

A Love of Labor: The Ethnographic Turn of *Zhuzhici*

Stephen Roddy

Professor of Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures,
San Francisco University, San Francisco, CA, USA

roddys@usfca.edu

Abstract

From the mid-Tang through the Qing dynasty, poets employed the short-lyric form known as *zhuzhici* [bamboo branch lyrics] to write, first and foremost, about ordinary people going about their daily lives in China and elsewhere in the Sinosphere. This article explores how early developments in this genre prepared the ground for what later emerged as an arguably proto-ethnographic mode – that is, both poetry and accompanying prose annotations based on poets' direct observations of and even immersive "fieldwork" within discrete localities. I focus specifically on poems about "water labor," by which I mean those that describe and give voice to vocational groups and communities along lakes, levies, and channels of the Yangzi River basin. It was partly thanks to this history of reporting about local lives and conditions, I argue, that *zhuzhici* eventually came to adopt a more information-intensive and increasingly empirical orientation during the later stages of their development. Moreover, this mode of what might even be identified tentatively as affective or lyrical ethnography prefigures efforts by contemporary social scientists to recalibrate ethnography in spatially affective modes, and I conclude with some observations on how its example might inform future efforts in these directions.

Keywords

affect – empiricism – ethnography – oar songs – *zhuzhici*

1 Ethnography, Affect, and Lyricism

In the early twentieth century, ethnography took shape as an empirically oriented, avowedly scientific mode of sociocultural analysis championed by key

figures in the emerging professions of anthropology and sociology. Pioneers such as Bronislaw Malinowski [1884–1942], Franz Boas [1858–1942], and E. E. Evans-Pritchard [1902–1973] distinguished this emergent genre from the writings of missionaries, historians, and explorers by stipulating that it be based on authors' sustained observation of and immersive experience in the socio-cultural contexts of its subjects and detached from utilitarian or other interests or preconceptions. Although direct observation remains a *sine qua non* for the form, poststructuralism and other trends have brought the once-vaunted ideal of scientific, disinterested objectivity under increasing scrutiny and debate. The organizational behaviorist Silvia Gherardi, among others, has called attention to the need for "affective attunement" with ethnographic subjects that results in "performative texts" invoking "tacit, implicit, and embodied" forms of knowledge.¹ Closely paralleling such embodiment within and through texts is the desideratum that ethnography be firmly rooted in geographic space. "The focus of an affective ethnography becomes," Gherardi writes, "the degree of affective intensity that composes the geography of organizing and the inclusion and exclusion practices materialized in a space.... To experience a place means to learn to be affected by place, and therefore also placeness becomes a resource for conducting an affective ethnography."² This emplacement emphasizes the body's "resonance" with materiality, both animate and inanimate, in collective spaces. Other writers have likened resonance quite literally to sonority, what some call an in-betweenness that mediates between and among multiple beings and states, a free-floating "music of the world at the local level – a complex polyphonic, polyrhythmic surround."³

It is one thing to call for recognizing and recalibrating the positionality and methodology of the ethnographer but quite another to retool the relatively dispassionate prose styles generally favored in academic writing into vehicles suitable for articulating qualities of affective resonance, sonority, and attunement.⁴ Some scholars have attempted to achieve this end by

1 For an overview of arguments that advocate the insertion of the embodied subject into academic writing by "tack[ing] between the analytical and the sensible" and between "embodied form as well as disembodied logic," see Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), xiii and 2–24.

2 Silvia Gherardi, "Theorizing Affective Ethnography for Organization Studies," *Organization* 26, no. 6 (2019): 745–54.

3 Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie, "An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers: Félix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 146.

4 For a relatively early and influential exposition of these themes, see James Clifford and George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 1–26. More recently, anthropologists such as Kirin Narayan have

incorporating various modes of emotionally evocative literary discourse into more conventional professional discourse, including experimenting with poetic forms. The anthropologist E. Valentine Daniel, who has authored one such effort in the form of an epic poem modeled on the classical Tamil canon, writes that there is a “truth in verse that could not be conveyed in prose.... I believe that most prose in the social sciences in particular does not merely overshadow or repress this affective truth in its secondary status, but may even kill it.”⁵ Whereas verse forms per se have yet to be taken up widely by professional ethnographers, lyricism in the more abstract sense of nonnarrative, emotionally freighted rhetorical registers has been invoked to redraw the contours of social ethnography and even of the presentation or status of propositional knowledge in general. Andrew Abbott, for one, has looked to Heian-era [795–1185] Japanese lyrical forms, both poetry (*tanka*, thirty-one-syllable poetry) and prose narrative (*monogatari*, or tales), as inspiration for a processual sociology that bridges gaps and levels hierarchies between ethnographic researchers and their informants.⁶

If Abbott had been better acquainted with East Asian literature, he might have also cited the literary tradition to which many Heian writers looked for inspiration – that of China in the Tang [618–907] and Song [960–1279] dynasties – and especially its lyrical genres. One in particular, *zhuzhici* 竹枝詞 [bamboo branch lyrics], beginning as early as the late eighth century, functioned as an instrument for recording descriptions of human and natural geography, so much so that imperial officials eventually encouraged submissions in this verse form to the bureaus charged with compiling regional gazetteers.⁷ The convergence of empirical knowledge with lyrical expression in *zhuzhici* offers a potentially instructive model for how premodern intellectuals applied poetic forms to the articulation of knowledge derived from close observation of the daily lives of human communities, including their interactions with their physical environment. Eminent scholar-officials such as Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 [772–842], Su Zhe 蘇轍 [1039–1112], Zha Shenxing 查慎行 [1650–1727],

discussed the merits of consulting and borrowing from literary exemplars to rethink and reshape ethnographic writing. See Kirin Narayan, “Chekhov as Ethnographic Muse,” in *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Helena Wulff (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 163–79.

5 E. Valentine Daniel, “The Coolie: An Unfinished Epic,” in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 67–114.

6 Andrew Abbott, “Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology,” *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 1 (2007): 69–72, 98.

7 Sun Jie 孫杰, *Zhuzhici fazhanshi* 竹枝詞發展史 [History of the Development of Bamboo Branch Lyrics] (Shanghai: Shiji chubanshe, 2014), 151.

Ji Yun 紀昀 [1724–1805], and Zhao Yi 趙翼 [1727–1814] are famous for their lyrical evocations of place through the medium of *zhushici*, which typically, though not exclusively, took the form of quatrains consisting of twenty-eight characters. Thanks in part to their efforts, *zhushici* evolved over the course of a millennium into a hybrid amalgamation of affective lyricism and empirically based description. By the late imperial period (after ca. 1550), they were typically written in sequences of dozens or sometimes even hundreds of poems, many accompanied by extensive prose glosses, with the explicit aim of surveying the topography, ecology, archaeology, architecture, and sociocultural conditions, inter alia, of discrete geographic regions and various social, ethnic, or vocational groups within them.⁸

This article traces the historical rise of ethnographic *zhushici* through one subset of these poems: those that foreground the laborers toiling along the lakes, levies, and channels of the Yangzi River basin. Lyrical invocations of labor, and the affective resonance expressed by poets toward their subjects, I argue, provided a critical element of the foundation, even a keystone, for the rise of descriptively rich *zhushici*, including prose annotations and colophons, which characterized the genre in the late Ming [1368–1644] and Qing [1616–1911] dynasties. What, we might ask, made this particular form attractive to poets and scholars who chose it to document their observations of local conditions under their jurisdiction as officials, along their routes of travel or in places of either temporary or permanent residence? Can the empirical turn of this genre during its final flowering in the Qing be traced to its early history in the Tang and Song? I answer these questions by providing a cursory overview of this poetic lineage from the Tang and Song to the Ming and Qing, and address whether this legacy could inform future efforts by social scientists, as Japanese *waka* poetry already has, to recalibrate ethnographic scholarship in spatially emplaced, affectively attuned modes that result in “performative texts” invoking “tacit, implicit, and embodied” forms of knowledge.⁹

8 A considerable proportion of the Chinese classical poetic canon addresses similar or even identical themes, such as the everyday lives of plebeian folk and, more broadly, human and natural geography, and the formal similarity of *zhushici* to other heptasyllabic quatrains meant that the boundaries of this genre were somewhat blurry. Nonetheless, the adoption of such local voices, which can be likened to a sonority that “mediates between and among multiple beings and states” (including the considerable use of local dialecticisms), is the single most important feature distinguishing the body of *zhushici* from other poetry. For examples that demonstrate these differences, see Stephen Roddy, “Bamboo Branches out West: *Zhushici* in Xinjiang, ca. 1740–1890,” *Modern Chinese Literature in Chinese* 16, no. 2 (2018): 23–26.

9 The ethnographic writings of Origuchi Shinobu [1887–1953] and, to some extent, those of his mentor Yanagita Kunio [1875–1962] prefigured the contemporary affective turn of

2 Waterborne

Premodern literati as well as contemporary scholars have posited various historical and geographic origins of *zhuzhici*, but most take the early poets Liu Yuxi, Bai Juyi 白居易 [772–846] and others at their word. Liu and Bai both claim to have been moved to compose their poems as lyrics to songs that they heard while traveling through or being posted within (what were then still) remote regions in the mid- to upper Yangzi River basin.¹⁰ In the late Tang and then the Song and Yuan [1206–1368] dynasties, their successors, such as Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 [1045–1105], Su Shi 蘇軾 [1037–1101], Yang Wanli 楊萬里 [1127–1206], and Wang Yun 王惲 [1227–1304], explicitly emulated Liu Yuxi's attempts to capture the folk authenticity, especially the local distinctiveness of the subjects and regions about which they wrote. Poets took to crafting scenes and vignettes of the quotidian lives of farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, street vendors, prostitutes, and other humble residents along the river and its tributaries, inscribing what could be called affective cartographies of both rural and urban landscapes. Many poems as well as commentaries on them note the tragic tone said to characterize the folksongs after which they were modeled; although the poems generally encompass a much wider range of emotional registers, poems addressed to or in the voices of humble laborers typically give expression to the toll taken on them by the vicissitudes and unpredictability of their environments, both natural and societal.¹¹

ethnography, most obviously in his extensive use of the Nara and early Kamakura-era poetry anthologies *Manyōshū* and *Shinkokinshū* in tracing the origins of contemporary linguistic, literary, and sociocultural practices. See Mochida Nobuko 持田叙子, *Uta no ko shi no ko, Origuchi Shinobu 歌の子詩文の子、折口信夫 [The Child of Song, the Child of Poetry: Origuchi Shinobu]* (Tokyo: Yōgi shobō, 2016), 117–42.

- 10 Theories about these origins include the non-Han ancient kingdom of Yelang 夜郎, the mid-Yangzi area of Chu, including Qu Yuan's 屈原 [340–278 BCE] *Nine Songs*, and the Ba 巴 region of Sichuan. See Sun Jie, *Zhuzhici fazhanshi*, 7–9. A later commentator, Mao Guiming, claims that Liu Yuxi's references to the exotic local customs of the people from whom he first heard these songs can be identified definitively as Miao, such as their “dancing to the moon and at annual festivals.” See Mao Guiming 毛貴銘, “Qian miao zhuzhici 黔苗竹枝詞 [Bamboo Branch Lyrics of Guizhou Miao Nation],” in *Zhonghua zhuzhici quanbian 中華竹枝詞全編 [Complete Bamboo Branch Lyrics of China]*, ed. Qiu Liangren 丘良任, Pan Chao 潘超, Sun Zhongquan 孫忠銓, and Qiu Jin 丘進 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2007), 7:71.
- 11 The rise of *zhuzhici* in giving voice to the suffering of humble laborers was anticipated by ballads [*yuefu* 樂府] in the late Han through the Tang dynasties; in fact, *zhuzhici* were often subsumed by critics under this rubric. The term “oar songs” can be found in poems and prose as early as the Former Han dynasty, and poems under this title have

As noted, *zhushici* were born in the mid- to upper reaches of the Yangzi River; most of the earliest surviving *zhushici* by Gu Kuang 顧況 [725–814], Liu Yuxi, Bai Juyi, and other mid- to late Tang and early Song poets explicitly refer to the Yangzi River and to the people, flora, and fauna of the Three Gorges 三峽 and Jingzhou 荊州 areas in present-day Sichuan and Hubei Provinces. By the late Tang, the geographical center had already begun to shift downstream toward the lower Yangzi, where they soon took hold and flourished across the landscapes of the Jiangnan delta. Many of the Jiangnan poems are named for a particular “lake” [*hu*] along the river or its tributaries; many of these lake songs also employ an alternative term for them, the “oar song” [*zhao ge* 棹歌]. These poems are replete with alluring visions of multiple flora and fauna, the lingering physical traces of historical figures and events, and, most of all, the quotidian joys and sorrows of the residents who toil along their shores, ranging from oarsmen and boat pullers, fishermen, and lotus-gathering maidens, to entertainers at lakeside and floating teahouses and other establishments. References to water abound in the entire surviving corpus of *zhushici* (numbering over 100,000 poems); one could even say that more than “bamboo” or any other physical features, watery environs remained the primary topos of this genre throughout its history. And I argue that the earliest examples of their fascination with the ways in which communities used and depended on water and other natural resources for their survival prefigure the discernibly ethnographic turn of *zhushici*, which reached its full maturity in the mid- to late Qing dynasty.

As Huang Tingjian explains in a comment on Liu Yuxi’s poems, these lyrics “channel local customs without being rustic,” and whereas poets throughout its history regularly invoked its earliest associations with the mid-Yangzi River, the imperative to record the conditions of specific localities meant that toponyms, customs, flora and fauna, and other topics varied significantly among poems produced across vast swathes of China and its neighbors. Moreover, this “channeling” often involved the motif of travel along the water, even in regions in which water transportation or even bodies of water were less ubiquitous than in the Yangzi basin.¹² Those who made travel over the water possible – boatmen – were the subjects of special interest and, indeed, “tapping the boat” [*kouxian* 扣舷], the rhythmic accompaniment to watermen’s singing, served as

been preserved from the Liang dynasty and the early and mid-Tang, preceding the earliest *zhushici* of Liu Yuxi and Bai Juyi. See Sun Jie, *Zhushici fazhanshi*, 32.

12 Zheng Yan 鄭豔, *Minsuxue shijiaoxia de zhushici yanjiu: Yi Jing Jin zhushici weili* 民俗學視角下的竹枝詞研究：以京津竹枝詞為例 [*Studies of Bamboo Branch Lyrics from the Perspective of Ethnology: Taking Bamboo Branch Lyrics of Beijing and Tianjin as Examples*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2017), 17.

a metonym for composing or reciting *zhuzhici*. This is most evident in poems that explicitly imitate the singing and chanting of those who rowed, pulled, steered, or otherwise operated watercraft and often assume the voices of these men. Yang Wanli's seven *Bamboo Branch Songs* [*Zhuzhige* 竹枝歌] and accompanying colophon, for example, directly acknowledge the poet's debt to the laborers of the Zhenjiang 鎮江 region who ferry him across the water:

We left the Danyang [Zhenjiang] government offices in the evening, and at the fifth watch reached Danyang County. The boatman and his pullers kept up their banter the whole evening, singing and joking to spur one another on. I could make out the gist of what they were saying, such as "Brother Zhang, Brother Li, everyone, let's pull hard together" or "One rest-rest, two rest-rest, over how many prefectures does the crescent moon shine?" Their voices were sadly beautiful, as they chanted in unison in response to the leader. I have refashioned and standardized them into these *zhuzhige*.

晚發丹陽館下，五更至丹陽縣。舟人及牽夫終夕有聲，蓋謳吟嘯謔，以相其勞者。其辭亦略可辨，有云：「張哥哥，李哥哥，大家著力齊一拖。」又云：「一休休，二休休，月子彎彎照幾州。」其聲淒婉，一唱眾和。因槩括之為《竹枝歌》云。

How many prefectures does the crescent moon illuminate?
How many homes are joyous, and how many sorrowful?
The moon's phases have something to do with people's sorrows,
Where there's a place to let up, we'll let up. (fifth of seven poems)

月子彎彎照幾州
幾家歡樂幾家愁
愁殺人來關月事
得休休處且休休（其五）。¹³

The colophon indicates that their vernacular singing and spirited patter kept up these pullers' morale and esprit de corps during the undoubtedly arduous task of pulling Yang's party toward their destination through the night. He inserts the men's phrase "letting up" [*xiuxiu* 休休] seemingly as a local colloquialism,

13 Wang Liqi 王利器, Wang Shenzhi 王慎之, and Wang Zijin 王子今, *Lidai zhuzhici* 歷代竹枝詞 [*Bamboo Branch Lyrics of Multiple Eras*] (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 2003), 1: 18–19.

but the educated reader would no doubt recognize its overlap with the lexicon of classical and literary sources, ranging from “Crickets [*Xishuai* 蟋蟀]” in the *Classic of Poetry* [*Shijing* 詩經] to dynastic histories such as the *History of the Former Han* [*Hanshu* 漢書], to a famed essay about reclusion by Sikong Tu 司空圖 [837–908], “The Resting Pavilion [*Xiuxiutingji* 休休亭記].” By employing locally inflected speech that simultaneously evokes associations with literary and historical sources, the poem fulfills Huang Tingjian’s desideratum, echoed by many later critics, that *zhushici* not be merely “rustic” [*li* 俚]. These poems “refashioned” (*yinkuo* 櫟括, lit. “straightened,” a term used in this period for revising prose or other works so that they could be sung to music), as Yang puts it, the raw material of their humble subjects by selectively distilling elements of the speech of oarsmen into a more elevated medium.¹⁴

Another example of oarsmen’s songs that inspired both observation and emulation by literati passengers is a series of twelve poems by Wang Yun, who writes that he “matched” poems to songs he heard while being rowed northward from Fujian through Zhejiang:

Returning north from Fujian, as our boat passed through Changxiu, I listened, reclining, to the oarsmen’s songs. I was very much pleased by them and wrote three rhyming verses to each of their opening lines. Inquiring about their lyrics, I discovered that they were shallow and rustic, not at all like my matching verses’ cheery brightness. I thus reworked them into twelve poems that speak of their hardships conveying people and messages back and forth. This was also Liu Yuxi’s intention in composing *zhushici*.

余自閩中北還，舟行過常秀間臥聽櫓歌，殊有愜余心者。每一句發端以聲和之者三。扣其辭語敷淺而鄙俚，曾不若和聲之驪亮也。因變而作十二闕，且道其傳送艱苦之狀，亦劉連州竹枝之意云。¹⁵

14 In another sequence of ten poems, titled “Weidingci shijie 圩丁詞十解 [Dike Men’s Ten Lyrics],” Yang Wanli extolls the achievements of farmers who tamed local waters to irrigate their fields in the Jiangnan region through complex networks of dikes and levees that require their constant care and attention, but allow them to enjoy abundant harvests year after year without fear of flooding. In the last poem, he concludes: “Atop the levees, men pull, while on the water, they navigate / From the front, they inspect the myriad fields of grain and mulberry.” Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhushici*, 1:20. On the use of the term *yinkuo*, see Wu Chengxue 吳承學, “Lun Songdai yinkuo ci 論宋代櫟括詞 [Refashioned Lyrical Songs of the Song Dynasty],” *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產, no. 4 (2000); also Yue Zhang, *Lore and Verse: Poems on History in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York, 2022), 121–152.

15 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhushici*, 1:27.

The poems range widely about the enervating work of rowing as well as the reasons that these rowers struggle to survive:

Zhejiang and Jiangsu are packed with people, their lives not easy,
 Even a slightly bad harvest turns them into refugees.
 This year, Suzhou and Changzhou have been suffering,
 Selling their sons to make a living doesn't raise much cash. (third of twelve)

兩浙人稠不易安
 少罹兇慊即流遷
 今年苦惱蘇常地
 易子營生不計錢。(其三)

[Official] business in Jiangnan is plentiful,
 Officials passing back and forth resemble gliding shuttles.
 It is because of this that we labor from morn to night,
 Alas, this has turned into a song of lament. (tenth of twelve)

幹當江南有許多
 往還冠蓋似攬梭
 因茲力役無朝暮
 歛乃翻成懊惱歌。(其十)¹⁶

Like Yang Wanli's poem cited earlier, Wang also "reworks" materials, but in this case the process is the reverse of Yang's: he reconfigures his original cheerful response poems to better match the somber mood of the laborers' songs, a mood he had failed to appreciate until someone explained the lyrics to him. In a sense, he acts as an investigator, perhaps even an "ethnographer," who overcomes his misunderstanding of local conditions and potential elite blindness (as one of the "hatted officials" [*guangai* 冠蓋] benefiting from this labor) to fashion a more faithful rendition of the laborers' voices. And he explains his efforts as following the path forged by Liu Yuxi's foundational lyrics, which channeled the thoughts and feelings of the humble residents of Langzhou 朗州, Wushan 巫山, and adjacent regions from which Liu drew his materials into literary forms that made them accessible to audiences beyond these geographic confines.

¹⁶ Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:27–28.

3 Turning toward Elegance, Infusing Knowledge

Wang Yun wrote in the early Yuan era, and although references to rowing, pulling, and the oars and ropes employed by laborers retained their centrality in the repertoire of motifs employed by poets, a subtle but significant transformation in the representation of life on and along the water took place over the following century. This is most evident in the collection titled *Collection on Bamboo Branch Lyrics of West Lake* [*Xihu zhuzhiji* 西湖竹枝集], assembled by Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 [1296–1370]. Most of the over 100 poets represented there, and many who followed in their wake, favored styles and subject matter that departed from the ballad-like modes generally favored by Tang and Song poets and toward a more refined idiom depicting leisurely, materially prosperous, culturally sophisticated settings of pleasure boats and establishments along the lakeshore that were patronized by wealthy, mostly literati elites. As a mid-fifteenth century author of a preface to Yang's collection puts it, these poems are excellent for "poets who, communing with the spirits of departed worthies, sing out these lyrics while floating on the lake, inebriated and tapping on the sides of their watercraft. How pleasing!"¹⁷ A later commentator, Chen Can 陳燦 [fl. 1760], notes that although these poets also engage in the requisite task of recording local customs, "they could not shake their habit of writing about luxurious banquets or beautiful courtesans ... often employing flowery language and delicate verbiage ... [which] strayed from the original intention for composing these songs."¹⁸ And even when they did refer to the beating of oars, this familiar motif is cast in a leisurely mode, as illustrated in this poem by Zhao Yi 趙奕 [fl. ca. 1310], the son of the painter and calligrapher Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 [1254–1322]:

At the head of the lake, waves glisten daily in the sun,
 Pairs of young ladies of Wu pass by, oaring.
 Separated by stands of lotuses, they smile without recognizing one
 another,
 While still singing Wu songs to one another.

湖頭日日水光波
 兩兩吳娃打槳過

17 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:66.

18 Chen also quotes a poem by Huang Zhouxing 黃周星 [1611–1680] that expresses a desire to overcome Yang Weizhen's influence over Ming poets and to restore the simplicity of *zhuzhici*. Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1256.

笑隔芙渠不相識
向人猶自唱吳歌。¹⁹

If anything, rowing by young women becomes an exercise in sensual enchantment for the poet cum voyeur, largely divorced from the labor of oars, as in this poem by Yan Gong 嚴恭 [fl. 1360] from *Xihu zhuzhiji*:

Maidens in the lake do not relieve sorrow,
In threesomes, they paddle out to the Hundred Flower Isle.
Gazing greedily on pairs of butterflies among the flowers,
They don't realize that some have flown onto their jade hairpins.

湖中女兒不解愁
三三盪槳百花洲
貪看花間雙蛺蝶
不知飛上玉搔頭。²⁰

Referring to the small craft aboard which the classic beauty Xishi 西施 drifted around the region with her lover, Fan Li 范蠡, female rowers – and virtually all the other female voices in West Lake poems – are typecast as waiting patiently (or not) for an absent, often faithless man, as in this poem by Zhang Shouzhong 張守中 [fl. 1360]:

The maiden of West Lake resembles Xishi,
Singing of bamboo branches aboard a melon-skin skiff.
My man's heart, like the moon, is sometimes black,
My body is like the mountain, which never moves.

西湖女兒似西施
瓜皮小船歌竹枝
郎心如月有時黑
妾身如山無動時。²¹

As in the oarsmen's songs, oarswomen also sing enchantingly, but, instead of lamenting the rigors of carrying literati over long distances for meager

19 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:45.

20 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:83.

21 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:105.

sustenance, they glide along the lotus-covered West Lake on light skiffs with few, if any, passengers, to alight on flowery isles dotting the lotus-covered waters. And even when these poems assume the voices of humble working fishermen and women, more often than not they speak of the unrequited desire of their female personae or the latter's anxiety over the safety of men who must fish or travel in distant parts, rather than the labor conditions. Lovelorn lyrics are indeed common throughout the history of *zhuzhici*, beginning in Liu Yuxi's surviving poems, but this motif assumes even greater prominence from the late Yuan through the Ming and early Qing periods, thanks in part to the influence of Yang Weizhen's collection. As the aforementioned comment by Chen Can notes, although such poems may also treat another form of labor – the work of the courtesans and other entertainers of West Lake and elsewhere – they tend to revisit romanticized images of female labor, such as weaving, spinning, and gathering, which emphasize immobility and thus separation from peripatetic fishermen, rowers, and other male laborers for whom their female admirers long.

Thus over the following several centuries, the “original intention” of *zhuzhici* attributed to Liu Yuxi and his heirs – that of recasting the bittersweet folksongs in Sichuan into a literary medium that preserved its “simplicity” [*zhi zhi*] – was partially supplanted by the elegant, sometimes recondite modes that generally elided the voices of humble laborers. As noted, the poems in Yang Weizhen's collection in particular tended to revolve around the themes of unrequited desire and to assume a feminine voice swearing devotion to a fickle lover, rather than venting complaints about the sorts of issues raised by Wang Yun or Yang Wanli. Such female personae lament their fate not of poverty or lowly status but of dependence on the whims of others – first and foremost of men. At the same time, however, the outpouring of poetry about Hangzhou's West Lake that continued throughout the Ming dynasty had the effect of intensifying scrutiny of its historical and cultural geography, horticulture, and distinctive social customs. Poems about this and other lakes in the region or beyond devote considerable attention to their geographic specificity – in other words, their “placeness.”²² The fascination with the minutiae of local conditions grew even stronger in the early Qing, just as *zhuzhici* experienced an unprecedented wave of popularity and widespread dissemination to regions

22 Sun Jie traces the development of this rootedness to place (what he calls “standing firmly in the land and soil of a place”) to the Yuan and primarily to poems from the Jiangnan region. Sun Jie, *Zhuzhici fazhanshi*, 118–19.

across all of China and even beyond it to Japan, Ryūkyū, and other foreign lands.²³

Such an interest in “placeness” became especially evident in the proliferation of annotations to poems by their authors, a tool conducive to documenting the local conditions alluded to in poems both more systematically and much more comprehensively than had been possible before the advent of this practice. It is no accident that the Kangxi 康熙 reign [1661–1722] also witnessed the rise of what eventually came to be called evidential learning [*kaozhengxue* 考證學], the scholarly movement first characterized by Hu Shih 胡適 [1891–1962] and many others since his time as the definitive birth of empiricism, comparable to that of the European Enlightenment. That the florescence of *zhuzhici* was influenced directly by this intellectual transition is confirmed by the fact that many leading evidential learning scholars, including the aforementioned towering figures Zhao Yi and Ji Yun, left dozens or even hundreds of such poems. Even more tellingly, the single most influential *zhuzhici* poet in the Qing dynasty, Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 [1629–1709], was one of the seminal exponents and practitioners of evidential learning during its formative phase.

Renowned nearly equally for both his scholarship and his poetry, Zhu Yizun wrote a series of a hundred poems, *Oar Songs of Mandarin Duck Lake* [*Yuanyanghu zhaoge* 鴛鴦湖櫂歌], which was cited by many who wrote in its wake as having set the standard for *zhuzhici* series about localities identified by bodies of water. Far more than poems in previous eras, Zhu’s work inspired generations of successors to emulate his lyrics’ combination of stylistic elegance and detailed descriptions of folk customs, historical landmarks, topographical features, and, increasingly, the livelihood of farmers, artisans, and multiple other humble occupations. Zhu’s poems are supplemented by laconic but informative annotations that provide additional facts or sources concerning the human geography of the region in which they are set (in Jiaying 嘉興 Prefecture, Zhejiang Province). At least one later commentator went so far as to claim that the poems not only equaled but, in some cases, exceeded local

23 Examples of *zhuzhici* sequences that have been gained renown as sources of information about localities include two about Yangzhou, *Yangzhou zhuzhici* 揚州竹枝詞 (1740), by Dong Weiye 董偉業 [1694–1767], and *Hanjiang sanbai yin* 邗江三百吟 (1808), by Lin Sumen 林蘇門 [1748–1809], the latter discussed and partially translated in Roland Altenburger, “Observations of a Changing World: Lin Sumen’s Bamboo-Branch-Style Songs Three Hundred Poems of Hanjiang (*Hanjiang sanbai yin*, 1808),” in *Yangzhou, A Place in Literature: The Local in Chinese Cultural History*, ed. Roland Altenburger, Margaret B. Wan, and Vibeke Børdahl (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 173–89; and discussed in Antonia Finnane, *Speaking of Yangzhou: A Chinese City, 1550–1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 284–93.

gazetteers in the breadth and exactitude of their scholarship; the fact that the Jiaxing gazetteer in the Kangxi era failed to include them was “a source of deep regret for those pursuing evidential learning.”²⁴

Consistent with his poems’ literary polish, Zhu’s empiricism typically takes the form of an erudite pursuit of often-obscure textual sources for clues to understanding the human and physical features of the landscape at the time of writing [1671–1673]. Many later series also make considerable use of written materials about local conditions, so-called *fengtu* 風土 but they also widen the scope of their sources by relying more heavily on firsthand, on-the-ground observations of the everyday lives of their residents. As the colophon to one such series set in Beijing [ca. 1790] puts it, “by expanding the scope of poetry to also include the vulgar and the common, [this genre] has been made far greater.”²⁵ However, such sociocultural inclusivity, which, as we have seen, characterized many Tang and Song poems, is conjoined with and mediated through the refined styles that, as noted, were the enduring legacy of the West Lake poetry in the Yuan and Ming inherited by Zhu Yizun. Zhu’s contribution was to dexterously fuse these seemingly contradictory impulses, inspiring subsequent generations of what we might tentatively call “poet-ethnographers” precisely because, more than almost any previous figure, he had managed to combine information-rich, empirically based descriptions of human and physical geography with a polished, elegant literary medium.²⁶ His successors both affirmed and further developed Zhu’s model of artfully weaving verbal tapestries of lyrically inflected facts on – and of – the (watery) ground.²⁷

24 Wang Chutong 王初桐, *Jinan zhuzhici* 濟南竹枝詞 [*Bamboo Branch Lyrics of Jinan*], in *Lidai zhuzhici*, 21566.

25 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 21584.

26 As a preface to another collection of oar songs, *Hanjiang zhaoge* 韓江櫂歌 [*Oar Songs of the Han River*], by Yue Jun 樂鈞 [1766–1814], puts it, “The trend of oar songs that were rooted to place seem to have begun in [Xin Qiji’s nine oar songs of Wuyi]. When they came to *Yuanyanghu zhaoge* [Oar Songs of Mandarin Duck Lake], by Zhu Yizun, which he likened to both *zhuzhi* and *langtaosha* [Waves Washing the Sand] modes, he did not only speak of the lake, nor only of rowing. They are both encyclopedic in scope and beautiful. This is its apogee.” Quoted in Sun Jie, *Zhuzhici fazhanshi*, 35.

27 Yan Qiyang 嚴奇岩 states that Zhu’s work was singularly responsible for inaugurating the trend to attach annotations with factual information about local conditions (in *Zhuzhici zhong de Qingdai Guizhou minzu shehui* 竹枝詞中的清代貴州民族社會 [*The Ethnic Society of Qing-Era Guizhou in Bamboo Branch Lyrics*] [Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2009], 2–3), but some influential works predate his by decades or more: examples include *Dianhai zhuzhici* 滇海竹枝詞, by Yang Shen 楊慎 [1488–1559], and *Moling zhuzhici* 秣陵竹枝詞, by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 [1585–1645]. See Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:253, 300–306.

Stylistically, Zhu Yizun's series largely resembles the elegant register of his Yuan and Ming predecessors' poems; thematically, too, he develops the inquisitiveness about local culture, language, and conditions that had been evident in some of the later Yuan and Ming poems set on the West Lake and elsewhere, excavating and foregrounding information about the linguistic, historical, and other features of the people and places that he describes in and around the lakes in Jiaying. Through the sweep of its hundred poems (which, according to Zhu's preface, have no particular order [*yu wu quanci* 語無詮次]), the physical and human contours of this landscape emerge into comprehensive view. We can glimpse these multifaceted features in a single example, Poem #69:

My home is by the head of the Qin Creek,
When days are long, I love to wash the boats of Heng Lake.
The flowers east of Zhanyun temple have burst into bloom,
It's a good time for a spring stroll south of the Righteous Woman's
Embankment.

Heng Lake and Zhanyun Temple are both to the east of Banluo. Righteous Woman's Embankment is the grave of Lü Rong, wife of Xu Sheng, who died in the Yellow Turban Rebellion during the Han. Prefect Mi collected money to bury her. Today, this is mistakenly thought to be the grave of Lü Meng.

阿儂家住秦溪頭
日長愛濯橫湖舟
霑雲寺東花已放
義婦堰南春可遊

橫湖、霑雲寺俱在半邏東。義婦堰，漢許昇妻呂榮冢，死黃巾之亂。糜府君斂錢葬之。今譌為呂蒙冢。²⁸

In each of its four lines, the poem brings up a single physical landmark, either natural or manmade, through the voice of a young woman reveling in the neighborhood's vernal delights. The relatively brief gloss tells the tale that has given the last reference, the embankment (or weir), its name, and ends by noting its "mistaken" identification with Lü Meng 呂蒙. The word "mistaken" occurs with some regularity in the annotations, often registering the author's objection to local lore that strays from the historical record. This fidelity to fact and the

28 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:824.

culling of inaccuracies was, according to a preface by Ye Feng 葉封 [1623–1687], one of Zhu's principal motivations for writing the series.²⁹ Many other poems and their glosses recount legends and beliefs that have become associated with particular sites, but similarly note their “errors” or simply consign them to apocryphal status. We would expect precisely such exacting standards from the author of the monumental *Study of the Meanings of the Classics* [*Jingyikao* 經義考] (in 300 *juan*), one of the most significant bibliographical compilations in the Qing and a formative influence on subsequent textual scholarship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was his rigorous commitment to sorting fact from fiction that, together with the literary polish of the series, earned Zhu's work the respect of generations of later poets.

4 Returning to the Plain and Ordinary

In the more than two centuries of the Qing dynasty that followed Zhu Yizun's series, numerous *zhuzhici* poets, especially those who wrote in the subgenre of lake/oar poems, acknowledged his methods as the model and inspiration for their own work. While adhering to the general principle of identifying “errors” and meticulously tracing historical genealogies of places, people, and practices, many incorporate increasingly vernacular language and content. As one author, Chen Qi 陳祁 [fl. 1780], put it, “For matters of the past, I occasionally look to Zhu [Yizun's] ten lines; For rustic speech, I randomly imitate Xie [Yong's ‘Twelve Rustic Word’] poems.”³⁰ It is unclear whether Xie Yong's 謝鏞 [1719–1795] poems under that title still survive and thus how truly “rustic” they were, but these two references hint at how Zhu's successors applied the textually based empirical methods pioneered by Zhu to the more demotic domains of folk customs, language, and beliefs.

According to a preface by his nephew (Sun Erzhu 孫爾準), Yang Lun 楊掄 [fl. 1778] wrote his hundred-poem series, *Oar Songs of Lotus/Hibiscus Lake* [*Furonghu zhaoge* 芙蓉湖櫂歌] (in Jiangyin 江陰, Jiangsu) in explicit imitation of Zhu Yizun's work. He identified them as oar songs in homage to Zhu as well as in acknowledgment of the genre's plebeian roots and character:

Today's poems record the circumstances of the locality, including what has been passed down from old, customs that can be seen and heard, ordinary men and fisherwomen – in other words, what can be learned

29 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:822.

30 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1445.

and understood with ease. The oarsmen drum tap on the sides of their boats and drum with their oars, singing these songs amid the waves and mist, thus making “oar song” an appropriate name for them.

今詩因地紀事，凡古老所流傳，習俗所聞見，黃郎漁婢，習而易知。相與鼓棹，發唱於煙波杳靄之際，則名之以櫂歌為宜。³¹

According to Sun, Yang’s descriptions of temple festivals, games, village customs, proverbs, and other localisms are more fully expressive of the genre’s plainspokenness [*zhipu* 質樸] than are Zhu Yizun’s recondite poems tracing forgotten events in the past [*yishi* 逸事]. Its poems are arranged sequentially over the four seasons, beginning with the New Year and Lantern Festivals, and ending with preparations for starting the cycle all over again. “Plain and ordinary” is indeed an apt qualifier for the Lotus Lake poems: their register is folksy, bragging about local products (e.g., multiple varieties of chestnuts) and talented citizens (e.g., an exceptionally dexterous barber), but also lamenting the endemic poverty of the residents:

Temple drummers noisily announce preparations for harvest festivities,
But how many families can celebrate with a full bin of grain?
They only lament the sight of grain merchants’ sails and masts,
As of old, families have no rice to last beyond the next meal.

After the harvest, much of the rice leaves the district. The price cannot be stabilized.

社鼓鼕鼕報賽忙
幾家能夠慶穰穰
只愁估客帆檣過
依舊家無隔夜糧

秋收後，米多出境，價不能平。³²

In a slightly later hundred-poem series about a district in Jiaying, *Danghu zhuzhici* 當湖竹枝詞, by Lu Gongdou 陸拱斗 [fl. 1790], local colloquialisms and humorous descriptions of harvest festivals figure prominently, too:

³¹ Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1372.

³² Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1383.

Golden stalks blanket a thousand fields,
 As autumn nears, their ears have already ripened evenly.
 Temple drummers announce the festival in every village,
 After listening to the gods' songs, the hogs' trotters disperse.

芄芄黃茂遍千畦
 時近秋分已秀齊
 社鼓村村同報賽
 神歌聽罷散豚蹄。³³

A preface to Lu's work by his friend Li Zongchuan 李棕川 [fl. ca. 1800] lauds the pivotal role of Zhu Yizun's series in stimulating the subsequent outpouring of *zhuzhici*, but notes that many of his later imitators strayed into "sensuality and flowery verbiage, which had nothing to do with the essential purpose of describing local customs and the ways of the humble folk." Only Lu's work has "deeply absorbed [Zhu's] original intention in writing oar songs."³⁴ In a still later sequence, *Weitang zhuzhici* 魏塘竹枝詞 (Weitang is also in Jiaying), the preface (by Ying Hu 應鵠, dated 1837) praises the author, Cao Xinxian 曹信賢 [fl. ca. 1800], for his fidelity to Zhu Yizun's work and lists several other poets who also followed closely in Zhu's footsteps. Their poems, including Cao's, are all in the format of identically rhymed [*heyun* 和韻] series, which, in the words of another preface (by Huang Antao 黃安韜 [fl. ca. 1830]), can supplement Zhu's poems by "recasting new materials" in the mold of the original work.³⁵ More so than either of the two series discussed above, the contents of this series introduce an earthy, sometimes lusty poetic mode along with a generous infusion of geographic and historical knowledge. We observe this in the poem that corresponds (using the same two rhyme words, *zhou* 舟 and *you* 游) to number 69 in Zhu's sequence quoted above:

Your heart is as hard as Rock Man's Head,
 When you leave town, you're as aimless as Untethered Boat.
 How many Bridges to Flourishing Fortunes have you skirted,
 To drift instead into the muddied Depths of Depravity?

33 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1485.

34 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1473.

35 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1543.

Rock Man's Head is in Ba'nán District; Untethered Boat is the inscription on a plaque over a room in the Qian family's Guest Garden; Flourishing Fortune Bridge is in Qianshan Township; Depths of Depravity is in Baoxi District.

郎心硬似石人頭
出外渾如不繫舟
多少興隆橋畔路
偏從敗落蕩中游

石人頭在八南區，不繫舟係錢氏客園中室上額。興隆橋在遷善鄉。敗落蕩在保西區。³⁶

This poem brings up toponyms in each of its four lines, just as Zhu's verse does, but cleverly uses their literal meanings in a breezier, more colloquial style. Here, instead of a putatively chaste maiden gazing demurely over flowery hillsides, the poetic voice rails theatrically against the "depravity" of her lover, echoing the refrain in hundreds of Yuan and Ming *zhuzhici* that men had a habit of straying toward "wild mandarin ducks" [*ye yuanyang* 野鴛鴦 aka prostitutes]. Although this particular poem lacks the historical or other learned references that are so prominent in Zhu's notations, the series as a whole retains some of the erudite style typical of Zhu's poems and includes extensive annotations for a significant number of its entries.

5 Fragrant Flowers, Bitter Roots, and Weighty Bricks

Peng Shu 彭淑 [1748–1808], the author of yet another hundred-poem series (*Changyang zhuzhici* 長陽竹枝詞), offers an especially effusive encomium to Zhu, praising the "surfeit of loveliness" in his descriptions of people and places and self-deprecatingly referring to his own poems as clumsy imitations that have "assumed a rustic tone to speak of everyday affairs."³⁷ True to this self-portrait, he lards his sequence about a district along the south bank of the Yangzi River in western Hubei with local folk wisdom about how to survive

³⁶ Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1440.

³⁷ Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1218. Peng Shu was a member of the Tujia ethnic group, which is concentrated in this region. See Kong Xiangru 孔相如, "Lun Qingdai Tujiazhu shiren Peng Qiutan Changyang zhuzhici 論清代土家族詩人彭秋潭長陽竹枝詞 [On Bamboo Branch Lyrics by the Qing-Era Tujia Poet Peng Qiutan]," *Minzu wenxue yanjiu* 民族文學研究, no. 3 (1985).

a famine, bargain for fish at the market, convey New Year's greetings tardily, or sing love songs convincingly, and quotes from ditties that poke fun at self-important officials. His annotations are confined mainly to descriptions of live performances of song or opera, some of which he attended. In a note to a poem commemorating a banquet where an ensemble of singers identified as ten "sisters" performed tragic love songs, he says that such sincere, moving expressions of feeling are "the true meaning" [*zhenyi* 真意] of *zhuzhici*. And in the poem, he explicitly identifies the progenitors of their singing style as the young women of Ba whose bamboo branch songs had inspired Liu Yuxi to write his poems a thousand years before:

The ten sisters' singing is all too tragic,
The girl who is leaving stamps her feet and wets her clothes with her tears.
Ning Township is near the Wu Mountain gorge,
This singing resembles [that of] the girls of Ba who sang of bamboo branches.

十姊妹歌太悲
別娘頓足淚沾衣
寧鄉地近巫山峽
猶似巴娘唱竹枝。³⁸

Invoking the tragic intensity of these forerunners, Peng draws a genealogical line directly from his own work to that of Liu Yuxi. Even though overall the tone of his sequence is far from bleak, he locates the essence of the genre in examples that were drenched in the heartrending tears of a jilted woman, which, as we have seen, remained a predominant thread in such poetry for several hundred years.

Aside from the ubiquity of tears of longing and loneliness, another word frequently intoned in *zhuzhici*, whether for romantic or other reasons, is "bitterness" [*ku* 苦]. In another contemporary sequence that not only invokes but is actually set partially in the Ba region, *Flowing Bamboo Branches* [*Yan zhuzhi* 演竹枝], its author Tan Cui 檀萃 [fl. 1761] is said to be overwhelmed by the bitterness of his fate, so much so that it has made him "mute." Tan was assigned the arduous task of supervising a shipment of Yunnan copper down the Yangzi River from Chongqing to Yangzhou and, from there, along the Grand Canal to Beijing. His hundred poems describe a cornucopia of local Sichuan legends in the voice of a seductively beautiful maiden of Wushan, who, after marrying

38 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1219.

him as a concubine, comforts the poet, now rendered mute by his bitterness about this physically and psychologically ruinous assignment (forced on him by a vindictive superior):

I pity you for having tasted bitterness for over a year,
And now you've set anchor in [the bitter] Canker Root [Huanglian]
Harbor.
Reports say the flowers in the river garden are coming into bloom,
I will go ahead and pick some fragrant sprigs for you.

憐郎喫苦已經年
又向黃連港泊船
報導江園花正發
為郎前去摘芳鮮。³⁹

Alongside these sentimental outbursts, the annotations (written in the poet's own voice) provide meticulously detailed accounts of shipping routes, different types of watercraft, prices and overall business conditions, and the historical, geographic, and climatic conditions in the regions through which the poet and his companions travel. Although this marriage between (feminine-voiced) lyrical expression and (masculine-inflected) empirical commentary is awkward in places, especially compared to the spare elegance of Zhu Yizun's work (which is not credited as an influence in the notes or prefatory remarks), the gendered juxtaposition of emotionally fraught lyrics with matter-of-fact observations about local conditions is singularly ingenious. That the author was a native of Anhui (in Wangjiang 望江, Anqing 安慶), the home of many of the most influential evidential scholars in his lifetime during the movement's heyday in the High Qing [1723–1820], may be far from incidental to these features in his sequence.

Such efforts to fashion a synthesis between lyrical expression and empirical observation continued well into the nineteenth century, such as in two sequences written sometime in the last century or so of the Qing. Lin Zhongqi's 林中麒 [fl. ca. 1790] *Zhapu zhuzhici* 乍浦竹枝詞 is set in Zhapu, the booming port just south of Jiaying, which, by the late eighteenth century, had surpassed Ningbo 寧波 as the hub of trade with Japan and Southeast Asia.⁴⁰ In his erudite preface written in parallel prose, Lin pays brief homage to Zhu as the model

39 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1173.

40 Matsuura Akira, "Shindai Sekkō Saho ni okeru Nihon bōeki to enkai bōeki no kanren 清代浙江乍浦における日本貿易と沿海貿易の連関 [The Relationship between

for his work, noting that he had striven to remain faithful to the sequence by writing the full hundred poems. The significance to Lin of Zhu's work is further emphasized in the first poem, in which he begins his description of Zhapu by noting that the "city today is a dense hive of 10,000 households, far more than during the time of the Scribe of Golden Pavilion [Zhu Yizun's sobriquet]." The attached gloss then quotes a regulated verse poem by Zhu, *Inscription for the Ruixiang Monastery* [*Ruixiang sengshe tici* 瑞祥僧舍題詞], which describes Zhapu as a lonely hamlet clinging to the coastline, with a mere "eight or nine households."⁴¹ This gesture seems to indicate not only how far the town has come since Zhu's time but also, by implication, that this poetry, too, had adapted to the current prosperity of the region. And, indeed, Lin's poems and glosses provide a thorough yet judiciously concise balance between historical geography and lyrical expression. As if needling Zhu Yizun because of his condescension, Lin lavishes attention on Zhapu's thriving maritime commerce, such as in this poem, which traces the town's commercial importance all the way back to the coastal trade in jasmine during the Northern Song [960–1127]:

The flower market is next to the Hall for Mapping the Ocean to its east,
Hurry up and buy me a fragrant bunch!
So lovely will they make me, standing in the breeze,
The seven sprigs at my waist will give off wafts of jasmine fragrance!

[Zhou Mi's] "Record of the Qianchun Reign": When jasmine first blooms, women stuff their waists with up to seven sprigs, which cost them tens of rolls [of coins]. The merchants from Fujian and Guangdong who come to sell flowers at Zhapu bring orchids and jasmine in the greatest amounts. Their prices are not particularly high.

花市東鄰籌海堂
催郎盡與買群芳
粧成愛殺當風立
七插吹來茉莉香

《乾淳歲時記》：茉莉初出，婦人簇帶多至七插，所值數十卷。閩廣商人販花至乍，蘭與茉莉最夥，價不甚穹。⁴²

Trade with Japan and Coastal Trade in Zhapu, Zhejiang during the Qing],” *Higashi Ajia bunka kōshō kenkyū* 東アジア文化交渉研究, no. 1 (2008): 143–50.

41 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1763.

42 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1774.

Oar Songs of Pingchuan [*Pingchuan zhaoge* 平川櫓歌], about another township just northeast of Jiaying, was composed between the late Qianlong and the Jiaqing period but not published until the early 1920s. Its author, Xu Han 徐涵 [1730–1813], wrote some of the annotations for his fifty-eight surviving poems, but the majority were added by at least three later writers (or possibly the same writer using three different pen names). These notes are especially useful, because Xu's poems cover an astoundingly wide range of topics: local tax rates, beekeeping techniques, boat construction, women's headgear, poultry and other animal husbandry, cormorant fishing, local crab varieties, Suzhou-bound ferry schedules, local school financing, cotton prices, physical geography, historical lore, and more. For example, he writes of the brickmaking sideline that farmers take up during their slack days in spring:

Fertile, level fields stretch out for 100 li,
Returning home with our animals in the evening, we sing short songs.
Our low-lying watery lands are laden with moisture,
Mud bricks too numerous to count weigh down the passing boats.

Note by Wan:⁴³ Many locals produce mud bricks to sell for cash on spring days when they take a break from planting. These mud bricks are unfired.

平疇百里沃饒多
晚牧歸來唱短歌
漫說水鄉卑濕甚
泥坯無數重船過

萬注：按鄉人於春耕休息日，多製泥坯以貨錢。泥坯乃磚瓦之未經火煉者。⁴⁴

Of all the sequences that I have covered, Xu's lyrics are without doubt the most comprehensive in surveying the everyday lives of their unassuming subjects. As such, *Pingchuan zhaoge* might be regarded as having most fully realized the potential of this genre for marrying lyrical expression with empirical observation: applying well-honed powers of description to the here-and-now of quotidian life, supplemented where appropriate by learned textual sources, in an aesthetically pleasing form. In this respect, it is representative of the late Qing dissemination of *zhuzhici* in nearly every corner of the empire and

43 No information is available about any of the three commentators of Xu's poems.

44 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 2:1738.

the larger Sinographic world, where they both lyricize and convey detailed information about multiple societal, vocational, geographical, and cultural contexts to their readers across this cultural sphere who increasingly sought out such knowledge.

6 Writing Poetry, Writing Ethnography

If the germ of this proto-ethnographic poetic mode can be traced back to the formative stages of *zhuzhici* in the Tang and Song dynasties, one might nonetheless ask whether its full flowering was preordained or to any degree inevitable.⁴⁵ Given the pivotal role of Zhu Yizun in setting the course for the final phase of *zhuzhici*, one could argue that such a development was far from clear in the surviving examples from the Tang and Song. Moreover, Zhu's model of rigorous empiricism, heavily weighted toward historical and textual sources, led some poets to look elsewhere for demotic modes, as attested to by the remarks by Lu Gongdou and others cited above. In addition, we can also point to ethnographically descriptive poems and annotations about non-Han ethnicities, beginning in Yunnan in the mid- to late Ming (*Diannan zhuzhici* 滇南竹枝詞, *Dianzhong zhuzhici* 滇中竹枝詞, and especially the *Translated Bamboo Branch Lyrics of Different Nations in the South of Yunnan* [*Diannan zhuyi yiyu zhuzhici* 滇南諸夷譯語竹枝詞]) and extending to other areas of the empire and even beyond in the Qing. In fact, the genealogy invoked by commentators such as the above-mentioned Mao Guiming, who, along with many, argued for a non-Han origin of the genre (which Liu Yuxi's description of *zhuzhici* songs as *cangning bukefen* 儻儻不可分 [crude and unintelligible], words he elsewhere used for the "barbarians" of Sichuan, seems to support), places this function – of rendering a cultural or geographic "other" more comprehensible – at the core of its historical trajectory after the seventeenth century.

Nonetheless, in the poems of the Tang, Song, and Yuan, we can discern early signs of these trends, first and foremost the genre's affective attunement with the rhythms of everyday life in surrounding landscapes, whether musical, biological, or geographical. Such resonance is evident in Liu Yuxi's foundational

45 For examples of *zhuzhici* that were included in practical collectanea for their perceived value in illustrating agricultural and sericultural customs and practices, see Zhou Anbang 周安邦, "You Mingdai riyong leishu *Nongsangmen* zhong shoulu de cansang zhuzhici tanjiu Wu zhong diqu de canye huodong 由明代日用類書《農桑門》中收錄的蠶桑竹枝詞探究吳中地區的蠶業活動 [Investigating Sericultural Activities in the Wu Region through the Bamboo Branch Lyrics Collected in the Ming-Era Encyclopedia *Agriculture and Sericulture*]," *Xingda renwen xuebao* 興大人文學報 55 (2015).

poems, whose arresting images of singing, flowing waters, howling gibbons, or broken hearts, inter alia, reverberated throughout the poetry of the subsequent millennium:

The waters churn noisily through the twelve shoals of Qutang Gorge,
This route has been difficult since ancient times.
I have long lamented that men's hearts are inferior to water,
They stir up waves on flat land, for no reason at all.

瞿塘嘈嘈十二灘
此中道路古來難
長恨人心不如水
等閒平地起波瀾。⁴⁶

Indeed, the continuity of the motifs, themes, and even language of *zhuzhici* over time and space is quite striking, especially to readers who are unfamiliar with the profound sensitivity to literary and historical precedents that have shaped Chinese cultural expression throughout the imperial era and even today. As we have seen with Zhu Yizun's poems, the desire to testify to and to "perform" their writers' affective engagement with their surroundings often went hand in hand with an almost archaeological excavation of an observed environment in order to discover not only the traces of the past but of the resonance of that past with the present as well. It is perhaps this antiquarian bent that might inhibit *zhuzhici* from being plumbed for models to apply to ethnographic writing and research in the present.⁴⁷

Regardless of these caveats, however, social scientists might still discover that *zhuzhici* have something valuable to offer to ethnographers in this time of aesthetic, sociopolitical, and epistemological ferment. As Kent Maynard and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor write about the poetry of ethnography and vice

46 Wang Liqi, *Lidai zhuzhici*, 1:3.

47 In his survey of travel and geographical writing over the span of Chinese imperial history, Richard Strassberg observes the enduring tendency for such works to assume a "miniaturistic," lyrical orientation, which following Yu-kung Kao, he attributes to the centrality of the literati lyric tradition, in contrast to the "novelistic tendency of modern Western travel writing," in *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 48. *Zhuzhici* certainly conforms to these general trends, which Cordell Yee argues have played a dominant role in the development of Chinese cartography, as well. See Cordell D. K. Yee, "Chinese Cartography among the Arts: Objectivity, Subjectivity, Representation," in *The History of Cartography*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2:2.150–69.

versa, the fusion of these two modes of writing requires multiple competencies and modes of knowing, through which to articulate an “artful reality”:

A poet may write more to what one does not yet know; an ethnographer (at least in the classic and positivist sense) writes more to what one already knows. The ethnographic poet and the poetic ethnographer must do both. That is, like the author of historical fiction, the ethnographic poet must try to be faithful to external historical experience, while reaching beyond or through it to an equally true, artful reality.⁴⁸

Needless to say, artistry is central to the practice of poetry of any kind, including ethnographically informative, “reality-based” *zhuzhici*. Moreover, poetry “shares a cultural function with myth, performance, and ritual, promoting ways of being that are not instructional but, instead, are performative, relying on the enactment and re-enactment of the verse itself, rather than on argumentation” to impart insights to its readers.⁴⁹ It is this possibility for re-enactment, a “refrain” that, in Félix Guattari’s analysis, makes this and other aesthetically centered discourse potentially “creative alternatives to scientific rationality.”⁵⁰ From multiple disciplinary perspectives, be they organizational behavior, anthropology, sociology, or psychology, the research for and construction of ethnographies is increasingly being reconfigured in ways that make room for the poet or, more generally, the lyrical ethnographer attuned to “polyphonic, polyrhythmic surround” in “the world at the local level.”⁵¹ Their exquisitely refined sensitivity to geographic particularities, to both love and labor experienced locally, makes *zhuzhici* surprisingly relevant to present-day efforts to revamp ethnography in these directions.

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48 Kent Maynard and Melissa Cahnmann-Taylor, “Anthropology at the Edge of Words: Where Poetry and Ethnography Meet,” *Anthropology and Humanism* 35, no. 1 (2010): 12.

49 Gasi Islam and Michael J. Zyphur, “The Sweetest Dreams That Labor Knows: Robert Frost and the Poetics of Work,” *Management Decision* 44, no. 4 (2006): 527.

50 Bertelsen and Murphie, “An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers,” 151.

51 Bertelsen and Murphie, “An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers,” 146.

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