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Contemplating “Return”: Xie Lingyun’s “Hillside Garden”

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Abstract

Xie Lingyun was the first of China’s great nature poets. As the most celebrated poet in fifth-century China and a histrionic scion of the illustrious Xie clan of the Eastern Jin, he had cultural influence that extended beyond the literary into religion and philosophy. This article examines Xie’s poetic exploration of the concept of “return” – an important rhetorical trope throughout the history of Chinese literature. By close reading, annotating, and analyzing a selection of Xie’s poems, the article sheds light on the poet’s obsession with instability in the meaning of “return” and argues that beneath the compliant poetic surface lies a saliently dissenting voice. Xie’s distinctive imagery and ideation emerge from an intricate deployment of earlier texts, among which the *Classic of Changes* is of paramount importance.

Keywords

poetry – return – Xie Lingyun – *Yijing*

Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 [385–433] came from one of the most distinguished aristocratic families of the Eastern Jin [317–420]. The Xie ancestral home in the north was in Yangjia 陽夏 County, Chen 陳 Commandery, in present-day Taikang 太康, Henan. The family moved south after the fall of the Western Jin [265–317]. They established an estate in the area of Guiji 會稽 (present-day Shangyu, Zhejiang, east of Shaoxing).¹

¹ 會稽 is often mistakenly pronounced “Kuaji.” I use “Guiji,” which is the correct pronunciation according to the *Guoyu cidian* 國語辭典 [*Mandarin Dictionary*] (Taipei: Shangwu

The most accomplished member of the Xie clan was Xie An 謝安 [320–385], who at the climax of his career thwarted the attempted invasion by Fu Jian 苻堅 [338–385] in the Fei 淝 River Battle in 383.² Xie An, as a cultural hero, triumphed not through brute force but moral and spiritual excellence. Michael Rogers posits: “Xie An’s legend does not depict an isolated great man, hurling challenge into the teeth of fate and commanding the tides of history; his heroics are of gentler order, and seem to be predicated of him more as a member of a collectivity than as an individual.... they convincingly dramatized a great cultural ideal the Southern Dynasties: the inevitable triumph of spirit over brute force.”³ Xie An was the perfect embodiment of what Charles Holcombe calls a “new cultural balance” admired by the Eastern Jin literati.⁴ The new ideal personhood, adopting terms from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 such as the “divine one” [*shenren* 神人]⁵ or the “true man” [*zhenren* 真人],⁶ cuts across the boundaries of so-called Confucian ethics, Daoist philosophy, and Buddhist-Daoist spiritual mysticism.⁷ At the heart of this new idealism is the virtue of passivity and quietism. Xie was the most outstanding figure in the fourth century, and his

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- yinshu guan, 1959), 3.1388. See also *Ci hai* 辭海 for an explanation of the pronunciation Guiji and how Kuaiji, the erroneous pronunciation, was initially introduced in the notes to *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 [*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*], by Hu Sanxing 胡三省 [1230–1302], who used *gong* 工 and *wai* 外 as the *fanqie* 反切 for 會.
- 2 For a biography of Xie An, see Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jin shu* 晉書 [*History of the Jin*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 79.2072–77. For a study of the image of Xie An, see Jean-Pierre Diény, *Portrait anecdotique d'un gentilhomme chinois Xie An (320–385), d'après le Shishuo xinyu* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1993).
 - 3 Michael Rogers, “The Myth of the Battle of the Fei River,” *T’oung Pao* 54.1 (1968): 71–72.
 - 4 Charles Holcombe, “True Man,” in *In the Shadow of the Han* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 126.
 - 5 The term *shenren* 神人 appears throughout the *Zhuangzi* text, but most prominently in the first chapter. See Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, annot., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [*Annotated Collection of the Zhuangzi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 1.17. I translate *shen* 神 as “divine,” which denotes god or a godlike figure.
 - 6 The term *zhenren* 真人 does not denote a separate category than *shenren*. It is a different name for the same thing. Another term *zhiren* 至人, also referring to the same godlike figure, appears in the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* together with *zhenren* and *shenren*. The chapter “Da Zongshi 大宗師 [The Great and Most Honored Master]” has an extended discussion of *zhenren*, i.e., godlike figure from antiquity. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 3A.226–35.
 - 7 See my “Fengliu yiwu Xie Kangle: shanshui, shanju, dili shuxie yihuo shi zhengzhi biaoshu 風流遺物謝康樂：山水、山居、地理書寫抑或是政治表述 [The Eccentric and Untrammelled Style of Xie Lingyun: Landscape Writing, Mountain Dwelling, or Political Discoursing],” in *Zhonggu wenxue zhong de shi yu shi* 中古文學中的詩與史 [*Poetry and History in Early Medieval Literature*], ed. Zhang Yue 張月 and Chen Yinchu 陳引弛 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2020).

“returning/retiring” [*gui* 歸] to the Eastern Mountains 東山 made him the living example of Eastern Jin ideal personhood.⁸

The Eastern Mountains in Guiji came to embody the monumental merit of “yielding” [*rang* 讓], for which the Xie clan would be remembered.⁹ Xie Lingyun wrote two poems praising Xie An and An’s nephew Xie Xuan 謝玄 [343–388], who was Xie Lingyun’s grandfather and the commander-in-chief in the Fei River Battle.¹⁰ Their retirement in the Eastern Mountains, shortly after having triumphed and saved the Jin, recalls the heroic conduct and moral rectitude of the high-minded recluses in the Zhou dynasty [1046–256 BCE].¹¹ Politically and militarily, the Xie descendants could not replicate the success of Xie An and Xie Xuan. Yet, through literary excellence, the cultured way of the Xie clan was propagated. The virtues of passivity and quietism as embodied in the concept of “return” were articulated the most eloquently in Xie Lingyun’s poetry.

In this article, we look closely at a few of Xie Lingyun’s poems and focus on the instability of the meaning of “return.” We argue that beneath the compliant poetic surface of “return” is a saliently dissenting voice that is critical of the military court that replaced Jin. Xie’s distinctive imagery and ideation about “return” emerge from an intricate deployment of earlier texts, among which the *Classic of Changes* [*Yijing* 易經], the *Classic of Poetry* [*Shijing* 詩經], and the *Zhuangzi* are of paramount importance in creating meaning.

First, a brief word on the life and career of Xie Lingyun before his 422 exile is in order. Known to his contemporaries as Duke Kangle 康樂公, Xie arrived in the capital Jiankang 建康 (present-day Nanjing) at the age of fifteen. He became a legendary figure whose “picturesque” life and “flamboyant and unrestrained” style made him the ultimate eccentric in the fifth century.¹² When he first entered court service, Xie Lingyun followed his uncle Xie Hun 謝混 [381–412], the youngest of Xie An’s grandsons, who was married to an imperial princess. Unfortunately, Xie Lingyun soon lost his powerful ally as, in 412, Liu

8 Xie An spent his early years as a retired gentleman in the mountains. When he accepted office as the later usurper Huan Wen’s 桓溫 [312–373] sergeant-at-arms, Xie An was past forty. Shortly after the Battle of the Fei River, Xie An and other members of the Xie clan withdrew from court.

9 See Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nan shi* 南史 [*History of the Southern Dynasties*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 19.546.

10 See Xiao Tong 蕭統, comp., Li Shan 李善, annot., *Wen xuan* 文選 [*Selections of Refined Literature*] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 19.912.

11 Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 19.912.

12 See J. D. Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream: The Life and Works of the Chinese Nature Poet Hsieh Ling-yün (385–433)*, *Duke of K'ang-Lo* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 9.

Yu 劉裕 [Emperor Gaozu 高祖, r. 420–422] rose to power and put Xie Hun to death.¹³ Xie Lingyun’s life was probably spared on account of his usefulness in decorating and legitimizing Liu Yu’s power and ambition to the throne.¹⁴ In April 413, Liu Yu appointed Xie Lingyun as the imperial librarian – a sinecure that had no significant advisory duties.¹⁵ From the beginning, Xie Lingyun seemed recalcitrant in his services to Liu Yu, who nevertheless tolerated the young man, perhaps reserving him for ceremonial roles.¹⁶ In the winter of 416, Liu Yu embarked on a northern campaign, for which he commissioned Xie Lingyun to compose a *fu* poem. Instead of properly singing praises of Liu Yu, the laudatory message in Xie Lingyun’s *fu* is mostly about Xie An.¹⁷ Whether Xie Lingyun deliberately missed the mark on this important commission is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say here that our poet’s literary design cannot be called transparent or superficial.

In 418 Liu Yu hosted a large gathering at his military base in Pengcheng 彭城 (present-day Xuzhou, Jiangsu) to celebrate the victory of the northern campaign. By then, he had been made the Duke of Song 宋公. Liu Yu rewarded court officials by conferring on them new titles and positions. Xie was appointed the gentleman attendant at the palace gate and gentleman councilor of the

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- 13 Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu*, 79.2079. See also Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream*, 10–18.
- 14 Cynthia Chennault notes the roles and functions of Eastern Jin elite families during the frequent changes in political authorities. According to Chennault, they positioned themselves at “center stage, prepared to carry out functions of large symbolic moment – such as presenting the imperial regalia at a new ruler’s investiture, memorializing ‘on behalf of the hundred officials’ to urge a usurper to the throne, and so forth.” Cynthia Chennault, “Lofty Gates or Solitary Impoverishment? Xie Family Members of the Southern Dynasties,” *T’oung Pao* 85.4–5 (1999): 257.
- 15 Shen Yue 沈約, *Song shu* 宋書 [*History of Liu-Song*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67.1743; Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream*, 18. Xie Lingyun’s title at the time was administrator to the commander in chief and assistant director.
- 16 Chennault posits Liu Yu’s tolerance of Xie Lingyun in the following terms: “[In] patiently planning for the day when he would himself take the throne, Liu Yu realized that brute force was insufficient to his purpose. He would need to cultivate some measure of acceptance from the old guard families who populated the bureaucracy, from its middle ranks up” (Chennault, “Lofty Gates,” 271). Still, as Chennault points out, “Xie Lingyun’s headstrong temperament is always a source of worry for Liu Yu” (273, n62).
- 17 This “panegyric” *fu* was apparently considered an important political service Xie Lingyun rendered for Liu Yu and was later included in Xie Lingyun’s official biography. For the Chinese text, see Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 67.1744–53; for a translation, see Tian Xiaofei, *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 287–340; for a study, see Jui-lung Su 蘇瑞隆, “Lun Xie Lingyun de *Zhuan zheng fu* 論謝靈運的《撰征賦》 [On Xie Lingyun’s *Zhuan zheng fu*],” *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, no. 5 (1990).

inner court, entrusted with ceremonial duties and functions.¹⁸ The Pengcheng celebration anticipated Liu Yu's ascension to power. A reading of two of the poems commissioned for the occasion shed light on some of the subtler feelings Xie Lingyun might have harbored about Liu Yu's imminent usurpation of the Jin throne. Expressions of concern and reservation are couched in a poetic exposition on the theme "return" from multiple perspectives.

On the Double Ninth Day, Attending the Farewell Assembly Hosted by the Duke of Song at the Cavalry Terrace in Honor of Secretariat Director Kong [*Jiuri cong Songgong ximatai ji song Kongling shi* 九日從宋公戲馬臺集送孔令詩]¹⁹

季秋邊朔苦	In the last month of autumn, winds on the northern border are bitter and harsh; ²⁰
旅鴈違霜雪	Migrating geese are flying against the onslaught of frost and snow.
淒淒陽卉腓	Wilted and withered, all plants turn fallow under the sun; ²¹

18 See Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 67.1753.

19 For the text, see Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.960–61; for a translation, see Wu Fusheng, *Written at Imperial Command: Panegyric Poetry in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York, 2008), 79–80.

20 The last month of autumn is the ninth lunar month. The northern border refers to Pengcheng, which was located on the northern frontier of the Eastern Jin.

21 This line alludes to *Mao shi* 204/2 ("Si Yue 四月 [The Fourth Month]"): "The autumn days were bitterly cold; / All plants and grasses withered. Turmoils and troubles made me ill; / Where can we return?" [秋日淒淒，百卉具腓。亂離瘼矣，爰其適歸。] The theme of "turmoils and troubles" is born out with a scenery of the late autumnal deterioration. My translation of the line is influenced by Satō Masamitsu who makes the following observation. Xie Lingyun coined the phrase *yanghui* 陽卉 by replacing "autumnal" with "sunny" and creating a concrete sense of warmth and brightness. This allows the reader to imagine the encroaching cold autumn air. Satō Masamitsu 佐藤正光, "Xie Zhan, Xie Lingyun de wenxue yu tamen de zhouwei: dui Pengcheng Xima tai zhi yanyou ji zuopin de kaocha 謝瞻、謝靈運的文學與他們的周圍——對彭城戲馬台之宴遊及作品的考察 [The Literary Writings of Xie Zhan and Xie Lingyun with a Focus on Historical Background: An Examination of the Banquet Hosted at the Cavalry Terrace and the Literary Works Composed for the Occasion]," in *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue lunji* 魏晉南北朝文學論集 [*Collection of Studies of Wei-Jin and Southern Dynasties Literature*], ed. Nanjing daxue Zhongguo yuyan wenxue xi 南京大學中國語言文學系 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 359. See also Mao Heng 毛亨, comm., Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, annot., Lu Deming 陸德明 phonetic commentary, and Kong Yingda 孔穎達, coll., "*Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 [Rectified Interpretation of the Mao's Book of Songs]," in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [*Annotations and Commentaries of the Thirteen Classics*], ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965), 13.442b.

皎皎寒潭絮	Bright and brilliant, the deep pool shimmers in the cold. ²²
良辰感聖心 雲旗興暮節	On this fine day, his sagacious mind is moved; ²³ Cloud-pennants are hoisted to celebrate the late-season festival. ²⁴
鳴葭戾朱宮	The sound of reed pipes arrives at the vermilion palace; ²⁵
蘭卮獻時哲 餞宴光有孚	Fragrant ale is presented to the savant of our day. ²⁶ The banquet is hosted to inspire confidence and trust; ²⁷
和樂隆所缺	Harmonious conviviality fortifies the lost principle binding lord and vassal. ²⁸
在宥天下理	“Letting Be” – All-under-heaven is in order; ²⁹

22 Note that the phrase *hantan* 寒潭, antithetical to *yanghui*, evokes a semantic sense of unfathomable mystery or contemplation. If *yang* denotes the generative energy, then the cold depth of a pool is *yin*, dark and unknowable like the human mind. Cf. the phrase *tansi* 覃思 or 潭思, Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 [History of the Former Han], annot. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 87B.3575. *Tan* is a Chu dialect word for a “deep pool.” See Paul Kroll, *A Student’s Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 442. The “deep pool” foreshadows the “sagacious mind” in line 5.

23 *Shengxin* 聖心 is a eulogistic reference to Liu Yu. The adoption of the word *sheng* may suggest “emperor” or “imperial.” Although Liu Yu was yet to ascend the throne, the “Nine Bestowals” [*jiuci* 九錫] ceremony had effectively made it a matter of formality. See Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* 六臣注文選 [Six Vassals’ Commentary of the Selections of Refined Literature], *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, 1904, 20.29a.

24 *Yunqi* 雲旗 are flags decorated with patterns of clouds. See Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, 20.29a.

25 *Zhugong* 朱宮 is the traveling palace at the Cavalry Terrace. See Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, 20.29a.

26 *Lanzhi* 蘭卮 is alcoholic drink scented with powdered thoroughwort [*lan cao* 蘭草]. See Ban Gu, *Han shu*, 22.1064. *Shizhe* 時哲 [savant of our day] refers to Kong Jing 孔靖 in whose honor the banquet was held.

27 This line alludes to *Classic of Changes*, Hexagram 64 “Weiji 未濟,” 6/5 (Fifth Yin) & 9/6 (Top Yang). For a translation, see Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 549–50.

28 This line alludes to *Mao shi* 161, “Lu Ming 鹿鳴 [Deer Cry],” which is a feast poem that celebrates the comity and loyalty between lords and vassals. The phrase *hele* 和樂 comes from the line that reads “In harmonious conviviality we indulge.” [和樂且湛。] The phrase appears also in the “Lesser Preface” to *Mao shi* 177, “Liu Yue 六月 [Sixth Month]”: “When ‘Lu ming’ was abandoned, harmonious conviviality was lost.” “Liu yue” is a poem about King Xuan of Zhou’s 周宣王 [r. 828–782 BCE] northern campaign against the Xianyun 狁狁 tribe. See Mao Heng, “*Mao shi zhengyi*,” 12–2.1a.

29 This line alludes to chapter 11 of the *Zhuangzi*, “Zai You 在宥 [Letting Be],” the opening lines of which read: “I have heard of letting the empire be, but I have not heard of governing the empire.” Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 11.364.

吹萬群方悅	“Breezing the Myriad” – people from all borders are delighted. ³⁰
歸客遂海隅	The “returning sojourner” follows the river course to the edge of the ocean; ³¹
脫冠謝朝列 弭棹薄枉渚	Taking off his cap, he bows out of the ranks at court. ³² Curbing the oars, his boat is moored by the winding sandbars; ³³
指景待樂闋	Looking at the shadow of the sun, he waits for the music to announce the end of the banquet. ³⁴
河流有急瀾	The currents of the river rush forth rapidly;

- 30 This line alludes to chapter 2 in the *Zhuangzi*, “Qiwu Lun 齊物論 [The Adjustment of Controversies],” which is the *locus classicus* of the concept of *chuiwan* 吹萬 [Breezing the Myriad] – the sage ruler spreads his beneficence like the gentle breezing, reaching all beings, nourishing yet without damaging them. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1B.50. The third century commentator Sima Biao 司馬彪 [240–306] explains the concept in the following terms: “The climate is gentle and breezy; myriad beings are being nourished and supplicated; the phenomenal world exhibits an unusual sight. [The sage king] allows each living being to have natural way and then that is where he would stop.” See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.960. The two *Zhuangzi* references suggest a harmonious and non-interfering government.
- 31 The phrase *guike* 歸客, unattested in texts composed before Xie Lingyun’s time, is arguably a case of neologism. It was to become an iconic concept in the Chinese cultural memory. In the *Wen xuan*, there are two occurrences of the phrase. *Sui* 遂 “watercourse” in this line is used in a verbal sense. I have emended 嶕 “mountain nook” to 隅 “corner, outlying place, border” following the *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* 20.29b. This reading has been accepted in most of the *Wen xuan* editions except the Li Shan 李善 edition of the *Wen xuan*. See Gu Shaobo 顧紹柏, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu* 謝靈運集校注 [*Redacted and Annotated Collection of Xie Lingyun*] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987), 25.
- 32 *Tuoguan* 脫冠 refers to the resigning or retiring from one’s official post. This is another neologism, unattested in texts composed before Xie Lingyun’s time. There is only one occurrence of this phrase in the *Wen xuan*. See Zhang Xie 張協, “Unpinning my hair, loosening my robe / with hair untied, I shall return to the edge of the ocean,” [抽簪解朝衣, 散髮歸海隅。] in Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 21.994.
- 33 This line alludes to the *Chu ci* 楚辭 [*Songs of the Chu*], adopting its terminology and imagery. The phrase *mizhao* 弭棹 “curbing the oars” derives from *mijie* 弭節 “curbing the pace,” which first appears in *Chu ci* for five times, before becoming a stock phrase in the Han and post-Han prose and poetry. Here Xie Lingyun replaces “pace” with “oars,” which specifies the feature of a journey by river. *Wangzhu* 枉渚 (渚) “winding sandbars” also alludes to “She jiang 涉江 [Crossing the Yangzi River],” in *Chu ci*, 4.130. Cf. “Xiang Jun 湘君 [The Lord of Xiang],” which contains the line: “At dusk, we curb the pace and moor at the northern sandbar.” [夕弭節兮北渚。] See Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, annot., *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補註 [*Annotated Chuci with Supplementary Commentaries*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 2.63.
- 34 See Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, 20.29b.

浮驂無緩轍 豈伊川途念 宿心愧將別 彼美丘園道 喟焉傷薄劣	Roving chariots do not slow down on their tracks. ³⁵ How can I only be contemplating our ways parted? ³⁶ It is the cherished aim, to my chagrin, that I have now gone against. ³⁷ That marvelous Way of the Hillside Garden! ³⁸ Alas! How I bemoan my paltry virtue and lame pursuit! ³⁹
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As the title suggests, this poem was composed for a celebratory banquet on the Double-Ninth Festival of the fourteenth year of the Yixi 義熙 period [405–418] (October 24, 418) in honor of Kong Jing 孔靖 [347–422], a long-time councilor and supporter of Liu Yu.⁴⁰ Kong Jing had served as a councilor and libationer for the army in Liu Yu’s campaign to recover the northern capitals of Chang’an and Luoyang.⁴¹ For his contributions, Kong Jing was promoted to director of the Imperial Secretariat [*shangshu ling* 尚書令]. Instead of accepting the position, Kong Jing asked to “retire/return” to his estate in Guiji, which was granted. In order to honor Kong Jing’s retirement, a banquet was held at Xima tai 戲馬臺.⁴²

- 35 *Fucan* 浮驂 in this line refers Liu Yu’s entourage. Line 17 describes Kong Jing’s boat journeying off speedily along the course of the river. Together these two lines present a scene of the retired gentleman parting ways with the rest of Liu Yu’s entourage. *Fu* 浮 is glossed as *xing* 行 in *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan* 20.29b.
- 36 This line contains a post-positioned verb, which is an important feature in Xie Lingyun’s poetry. Such inversion of word order sometimes impresses upon the reader as contrived and could be a factor leading to the critical view on Xie Lingyun’s poetic style being *fanfu* 繁複 or “intricate and complex.” The sentence’s syntax may be described as follows: *Qi* 豈 adverb serving as rhetorical question marker, *yi* 伊 adverb as modifier, *chuantu* 川途 compound noun as pre-positioned object, *nian* 念 verb as post-positioned predicate.
- 37 About this line, Li Shan explains: “Kong Jing retires to dedicate himself to ‘cultivating simplicity’ *yangsu* 養素 and yet I [Xie Lingyun] am ashamed for being still attached to the official position.” *Suxin* 宿心 refers to the intention to embrace simplicity and part with fame and gain. See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.960.
- 38 *Qiyuan dao* 丘園道 alludes to the *Classic of Changes*, Hexagram 22 “Bi 賁,” 6/5, “This is Elegance as from a hillside garden, so bundles of silk increase to great number. If one is sparing, in the end, there will be good fortune.” See Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 276–77.
- 39 *Bolie* 薄劣 alludes to Pan Yue’s 潘岳 [247–300] “Xianju Fu 閒居賦 [*Fu* on Leisurely Living],” the coda of which contains the line: “Surely my use is paltry and my talent is meagre.” [信用薄而才劣。] See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 16.706.
- 40 Kong Jing, who was a native of Shanyin 山陰 of Guiji, had backed Liu Yu with military and financial support in putting down the coastal rebellions in 401 and eradicating the usurper Huan Xuan 桓玄 [365–404] in 404. For Kong Jing’s biography, see Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 54.1531–1532.
- 41 Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 54.1532.
- 42 Located in Pengcheng, this terrace was associated with Xiang Yu 項羽 [232–202 BCE], the famous Chu general who contended with and lost to the Han founder Liu Bang 劉邦 [256–195 BCE]. Kong Jing’s biography in the *Song shu* mentions his mystical prowess in

Kong Jing's "returning" recalls Xie An's voluntary renunciation of power, and it invites an interpretation with more than one dimension. Could Kong Jing's demurral of service imply disapproval of Liu Yu's power grab and, therefore, a refusal to pay loyalty to the general-cum-usurper?⁴³ *Gui* 歸 [to return] appears in early classical texts to denote "loyalty." To "return/retire" implies a rejection [*qi* 棄] of the reigning ruler, who is deemed unsuitable or unbenevolent.⁴⁴ As a literary theme, "to return" as a potential expression of political dissent can be traced back to the *Classic of Poetry* and culminated in the literary works in the *Selections of Refined Literature* [*Wenxuan* 文選].⁴⁵ The prevalent use of *gui* (a word that is inherently multivalent), however, may also have blunted its politically jarring message. Laments to "return" would develop in the direction of praise of the natural landscape, that is, a pristine world far away from the entangled network of society and politics.

The ceremonial farewell gathering may have been a savvy move by Liu Yu to thwart any unpleasant implication of Kong Jing's retirement. Commenting on the occasion, the *History of Liu-Song* [*Songshu* 宋書] states: "[Kong Jing] declined the appointment to return east. The emperor hosted a banquet to bid him farewell at the Cavalry Terrace. All officials [were asked] to compose a verse to praise this."⁴⁶ This official account, referring to Liu Yu as Emperor Gaozu, speaks to the intended function of the Xima tai banquet, that is, to enforce and ensure a unifying narrative about Kong Jing's "return/retirement" by laying out a pretext for "praising" Liu Yu, the soon-to-be usurper.

In the following discussion, we first look at Xie Lingyun's poem, which through intertextual references presents a complex and complicated interpretive space of "return." By presenting the sophisticated textual map of signification, we determine whether the poet fulfills his prescribed compositional purpose, that is, to offer "praise" to Liu Yu.

subduing the malevolent spirit of Xiang Yu, which speaks to an extent the sacrificial function Kong Jing performed in Liu Yu's military exploits. See Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 54.1532.

43 For a detailed discussion on the background of this politically-charged literary occasion and a list of attendee-writers at the banquet, see Satō Masamitsu, "Xie Zhan, Xie Lingyun de wenxue," 349–53; see also Wu Fusheng, *Written at Imperial Command*, 75–77.

44 The *Mencius* contains various examples supporting this reading. For example, "Now you [Mencius] have rejected/abandoned this Solitary One and return/retire." [今又棄寡人而歸。] Zhao Qi 趙岐, annot., Sun Shi 孫奭, coll., "Mengzi zhushu 孟子注疏 [Annotations and Commentaries of Mencius]," in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [Annotations and Commentaries of the Thirteen Classics], ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965), 4B.82–2.

45 The first notable example is likely *Mao shi* 36. In the *Wenxuan*, *gui* as a literary motif is all too common.

46 辭事東歸，高祖餞之戲馬臺，百僚咸賦詩以述其美。Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 54.1532. *Qi mei* 其美 here refers to the moral values of Kong Jing's "return."

Collected in the *Selections of Refined Literature* under the category of “Lord’s Feast,” Xie Lingyun’s poem shares some characteristics of “Lord’s Feast” [*gong-yan* 公讌] poetry.⁴⁷ For example, the opening stanza (lines 1–4) describes the season and scenery as an introduction to the poetic occasion, which, in this case, is a grand gathering in a bordertown in desolate autumn. They mention images from nature that are conventionally constructed as indices of human emotions in responding to social-political events. Late autumn in line 1 might suggest a decline in the “kingly way,” that is, humane government.⁴⁸ Frost and snow might denote hardship endured by soldiers in the campaign [*zhengfu* 征夫]. Migrant geese and withering grass are “evocative imagery” [*xing* 興] associated with displacement and death.⁴⁹ The backdrop as described in the first stanza obliquely refers to Liu Yu’s recent northern campaign, and yet the poetic tone can hardly be described as laudatory. Line 3 touches on the theme of “return” by alluding to “The Fourth Month [*Si yue* 四月],” number 204 in *Mao’s Book of Songs* [*Maoshi* 毛詩], which is a lament about “turmoils and troubles” [*luanli* 亂離]. One could argue that it lacks explicit criticism. But ambiguity alone is sufficient to alert a reader who is accustomed to subtle suggestions.⁵⁰ To the educated elite, this poem would call to mind the familiar cry of woe by a displaced soldier: “Alas, to where can we return?”⁵¹

In the *Classic of Poetry*, a trooper’s complaint, together with related types of scenes, such as “distressed/deserted wife” [*sifu* 思婦, *qifu* 棄婦], “[yearning] to return” [*sigui* 思歸], and “hardship on the road” [*xinglu nan* 行路難], constitute the most striking expression of the Zhou experiences with war. For example, “Eastern Mountain [Dong shan 東山],” poem 156 in *Mao’s Book of*

47 The “Lord’s Feast” follows a poetic convention of offering flattering remarks to the lord or the host of a banquet. There are four poems in the section that celebrate a banquet hosted by Cao Pi 曹丕 [187–226] upon his promotion to the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses [*wuguan zhonglangjiang* 五官中郎將]. These Jian’an compositions are early models of poetry written at imperial command. See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.943–973.

48 See Ma Ruichen 馬瑞辰, *Maoshi zhuanjian tongshi* 毛詩傳箋通釋 [*General Commentary of the Mao’s Book of Songs with Zheng Xuan’s Subcommentary*], coll. Chen Jinsheng 陳金生 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 21.683. When the full bloom of summer is over, decline and deterioration begin. After that, what comes is chaos.

49 For a discussion of *xing*, an important literary trope from the *Classic of Poetry* tradition, see Pauline Yu, *The Reading Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1987), 44–47.

50 For a discussion of the thematic signification and structuring through imagistic analogy in the *Classic of Poetry*, see C. H. Wang, “The Theme,” in *The Bell and the Drum: Shih Ching as Formulaic Poetry in an Oral Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 98–125.

51 爰其適歸。For a grammatical and philological discussion of the line, see Ma Ruichen, *Maoshi zhuanjian tongshi*, 21.685.

Songs, is a lyrical account of the Duke of Zhou's 周 three-year campaign to the east of the Taihang 太行 mountains from the soldier's perspective.⁵² Also, a slate of poems sings of the campaigns carried out by King Xuan of Zhou 周宣王 [r. 828–782 BCE]: #167 “Cai wei 采薇,” #168 “Chu che 出車,” #169 “Di du 杕杜,” #177 “Liu yue 六月,” #178 “Cai qi 采芑,” #179 “Che gong 車攻,” #234 “He cao bu huang 何草不黃,”⁵³ etc. Most of these poems are traditionally interpreted as praise of King Xuan's military achievements, which helped restore the way of early Zhou founders. Xie Lingyun's choice of poem 204 in *Mao's Book of Songs*, intertextually speaking, is interesting if not somewhat surprising, as it seems to indicate a critical instead of eulogistic overtone.

Poem 204 is the fourth in a suite of ten poems with poem 201, “Valley Wind [Gufeng 谷風],” a motif for wife's complaint, as the title piece.⁵⁴ Commenting on the purpose of the poem, the preface reads: “This is to criticize King You of Zhou 周幽王 during whose reign the customs of the world worsened and the way of conviviality and friendship declined.”⁵⁵ As such, line 3 could be read as an indirect comparison of Liu Yu to one of the most notorious ancient kings at a declining age. The image of a deep pool in line 4 is important, as it denotes the contemplative mind. Is this the reflective mind of a poet whose innermost thoughts are at the same time hidden and manifest, depending on the audience?

The second stanza of the poem describes the banquet scene. The use of “sagacious mind” [*shengxin* 聖心] in line 5 is a reference to the host Liu Yu. Commentators have noted that *sheng* is usually reserved for describing the king or emperor. Does this suggest that, at the time of composition, Liu Yu's imperial ambition had already been acknowledged and accepted? The answer is most likely yes, as the same reference is used in another poem written for the same occasion.⁵⁶ The author was Xie Lingyun's cousin, Xie Zhan 謝瞻 [387–421].⁵⁷ The poem by Xie Zhan, also titled “On the Double Ninth Day, Attending

52 Qu Wanli 屈萬里, *Shijing quanshi* 詩經詮釋 [Annotated Classic of Poetry] (Taipei: Lianjing, 1999), 271.

53 Qu Wanli, *Shijing quanshi*, 295.

54 For a discussion of “valley wind” as “wife's complaint,” see Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*, 103–6.

55 See Mao Heng, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 13–1.1a. Although modern scholars have done away with this reading, the fifth-century audience would associate this with the last depraved king of the Western Zhou. See Wang, *The Bell and the Drum*, 104.

56 See Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 24.

57 For a biography of Xie Zhan, see Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 56.1557–59. See also David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, ed., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* (Leiden: Brill, 2012–14), 3:1636–39; Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream*, 8. For a discussion

the Farewell Assembly Hosted by the Duke of Song at the Cavalry Terrace in Honor of Secretariat Director Kong,” is a shorter piece of eighteen lines.⁵⁸

風至授寒服	Autumn winds arise – it is time to distribute cold-season clothes; ⁵⁹
霜降休百工	Winter frost descends – all works are paused. ⁶⁰
繁林收陽彩	The dense forest ceases its bright gleam;
密苑解華叢	In the lush garden, flower clusters are withering.
巢幕無留鷺	On the nests built on tents no swallows dally; ⁶¹
遵渚有來鴻	Following the sandbars, there are geese arriving from afar. ⁶²
輕霞冠秋日	Wisps of rosy clouds crown the autumn sun;
迅商薄清穹	Swift gusts from the west flit by the ethereal firmament. ⁶³
聖心眷嘉節	The sagacious mind turns affectionately toward this fine seasonal festival;
揚鑾戾行宮	Riding in the chariot, he arrives at the traveling palace. ⁶⁴
四筵霑芳醴	For guests sitting on four sides, fragrant ales are served; ⁶⁵
中堂起絲桐	In the middle of the hall, music arises from the silk and paulownia instrument. ⁶⁶

of Xie Zhan and his poems, see Yue Zhang, *Lore and Verse: Poems on History in Early Medieval China* (Albany: State University of New York, 2022), 97–120.

58 For the text, see Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.956–57.

59 This line alludes to *Mao shi* 154/1 (“Qi Yue 七月 [The Seventh Month]”): “In the seventh month, the fire star appears; in the ninth month, cold-season clothes are distributed.” [七月流火，九月授衣。]

60 Lü Yanji 呂延濟 [fl. 718] comments: “With the arrival of the first frost, adhesives and paints become hardened and they can’t be used to work on tools or vessels.” See Xiao Tong, *Liuchen zhu Wenxuan*, 20.25b.

61 This line alludes to the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 [*Zuo Commentaries*], “Xianggong 襄公二十九年,” in which *chaomu* 巢幕 describes the precarious position an official finds himself in when serving an unstable or temporary regime. Here it refers the powers that had been vanquished by Liu Yu.

62 This line alludes to *Mao shi* 159/2, “Jiu Yu 九罭 [The Fishnets]”: “The wild geese fly along the sandbars.” [鴻飛遵渚。]

63 *Xunshang* 迅商, according to Li Shan, refers to the swift autumn wind arriving from the west. See *Wen xuan* 20.957.

64 *Yangluan* 揚鑾 literally means “raising high the chariot bells.” It is derived from *yangbiao* 揚鑣 “raising high the horse’s cheek-bar.” Cf. the phrase *yangbiao feimo* 揚鑣飛沫, *Wen xuan*, 17.508.

65 *Siyan* 四筵 [four sitting mats] is a metonymy for the guests sitting at the banquet.

66 *Sitong* 絲桐 is a synecdoche for the zither.

扶光迫西汜 When the light of the sun presses on toward the western shore;⁶⁷
 歡餘讌有窮 Our joy lingers while the feast draws to an end.
 逝矣將歸客 Departing now! The returning sojourner!
 養素克有終 In cultivating the unadorned virtue, he will be able to
 Culminate.⁶⁸
 臨流怨莫從 Facing the stream, I regret not being able to follow;⁶⁹
 歡心歎飛蓬 With a convivial heart, I lament the flying
 tumbleweed.⁷⁰

Xie Zhan's third stanza corresponds to Xie Lingyun's second stanza in describing the banquet with similarly decorated vocabulary typical of the "Lord's Feast" genre. *Sheng* is used to refer to Liu Yu – likely a requirement for the commissioned literary presentation. Throughout the poem, Xie Zhan maintains an unequivocally eulogistic tone. The piece opens by alluding to "Seventh Month [Qiyue 七月]," poem 154 – a song of praise to the Duke of Zhou – one of the most venerated political figures in the Chinese tradition.⁷¹ Further, Xie Zhan's allusion to the *Zuo Commentaries* [*Zuo zhuan* 左傳] in line 5 lauds Liu Yu's

67 *Fuguang* 扶光 is the light of *Fusang* 扶桑, the legendary tree from which the sun rises. *Si* 汜 is *Mengsi* 濛(蒙) 汜 [Murky Shore]. See Hong Xingzu, *Chuci buzhu*, 3:88: "It emerges from Scorching Vale and halts at Murky Shore." [出自湯谷，次于蒙汜。]

68 *Yangsù* 養素 derives from the *Laozi* line "exemplify simplicity, embrace the uncarved block." [見素抱樸。] See Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 82. *Zhong* 終 means "to end" or "to die." Here it implies a "good end" [*shanzhong* 善終] and a "death that fulfills the heavenly ordained terms" [*zhong tiannian* 終天年]. The English word "culminate" – with senses of "exalted," "summit," and "reaching a point of highest development" – is an appropriate equivalent for *zhong*. This alludes to *Classic of Changes*, Hexagram 15 "Qian 謙 [Modesty]," 9/3, "Diligent about his Modesty, the noble man has the capacity to maintain his position to the end, and this means good fortune." [勞謙，君子有終，吉。] Lynn, *Classic of Changes*, 231.

69 *Linliu* 臨流 alludes to *Chu ci*, "Chou Si 抽思 [Expressing Emotions and Thoughts]," 4:139, "Facing the stream, I heaved a long sigh." [臨流水而太息。] In early medieval poetry, *linliu* is a literary trope on homesickness, yearning or longing for friends and relatives, and nostalgia for ancient times of benevolent rule. Cf. Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 line "Facing the stream, I bid farewell with friends." [臨流別友生。] Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 26.1235.

70 Li Zhouhan 李周翰 [fl. 718] reads the line as Xie Zhan expressing regret for not being able to travel with Kong Jing and that they will be separated and follow their respective unpredictable journeys ahead like the tumbleweed. Within a few years, Xie Zhan, Kong Jing, and Liu Yu would all pass.

71 See Mao Heng, *Mao shi zhengyi*, 8–1.7a: "The poem lays out the Zhou kings' enterprise. Duke of Zhou encountered calamity. The poem lays out the path by which former kings of Zhou, beginning with Lord Millet, had conducted their transformative rule to demonstrate the hardship of the Zhou kings' enterprise." [陳王業也。周公遭變，故陳后稷先公風化之所由致，王業艱難也。]

campaign for wiping out illegitimate and unstable regimes that had plagued the north. The geese imagery in line 6 is associated with servicemen’s submission to Liu Yu, instead of their struggle, as is the case in Xie Lingyun’s line 2. In sum, Xie Zhan’s poetic praise of Liu Yu is uncomplicated and unreserved. His celebratory tone culminates in the imagery in lines 7 and 8: “Wisps of rosy clouds crown the autumn sun; / Swift gusts from the west flit by the ethereal firmament.” Needless to say, heaven and the sun both refer to Liu Yu as the highest power. Xie Zhan concludes the poem with appropriately congratulatory remarks to honor Kong Jing’s retirement. Overall, it was competent and uncontroversial.⁷²

In comparison, Xie Lingyun’s poem, to which we now return, invites nuanced readings through its use of opaque allusions. The most intriguing feature of Xie Lingyun’s poetry is his intertextual reference to the *Classic of Changes*.⁷³ They are critical for decoding the ambivalent tone in this piece. For example, line 9 refers to Hexagram 64, “Ferrying Incomplete [*Weiji* 未濟]” as follows: “The banquet is hosted to inspire confidence and trust.” *Youfu* 有孚 [to have/inspire confidence] alludes to the Fifth Yin [六五 or 6/5] and Top Yang [上九 or 9/6] of Hexagram 64. The statement for the Fifth Yin reads: “Rectitude brings good fortune. No regret. The light of the nobleman evokes confidence. Good fortune.”⁷⁴ The statement for Top Yang reads: “With confidence, we drink. There is no blame. Yet one might get his head wet. For the one evoking confidence, in this, he missteps.”⁷⁵ The intertextual background suggests a conditioned “confidence and trust,” as “misstep” due to arrogance or self-indulgence may be imminent. Hence a tone of caution in line 9.⁷⁶ The Commentary on the Image [*xiangzhuan* 象傳] of 9/6 further supports this reading: “In drinking, one gets his head wet. This is not knowing propriety.”⁷⁷ Call

72 Li Shan, quoting the *Song shu*, reports that Xie Zhan’s composition was ranked the better of the two poems composed among the invited guests. See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.956.

73 See Wendy Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry: Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 222–58.

74 貞吉，无悔，君子之光，有孚，吉。Translations of the *Classic of Changes* passages quoted are mine, unless otherwise noted. See Li Dingzuo 李鼎祚, annot., *Zhou yi jijie* 周易集解 [Collected Annotations of the *Changes*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 12.387; see also Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 549.

75 有孚于飲酒，无咎，濡其首，有孚，失是。See Li Dingzuo, *Zhou yi jijie*, 12.388; see also Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 549–50.

76 See Zhang Yinan’s study of the pattern and style of Xie Lingyun’s use of hexagrams in poetry, Zhang Yinan 張一男, “Xie Lingyun shiwen huayong Yi dian fangshi yanjiu 謝靈運詩文化用《易》典方式研究 [On the Methodology of Xie Lingyun’s Use of the *Changes*],” *Yunnan daxue xuebao* 雲南大學學報, no. 2 (2011): 99.

77 “飲酒濡首”，亦不知節也。See Li Dingzuo, *Zhou yi jijie*, 12.388; see also Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 550.

for prudence is noted also in the Commentary to Judgment [*tuanzhuan* 象傳] and Commentary on the Image of Hexagram 64. The former reads: “The little fox has almost ferried across. He is not yet out of water.”⁷⁸ The latter says: “Fire is positioned above water: this constitutes the image of Ferrying Incomplete. The nobleman [ought to] carefully distinguish among things and situate them in their correct places.”⁷⁹ The overall message through Hexagram 64 is caution, which could have been Xie Lingyun’s assessment of Liu Yu’s ending of Jin. Still, Liu Yu may or may not have picked up on the message.⁸⁰

The use of hexagrams gives Xie Lingyun’s piece an intriguing depth and complexity.⁸¹ As Zhang Yinan points out, the poet is inclined to use the *Classic of Changes* to establish correlations between events in real life and their principles as indicated in the image [*xiang* 象].⁸² As such, the text and its imagery served as a practical guide in challenging and compromising situations. After all, it was through pragmatism, as Cynthia Chennault has posited, that the Xie clan had realized their speedy ascension to the top.⁸³ For the thorny yet unavoidable question whether to serve [*chuchu* 出處] – that is, “whether to advance or withdraw” [*jintui* 進退] – the Hexagrams, with their Images and Commentaries, would have offered a reasoned if not always efficacious remedy.

In addition to Hexagram 64, Xie Lingyun alludes to Hexagram 22, *Bi* 賁 [Grace], in the penultimate line of his poem: “That marvelous Way of the Hillside Garden!” The term “hillside garden” [*qiuyuan* 丘園] is from the Judgment of the Fifth Yin [六五 6/5] of *Bi*: “This is the Grace of Hillside Garden. Bundles of silk. Meager. Ending is good.”⁸⁴ Medieval commentators offered further insights into the image of Hillside Garden as indicating a good serviceman losing his position and yet it promises an “auspicious ending.”⁸⁵ In classical texts, an “ending” [*zhong* 終] refers saliently to death. “Auspicious ending” suggests that a timely

78 See Li Dingzuo, *Zhou yi jijie*, 12.384; see also Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 545.

79 The upper trigram is *li* 離, signifying fire; the lower trigram is *kan* 坎, signifying water. See Li Dingzuo, *Zhou yi jijie*, 12.385; Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 550.

80 Wu Fusheng, *Written at Imperial Command*, 76.

81 For a systematic analysis of Xie Lingyun’s use of the hexagram, see Zhang Yinan, “Xie Lingyun shiwen huayong yi dian fangshi yanjiu,” 94–101.

82 Zhang Yinan, “Xie Lingyun shiwen,” 99.

83 “Generally speaking, it was through an ability to adapt to changes in the court’s power structure that Xie males of the Southern Dynasties reached the upper ranks. Those whose careers were both accomplished and long-lasting possessed, among other practical talents, a political acumen that helped them surface on the victor’s side after contests for leadership, and the well-spoken wit to extricate themselves from compromising situations.” Chennault, “Lofty Gates or Solitary Impoverishment,” 261.

84 賁于丘園，束帛戔戔，吝，終吉。See Li Dingzuo, *Zhou yi jijie*, 5.153; Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 276.

85 See Li Dingzuo, *Zhou yi jijie*, 153.

retirement has the benefit of avoiding a violent death. Through Hexagram 22, Xie Lingyun praises Kong Jing’s “return” with a palpably envious tone. The poem ends with possibly conventional laments over one’s own “paltry virtue” and “lame pursuits,” but the poet’s true concern seems to be his inability to “return” in time and therefore avoid the unthinkable.

In April 422, Liu Yu’s health took a bad turn. Within two months, he would pass away. The power vacuum that was left resulted in the ousting of Xie Lingyun at the hands of the powerful minister of education, Xu Xianzhi 徐羨之 [364–426]. Xie was banished to the remote Yongjia 永嘉 (present-day Wenzhou, Zhejiang). The official account of the turn of the events reads as follows:

Xie Lingyun by nature was obdurately adamant. On various occasions, he violated rules and rituals. The court [of Liu Yu] only employed him on account of his literary talent and did not entrust him with significant duties in accord with his position. Xie Lingyun thought his talents would make him fit for participation in essential decision making. Since he was not appreciated, Xie Lingyun harbored resentment and indignation. Liu Yizhen, Prince of Luling, had been fond of writings and documents since a young age. He and Xie Lingyun were on better terms than usual when the Young Emperor [Liu Yu’s elder son, Yizhen’s elder brother] ascended the throne. Power lay with [certain] ministers. Xie Lingyun [was accused of having] formed cliques, influenced the opposing sides, and denigrated those in service. The minister of education, Xu Xianzhi, and others found him a calamity and then demoted him to the remote town of Yongjia.⁸⁶

The prospect of going to Yongjia would have seemed daunting for Xie Lingyun, who had spent much of his adult life in the capital. He may have intentionally delayed the trip, and, when he finally was ready to embark on this distant journey, Xie Lingyun wrote the following poignant poem as a farewell note to his friends and relatives. In this piece, titled “Neighbors Sending Me Off at the Block Hill [*Linli xiangsong fangshan* 鄰里相送方山],”⁸⁷ we catch a further glimpse of the poet’s view on “return,” which could mean a matter of life and death for the early medieval courtier serving in arguably the darkest time in history.

86 Shen Yue, *Song shu*, 67.1753.

87 Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.980–81. Block Hill was located 50 *li* (16 miles) east of the capital. One of the four major fords in the vicinity of Jiankang, the Block Hill was named after its shape resembling a square seal. Protruding out of the river, it was also known as the Mount Tianyin 天印山.

祇役出皇邑	On account of an assignment, I now depart the imperial town;
相期憩甌越	A date is set for my respite in the Ou and Yue regions. ⁸⁸
解纜及流潮	Untying the cord, I will travel away with the tides;
懷舊不能發	Thinking of my old friends, I can't bear to leave.
析析就衰林	Soughing and sighing, the desolate forest is my company;
皎皎明秋月	Bright and glistening, the autumn moon shines on me.
含情易為盈	Harboring various feelings, I become easily overwhelmed;
遇事難可歇	Encountering all matters, I can hardly find any relief.
積痾謝生慮	For long I have suffered ill health and withdrawn from life's concerns;
寡慾罕所關	My desires are few and seldom do I have wants. ⁸⁹
資此永幽棲	From now on, I shall forever dwell in seclusion;
豈伊年歲別	How is this parting a matter of mere months?
各勉日新志	Let us each strive daily for renewal in virtue; ⁹⁰
音塵慰寂蔑	A message or a visit from you will be much consolation in my muffled oblivion. ⁹¹

It is somewhat ironic that now Xie Lingyun was the one being “sent off,” although not voluntarily. Instead of relying on opaque and obscure intertextual references, as seen in the “Double Ninth,” this farewell poem relies primarily on direct expressions for meaning. Xie Lingyun begins by referring to his departure from the capital and referring to his exile as a “respite” [*qi* 憩]. The second stanza conveys a mournful poetic mood through an effective depiction of desolate scenery. The sighing and sighing from a forest of withered trees seem to sympathize with the sad traveler. The bright moon, with its overflowing light, portrays the poet’s brimming emotions. In a heavy and yet restrained tone, the

- 88 Ou 甌 and Yue 越 are ancient names for modern southern Zhejiang and parts of Fujian.
- 89 Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, ed., *Laozi jiao shi* 老子校釋 [*Redacted and Annotated Laozi*] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 75.
- 90 *Rixin* 日新 alludes to *Classic of Changes*, hexagram 26 “Daxu 大畜 [Great Domestication].” The Commentary on the Judgment of “Daxu” reads: “In *Daxu*, we find the hard and strong and the sincere and substantial gloriously renewing their virtue with each new day.” See Wang Bi 王弼, annot., Kong Yingda 孔穎達, coll., “*Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 [The Correct Meaning of the Books of Changes with Subcommentary],” in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 [*Annotations and Commentaries of the Thirteen Classics*], ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 139–40.
- 91 *Yinchen* 音塵 alludes to a line from Lu Ji 陸機, “*Sigui Fu* 思歸賦 [Yearning to Return]: “Obliterated are my voice and traces by the banks of Yangzi.” [絕音塵於江介。] See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 13.602, 20.981.

poet speaks of his intention to retire in lines 9–12, and the poem ends with an allusion to “Yearning to Return [*Sigui fu* 思歸賦],” by Lu Ji 陸機 [261–303].⁹²

In surmising the impact of Xie Lingyun’s demotion and exile, Frodsham calls it the “turning point” when the “gay roisterer, the dashing man about town died forever.”⁹³ The contemplative and morose tone of the farewell poem recalls the poet’s obsession with “return,” as seen in the Kong Jing piece. His envy of the old vassal’s timely “return,” which would allow him to live out his heavenly ordained years in the mountains of Guiji, would probably have become even stronger at this point in his life. His wish to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors to leave behind the treacherous changes in regimes seemed ever more unattainable. We detect a sense of desperation and despair in another parting poem written around the same time, and it has an unusually detailed title: “On the Sixteenth Day of the Seventh Month of the Third Year of the Yongchu Reign, I Set Out from the Capital to Travel to the Commandery [*Yongchu sannian qiyue shiliu ri zhijun chufadu* 永初三年七月十六日之郡初發都].”⁹⁴

述職期闌暑	By the end of summer, I have accepted my appointment;
理棹變金素	When I ready the oars, the season is in its metal phase. ⁹⁵
秋岸澄夕陰	The autumnal shore is lucid in the evening light;
火旻團朝露	The Great Fire star shines like the morning dew forms. ⁹⁶
辛苦誰為情	Travails of life, to whom shall I relate such pain? ⁹⁷
遊子值頽暮	A traveler meets his fate in this despondent late season.
愛似莊念昔	“Loving his own kind,” Zhuangzi yearns for his homeland; ⁹⁸
久敬曾存故	“With a long-term admiration,” Zengzi cherishes his old friends. ⁹⁹
如何懷土心	What about this mind that longs for home!
持此謝遠度	Harboring these thoughts, I bid farewell and embark on the far journey.

92 See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 20.981.

93 Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream*, 32.

94 See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 26.1236–38. The date in the title translates to August 19, 422.

95 “Metal phase” refers to autumn.

96 The fire star is Antares, which is considered the harbinger of autumn.

97 This line alludes to a lament by Lu Ji upon leaving his hometown to take up an office in the northern capital Luoyang: “such bitterness and hardship, no one understands.” See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 24.1147, 26.1229.

98 This alludes to a story in the *Zhuangzi* about an exile from the Yue state who grows ever more homesick. See Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 8B.821.

99 See Li Shan’s commentary in Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 26.1236.

李牧愧長袖 Li Mu was ashamed about his dangling sleeves;¹⁰⁰
 卻克慙躑步 Xi Ke was embarrassed for his lame gait.¹⁰¹
 良時不見遺 Encountering good times, they were not abandoned by
 the court;
 醜狀不成惡 In spite of their deformed conditions, no harm was done
 to them.
 曰余亦支離 I am also impaired in this body;¹⁰²
 依方早有慕 For long I have yearned to return to my home state.
 生幸休明世 To be born into the enlightened age is my good fortune;
 親蒙英達顧 In person I have received kind regards from the peer-
 lessly perspicacious.
 空班趙氏璧 With no merit, I have a place among those who can
 retrieve Zhao's jade disk;¹⁰³
 徒乖魏王瓠 Useless, I am but a misfit like King of Wei's gourd.
 從來漸二紀 It's been two decades since I joined the service;
 始得傍歸路 Only now am I able to embark on the road home.
 將窮山海迹 My traces will obliterate in mountains and lakes;
 永絕賞心晤 Forever, I part with my close friends whom I shall see no
 more.

In this poem, Xie Lingyun states in no uncertain terms his wish to retire from court service and “return” to the mountains. The opening couplet, in keeping with poetic convention, describes the occasion with a description of seasonal change. The second couplet depicts striking autumn scenery. In line 3, the riverbank, due to receding water, reveals a fresh outline in the light of dusk. The verb *cheng* 澄 here means to “purify,” referring at the same time to what water does to the riverbank and the effect of the evening light on everything in the vicinity. Heaven and earth connect through water – the essential element of the universe, whose incessant transformation becomes particularly evident to

100 Li Mu 李牧 [d. 229 BCE], a famous general from the state of Zhao, had short arms, but that did not prevent him from achieving military successes against both the *Xiongnu* and the state of Qin. See Liu Xiang 劉向, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 [Intrigues of the Warring States] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 1:289.

101 Xi Ke 卻克 [d. 587 BCE], a grandee of the state of Jin, walked lamely and was jeered by members of the Qi household. See Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 26.1237.

102 Zhili 支離 is the name of a recluse with deformed body who was nevertheless able to live out his heavenly ordained years. Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, 2B.180.

103 This alludes to Lin Xiangru 藺相如 [fl. 279 BCE], the resourceful and courageous minister of Zhao who secured the return of the priceless jade disk known as Mr. He's Jade [*Heshi bi* 和氏璧]. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 [Classic of History] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 81.2439–41.

a poet who is sensitive to his surroundings after having experienced a sudden and life-changing event. As cold weather approaches, water particles coalesce at night to form dew drops, whose shimmering light reflects the shining Great Fire star. This wonderful sight saddens the exiled courtier. The poet speaks of his yearning for like-minded friends with textual references to Zhuangzi 莊子 [369–286 BCE] and Zengzi 曾子 [505–435 BCE] and comments on his banishment with two historical examples.¹⁰⁴ The two farewell poems impressed the reader as emotive. The poet’s contemplation of “return” also seems to deepen in them.

On his river journey to serve in remote Yongjia, Xie Lingyun stopped by the Xie clan’s “old mountains” in Guiji and wrote a poem vowing to return before too long, “Passing through the Shining Estate [*Guo shining shu* 過始寧墅].”¹⁰⁵

束髮懷耿介	Since hair-binding age, I have harbored an uncompromising sense of rectitude;
逐物遂推遷	Driven by worldly matters, I have since followed their transferences.
違志似如昨	Deviating from my original aim, it happened like yesterday;
二紀及茲年	Two decades are gone, and here I am.
緇磷謝清曠	Besmirched and bruised, I am less than pure or unperturbed;
疲薺慙貞堅	Tired and spent, I have not exactly stayed unwavering.
拙疾相倚薄	Clumsy and ill in health, I have sometimes gone with the current;
還得靜者便	Upon returning, I hope to find quietude and peace.
剖竹守滄海	Holding the official tally, I am to guard the glaucous coast;
枉帆過舊山	Bending my sail, I stop at my old mountains;
山行窮登頓	Ascending and descending, the mountain path comes to an end;
水陟盡洄沿	Whirling and then falling, the river course is exhausted.

104 One puzzling point is the poet’s use of the phrase Zhili, which is the name of a recluse with deformed body in the *Zhuangzi*. Is Xie Lingyun speaking of his own deformity in a literal or metaphorical sense? This question, unfortunately, cannot be answered. No commentaries offer any suggestions on this.

105 For the text, see Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 41–44; Xiao Tong, *Wen xuan*, 26.1238–39. For translations, see Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream*, 1.118; Stephen Owen, “The Librarian in Exile: Xie Lingyun’s Bookish Landscapes,” *Early Medieval China* 10–11, no. 1 (2004): 214–15.

巖峭嶺稠疊	Cliffs pierce into the sky, peaks pile on high;
洲縈渚連綿	Sandbars winding, islets extend on and about.
白雲抱幽石	White clouds embrace a dark rock; ¹⁰⁶
綠篠媚清漣	Green bamboo leaves frolic over limpid ripples. ¹⁰⁷
葺宇臨迴江	A thatched eave overlooks the twirling stream;
築觀基曾巔	A belvedere is constructed with its foundation on a high peak.
揮手告鄉曲	Waving goodbye, I part with my townsmen;
三載期歸旋	In three years, I will return.
且為樹粉檟	Make sure to plant some elm and catalpa trees for me;
無令孤願言	Do not let my wish go unfulfilled.

When reading this poem, the reader might detect an ever-more salient theme of “return.” The poet expresses regret for having been caught up in worldly matters and now wishes to “return,” which goes beyond the conventional notions of “leaving court service and retiring.” Xie Lingyun’s “return” denotes the unattainable modest wish for a “good ending,” that is, to live out one’s heaven-ordained years and not to die prematurely or violently. After all, death is considered the “ultimate return” [*dagui* 大歸] and the final reversal to nature and the Way of nature.¹⁰⁸ The image of elm and catalpa [*fenjia* 粉檟] trees, the raw material for the coffin, in the penultimate line suggests a natural ending in the Guiji mountains. Unlike Kong Jing, whose timely and wise withdrawal from Liu Yu’s court secured his person and posthumous reputation,¹⁰⁹ Xie Lingyun, as we know, unfortunately, could not avoid the fate of dying a violent and ignoble death in one of the darkest centuries of Chinese history.¹¹⁰

106 This line alludes to Zuo Si’s 左思 “Zhao Yin 招隱 [Summoning the Recluse]”: “White snow lingers on a dark ridge,” [白雲停陰岡。] in *Wen xuan* 22.1027. Unlike Zuo Si, Xie Lingyun personifies nature by using a transitive verb.

107 About Xie Lingyun’s use of the word *mei* 媚, Rur-Bin Yang who posits that *mei* was aesthetically preferred among the cultured elite in the fifth century Jiangnan that Xie Lingyun was a leading member. Yang reads *mei* as representing “facial features; the radiance of face and eye(brows) that are lovely and fresh.” Yang concludes that *mei* signifies “radiant outward beauty” that “manifests the Way.” Rur-Bin Yang 楊儒賓, “Shanshuishi yeshi gongfu lun 山水詩也是工夫論 [On Landscape Writing as Self-Cultivation],” *Zheng da zhongwen xuebao* 政大中文學報 22 (2014): 17–20.

108 See Wang Chong 王充, “Lun Si 論死 [Statement on Death],” in *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 [Redacted and Annotated Lun heng], annot. Huang Hui 黃暉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 871–73.

109 Gu Shaobo, *Xie Lingyun jijiaozhu*, 44.

110 For a discussion of Xie Lingyun’s death, see Timothy Chan, “Xie Lingyun on Awakening,” in *Considering the End: Mortality in Early Medieval Chinese Poetic Representation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 127–58.

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