1957), pp. 167-81. Li Feng-mao 李豐楙, "Liu-ch'ao yüeh-fu yü hsien-tao ch'uan-shuo" 六朝樂府與仙道傳說, in *Ku-tien wen-hsüeh* 古典文學 (Taipei: Hsüeh-sheng shu-chü, 1968) 1, pp. 67-96, written without reference to Wang Yün-hsi's work, was helpful in my study.

² On this work see Wang Yün-hsi, *Yüeh-fu shih lun-t'ung* 樂府詩論叢 (Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1958), p. 148.

³ Kuo, *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1979; hereafter *YFSC*) 47, pp. 683-86. These poems may also be found in Lu Ch'in-li 逯欽立, *Hsien Ch'in Han Wei Nan-pei-ch'ao shih* 先秦漢魏南北朝詩 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 1057-60.

originated in the Nanking area. The *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng* 古今圖書集成 encyclopedia says that they were written during the Chin dynasty,⁴ and it seems probable that they date from the last years of the dynasty, that is, from the early fifth century A.D. Ho Ch'eng-t'ien 何承天 (370-447) further confirms that "Songs for the Gods" are a kind of contemporary folk music.⁵

The lower Yangtze basin is traditionally associated with popular, unorthodox religion. The geographical monograph of the official history of Sui contains eight short phrases describing the "general character" of the region. Two of the phrases say, "the customs: belief in demons and spirits, a liking for excessive cults (*yin-ssu* 淫祠)."⁶ Many tales found in *Hou Han-shu* speak of a superstitious peasantry of the region who ruined themselves in useless sacrifices and expensive ceremonies.⁷ *Hou Han-shu* also tells us of a sorcerer, father of the famous filial paragon Ts'ao O 曹娥, who was "skilled in singing while accompanying himself on a string instrument," and who was drowned in 142 or 143 A.D. while apparently trying to pacify the god of the bore in the Ch'ien-t'ang River (Wu Tzu-hsü 吾子胥).⁸

The histories tell us of the constant war the authorities waged against these unofficial cults throughout China, but nowhere were they more unsuccessful than in Wu. A famous example is the cult rendered to Chiang Tzu-wen 蔣子文 on Mount Chung 鍾 near Nanking. Prohibited at the end of the Han, and prohibited and then tolerated by the kingdom of Wu, Chiang Tzu-wen received the posthumous title of "marquis."⁹ Again prohibited by the Sung in 421, the temples were rebuilt around 454; and then, a dozen years later, prestigious titles were conferred on him and his followers.¹⁰ When, a century later, the first ruler of the Ch'en dynasty visited Mount Chung (called Mount Chiang 蔣 since the Sung), he sacrificed at the temple of "Emperor" Chiang!¹¹ Such was the reputation for religiosity and interest in popular cults in the kingdom of Wu (222-280), that in the fifth century

men believed (wrongly) that the court in that kingdom had no formal ritual music and that professional singers were called upon to sing the third-century equivalent of "Songs for the Gods."¹²

The poems that we read below give us an inkling (but only an inkling) of what the popular cults actually comprised. The standard history (*Chin shu* 晉書), however, contains a few precious remarks that help us picture what went on. They are contained in the biography of one Hsia T'ung 夏統, a native of Yung-hsing 永興 (between Hang-chou and Shao-hsing in Chekiang) who lived around 280. His biography, in *chüan* 94, a chapter devoted to men who refused to serve in the government (*yin-i* 隱逸), can be divided clearly into three parts. First is a description of his poverty and his impassioned defense, against his relatives, of his life as a private citizen, refusing state service. Second, his cousins trick him into attending a popular religious ceremony, which is briefly described. Third, while in Loyang to buy medicine for his ailing mother, he meets the Defender-in-chief (*t'ai-wei* 太尉) Chia Ch'ung 賈充 (217-282), to whom he preaches a Confucian sermon on the moral purity of his native K'uai-chi and for whom he performs nautical tricks with his boat and sings, provoking mysterious meteorological phenomena. Chia Ch'ung attempts to attract him to his service with a brilliant military parade and beautiful singing girls. Hsia T'ung remains steadfast and returns to K'uai-chi. It is this last episode that provides the only date known in Hsia T'ung's life: Chia Ch'ung was Defender-in-chief from 276 to his death in 282.¹³ Hsia T'ung's refusal to enter into Chia Ch'ung's service is of course an echo of his plea for a life far from politics in the first part of his biography, but it is the second part that interests us here.

Hsia T'ung was so angry with his relatives for having encouraged him to enter official service that he refused to see them anymore. It is at this point that the second part of his biography begins.

At this time Hsia T'ung's mother fell ill and he took care of her and gave her medication. Because of her illness his relatives were able to see him again. His uncle Hsia Ching-ning 苟寧 was about to perform

¹² SS 19, p. 541. They based their assumption in part on the fact that in January of 268 the king of Wu had female singers sing night and day during a ceremony for the re-entombment of his father; see *Chin shu* 晉書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974; hereafter CS) 59, p. 1371; and *Chien-k'ang shih-lu* 建康實錄 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1986), p. 99.

¹³ Wan Ssu-t'ung 萬斯同, *Chin chuang-hsiang ta-ch'ien nien-piao* 晉將相大臣年表 (Erh-shih-wu shih pu-pien edn., vol. 3), pp. 3d-5a.

⁴ *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng*, "Shen-i" 神異典 40, "tsa kwei-shen" 雜鬼神部, *i-wen* 藝文 2, p. 1a.

⁵ *Sung shu* 宋書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974; hereafter SS) 19, p. 541.

⁶ *Sui shu* 隋書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1973) 31, p. 886.

⁷ Wang, "Shen-hsien," pp. 167-68; R. A. Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion," in H. Welch and A. Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979), pp. 53-81; *Hou Han-shu* 後漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1965) 41, p. 1397; and 57, p. 1841.

⁸ *Hou Han-shu* 84, p. 2794; cf. *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世說新語 (hereafter SSHY) 11; trans. Richard Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 1976), p. 293 (the dates given should be 142-143, not 107-125).

⁹ *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1979) 5, p. 57. ¹⁰ SS 17, p. 488.

¹¹ *Nan shih* 南史 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1975) 9, p. 272; the visit took place November 17, 557, the day after his coronation.

a sacrifice to his ancestors.¹⁴ He invited two sorceresses named Chang Tan 章丹 and Ch'en Chu 陳珠, both of them outstanding beauties. They wore splendid clothing and were excellent singers and dancers. They also knew how to vanish from sight and hide their shadows.

At the beginning of the first watch (seven P.M.) bells were struck and drums beaten with intermittent music from strings and wind instruments. Chang Tan and Ch'en Chu drew their knives and cut their tongues; they swallowed their knives and spit fire. From gloomy mists rays of light like lightning shot out. Hsia T'ung's cousins wanted to go to see them, but they feared he would raise difficulties, so they got together and tricked him, saying:

"Our uncle has just recovered from a serious illness and all of us, young and old, think it is an occasion for joy. We want to take advantage of the sacrifice he is going to perform to go and congratulate him. Will you come with us?" Hsia T'ung went along.

When they entered the gate, the first thing they saw was Chang Tan and Ch'en Chu in the central courtyard lightly dancing in a round. They chattered and smiled like otherworldly creatures as they performed a dance, as if they were flying, a dance during which they balanced goblets, nimbly passing them from one to the other. Hsia T'ung was so shocked and surprised that he fled not through the gate, but straight out crashing through the hedge.

Once back he upbraided the others.¹⁵

Hsia T'ung uses erudite allusions to *Shih ching*, Poems 51 and 54, to *Lun yü* (VIII/14 and VI/26), *Kuo yü* ("Chin yü" 7), and *Tso chuan* (Chao 28 and Huan 1) to revile his cousins and condemn with extraordinary violence what he calls dissolute behavior between men and women: "I have always regretted," he says, "not having been able to strike Shu-hsiang's head against the earth or gouge out Hua-fu's eyes," because the former married a woman for her beauty,¹⁶ and the latter (both men of antiquity) ogled a married woman when she passed him.¹⁷ That his cousins could carouse with

¹⁴ Or perhaps to his father (and thus Hsia T'ung's paternal grandfather). There are parallel texts to this passage in *Ch'u-hsieh chi* 初學記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1962) 15, p. 373; *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* 北堂書鈔 (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she, 1962) 112, pp. 3b-4a; and *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1960) 568, p. 9a, all quoting "Hsia Chung-yü pieh-chuan" 夏仲御別傳. *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* clearly states he sacrificed to "his ancestors"; my quoted source, CS 94, p. 2428, is ambiguous: *hsien-jen* 先人 can mean either "father" or "ancestors."

¹⁵ CS 94, p. 2428.

¹⁶ *Tso chuan*, Chao 28; trans. James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, vol. 5 of *The Chinese Classics* (1872; rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1960), pp. 726-27.

¹⁷ *Tso chuan*, Huan 1; trans. Legge, *Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 36.

these base magicians was too much for him: he took to his bed and refused to talk to anyone.

Hsia T'ung's reaction to this form of popular religion, while probably compounded with monkish misogyny, was not unique. We have seen that the state tried (unsuccessfully) to combat the cult of Chiang Tzu-wen; it was hostile to all non-official cults throughout the empire. Not only was the Confucian state hostile to these unorthodox religious manifestations, but organized religion of all sorts (Taoist and Buddhist) combatted them and criticized in particular the kind of noisy floor shows that so offended Hsia T'ung: "loud noise, resounding drums, heard in the four directions."¹⁸ Even what I suppose should be called religious Taoist "splinter groups" abominated these cults with their noisy music and blood sacrifices.¹⁹ It is not surprising, then, that we have so little material on these despised cults, which makes our "Songs for the Gods" all the more precious to study.

SONGS FOR THE GODS

The problems in the translation of these eighteen short poems begin with the very first title. The words used, "Su-o" 宿阿, are unknown as a compound elsewhere, and neither Wang Yün-hsi nor Li Feng-mao have ventured a guess.

1. *Spending the Night on the Hill*

Su Lin opens the Gate of Heaven;
The Venerable Chao closes the Door of Earth.
Our Way is also the gods' Way:
Let the True Officials now descend!

Su Lin 蘇林 is a famous Taoist immortal. His hagiography appears in the collection *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 雲笈七籤,²⁰ and he has recently been studied for the role he plays in religious Taoism.²¹ The Venerable Chao (Chao *tsun*

¹⁸ Lu Hsiu-ching 陸修靜, *Lu hsien-sheng tao-men k'o-lüeh* 陸先生道門科略, in *Tao-tsang* no. 761, p. 9.

¹⁹ Christine Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste: Etude du Dongyuan shenzhou jing* [洞淵神呪經] (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, forthcoming), chap. 2, part 1.

²⁰ *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 雲笈七籤 104, pp. 1-5. Wang, "Shen-hsien," pp. 171-72, mentions other references. Hsiao Ti-fei 蕭濂非, *Han Wei Liu-ch'ao yüeh-fu wen-hsüeh shih* 漢魏六朝樂府文學史 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1984), p. 226, corrects the error he made in the identification of this figure in the original (1944) edition of his book.

²¹ Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme*, Publications de l'EFEO 137 (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984) 2, pp. 365-68; see also M. Porkert, *Biographie d'un taoïste légendaire: Tcheou Tseu-yang*, Mémoires de l'IFEO 10 (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1979), pp. 13-16, 29 ff.

趙尊) is more difficult to identify. Wang Yün-hsi suggests he is Chao Tao-yin 道隱, who is mentioned in the biography of K'ou Ch'ien-chih 寇謙之 (?-448) as the master of Li P'u 李譜 (the great-grandson of Lao-tzu and the saint who revealed the New Law to K'ou Ch'ien-chih). He is said to have obtained the Way during the Shang dynasty and to be the True Venerable, Chen-tsun 真尊, of one of the thirty-six heavens between heaven and earth. If his heaven was a "grotto heaven," *tung-t'ien* 洞天, under the earth, the Venerable Chao may very well be Chao Tao-yin.²²

This poem looks very much like an introductory prelude to a ceremony, asking the gods (here called True Men or Perfected)²³ to descend and the guardian of the earth to close his door so that earthly demons cannot appear and disturb the worship. The poem is very "Taoist" in every line and implies, in line 3, that the particular form of popular religion this poem accompanied was compatible with religious Taoism. Unless this first poem is actually a poem used by the religious Taoists themselves, this would set it apart from the others in the series.

The second poem, consisting only of two hexameters, bears a Taoist-sounding title: "Lord of the Way," *tao-chün* 道君. This was an official designation given to someone higher in rank than a True Man and is referred to at least as early as T'ao Hung-ching 陶弘景 (456-536).²⁴ But the title's relevance to the two hexameters is not clear, and the religious Taoist terminology disappears in these poems after the title of this second poem.

2. Lord of the Way

In the central court stands a tree that talks by itself,
A plane tree that spreads out its branches and covers them with
leaves.

²² See *Wei shu* 魏書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974) 114, p. 3052; J. R. Ware, "The *Wei Shu* and *Sui Shu* on Taoism," *JAS* 33 (1933), p. 234. Wang, "Shen-hsien," pp. 171-72, believes that since Chao Tao-yin does not seem to appear elsewhere this poem must be dated long enough after the revelation to K'ou Ch'ien-chih (423) for him to have become a popular religious deity.

²³ The term used, *chen-kuan* 真官, becomes common in T'ang times; see references in *T'zu yüan* and *Dai Kan Wa jiten*. Is there perhaps an allusion in the poem's title to the "Nocturnal invocation," *su-ch'i* 宿啓, used to begin ceremonies in later Taoism? See Franciscus Verellen, *Du Guangting (850-923): Taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale*, Mémoires de l'IEHC 30 (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1989), p. 90.

²⁴ In *Chen-ling wei-yeh fu* 真靈位業圖 (*Tao-tsang* no. 73) the highest divinities almost all contain the words "Tao-chün," "Lord of the Way," in their titles. The use of Taoist terminology in these first two poems is not surprising, since at its origins the Taoist religion was close to cults the common people practiced to keep away evil demons; see Ch'en Kuo-fu 陳國符, *Tao-tsang yüan-liu k'ao* 道藏源流考 (1949; Peking: Chung-hua, 1963), pp. 260-61.

There is no lack of magical trees in Chinese folklore and mythology, and this poem probably accompanied the worship of a local example. Wang Yün-hsi quotes a tale from the *Chih-kuai* 志怪 collection of fantastic tales that dates to the end of the Chin dynasty (around A.D. 400).²⁵ In it we discover a man dressed in yellow wearing a white hat who gets into bed with a woman sometime after midnight four or five nights running. When he has left on the morning of the last night, the woman in the bed admits to the hero of the tale that he is "The Youth of the Plane-tree Marquis" ("T'ung-hou lang" 桐侯郎), "the tree in the temple to the east of the road."²⁶ The hero captures him when he appears again the next night, but he has to let him go free when the plane-tree god provokes such high winds that the boat carrying him to the capital seems about to capsize. Perhaps these two (fragmentary?) lines refer to one of his breed, and the "Lord of the Way" is the usurpation of a Taoist title for a purely local cult of popular religion.

The following poem again most probably describes a popular cult. It is particularly difficult to translate because of the *impressifs* or "doublets" (*yang-yang* 佯佯 and *i-i* 翼翼) in the first two lines and (like most of the poems in the series) because of the lack of context: we actually know so little of what went on during these ceremonies.

3. The Sainly Youth

On the left (he dances) without affectation;
On the right (she dances) without stiffness:
The Immortal on one side of the Youth,
The Jade Maiden on the other.
The wine does not taste of crystal sugar
And brings forth the color in (the god's) cheeks.

Wang Yün-hsi quotes two examples of local goddesses called "saints" (*sheng* 聖, as in this poem),²⁷ and he suggests that the Immortal and the Jade Maiden are either goddesses who accompany the Sainly Youth or sorceresses who danced before the god to please him, just like those who had so

²⁵ See Li Chien-kuo 李劍國, *T'ang-ch'ien chih-kuai hsiao-shuo shih* 唐前志怪小說史 (Tientsin: Nan-k'ai ta-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1984), p. 335.

²⁶ *I-uen lei-chü* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Ku-chi, 1982) 86, p. 1527. Wang, "Shen-hsien," pp. 172-73, quotes the *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 956, p. 5b, version; see also Lu Hsün 魯迅, *Ku hsiao-shuo kou-ch'ien* 古小說鉤沈 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1954), p. 189.

²⁷ Wang "Shen-hsien," p. 173, quoting *Nan shih* 51, p. 1264, and Liu Chih-lin's 劉之遴 *Shen-i lu* 神異錄, quoted in *T'ai-p'ing huan-yü chi* 太平寰宇記 92 (not 93 as he says), p. 14a, of an edition whose preface is dated 1793.

angered Hsia T'ung.²⁸ Chang Ya-hsin 張亞新 believes that these two are statues who flank the god.²⁹ I have translated as if it were these two figures who dance before the god, and I take them to be dancers who impersonate the immortal lads and jade lasses that appear so often in Taoist texts.³⁰

The methods for making "crystal sugar," *sha-p'ang* 沙糖, from sugar cane are said to have been imported from Central Asia into China only in the seventh century;³¹ thus does the term here refer to some other form of sugar, or does this anachronism point towards a late date for our poem? Is this sugarless wine (*naturrein*, as the Germans say of their best white wine) of superior quality, suitable for libations to the Saintly Youth? Or is it, as Yü Kuan-ying 余冠英 suggests, of inferior quality, but good enough to brighten the *worshippers'* spirits and thus suitable for use in revering the god?³² The concision and simplicity of this poem make it impossible to know who is correct.

The title of the following poem in two six-line stanzas bears the name of a goddess known as the Goddess of the Ears in early Taoist texts;³³ but it is highly probable that we are again in the presence of a local goddess, and not the Taoist Goddess of the Ears.

4. *The Charming Girl*

I

Wandering north near the rivers and lakes,
We look out upon water plants as far as the eye can see.
The lotus have burst into splendid flowers;
The limpid water is both pure and clear.
Strings accompany a rhythmic song,
Whose sounds seem to linger long in the air.

²⁸ Here he follows Hsiao, *Yüeh-fu wen-hsüeh*, p. 227.

²⁹ Chang, *Lü-ch'ao yüeh-fu shih hsüan* 六朝樂府詩選 (Honan: Chung-chou ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1986), p. 50.

³⁰ See, e.g., *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 55, p. 132. There are many, many other references to Jade Lads and Jade Lasses and the like; see K. M. Schipper, *Index du Yunji qigian*, Publications de l'EFEO 131 (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981), pp. 387-88, for further references. John Lagerwey of the Ecole Française de l'Extrême-Orient, Paris, informs me that today gods and goddesses in popular religious Taoist ceremonies are often flanked by Golden Lads, *chin-t'ung* 金童, and Jade Maidens.

³¹ *Pen-ts'ao kang-mu* 本草綱目 (Peking: Jen-min wei-sheng ch'u-pan-she, 1978) 33, p. 1890; Edward Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1963), p. 153.

³² Yü Kuan-ying, *Yüeh-fu shih-hsüan* 樂府詩選 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh, 1954), pp. 93-94.

³³ *Lung-yü ho-t'u* 龍魚河圖, quoted in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 881, p. 4b, and the commentary to *Huang-fing nei-ching* 黃庭內經 4, quoted in *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 11, p. 23, where the commentary cites *Chen kao* 真誥.

II

As we stroll across the bridge
The water in the stream flows west.
On the bank is an immortal's residence,
Past which the fishes flow to the west.
They do not go away alone:
They go together in threes and twos.

The "songs accompanied by strings" in the penultimate line of the first stanza alert us to the fact that we are near a temple where "songs for the gods" are being played. The first two lines of the second stanza recall two lines of a ballad called "The Song of the White Hair" ("Pai-t'ou yin" 白頭吟): "Strolling near the imperial canal, / Whose waters flow to the west"³⁴ — or "to the east," because the line literally reads "east and west." But this is probably a case in which the poet has used two contrasting words to express the meaning of only one of them.³⁵ I have chosen "west" because of line 4.³⁶ The first line of the second poem may also be read "As we stroll on the bridge to Yüeh," the province southeast of Wu. The "immortal" of line 3 is, of course, the "Charming Girl," and her residence is the temple to her on the river bank. Like the goddess in Poem 6, the Charming Girl is probably a goddess to whom one prayed for marriage or for children. Do the fish symbolize her mate-making power or her power to give children? Fish symbolize fertility in China as in the West.³⁷

We know nothing about the Charming Girl or her cult; we know a little more about the gods referred to in the two succeeding poems.

5. *The Youth of the White Stone*

I

The Youth of the White Stone
Lives near the River.
The Count of the River leads his procession
And the fish follow in the rear.

³⁴ SS 21, p. 622; *YFSC* 41, p. 600.

³⁵ Yü Kuan-ying, "Han Wei shih li te p'ien-i fu-tz'u" 漢魏詩裏的偏義複詞, in his *Han Wei Lü-ch'ao shih lun-ts'ung* 漢魏六朝詩論叢 (Shanghai: T'ang-li ch'u-pan-she, 1953), pp. 40-41.

³⁶ I follow Chang, *Yüeh-fu shih-hsüan*, p. 51; Yü, "P'ien-i fu-tz'u," p. 41, thinks there is an allusion here to the ballad "Ch'ien huan-sheng ko" 前緩聲歌: "In eastward flowing water there must be fish swimming westwards against the current"; he suggests the water in l. 2 is flowing east.

³⁷ Wen I-to 聞一多, "Shen-hua yü shih" 神話與詩, in *Wen I-to ch'üan-chi* 全集 (Peking: San-lien, 1982), pp. 134-36; see also Li, "Yüeh-fu yü hsien-tao," p. 74.

II

The stones piled up (before his temple) are (as beautiful as jade);
 The pine trees planted in straight lines are kingfisher blue.
 The beauty of the Youth is unique:
 The world does not know his equal.

There are numerous White Stone Mountains in China. Wang Yün-hsi has identified the site described in this poem with the White Stone Fort, Pai-shih lei 白石壘, near the Yangtze north of Nanking and northeast of the Stone Citadel, Shih-t'ou ch'eng 石頭城, which played such an important role in medieval history.³⁸ He bases his identification on a story found in *chüan* 9 of *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記 about Yü Liang 庾亮 (289–340).³⁹ According to this story Yü Liang fell ill after having punched a red-eyed demon who had appeared before him in the latrine. He called a fortune-teller (*shu-shih* 術士) who explained:

In the past, during the Su Chün 蘇峻 affair, your lordship prayed for good fortune at the shrine of the White Stone and promised to sacrifice an ox. Since you have not yet requited the god with your sacrifice (*chieh* 解),⁴⁰ this demon was sent to investigate. You cannot be saved.

The *Sou-shen chi* is made up of texts of unequal value, but this story is well attested elsewhere.⁴¹ We know, moreover, that Yü Liang successfully held White Stone Fort against Su Chün who attacked it with vastly superior forces in 328,⁴² and that he subsequently visited the spot.⁴³ We have a short text written by him in a temporary ancestral temple set up on the White Stone announcing the victory to the imperial ancestors.⁴⁴ There can be no doubt that a temple existed on this site in the fourth century and in all probability is the temple celebrated in this poem.

The Count of the River, Chiang-po 江伯, is probably the southern cousin of the redoubtable Count of the (Yellow) River, Ho-po 河伯, but he is not well known. The only references to him I have been able to find are

³⁸ Wang, "Shen-hsien," pp. 174–75; he quotes *Tu-shih fang-yü chi-yao* 讀史方輿紀要 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1957) 20, p. 914.

³⁹ No. 249, p. 120, of the edn. by Wang Shao-ying 汪紹楹 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1979).

⁴⁰ As in *Chuang-tzu* 4; trans. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1968), p. 65, and *Lun-heng* 25, "Chieh-ch'u" 解除.

⁴¹ *SSHY* 17, no. 9; trans. Mather, *New Account*, p. 325; *CS* 95, p. 2475.

⁴² *CS* 99, p. 2630.

⁴³ Probably at the end of his life; cf. *SSHY* 8, no. 107; trans. Mather, *New Account*, p. 237.

⁴⁴ *SS* 16, p. 448.

in a fragment from *Nan Yüeh chih* 南越志 by Shen Huai-yüan 沈懷遠, who lived in the first half of the fifth century,⁴⁵ and a line from a poem by Ch'u Kuang-hsi 儲光義 (fl. 730).⁴⁶ We learn from the former simply that the count's underwater palace and style of living were not different from those of terrestrial counterparts.⁴⁷

It is hard to know just who the White Stone Youth was. There were other gods with the same name who were probably totally unrelated to him.⁴⁸ I would think he was a purely local god, taking his name from the place of his worship, although it is possible that he was, at least partially, identified with the famous immortal called Master of the White Stones, Pai-shih hsien-sheng 白石先生, who appears in *Shen-hsien chuan* 神仙傳.⁴⁹ He seems to be a masculine counterpart of both the Charming Girl we have just met and the female deities we see in the next three sets of poems.

The goddess who is the subject of the following poem is often mentioned in medieval literature; she is the only god mentioned in the titles of these poems who is not completely unknown.

6. *The Young Damsel of the Blue Stream*

The gate opens on pure white water
 Beside the bridge.
 That is where the Young Damsel lives,
 Alone, no young man with her.

The Blue Stream, Ch'ing-hsi 青溪 (sometimes called Pure 清 Stream), was in fact a canal built in 241–242.⁵⁰ Its water came from springs on Mount Chung (or Mount Chiang, or Mount Tzu-chin 紫金 as it is called today), and it entered the Ch'in-huai River almost due south of medieval Nanking. The temple was beside the dyke at the confluence of the canal and the

⁴⁵ *SS* 82, p. 2105.

⁴⁶ "T'ung chu-kung ch'iu-jih yü K'un-ming ch'ih ssu ku" 同諸公秋日遊昆明池思古, *Ch'üan Tang-shih* 全唐詩 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1960) 138, p. 1398.

⁴⁷ *Nan Yüeh chih* quoted in *P'ei-wen yüan-fu* 佩文韻府, under "Chiang-po."

⁴⁸ Rolf A. Stein, "Remarques sur les mouvements du taoïsme politico-religieux au II^e siècle ap. J.-C.," *TP* 50, 1–3 (1963), pp. 43–46, sees an analogy between our Yangtze White Stone Youth and a god with a similar name who appears on a stele dated 183 and who was the spirit of a mountain in Hopeh.

⁴⁹ See Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂, trans., *Shinsen den* 神仙傳, vol. 8 of *Chügoku koten bungaku taikai* 中国古典文学大系 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1969), pp. 355–56. Chang, *Yüeh-fu shih hsüan*, p. 52, is mistaken when he refers to the *Lieh-hsien chuan* as containing a possible model for the Youth of the White Stone.

⁵⁰ *Chien-k'ang shih-lu* 建康實錄 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1986) 2, p. 49. No mention of the temple is made in the work dated 756, which does list a multitude of Buddhist temples that lined the banks of the canal.

Ch'in-huai. It must have been very famous, for one source says the canal was named after it.⁵¹

The Young Damsel of the temple was, according to a fifth-century source, the third youngest sister of Chiang Tzu-wen,⁵² which perhaps accounts for her celebrity and also for her power. According to the same source she was responsible for the death of the father of Hsieh Ling-yün 謝靈運 (385-433), who foolishly killed some fledglings nesting in her temple. Another source of the same period shows she was a music lover, eager to enroll the best players among mortals for her otherworldly concerts, after she has done them in.⁵³

But the Young Damsel, as we see in the short poem devoted to her, seems to have been known especially as an amorous goddess. In an anecdote dated from the end of the fourth century she appears in a dream to a young Buddhist monk whom she had admired when he came to look at her temple. She informs him that he is to die and become her consort. Before his death he informs his brother monks of his misfortune and asks them to visit him in the Young Damsel's temple after his death. They do and are able to talk with him as in life. When, at his request, they chant the Buddhist liturgy for him for the last time, they all burst into tears.⁵⁴

The most famous story about the goddess is found in *Hsü Ch'i Hsieh chi* 續齊諧記 by Wu Chün 吳均 (469-520), a writer highly renowned for his prose style. The story tells of one Chao Wen-shao 趙文韶 (unknown elsewhere), who lived near the central bridge on the Pure (that is, Blue) Stream. Homesick for his native K'uai-chi, he movingly sings a ballad while leaning on his front gate. A young servant girl appears and tells him her mistress enjoyed his singing. Chao invites her over and sings another song for her. She then shows virtuosity at the harp (*k'ung-hou* 箜篌) and accompanies her servant, who sings subtly suggestive songs that describe a lonely woman ready to give her heart to a lover. They pass the night together and exchange gifts. The next day, Chao Wen-shao happens to enter the Pure Stream

Temple where he finds his presents and recognizes the Young Damsel and her attendant statues as the women he saw the night before. They never returned. The event is dated 428.⁵⁵

Are these anecdotes and the four tetrameters of the ditty-like poem enough to say that the Young Damsel is a goddess of love, and that the bridge next to her temple is a bridge that brings lovers (like the Cowherd and the Weaver-girl) together?⁵⁶ It certainly seems as if we are in the presence here of an "excessive cult," one devoted to the union of lovers and marriage. But the character of the cult seems to have evolved, and in Ming times the Young Damsel was revered as a loyal wife who, during a period of disorders, drowned herself and her two daughters in the Blue Stream, in all likelihood to preserve her chastity.⁵⁷

The following two poems also describe goddesses, but they are goddesses about whom we know nothing except what we learn from the poems themselves.

7. *The Damsels of the Lake Shore*

I

In the area surrounding the shores of Red Mount Lake
In the first three months of the year
The marshes filled with aquatic plants are covered in green.

II

The shores of the lake are the Red Mount's shingle beach;
The Great Damsel lives on the east of the lake,
The Second Damsel on the west.

The Red Mount Reservoir, Ch'ih-shan t'ang 赤山塘, was originally an artificial lake built during the Ch'ih-wu 赤烏 era (238-250). It was repaired continually during the centuries and still exists under the name Red Mount Lake 湖, east of Hu-shu 湖熟 and south of Chü-jung 句容, Kiangsu, which is southeast of Nanking.⁵⁸ The word *chiu* 就, which I have translated as

⁵¹ Ku Yeh-wang 顧野王 (d. after 569), *Yü-ti chih* 輿地志, reproduced in Wang Mo 王謨, comp., *Han T'ang ti-li shu-ch'ao* 漢唐地理書鈔 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1961), pp. 23b-24a, where the stream is called "Pure," *ch'ing* 清.

⁵² Liu Ching-shu 劉敬叔 (d. ca. 470), *I-yüan* 異苑 (Chin-tai pi-shu edn. [Shanghai: Po-ku-chai, 1922]), 5, pp. 3b-4a.

⁵³ Liu I-ch'ing 劉義慶 (403-444), *Tu-ming lu* 幽明錄, quoted in *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* 109, p. 8b, and *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 577, p. 8b.

⁵⁴ In *Sou-shen hou-chi* 搜神後記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1981), no. 50, pp. 31-32, this anecdote is said to take place at the end of the third century (during the T'ai-k'ang era); *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* 太平廣記 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1961) 294, p. 2343, gives the end of the fourth century (during the T'ai-yüan era), which is more appropriate.

⁵⁵ This story is translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in *Poetry and Prose of the Han Wei and Six Dynasties* (Peking: Panda Books, 1986), pp. 129-31; the Chinese text can be found in *Han Wei ts'ung-shu* 漢魏叢書 (1791 edn.), pp. 8b-9b.

⁵⁶ Li, "Yüeh-fu yü hsien-tao," pp. 74-75, suggests so.

⁵⁷ Hsiao, *Yüeh-fu wen-hsiieh*, pp. 227-28, quotes *Chiang-ning fu chih* 江寧府志, cited in *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng*.

⁵⁸ See *Tu-shih fang-yü chi-yao* 20, p. 945; *Chung-kuo hsün yü-t'u* 中國新輿圖, 3d edn. (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1917), plate 10, still shows the lake.

"shore," nowhere has that meaning. Only the *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu* 說文解字 defines the character as meaning "heights, elevated."⁵⁹

The third line of the first poem is found in various forms among the ballads of this and later periods.⁶⁰ The second line of the second poem reads: "The Great Damsel (is) to the east of the Great Lake." I follow a variant found in the *Ku-chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng* encyclopedia.⁶¹ The two poems resemble the poems concerning the Charming Girl (No. 4): first a description of the surrounding scenery, then of the shrine itself.

The following poem is the last in the series that is clearly related to popular religion. It again concerns an otherwise unknown goddess.

8. *The Damsel's Grace*

I

The Brilliant Damsel follows the Eight Winds
In the dense vapors between the clouds and the sun.
Animals of all kinds lead her procession;
The Scarlet Bird, the unicorn, and phoenix bring up the rear.

II

How high are the cypresses on the mountain's crest:
Winter and summer their needles do not wither!
They, above all, receive the grace of heaven
And flourish, branch and needle, luxuriantly.

The last two lines of the first stanza strongly resemble the first line of Poem No. 5, to the Youth of the White Stone. In both cases there is a suggestion of a ritual procession, aquatic in the case of Poem No. 5, airborne here. The Scarlet Bird, one of the twenty-eight stellar mansions as well as an auspicious omen, the unicorn, and the phoenix are all fabulous creatures that appear in order to welcome sage kings. It is very possible that in these two poems we see the description of religious processions,⁶² of the kind we know took place in the Middle Ages in China.⁶³ The second stanza is again (as is the case with the first stanzas of Poems 4 and 7) a description, this time of a tree-clad mountain.

⁵⁹ *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1963), 5 *hsia*, p. 11a.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 25, p. 364. ⁶¹ As in n. 4, above, but p. 1b.

⁶² Li, "Yüeh-fu yü hsien-tao," p. 75; he refers to an article by Piet van der Loon translated into Chinese that appears in *Chung-wai wen-hsüeh* 中外文學 5 (1979), presumably "Les origines rituelles du théâtre chinois," *JA* 265 (1977), pp. 141-68.

⁶³ Hama Kazue 濱一衛, "Gigaku genryū kō" 伎楽源流考, *Chūgoku bungaku hō* 中国文学報 9 (1958), pp. 1-16.

Is the Brilliant Damsel a sun goddess, as Wang Yün-hsi believes?⁶⁴ This would make her the only astral deity, as opposed to purely local, terrestrial gods, in our series. It would help explain the third line of the second stanza: the conifers on the mountain, close to the sun and the stars, receive greater benefit from their "effulgences," *ching* 景, than the plants and creatures of the plains.⁶⁵ But a "sun goddess" seems out of place among these homely local divinities.

The last three sets of poems also seem out of place in this series of "songs for the gods," for they have nothing religious about them.

9. *The Young Lotus Pickers*

I

From our boats we pick water chestnut leaves,
And, in passing, pluck lotus flowers.
We strike our oars and call our comrades
To unite their voices in the song of the lotus pickers!

II

In the east lake boys (sing) "Pulling Water-oats";
In the west lake, the songstresses (sing) "Picking Water-chestnuts."
We do not sing for pleasure,
But to dissipate our sadness.

These two quatrains are very much in the style of the southern popular ballads called Wu-sheng and Hsi-ch'ü, and it is hard to see how they would have been used in a religious ceremony. They seem to be modeled on popular "gathering songs" and to have been written by a fairly sophisticated poet.

The second stanza is very hard to understand without at least two textual emendations suggested first by Yü Kuan-ying,⁶⁶ and incorporated in the 1979 edition of *Yüeh-fu shih-chi*.⁶⁷ These emendations are based, in part, on the existence of two ballad titles among the southern popular ballads, "Pulling Rushes" ("Pa p'u" 拔蒲)⁶⁸ and "Gathering Water Chestnuts" ("Ts'ai ling" 採菱).⁶⁹ But, however one interprets these lines, the last

⁶⁴ Wang, "Shen-hsien," p. 178.

⁶⁵ See Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," in Welch and Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism*, pp. 177-78.

⁶⁶ Yü, *Yüeh-fu shih-hsüan*, p. 96.

⁶⁷ *YFSC* 47, p. 686.

⁶⁸ *YFSC* 49, pp. 718-19.

⁶⁹ *YFSC* 51, pp. 739 ff. The earliest known are by Pao Chao 鮑照 (405?-466). "Water-oats" translates *ku* 藨 (*Zizania latifolia*).

two lines of the second quatrain are imbued with a form of melancholy that seems to take them out of the category of "popular" poetry and to make one feel the presence of a man of letters. There is a pun in the penultimate line: "We do not sing for pleasure." This can also mean "We do not sing to make music," a common pun throughout Chinese literature and not at all surprising in these southern ballads, where puns abound. Both the fact that this poem is so literary and that it has an emotional meaning in itself make it difficult for me to follow Li Feng-mao, who couples it with Poem 7 and sees them both as "possible expressions of sacrificial ceremonies concerned with agriculture."⁷⁰

Aside from its enigmatic title, which may have religious overtones, the following poem again seems difficult to interpret as a "song for the gods."

10. *The Boy under Brightness*

I

He presses his horse up the slope before him,
The horse's hooves striking against the pebbles.
I don't care if they do strike the horse's hooves;
I only care for the lad on horseback!

II

Young Ch'en prancing about on his bay and white,
Young Lu mounted on his piebald steed,
Turning about the archery gallery,
They gaze at the gate, not wanting to return home.

Again we have here two quatrains very similar to southern popular ballads. The first looks like a love song, showing a young woman's solicitude for her young lover and her indifference to what he might be doing to his horse. The second is a vignette of young men's life, perhaps rich young men eager to prolong their sport and not go back to their families. If the two quatrains form a pair, the second could be put into the mouth of the lover of one of the young men, who is jealous of the attraction of the archery gallery over her own. I have accepted Wang Yün-hsi's suggestion and changed *k'ung* 孔, the second character of the first line of the second quatrain, to *lang* 郎, making it parallel with the second line.⁷¹

The last two quatrains are quoted almost word for word from other ballads, the first almost surely from Han times, the second a southern ballad

roughly contemporary with the "songs for the gods." The title is again obscure.

11. *Of a Common Birth*

I

Man's life lasts not one hundred years
And yet he holds within him one thousand years of woe!
Learn quickly how fast our span is run
And grasp a torch to wander forth in the night!

II

The years and months speed by
Already white autumn is upon us.
The crickets are singing in the empty hall:
Sadness comes, filling one with melancholy.

The first quatrain is a slightly modified version of four lines from "Hsi-men hsiung" 西門行;⁷² the second quatrain is even less modified from "Tzu-yeh pien-ko" 子夜變歌, No. 3.⁷³ The first quatrain is a carpe diem, the second, a lament for the passage of time. "White autumn" refers to the fact that in the system of correspondences of classical thought autumn is "white" or "colorless," *su* 素 (spring is green, summer red, and so forth). What these two have to do with the general title, "Of a Common Birth," is difficult to ascertain. Is it quasi-biblical: "As we are all born, (so shall we die . . .)?" The melancholy and sophistication of these two quatrains seem hard to reconcile with the rest of the series, as heterogeneous as this latter may seem. One is tempted to agree with Obi Kōichi: in the last two poems "of the series in particular we hardly feel any religious elements. Have everyday folksongs been diverted here and used just as they are as sacrificial texts?"⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

The "Songs for the Gods" are a unique set of poems used in popular religion. In much reduced scale they represent for early medieval China what some of the poetry of the *Shih ching* and the *Ch'u tz'u* (the "Chiu ko"

⁷² *YFSC* 37, p. 549; it also appears in no. 15 of the Nineteen Old Poems, *Wen hsüan* 文選 (Hu K'o-chia edn.) 29, p. 7a.

⁷³ *YFSC* 45, p. 655.

⁷⁴ Obi Kōichi 小尾 郊一 and Okamura Sadao 岡村 貞雄, *Ko gafu* 古樂府 (Tokyo: Tōkai daigaku, 1980), p. 306. Obi translates 10 of the 18 poems of the series (1-6, 9, 1, 10, 1, and 11.2).

⁷⁰ Li, "Yüeh-fu yü hsien-tao," p. 75. ⁷¹ Wang, "Shen-hsien," p. 179.

in particular) represent for early and late ancient China. They were preserved in a collection made close to a century after their creation and thus their authenticity need not be rejected out of hand. The gods they mention and the ceremonies they allude to are, for the most part, unknown.

Are they a proper "series"? Are they given in the order they were sung during a single ceremony? The first poem is a request for the gods to descend, the very type of poem one would expect at the beginning of a ceremony. It can be compared to a poem by Wang Wei, the first of two contained in the same chapter of *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* as the "Songs for the Gods," which describes a sacrifice to the goddess of Mount Yü 漁 (Hopeh), a poem entitled "Welcoming the God," "Ying-shen" 迎神.⁷⁵

The succeeding six titles (eleven poems) are all to different divinities. The White Stone Youth, the Young Damsel of the Blue Stream, and the Damsels from the Lake Shore, the only divinities we can locate, all come from the Nanking region, although the first and last are close to fifty kilometers apart. Would a single ceremony include six different divinities from localities so far apart? We know so little of these cults that it is impossible to decide.

But the most difficult problem is to know how to account for the last six poems (three titles). Are they just popular ballads from Wu that have simply been added to these religious songs by mistake? They are the only sets of poems in the series that correspond exactly in their prosody to the Wu ballads, being pairs of pentametric quatrains. Are they really ceremonial songs vaguely concerned with agriculture or some sort of play or sport that accompanied religious ceremonies much like the foot races that accompanied Easter celebrations in the Middle Ages in Europe? Or are they "everyday folksongs" that somehow were used as poems of separation? The second poem by Wang Wei to the goddess of Mount Yü is called "Accompanying the Goddess," "Sung-shen" 送神, and the last quatrain of the "Songs for the Gods" belongs to a category ("Tzu-yeh pien-ko") that was sung as "accompanying" songs at the end of a set of ballads.⁷⁶ The problem is complicated and perhaps insoluble, but these last six poems certainly seem to be popular folksongs unrelated to the preceding twelve.

The literary quality of most of this poetry is not very high, which is perhaps a confirmation of the fact that it was actually conceived as "utilitarian" literature by unlettered authors. It is true that the poetic description that makes up Poem I of "The Charming Girl" is lovely. The simplicity

and awkwardness of many of the others, too, is striking (especially during this period of highly ornate verse), and the last poems compare favorably with many of the other popular ballads of the period.⁷⁷ It is these that have most interested anthologists. But the greatest value of these songs is the testimony they give to the existence of a popular religion about which we know so little.

⁷⁷ Lu K'an-ju 陸侃如 and Feng Yüan-chün 馮沅君, *Chung-kuo shih-shih* 中國詩史 (Peking: Tso-chia ch'u-pan-she, 1957), vol. 1, p. 232, think the opening poem to be "extremely clumsy," but consider the "love poetry" to be good, citing as examples nos. 5, 2, 6, and 10.1. These poems make the authors think of the "Chiu ko" of the *Ch'u tz'u*, and they place these "popular sacrificial songs without any doubt far above the odes of the Chou (*Shih*, nos. 266-296) or (the Han ritual songs) 'Fang-chung tz'u-yüeh' 房中祠樂." The latter refers to "An-shih fang-chung ko" 安世房中歌, trans. E. Chavannes, *Les Mémoires historiques* (rpt. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1967) 3, pp. 605-11, from *Han shu* 22, pp. 1046-52.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|-------------------------------|
| CS | <i>Chin shu</i> 晉書 |
| SS | <i>Sung shu</i> 宋書 |
| SSHY | <i>Shih-shuo hsün-yü</i> 世說新語 |
| YFSC | <i>Yüeh-fu shih-chi</i> 樂府詩集 |

⁷⁵ YFSC 47, p. 687.

⁷⁶ YFSC 45, p. 655; 30, p. 441. See also Wang, *Liu-ch'ao yüeh-fu yü min-ko*, pp. 63-70.