

A Reading of Li Bo's Biography in the *Old History of the Tang**

William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Madison, Wisconsin)

1) Introduction

Although Li Bo's poetry is held in high esteem by Western students of Chinese literature, their studies of his life have produced quite distinct portraits. Victor Mair ("Li Po's Letters in Pursuit of Political Patronage"¹) has shown that Li Bo maintained an interest in political life. Paul Kroll in a series of articles (and a forthcoming book) has explored the Daoist and Buddhist aspects of his life and works.² Elling Eide's seminal study ("On Li Bo"³) has attempted to address the poet's possible non-Chinese origins and the effects this may have had on his poetic *oeuvre*. Most damning, of course, was Arthur Waley's little biography, *The Poetry and Career of Li Po, 701–762 A.D.*⁴ It praises only Li Bo's genius as a 'banished immortal,' while condemning him for the drunkenness that "disqualified him from office," arguing that his understanding of Daoism was flawed, claiming that he was "almost wholly indifferent" to the plight of the common people, and concluding that he was generally "boastful, callous, dissipated, irresponsible and untruthful" (pp. 100-102). Modern Chinese studies by Yu Xianhao 郁賢皓, Shi Fengyu 施逢雨, and others have presented a more balanced portrait, but once again a portrait painted with a modern brush.⁵ In this study I want to return to the earliest official assessment of Li Bo's life, that written by an unknown biographer for the "Wenyuan zhuan" 文苑傳 of the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書.⁶ Although this biography has been criticized almost since its completion in the late tenth century,⁷ and although the account of Li in the *Xin Tang shu* is con-

* This paper grew out of discussions in my History of Chinese Literature class during the spring of 1997. I want to thank the members of the class – Chen Bingmei, Scott W. Galer, Meowhui Goh, and Su Zhi – as well as subsequent classes for their useful suggestions.

¹ *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44 (1984): 123-53.

² Cf. Kroll's "Li Po's Rhapsody on the Great P'eng-bird," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 12 (1984):1-17; "Li Po's Transcendent Diction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 99-118; "Verses from on High: The Ascent of T'ai-shan," *T'oung Pao* 69 (1983): 223-60, "Li Po's Purple Haze," *Taoist Resources* 7.2 (1997): 21-37, "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High Tang," *T'oung Pao* 84.1-3 (1998): 62-101, and his recent *Dharma Bell and Dharani Pillar: Li Po's Buddhist Inscriptions* (Kyoto: The Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2002).

³ In *Perspectives on the Tang*, Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, pp. 367-403.

⁴ London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950.

⁵ See Yu Xianhao's "Preface" to *Li Bo shi xuanji* 李白詩選集 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1990), Yu's "Li Bo" entry in *Tang caizi zhuan jiaojian* 唐才子傳校箋, Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮, ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987), 1:2.380-95, and Shi Fengyu 施逢雨, "Li Bo shengping kaosuo [shang/xia]" [李白生平考所[上/下]], *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報, New Series 23.4 and 24.1 (December 1993 and March 1994): 361-400 and 45-84, respectively.

⁶ All references will be to the Zhonghua Shuju edition of the text published in 1975 and edited by Niu Zhigong 牛致功 and others at Shaanxi Shifan Daxue. Li Bo's biography is in *juan* 190A, pp. 5053-54.

⁷ See, for example, Zeng Gong's 曾鞏 (1019–1083) comments in his "*Li Bo shiji houxu*" 李白詩集後序 (in his *Zeng Gong ji* 曾鞏集 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984]), 1:12.194.

sidered by some to be the “basic source” for his life, the *Jiu Tang shu* contains the earliest full-scale “life” of Li Bo.⁸

In order to better comprehend this “life,” however, a brief review of the structure of official biographies may be in order. Both Peter Olbricht and Denis Twitchett have perceived a common structure in many early biographies. From Olbricht’s depiction of a standard official biography in his “Die Biographie in China”⁹ the following components can be extracted: (1) the names of the person depicted; (2) the hometown of his family; (3) the names of his paternal ancestors; (4) when the biographee’s father has died early, the family name of the mother and her role as educator of the son is given (often in the form of an anecdote); (5) topical comments about the virtue or character of the individual; (6) the date when the examination was passed; (7) the series of promotions and setbacks in the person’s official career; (8) a seasoning of the individual’s “words and deeds” during his career; (9) a description of the friends and colleagues the person had; (10) linguistic resonances of earlier biographies which associate the biographee with precedent behavior by well-known individuals of the past; (11) historical documents or literary works, as appropriate; (12) accounts of attempts to retire based on illness or old age; (13) a sentence on the means, date, and age of the subject at his demise; (14) posthumous titles, and (15) a record of his descendants.

Twitchett, in his “Chinese Biographical Writing” (in *Historians of China and Japan*, W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank, eds [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], pp. 95-114; the citation below is from pp. 107-8) also sees an underlying structure to these biographies:

[The] preliminary section of a biography provided the reader with the information that enabled him to ‘place’ the subject in his relationship with his family. This relationship was of particular significance during the medieval period when the great aristocratic families had surrounded themselves with privilege. The *lieh-chuan* continues with the ‘biography’ itself. These sections are constructed around an outline career, presented in the form of the subject’s successive official appointments, promotions, his titles, honors, enfeoffments, etc. These appointments are rarely dated systematically, and the total effect might be compared to a graph of which only one-of the co-ordinates – that of rank – can be accurately determined, while that of time is known only at a few points. It is this outline of an official career which suffers most from the compilation of the *lieh-chuan* directly from the *hsing-chuang* 行狀 (account of conduct).

The skeleton provided by this *curriculum vitae* is filled out by a variety of devices. The first of these, and one which is particularly widespread, is the use of formulaic passages and conventional episodes designed to demonstrate the individual’s fitness for the category under which the historian wishes to include him. Professor Herbert Franke has already drawn attention to a number of these

⁸ The text has been translated by Shigeyoshi Obata 小畑董良 in his *The Works of Li Po, the Chinese Poet* (Rpt. New York: Paragon, 1965 [New York: Dutton, 1922]), pp. 204-5. Obata also translated the biography in the *Xin Tang shu* (pp. 206-9) which is also rendered by William Dolby in *Renditions* 20 (1990): 111-15.

The best concise account of the composition of the two Tang histories remains that of Robert des Rotours in his *Le Traité des examens* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1932; pp. 56-71). Denis Twitchett in his *The Writing of Official History under the Tang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) has two relevant chapters: 8) “Biographies” (pp. 62-83) and 12) “The Compilation of the *Chiu Tang shu*” (pp. 191-7; this chapter does not have include much information on the compilation of biographies). Twitchett notes (p. 196) that the traditional attribution of the *Jiu Tang shu* to Liu Xu 劉昉 (888–947) needs to be revised, since Liu was merely the man who wrote the memorial submitting the work to the throne, and most of the compilation was done by the trio of Zhang Zhaoyuan 張昭遠, Wang Shen 王伸, and Jia Wei 賈緯.

⁹ *Saeculum* 8 (1957): 224-35.

topoi, and his list might be considerably expanded¹⁰. ... They are a feature against which the reader should be constantly on his guard, as they are as often attempts to link the subject with some paragon of Antiquity as they are descriptions, even in the most oblique and metaphorical sense, of his actual character or conduct. ... The third type of material used to add body to the biography is the description of the actions of the individual in his official capacity. ...

The biography ends with the death of the subject and with the posthumous honors which were accorded him, and this is frequently followed by an eulogy and brief account of his descendents. This material is almost invariably quoted from one or other of the funerary compositions.

This description of the typical *lieb-chuan* entry is perhaps unfair to the occasional biography in which a happy turn or phrase or some vivid use of detail suddenly throws light on the individual. But the typical example is as dry and impersonal as the Annals themselves, and the modern reader in search of some clue to the personality of the subject will find it very difficult to form any picture of the man as an individual, even when he has mastered the clichéd forms in which the character is described.

The *Jiu Tang shu* biography of Li Bo was compiled in a fashion which corresponds little to these idealized conceptions of official lives. There is no *xing zhuang* 行狀 (account of conduct) on which to base the biography. In fact, although the *Xin Tang shu* biography seems likely to have consulted the prefaces by Li Yangbing 李陽冰 (fl. 760–765; preface dated 762) and Yue Shi 樂史 (930–1007) to their collections of Li Bo's works, as well as the the burial inscriptions by Fan Chuazheng 范傳正 (fl. 800–815) and Pei Jing 裴敬 (fl. 840),¹¹ some of which must also have been available to the compilers of the *Jiu Tang shu*. Yet the biography of Li Bo in the *Jiu Tang shu* has no identifiable sources and in fact is often in conflict with existing sources.¹² It seems to conform to a Tang *liezhuan* as described by Twitchett more recently:

The biographies including in the *lieb-chuan* were not biographies in our sense at all. They made no attempt at a full portrait of their subject, or even as a rounded account of all his activities. They described an individual's performance of a specific function or role.

Thus, based on my reading of Li Bo's biography in the *Jiu Tang shu*, I believe that the biographer's intent was to cast Li Bo in the role of a "banished immortal," an epithet that was later commonly applied to him. To support this reading, I shall translate the biography below, emphasizing the concepts suggested by Olbricht and Twitchett that an official biography is made up of meaningful, specified sections. Following the translation of each section, a brief commentary will be provided. This assessment will close with some remarks towards a conclusion.

¹⁰ See Herbert Franke, "Some Remarks on the Interpretation of Chinese Dynastic Histories," *Oriens* 3(1950): 113-22, and especially pp. 120-1.

¹¹ Li Yangbing's collection of Li Bo's works was titled *Caotang ji* 草堂集 and his preface can be found in *Li Bo ji jiaozhu* 李白集較注, Zhu Jincheng 朱金城 and Qu Shuiyuan 瞿蛻園, eds. (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1980), pp. 1789-90; Yue Shi edited *Li Hanlin biji* 李翰林別集 and his preface is in *Ibid.*, pp. 1791-2; the two inscriptions are respectively titled "Tang Zuoshiyi Hanlin Xueshi Li Gong xin mubei" 唐左拾遺翰林學士李公新墓碑, *Ibid.*, pp. 1780-2 and "Hanlin Xueshi Li Gong mubei" 翰林學士李公墓碑, *Ibid.*, p. 1783-4. In addition to these works, there are also Li Hua's 李華 (ca. 715 – ca. 774) "Gu Hanlin Xueshi Li Jun muzhi" 故翰林學士李君墓記, *Ibid.*, p. 1779, and Liu Quanbai's 劉全白 (fl. 774–790) "Tang gu Hanlin Xueshi Li Jun jieji" 唐故翰林學士李君碣記, *Ibid.*, pp. 1779-80, neither of which seems to have influenced the official biographies.

¹² It is possible that the compilers consulted Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779–831) "Tang Jianjiao Gongbu Yuanwailang Du Jun muximing" 唐檢校工部員外郎杜君墓係銘, in *Du shi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳註. Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 (1638–1771), ed. and comm. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979), 5:2235-7.

2) The *Jiu Tang shu* Biography of Li Bo

Section 1 of the biography (*Jiu Tang shu*, 190C:5053-54) gives Li Bo's names and is the first part of the 'placing' portion of the biography:

[5053] Li Bo, style name Taibo, was a native of Shandong: 李白字太白、山東人。

Shandong is a problem here as was noticed very early on. Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1019–1080) in his “*Li Bo shiji houxu*” 李白詩集後序 (Postface to the Collected Works of Li Bo) pointed out that the *Jiu Tang shu* must have erred here.¹³ The *Xin Tang shu*, various other traditional commentators, and modern scholars such as Chen Youjin 陳友琴 have all concurred in this assessment of the *Jiu Tang shu* and in verifying Li Bo's western origins.¹⁴ Indeed, in Tang times “Shandong” meant something similar to what it meant in Han times, referring to the vast area east of Mount Yao 嶠 and the Han-ku 函谷 Pass; it would not normally refer to a specific region. One solution to the problem was suggested by another early editor of Li Bo's works, Yue Shi, who noted that Li Bo referred to himself as a “Shandong ren” 山東人 and that this tradition was somehow misunderstood by the *Jiu Tang shu* compilers.¹⁵ It was in this sense that Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) wrote the line “You are on good terms with Li Bo of Shandong” 汝與山東李白好.¹⁶ Qian Qianyi's 錢謙益 (1582–1664) note to the poem supports this conclusion: “It is likely that when Bo lived in reclusion at Culai his contemporaries used Shandong as an epithet to refer to him. For this reason in Du's poem he is also said to be ‘Shandong Li Bo.’ Zeng Gong was wrong in taking the *Old [Tang] History* [text] as an error.” 蓋白隱於徂徠，時人皆以山東人稱之。故杜詩亦曰山東李白。曾鞏以舊史為誤，非也。¹⁷ Provisionally let us allow Qian Qianyi the final word on this subject and turn to Section 2, which tells of Li Bo's youth:

In his youth he had surpassing talent, his ambition and spirit were expansive and soared uncontrolled,¹⁸ and he had a heart intent on transcending the world. 少有逸才、志氣宏放、飄然有超世之心。

The text here resonates with the language used to describe some of Li Bo's spiritual ancestors. The *locus classicus* of *yi cai* 逸才 (surpassing talent)¹⁹ in this context could well be the depiction of the youth-

¹³ Zeng Gong, *Zeng Gong ji* 曾鞏集 (2v. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984), 1:12.194.

¹⁴ Chen Youjin's conclusion is presented in his “Yu Yu Pingbo Xiansheng shangque Shandong Li Bo de wenti” 與俞平伯先生商榷山東李白的問題, in *Li Bo yanjiu lunwenji* 李白研究論文集. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1964, pp. 265-9. The opening of the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975) biography of Li Bo is one of the bases for such claims and reads (202.5762-4): “At the end of the Sui his ancestors were moved to the Western Regions because of an offense. At the beginning of the Shenlong era (705 A.D.) they escaped back [to China], sojourning at Baxi.” 其先隋末以罪徙西域，神龍初通還，客巴西。Baxi, i.e. Mianzhou 綿州, was located near the modern city of Mianyangshi 綿陽市 in Sichuan (see Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集 [Shanghai: Ditu Chubanshe, 1981], 5:65).

¹⁵ Yue Shi's (fl. 1000) comments, along with those by a number of other critics, were cited by Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602) in a section entitled “Shandong Li Bo” 山東李白 in Hu's *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 少室山房筆叢 (Rpt. Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1965), 1:9.118-21.

¹⁶ In Du's “Su Duan Xue Fu yan jian Xue Hua zuige” 蘇端薛復筵簡薛華醉歌, *Du shi xiangzhu*, 1:4.294 (see also the translation by Erwin von Zach, *Tu Fu's Gedichte* (2v., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952; 1:3.78-9).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:4.295.

¹⁸ Does this recall the line from Du Fu's early poem “Chunri yi Li Bo” 春日憶李白 (*Du shi xiangzhu*, 1:1.52-4): 白也詩無敵，飄然思無群 “Soaring, his thoughts are without match”? (see also von Zach, *Tu Fu's Gedichte*, 1:1.8.

¹⁹ Li Bo himself is referred to as *yi cai qi gao* 逸才氣高 “of surpassing talent and a high spirit” in an anecdote in Meng Qi's 孟棻 (fl. 875–890) *Ben shi shi* 本事詩 (The Basis of Events in Poems, preface 876; cited in *Li Bo ji jiaozhu*, 4:1899-1900). The *Ben shi shi* was written before the start of the compilation of the *Jiu Tang shu*, but whether this passage was

ful Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–243) in his biography in the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962, 35.930): “As a youth Liang had a talent which surpassed the crowd, an eminent and lordly spirit, was eight *chi* in height, and his visage was grand indeed, so that his contemporaries all found him outstanding.” 亮少有逸群之才，英霸之氣，身長八尺，容貌甚偉，時人異之。 Or it might suggest the description of Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328–376) in his biography in the *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974, 92.2319): “Hong had a surpassing talent and his literary works were exceedingly beautiful.” 宏有逸才，文章絕美。 The reference of the following four-character line – “his ambition and spirit were expansive and soared uncontrolled” (zhiqi hongfang 志氣宏放) – seems surely to refer to Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263) whom, his biographer tells us (*Jin shu* 49.1359), “had an extraordinary visage and his ambition and spirit were expansive and soared uncontrolled.” 容貌傑，志氣宏放。 The overall effect of this passage is to link Li Bo to prominent men of the Six Dynasties through a matrix of textual resonances. Devoid of a clear geographical ancestry of his own, the *Jiu Tang shu* biography begins to provide a textual line for Li Bo. The author of this biography saw similarities between Li Bo and Zhuge Liang, Yuan Hong, and Ruan Ji – men we have seen Twitchett above refer to as “paragons of Antiquity.” Zhuge Liang and Ruan Ji and their eccentricities are well known. Yuan Hong, however, seems to be perhaps the closest spiritual double, since his background is unclear (he was an orphan), he raised himself up from poverty through his literary talents, and he then got in trouble with his patrons (Huan Wen 桓溫 [312–373], for example) through his writings. He was also known for spontaneous composition.²⁰ All similarities to Li Bo.

Section 3 returns to the subject of Li Bo's family and home:

His father was Commandant of Rencheng, and accordingly he made his home there. 父為任城尉，因家焉。

The author of this biography for some reason did not feel secure to tell us about Li Bo's origins. Was it because he felt these origins were clouded in controversy? It is difficult to say. Rencheng is located near modern Jining 濟寧 City in Shandong (Tan Qixiang, 5:45), about sixty-five miles southwest of Mount Culai 徂徠 (see also the passage immediately below).²¹

Section 4 tells us about Li Bo's friends and associates of his early years:

In his youth he lived in reclusion at Mount Culai together with various other young scholars in Lu, such as Kong Chaofu, Han Mian,²² Pei Zheng, Zhang Shuming, and Tao Mian; they uninhibitedly sang songs and indulged in wine so that at that time they were called “The Six Recluses of the Bamboo Stream.” 少與魯中諸生孔巢父、韓沔、裴政、張叔明、陶沔等隱於徂徠山、酣歌縱酒、時號「竹溪六逸。」

Here the problem of Li Bo's movements and activities during his early years arises again. According to many modern accounts of Li Bo's life, after his birth in Sichuan he remained there until he was

one of the sources for the “Li Bo liezhuan” is impossible to say (on *Ben shi shi* see the notice by Zhou Xunchu 周勳初 in *Tang yulin jiaozheng* 唐語林校證 edited by Zhou (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), 2:793.

²⁰ See the several anecdotes related to him cited in chapter four (“Wenxue” 文學) of the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (see also Richard B. Mather, trans., *A New Account of Tales of the World* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976], pp. 138-41) and his biography in the *Jin shu* cited above.

²¹ According to the long biographical coda added to a story about Li Bo's meeting with He Zhizhang on first coming to the capital and included in *Ben shi shi* (as cited in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Rpt. Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1981], 1:201.1511-2), Li Bo spent his days in Rencheng carousing with likeminded men.

²² Han Mian should be Han Jun 準 (cf. *Xin Tang shu*, 202.5762). Other than Kong Chaofu these men are unknown outside this text; on Kong see his biographies in *Jiu Tang shu*, 154.4095 and *Xin Tang shu*, 163.5007.

twenty-four years old, spending some time in reclusion at Mount Min 岷.²³ He then moved down the Changjiang 長江 to Anlu 安陸²⁴ where he was “based” until 737.²⁵ How could Li Bo thus have been a youth in reclusion at Mount Culai in Lu?²⁶ He may have been able to pass through Lu in the mid-730s, but not to live in reclusion there. In fact, according to the *Xin Tang shu* and many modern accounts of his life, it was the twenty-eighth year of the Kaiyuan era (740) before he reached Lu, befriended Kong Chaofu and the others, and lived in reclusion for a time.²⁷ Yu Xianhao (“Preface,” pp. 405) suggests that Li Bo’s reclusion at this time may have been related to the Tang practice of asking local officials to recommend talented recluses in their area. According to Li’s biography in the *Xin Tang shu* (202.5762) Li Bo’s early reclusion in Sichuan led to his recommendation for a local examination (which he failed).

But if the reality of this passage fails, textuality succeeds. The connection between Li Bo and the Six Dynasties continues in the epithet “Six Recluses of the Bamboo Stream” which recalls, of course, the *Zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢 “Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove.”

Section 5 continues to tell of Li Bo’s reclusion, an activity which in this biography almost takes the place of an “official career”:

At the beginning of the Tianbao period (742–755), he traveled with no fixed residence to Kuaiji, and together with the Daoist priest Wu Yun lived in reclusion in Shan. 天寶初、客遊會稽、與道士吳筠隱於剡中。

According to the *Xin Tang shu* (202.5762), Li Bo left the reclusive life (or abandoned the pose) in 742. Yu Xianhao notes that most modern scholars reject the idea that Li Bo and Wu Yun went to Kuaiji or Shan²⁸ at this time.²⁹

In Section 6 Li Bo is called to the capital by an imperial envoy.

Before long Xuanzong summoned Yun to go to the capital city, and Yun recommended him to the court, which sent an envoy to call him in, and together with Yun he attended on the emperor from the Hanlin Academy. 既而玄宗召筠赴京師、筠薦之於朝遣使召之、與筠俱待詔翰林。

The *Xin Tang shu* (202.5762-3) account is somewhat different: “At the beginning of the Tianbao era, Li Bo went south into the Kuaiji [mountains] and was on good terms with Wu Yun. Yun was summoned and for this reason Bo also went to Chang’an. He went to see He Zhizhang 賀知章 (659–744). When Zhizhang took a look at his writings, he exclaimed, ‘You are a banished immortal!’ He spoke of him to Xuanzong and the emperor summoned him to an audience in the Golden-bell Hall; he discussed current affairs and Li Bo presented a memorial. The Emperor granted him a meal, personally preparing a stew for him and issuing a decree that he serve in the Hanlin [Academy].”

²³ Cf. *Xin Tang shu*, 202.5762. Mount Min was located a little more than fifty miles WNW of Baxi (where the Li family settled upon returning from the Western Regions) near modern Maowen 茂汶 County in Sichuan (Tan Qixiang, 5:65). Feng Shiyu (p. 363) argues that it is much more likely that Li went into reclusion on a mountain close to his family in Baxi.

²⁴ Anlu was located near the modern town of the same name in Hubei, about sixty miles northwest of modern Wuhan (Tan Qixiang, 5:34).

²⁵ On Li Bo’s years in Anlu and his numerous sojourns during this period to other places, primarily in the Lower Yangzi Valley, see Yu Xianhao’s “Preface” and Shih Fengyu, “Li Bo pingsheng kaosuo (shang),” pp. 364-81.

²⁶ Mount Culai was located about sixty miles northeast of Rengcheng in modern Shandong (Tan Qixiang, 5:45).

²⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 202.5762.

²⁸ Shan refers to Shanxian 剡縣 (Feng Shiyu, p. 397) located twenty-five miles southeast of Kuaiji which was itself about twenty-five miles south of modern Hangzhou (Tan Qixiang, 5:55).

²⁹ Yu, “Preface,” p. 5, and *Tang caizhi zhuan*, p. 386.

天寶初、南入會稽、與吳筠善，筠被召，故白亦至長安。往見賀知章。知章見其文，歎曰：「子，謫仙人也！」言於玄宗，召見金鑾殿，論當時事，奏頌一篇。帝賜食，親為調羹有詔供奉翰林。The encounter with He Zhizhang comes somewhat later in the *Jiu Tang shu*.³⁰ Moreover, as Yu Xianhao ("Preface," p. 5, and "Li Bo," *Tang caizhi zhuàn*, p. 386) notes, it was the recommendation of the Yuzhen 玉真 princess,³¹ rather than that of Wu Yun or He Zhizhang, which Li Bo secured to win for himself an imperial summons. Once again the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer prefers to streamline his narrative by keeping Li Bo in the company of fellow spirits like Wu Yun and to maintain the tone of Li Bo as a person above politics by neglecting to refer to his "discussing current affairs" with the Emperor.

Section 7 describes Li Bo's activities once in the capital. These activities are not easily fit into the categories offered by Olbricht and Twitchett above unless they are seen as what Olbricht calls "words and deeds" intended to "season" the biography.

As Po craved wine, he got drunk every day with his drinking companions in a wineshop. 白既嗜酒、日與飲徒醉於酒肆。

The expression *shi jiu* 嗜酒 "to crave wine" (although not listed in most dictionaries as a compound) recalls descriptions of some of the foremost among the reclusive and enlightened. Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427) is said to have "loved to read, without seeking thorough explanations, so that each time he would grasp the meaning, he would be so pleased that he would forget to eat. By nature he craved wine, but his family was poor and he was not able to obtain it often." 好讀書，不求甚解，每有會意，欣然忘食。性嗜酒，而家貧不能恆得。³² Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), Ruan Ji, both of whom are known for their interest in immortals, and the scholar-recluse Zhu Bainian 朱百年 (368–454), who was also tied to the Kuaiji region, are all similarly depicted in their biographies.³³ Thus while recording Li Bo's dissolution, his biographer is also using a *topos* to rank Li among a distinguished list of "dissolutes."

Section 8 ostensibly depicts at last the "duties" of Li Bo's "official career," his responsibilities as a Hanlin Academician, but it also subtly continues the account of Li's fondness for drink.

When Xuanzong had composed some a tune, he wanted to have new lyrics for his song, and immediately summoned Bo; Bo was already lying down in a wine shop. He was called back into the palace, his face splashed with water, and then ordered to take up a brush. In a short time he had completed more than ten pieces; the emperor found them quite fine. 玄宗度曲、欲造樂府新詞、亟召白、白已臥於酒肆矣。召入、以水灑面、即令秉筆、頃只成十餘章、帝頗嘉之。

This famous albeit anecdotal account must have been meant to have taken place during the nearly two years Li Bo was at court (742–744).³⁴ That Li Bo was capable of instantaneous composition while still sobering up lends this passage a topical tone.³⁵

³⁰ The account in *Tang zhi yan* 唐摭言 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 1978), 7.81, records this meeting "after Li Bo left Shu and came to the capital" and says what He Zhizhang read was Li's now famous "Shu dao nan" 蜀道難 (see also n. 49 below).

³¹ Cf. *Xin Tang shu*, 83.3657.

³² See Tao Qian's biography in *Jin shu*, 94.2460.

³³ See their biographies in *Jin shu*, 72.1904, *Jin shu*, 49.1359, and *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974), 93.2295, respectively.

³⁴ Cf. Feng Shiyu, "Li Bo pingsheng kaosuo (xia)," *Qinghua xuebao*, New Series 24.1 (1994): 45-9.

³⁵ Hans Frankel has called this the "speed of composition *topos*" (often expressed in terms of 下筆成章); see Frankel, "Tang Literati: A Composite Biography," in Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 73. There is a more detailed version of this encounter in the *Ben shi shi* (cited in *Tai ping guangji*,

Section 9 relates the events which led to Li Bo's expulsion from the palace; this reflects the "promotions and setbacks" in a person's career which Olbricht noted as part of the standard.

Once when he was very drunk in the palace hall, he stretched out his feet and ordered Gao Lishi (684–762) to take off his boots; for this reason he was sent away from [the palace]. 嘗沉醉殿上、引足令高力士脫靴、由是斥去。

This is a story that has many antecedents (one thinks first perhaps of the manner in which Liu Bang was wont to receive guests while having his feet washed). It is also anecdotal.³⁶ One longer version in the *Xin Tang shu* (202.5763) provides more details: "Once when Bo was attending the emperor he got drunk and had Gao Lishi take off his boots. Lishi had always been treated nobly and was shamed by this. He picked out one of his poems in order to incite Noble Consort Yang. When the emperor wanted to make Bo an official, the lady immediately put a stop to it. Bo understood that he would not be accepted by those close to [the emperor] so he was more haughty and unrestrained and did not cultivate himself. ... He entreated [the emperor] to be returned to the mountains and the emperor conferred gold upon him and released him to return." 白嘗侍帝，醉，使高力士脫靴。力士素貴，恥之，適其詩以激楊貴妃，帝欲官白，妃輒沮止。白自知不為親近所容，亦驚放不自脩。... 懇求還山，帝賜金放還。 The *Tang caizi zhuan* account (1:2.387)³⁷ completes the *Xin Tang shu* narrative by revealing that the poem selected was the "Qingping diao" 清平調 verse in which Li Bo depicts the events of Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕, Yang Guifei's notorious Han-dynasty predecessor.³⁸ The biographer of the *Jin Tang shu* by omitting this compelling story (and obviously a story which was well-known at the time the biography was compiled) emphasizes drunkenness as the cause of Li Bo's dismissal from the palace.³⁹

The *Jin Tang shu* account continues in Section 10 which depicts Li Bo not in exile but enjoying himself presumably with like-minded companions:

Then he roamed about the rivers and lakes, drinking heavily the whole day long. 乃浪跡江湖、終日沉飲。

3:201.1512) in which Li Bo is said to have gotten drunk during a feast provided him by Prince Ning 寧 (Li Xian 李憲, 680–742, Emperor Xuanzong's elder brother by a different mother; biographies in *Jin Tang shu*, 95.3009-14; *Xin Tang shu*, 81.3956-9) There is a story of Li Bo drinking at a party given by the prince in *Tianbao yishi* 天寶遺事 (cited in *Li Bo ji jiaozhu*, 4:1897-8). Li Xian died in the eleventh lunar month of 742; the prince's son, Li Jin 李璣 (d. 750), did drink and write verse with He Zhizhang (*Jin Tang shu*, 95.3014).

³⁶ For a discussion of variations on the story see Paul Douglas Moore, "Kao Li-shih's Removing Li's Boots," in Moore's dissertation, "Stories and Poems about the Tang Poet Li Po," Georgetown University, 1982, 1:39-41.

³⁷ The *Tang caizi zhuan* account was possibly based on the even more detailed anecdote concerning these events recorded in the *Songchuang zalu* 松窗雜錄, a work probably compiled by Li Jun 李濬 (fl. 875; as cited in *Tang caizi zhuan*, 1:2.387-8). On the authorship and nature of the *Songchuang zalu* see the note by the modern scholar Zhou Xunchu in *Tang yulin jiaozheng*, 2:770-1.

³⁸ The poem is the second of what are titled "Qingping diao ci" 清平調詞 in *Li Bo ji jiaozhu* (1:5.391) and reads: 一枝紅豔露凝香，雲雨巫山枉斷腸。借問漢宮誰得似，可憐飛燕倚新妝。 Elling Eide (*Poems by Li Po* [Lexington, Kentucky: Anvil Press, 1984], p. 29) translates the poem under the title "A Suite in the Ch'ing-p'ing Mode, Part Two" as follows:

A branch of red voluptuousness / the dew congealed perfume. / For clouds and rain on Sorceress Mountain / why go breaking your heart.
I wonder who could be compared to the palace of the Han? / Would it be dear Flying Swallow / trying new powder and rouge?

³⁹ Waley also notes that Gao Lishi as a devout Buddhist tried to undermine Wu Yun's position at court and would naturally have extended his hostility to Li Bo (*The Poetry and Career of Li Po*, p. 25).

Rather than returning to the mountains as in the *Xin Tang shu* narrative cited above (the same text also notes that Li Bo “wandered about through the four regions” 浮游四方), Li Bo descends onto “the rivers and lakes.” This term, *jianghu* 江湖, connotes an underworld such as was depicted in the recent film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* 臥虎藏龍 (the term *jianghu* was in fact used often by the characters in this film) which is often associated with *Wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說. In official historical literature *jianghu* often designated a world of bandits and thieves (see, for example, the comments in the biographies of Yin Shang 尹賞 [*Han shu*, 90.3675] and Wang Mang 王莽 [*Ibid.*, 99B.4155]). By employing the term *jianghu*, the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer suggests that other, off-color but not criminal, fringe of society. Members of the *jianghu* were considered beyond social convention by their actions and their convictions. Men such as Wu Rui 吳芮 of the Han dynasty⁴⁰ and Li Chi 李赤 of the Tang.⁴¹ The term also had explicit Daoist connotations that can be seen in the story of the adept Shi Min 石旻 who came from unknown parts and “wandered among the lakes and rivers” (浪跡江湖之間, *Taiping guangji*, 1:74.465).⁴² Another tale about two recluses, Master Lu 盧 and Master Li 李 (*Taiping guangji*, 1:17.118-9), reveals that after giving up his seclusion Master Li then “wandered the rivers and lakes” for a time before starting an official career. He ran into debt but was then fortunate enough to meet up with Master Lu who was in fact a wealthy and magical man who helped Master Li resolve his problems and find a wife.⁴³ Thus, although he had no textual basis that we can locate, the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer evoked Daoist tales of marvels by placing Li Bo amidst the “rivers and lakes,” a sharp departure from standard official historiography. The term *chen yin* 沉飲 “to drink deeply” reemphasizes the Daoist theme, since it had earlier been used by Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456) to refer to the famous drinker and Daoist Liu Ling 劉伶 (fl. 265), one of the “Seven Masters of the Bamboo Grove.”⁴⁴ These sections in a normative biography should have shown Li Bo's career; what they make clear here is that he was someone beyond the norms either of biography or of life itself.

In the following paragraph of the *Jiu Tang shu* biography (Section 11), Li Bo's eccentric behavior is highlighted:

At the time the Attendant Censor Cui Zongzhi 崔宗之⁴⁵ had been banished to an official position in Jinling, together with [Li] Bo he drank and matched poems. Once on a moonlit night they boarded a small boat from Caishi to Jinling; Bo wore his brocade robe from the palace, and in the boat looked all

⁴⁰ Wu Rui's biography in the *Han shu* 漢書 (34.1894) begins: “Wu Rui was the magistrate of Fanyang; he had greatly captured the minds of those people midst the rivers and lakes and he was called ‘the Lord of Fan.’” 吳芮·秦時番陽令也·甚得江湖間民心·號曰番君·

⁴¹ Li Chi (Li the Red) is a possibly fictional character for whom Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) wrote a “biography” (“Li Chi zhuan” 李赤傳 in *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集 [4v. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1979], 2:19.481). Liu depicts a deranged man who has fallen deeply in love with the privy goddess and finally drowns himself in the privy. The biography opens with the line: “Li the Red was a prodigal of the rivers and lakes” 李赤江湖浪人也 (see my translation of the “Biography of Li ‘The Red,’” in *Supernatural and Fantastic Tales from China*, Karl S. Y. Kao, ed. [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1983], pp. 190-2).

⁴² The story was originally collected in the *Xianshi zhi* 宣室志. Shi had mastered the abstruse arts of the Daoists and developed a drug which could bring dead things back to life.

⁴³ The *Taiping guangji* editors took the tale from the now lost *Yi shi* 逸史, but it was also recorded in the *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 (Taibei: Ziyou 自由 Chubanshe, 1984; 3:113.1565). According to the *Daozang tiyao* 道藏提要 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Chubanshe, 1991; Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 *et al.*, eds., p. 776), this second half of *juan* 113 was taken from the *Xu Xianshuan* 續仙傳 by Shen Fen 沈汾, a man who like in the Five Dynasties state of Nan Tang 南唐 (*Daozang tiyao*, p. 220); indications are Shen compiled his biographies during the early tenth century, some years before the completion of the *Jiu Tang shu*.

⁴⁴ “Yan Yanzhi zhuan” 顏延之傳, *Song shu*, 73.1893.

⁴⁵ Biography in *Xin Tang shu* (121:4331); see also *Quan Tang wen* (300:7b) and *Quan Tang shi* (261:2905).

about and smiled scornfully, as if there were no other people alongside them there. 時侍御史崔宗之謫官金陵、與白詩酒唱和。嘗月夜乘舟、自采石達金陵、白衣宮錦袍、於舟中顧瞻笑傲、傍若無人。

Yu Xianhao (“Li Bo,” *Tang caizhi zhuan*, p. 390) points out that Cui Zongzhi was neither a censor nor banished to Jinling.⁴⁶ He argues that this trip was made from Jinling and actually involved Cui Chengfu 崔成甫 (b. before 720) who was also a censor.⁴⁷ Although the *Jiu Tang shu* seems to err in details, the design once again seems to be to point to Li Bo as a man who lived outside social norms. *Xiao ao* 笑傲 “to smile scornfully” also occurs in the “Zhongfeng” 終風 ode of the *Shijing* (Mao #30) to depict a lover who has rejected the persona. The poem has been interpreted to mean a ruler’s rejection of a courtier and the resonances, intentional or not, are apt here. Further emphasizing the uncertainty about this section is a parallel passage attributed to the *Tang zhi yan* 唐摭言⁴⁸ which reads: “When Li Bo was wearing his brocaded robe from the palace, he went on an excursion on the Yangzi River at Caishi. He was haughty and smug, as if there were no one alongside him; owing to his drunkenness, he entered the stream to grasp the moon [reflected there] and died”. 李白著宮錦袍、游采石江中、傲然自得、傍若無人、因醉入水中捉月而死。 The point is that the *Tang zhi yan* passage suggests that this trip took place much later, just before Li Bo’s death. While it is equally possible that the *Tang zhi yan* passage is corrupt, given the problems seen already with the accuracy of the *Jiu Tang shu* biography, I am inclined to suspect that it is the *Jiu Tang shu* text which is corrupt here.

In Section 12 the *Jiu Tang shu* returns to another assessment of Li Bo by a contemporary, a passage which might be construed (in Olbricht’s terms) as a “topical comment about the character of an individual.”

Earlier, when He Zhizhang met Bo, he evaluated him by saying, “This is a man who is an immortal banished from Heaven.” 初賀知章見白、賞之曰：「此天上謫仙人也。」

Here we have a passage out of chronological order. *Chu* 初 is often an indicator of a new or separate source for what follows. Here the *Jiu Tang shu* version is abbreviated from that we saw earlier in the *Xin Tang shu* (202.5762-3): “He went to see He Zhizhang. When Zhizhang took a look at his writings, he exclaimed, ‘You are a banished immortal!’”⁴⁹ Here again the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer is mainly interested in adhering to the theme that seems to be expressed explicitly here for the first time: that Li Bo is an immortal banished from heaven. The modern scholar Li Fengmao 李豐楙 has shown that the banished immortal is “one of the major themes of Daoist literature.”⁵⁰ He also ar-

⁴⁶ There is the briefest of biographical notes appended to the biography of his father (*Xin Tang shu*, 121.4331), Cui Riyong 崔日用 (673–722), a scholar-official who had helped Xuanzong to power in 713 and for a time was a court favorite. Cui Zongzhi was acquainted with both Li Bo and Du Fu and known for his broad learning.

⁴⁷ Cf. Yu Xianhao, *op. cit.* On Cui Chengfu see *Xin Tang shu*, 72b.2800. Cui’s father was the better-known literatus Cui Mian 崔沔 (670–736; biography in *Xin Tang shu*, 129.4475-8) who had an impressive official career despite running afoul of the powerful Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731). Cui Mian’s more famous son was Cui Youfu 崔祐甫 (721–780; biography in *Xin Tang shu*, 142.4666-8), Cui Chengfu’s younger brother, became prime minister under Emperor Dezong just before he died. In considering all the evidence and the composite nature of this section, it is quite possible that although the information about rank and location are incorrect, Li Bo did travel here with Cui Zongzhi.

⁴⁸ This passage is not in the current version of *Tang zhi yan*; the citation here comes from the *Li Taibo nianpu* 李太白年譜 compiled by Wang Qi 王琦 (1696–1794) and recorded in *Li Taibo quanji* 李太白全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1977; 3:35:1612-3).

⁴⁹ In the *Tang caizhi zhuan* version (1:2.384) of this story what He Zhizhang read had become a particular work: “Shu dao nan” 蜀道難.

⁵⁰ Li Fengmao, “Daojiao zhexian chuanshuo yu Tangren xiaoshuo” 道教謫仙傳說與唐人小說, in Li’s *Daojiao Wuru yu zhejiang: Lichao, Sui, Tang Daojiao wensue lunji* 道教誤入與謫降：六朝、隋、唐道教文學論集 (Taipei: Xuesheng, 1996, p. 247).

gues that the concept of the banished immortal in the Tang was a symbol for the unusually gifted individual. Du Fu had already used the expression *zhe xianren* 謫仙人 (banished immortal) to depict Li Bo and it eventually became a standard epithet for him.⁵¹

Our biography continues in Section 13 with a description of events in Li Bo's final years and another failed attempt at an "official career":

During the rebellion of [An] Lushan, Xuanzong went to bestow his favor on Shu and en route made Prince Yong, [Li] Lin, the Commander in Chief of Troops and Horse of the Jiang-Huai region and Grand Military Commissioner of Yang Prefecture. Bo went to pay a visit on him [Prince Yong] in Xuan Prefecture and was then appointed as a retainer. When Prince Yong plotted rebellion, his troops were defeated, and Bo was sentenced to a lengthy⁵² exile in Yelang. Later because of an amnesty he was able to return. 祿山之亂、玄宗幸蜀、在途以永王璘為江淮兵馬都督、揚州節度使、白在宣州謁見、遂辟為從事。永王謀亂、兵敗、白坐長流夜郎。後遇赦得還。

This account of Li Bo's involvement with Prince Yong, Li Lin, is also problematic. As Yu Xianhao notes (*Tang caizhi zhuan*, 1:390-1), Li Lin held the position of *Jiangling Da Dudu* 江陵大都督, but was never appointed Commander in Chief of Troops and Horse of the Jiang-Huai Region or Grand Military Commissioner of Yang Prefecture. Li Lin was based further west in Jiangling (near modern Jingsha 荊沙 in southern Hubei on the north bank of the Jiang; Tan Qixiang, 5:53). If Li Bo had an audience with him several hundred miles to the east in Xuanzhou (near modern Xuancheng 宣城 in Anhui, Tan Qixiang, 5:38) we must assume that Li Lin had not yet moved west to take up what would have been a more exposed post – i.e., closer both to the rebels in the capital and the emperor in Sichuan – in Jiangling. Yelang was on the borders of Tang control, near modern Zheng'an 正安 city (also known as Zhen 珍 Prefecture) in Guizhou (Tan Qixiang, 5:59). Once again the *Xin Tang shu* and other accounts of Li Bo's final years are much more complicated than the *Jiu Tang shu* version. Perhaps the point was to place Li Bo at the edge of the empire; perhaps this is simply a case of careless compilation. This passage fits neither the overall tone of the *Jiu Tang shu* biography nor the assumed actual events of his final years.⁵³

Section 14 of the *Jiu Tang shu* text returns to its previous tone to complete the biography by recording Li Bo's death but not, as was common, the exact date of his passing:

Finally, because he drank wine to excess, [Li Bo] drank himself to death in Hsüan-ch'eng. There is a collection of his writings in twenty *juan* circulating at this time. 竟以飲酒過度、醉死於宣城。有文集二十卷、行於時。

The term that stands out from this closing section is *zui si* 醉死, "drink oneself to death." It is not a common expression even among depictions of noted tipplers. The only other usage discovered was in the biography of Fu Yi 傅奕 (555-639; *Jiu Tang shu*, 79.2717), a scholar with an interest in astronomy and an antipathy for Buddhism. Once when Fu Yi had lain himself down after drinking a great deal he wrote his own funerary inscription which read: "Fu Yi was a man of the clouds from the Green Mountains. Because of wine he drank himself to death, alas and alack!" 傅奕，青山雲人也，因酒醉死，嗚呼哀哉！ He actually died of an illness. Nevertheless, the mocking way Fu Yi

⁵¹ See Du Fu's "Ji Li Shi'er Bo ershiyun" 寄李十二白二十韻, *Du shi xiangzhu*, 2:7.660-5 (see also von Zach, *Tu Fu's Gedichte*, 1:6.192-4. The only other reference to a person as a "banished immortal" in the dynastic histories is to the recluse, a certain Mr. Cai 蔡 (*Nan Qi shu* 南齊書, 59.943) who spent his entire life in reclusion and raised several dozen rats in the mountains; he seems to have little reference to our narrative.

⁵² *Chang* 長 here could also refer to a distant exile.

⁵³ Cf., for example, the final paragraphs or the *Tang caizhi zhuan* (1:2.390-2) version and the comments by Yu Xianhao.

used the term *zui si* underlines its rarity in standard historical writings. In fact, in the *Jiu Tang shu* biography the expression *zui si* does not seem to be a normal term but rather a rhetorical device, *apostrophe* or an elliptical expression (*tiao tuo* 跳脫 in Chinese), and *zui si* is actually meant to imply here Li Bo “dying after becoming drunk by trying to gather in the image of the moon on the water” (as, for example, we saw in the *Tang zhi yan* excerpt cited above). Since *zui si* is such an unusual, almost unique, usage, its possible extended import will have to be considered in the overall assessment of the biography below.

The collected writings noted here are probably the edition that existed at the end of the Tang made up of the ten-juan *Caotang ji* 草堂集 (preface 762) compiled by Li Bo’s relative, Li Yangbing, shortly after Bo’s death and augmented by an additional ten-juan added by Fan Chuanzheng during the early ninth century.⁵⁴

3) Concluding Remarks

As an official biography, the *Jiu Tang shu* “Li Bo zhuan” adheres to but a few of the structural components and principles set forth by Peter Olbricht and Denis Twitchett. We have no clear hometown. No mention of ancestors other than Li Bo’s father (and this is a passing reference). No literary works cited. A distorted account of Li Bo’s admittedly distorted “official career.” And not a single date mentioned in the text. In contrast, there are what subsequent scholars have shown to be frequent errors in and glaring omissions from the overall narrative of Li’s life. This situation is difficult to explain from the historiographical point of view. If, however, one views this biography as an appreciation of Li Bo’s major popular legacy, his role as a drunken immortal who has been banished from heaven – in short a hagiography, rather than a biography – the text can be induced to conform to a certain logic. On this role, observations by Paul Douglas Moore (“Stories and Poems,” p. 31) may help set the scene:

During the T’ang, it was a common belief that immortals who had committed some offense in Heaven were sent into exile on earth for a set period. There they become unusual men. Waley (p. 20) notes that in a prose note attached to a poem Li Po himself emphasized that the name Banished Immortal was “simply a record of fact.”

Whether or not this was a common belief, it seems to have been the guiding theme for the author of the *Jiu Tang shu* Li Bo biography. First through the displacement of Li Bo from his actual mortal home in Shu, and the failure to even attempt to date his birth, the poet is released to become a wandering free spirit who appears to his major audience in the capital city from “east of the mountain.” Although the term Shandong generally refers to a huge area during the Tang, the way Li Bo and contemporaries like Du Fu applied it suggests that something more specific, perhaps “east of Mount Tai 泰,” was implied. The fact that Penglai, the eastern home of immortals, might also be associated with the region “east of Mount [Tai]” may also have figured in the designation “Shandong ren.”⁵⁵ Shandong is no longer an anomaly, but an integral part of locating Li’s immortal origins.

⁵⁴ See the thorough discussion of this edition by Yu Xianhao, *Tang caizi zhuan*, 1:2.393-4. On Li Yangbing see the note in *Xin Tang shu*, 72A.2475. Fan Chuanzheng has biographies in both Tang histories (*Jiu Tang shu*, 185B.4830, and *Xin Tang shu*, 172.5208). According to *Dengke ji kao* 登科記考 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980, 2:13.488), Fan passed the *jinshi* examination in 794 and was acquainted with Liu Zongyuan.

⁵⁵ At least one later poet, Duan Wengui 段文圭 (10th century), depicted Li Bo as someone associated with Penglai in his “Jing Li Hanlin mu” 經李翰林墓 (身謫蓬萊金籙外) cited in *Li Taibo quanji*, 3:36.1646.

Next the textual associations between Li Bo and men like Ruan Ji, Zhuge Liang, and Yuan Hong enhance the idea of a life for Li Bo which stretched beyond the first half of the eighth century. The compression of Li Bo's two periods of reclusion (one during his youth in Shu and one during his sojourn in Lu) into one spent with Kong Chaofu and company helps the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer focus the narrative on Li Bo's immortality. This status is then verified in the biographer's identification of Li Bo as one of the "Six Recluses of the Bamboo Stream," an epithet which further associates Li to the illustrious predecessor group, the "Seven Masters of the Bamboo Grove." The travels and friendship with Wu Yun, a Daoist priest, although anachronistic in the narrow historical sense, fit as a logical means for Li Bo to be brought to court. The location that Wu Yun and Li Bo chose, Kuaiji Mountain, is important because it was one of the traditional homes of immortals and immortal seekers (witness Zhu Bainian). The theme of drinking in the capital and drunkenness at court are reprehensible in terms of the conventions of Confucian bureaucrats, but completely at home with men with strong affiliations to immortality like Tao Qian, Guo Pu, Zhu Bainian, and Li Bo himself. The combination of the "speed of composition *topos*" with Li Bo's drunkenness may also be intended to suggest a near hallowed existence. In the section devoted to the altercation with Gao Lishi, the *Jiu Tang shu* omits the fascinating details seen in parallel accounts of how Gao tried to convince Yang Guifei that Li Bo's poem was intended to insult her. Here the emphasis is on Li Bo's drinking and how that makes him unfit for ordinary mortal posts. Spurned from the palace, Li ventures for a time into the almost mythical underworld of the rivers and lakes. The textual ties noted above between *jianghu* and the Daoist tale tradition are also a part of this chain of resonances in support of Li Bo's immortality. In the subsequent section which tells of Li Bo's riverine excursion at Jinling, the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer indeed reveals – perhaps too overtly – his ability to shape the fact to his theme. In parallel accounts noted above, Li Bo was shown to don his court robes and board a boat only moments before his death. Here he wears the robes to show that even among commoners he fails to fit in. By deconstructing the anecdote about Li Bo's death and appropriating a portion of it here, the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer is able to cap the first long paragraph of his biography while simultaneously preparing the formal announcement of his theme.

That announcement follows immediately. It is set off clearly by moving it outside the temporal sequence of the narrative through the use of the word *chu*, "earlier." *Chu* generally marks the introduction of a narrative from a separate text, but here it is a marker to pause the reader so that he will pay close attention to He Zhizhang's claim that Li Bo was a banished immortal. The chronology here (and through much of the biography) transcends that of the mortal world. He Zhizhang's revelation that Li Bo is a banished immortal acts as a fulcrum; it swings the reader's attention back to much of what may have puzzled him in the first part of the narrative. Now that the reader understands that Li Bo is an immortal, problems from the first part of the biography are more easily understood. This theme also controls the concluding sections of the biography.

The first of these concluding sections, the thirteenth overall, tells of Li Bo's involvement in Li Lin's rebellion and may seem puzzling at first. The *Jiu Tang shu* biographer has chosen to omit so many other details and events in Li's life that one wonders why he didn't ignore this affair, too, if his intent was indeed to show Li Bo as a banished immortal. Yet this passage is one in which Li Bo is shown to do no apparent wrong. He simply chose his mortal associates with little care. Here *luan* 亂 "rebellious, chaotic" refers not only to Prince Yong, but also to Li Bo's attempt to live life as a mortal. The lengthier story of Li's exile such as that recorded in the *Xin Tang shu* is abbreviated by the *Jiu Tang shu*, probably because the longer version would have impeded the biographer's desire to end his narrative in reaction to the *luan*, by moving directly to the final scene in which Li drinks and dies.

This final scene calls for reconsideration. While the expression *zui si* may well be intended to suggest the episode in which Li Bo reached for the reflection of the moon and died as a result, here the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer has removed the court robes and details from the death to create what could well be seen as the kind of death-transformation (*hua* 化, which was sometimes effected by drugs, sometimes even by wine) of man into (or back into) immortal. Our understanding of the connotation of *zui si* as a kind of transformation is supported by a passage in the *Xin Tang shu* biography (202.5763) of Li Bo which claims that “Bo late in life was fond of Huang-Lao Daoism” 白晩好黃老.⁵⁶ Also to be noted here is the obscurity of Li Bo’s death in the *Jiu Tang shu* biography. This is in contrast to the *Xin Tang shu* (202.5763) account which explains how Li Bo saw a beautiful hill and selected it as his burial site. The *Jiu Tang shu* biographer may be following a convention used by many Daoist hagiographers who brought their subjects from unknown backgrounds and ended their texts with the immortal heading off for an obscure destination (*buzhi suo qu* 不知所去).

A man who was fond of Huang-Lao, who himself believed himself to be a banished immortal, deserved a hagiography to verify this status. Of course, this reading is tenuous. There is no way to *prove* that it reflects the intent of the *Jiu Tang shu* biographer. Nevertheless, it seems to provide a structure to this otherwise amorphous narrative and a theme that both explains many of the historical anomalies found in the biography and remains true to Li Bo’s popular legacy. Somehow I think Li Bo might have enjoyed the idea that his first biography was an essay on his immortality.

⁵⁶ The *Tang caizhi zhuan* (1:2.392) account elaborates further: “Bo in his later period was fond of Huang-Lao Daoism. When he crossed at Ox-island Jetty, he boarded [his boat] while drinking wine and in grasping for the [reflection of the] moon, sunk into the stream.” 白晩節好黃老，度牛渚磯，乘酒捉月，沉水中。