Bai Juyi (Bai Lo Tian) 易居白 (樂天), 772-846 AD, Tang Dynasty Poet, Midst Everyday Life, Musings on the Ordinary, Influences of the Not So Obvious

by

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ABSTRACT

Bai Juyi (易居白, 772-846AD) was one of the greatest scholar-intellectuals and poets of China’s Tang dynasty period (朝唐, 618-907 AD). He is generally considered to be one three most outstanding poets of his day, alongside Tu Fu(杜甫 712-770) and Li Bai(李白 701-762). Arguably, he was by far the most popular amongst the general population.

The aim of this thesis is to describe the poet’s life, using as much as possible his own poetry and prose to provide a lens for Bai’s sensitivity to those socio-cultural forces, particularly Buddhism, that powerfully influenced his desire to be effective and of value to his society and his family while seeking inner peace and tranquility.

The ideological flux of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism permeated Bai’s entire spiritual and psychological being, warring with a continual awareness of his self-proclaimed political and administrative incompetence. These ideologies are discussed in the context of the poet’s life.

His inner and outer life is regarded, indeed scrutinized, through the poet’s own words as he candidly and poignantly deals with the great issues of loyalty and service to the sovereign, compassion for the sufferings of the common people, responsibility to family and friends, and the insatiable and driving need to write poetic verse.

Buddhism reached its peak as a social force during the mid-Tang period around the reign of Empress Wu (武后 reign period 684-705, lived 609-705). The evolution of Chan (禪) and other variant forms of Mahayana Buddhism is briefly studied while citing the monumental contributions of Fazang (法藏 643-712) of the Hua Yan School (華嚴) and Hui Neng (慧能 638-713) of the Chan School. Bai’s own philosophical interests and religious proclivities seem derivative of his times.

The influence of these ideological fluxes and social tensions, coupled with a growing awareness of his own mortality, is clearly evidenced in Bai Juyi’s poetry and memorials. His temple poem You Wu Zhen Si Shi (詩寺真悟遊) will be examined closely to reflect some of these impressions.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................................... iii
PREFACE ............................................................................................................................. v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................... vi
DEDICATION ....................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER I: Introduction ................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER II: Biography of Bai Juyi (易居白 772-846AD ) .............................................. 2
  2.1 Historical Context ........................................................................................................ 2
  2.2 Family, Education and Friends .................................................................................. 4
  2.3 Government Service ................................................................................................... 15
  2.4 Political Activities ...................................................................................................... 17
  2.5 Bai Juyi’s Poetry and Memorials ................................................................................ 23
      2.5.1 In His Poems of Social Concern ......................................................................... 24
      2.5.2 Poems of Personal Pleasure, Poems of Nature .................................................... 29
      2.5.3 His Delight in Poems of Nature ......................................................................... 29
      2.5.4 Poems About Himself ......................................................................................... 31
  2.6 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 42

CHAPTER III: Buddhism in Tang Dynasty China (618-905 AD) ...................................... 44
  3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 44
  3.2 Buddhism’s Fundamental Principles and Ideological Evolution in the Tang Period ......................................................................................................................... 47
  3.3 Buddhism’s Encounter with Taoism and Confucianish: During the Period of Independent Growth (ca. 589-900) .................................................................................. 54
  3.4 Prevalent Schools during the Life of Bai Juyi (772-846) ........................................... 57
      3.4.1 Fa Zang and the Hua Yan School ........................................................................ 58
      3.4.2 The Chan (Zen) School ........................................................................................ 60
  3.5 Summary ....................................................................................................................... 63

CHAPTER IV: Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism in the Poetry of Bai Juyi .......... 65
  4.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 65
4.2 Bai Juyi and Confucianism: Zeal and Ambition Leading to the “Dusty Net” ....... 70
4.3 Taoism and Buddhism in Bai Juyi’s Poetry ...................................................... 79
4.4 Summary ............................................................................................................. 88

CHAPTER V: Temples, Caves and Landscapes in Bai Juyi’s Poetry .......................... 91
5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 91
5.2 Background to Bai Juyi’s Temple Poem ‘Wu Zhen Si Shi’ (詩寺真悟遊) ........... 97
5.3 Annotated Translation and Interpretation of You Wu Zhen Si Shi (遊悟真寺詩) 100

CHAPTER VI: Conclusions ......................................................................................... 122

CHAPTER VII: Suggestions for Further Study .......................................................... 125

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................... 127

APPENDIX A: Chronology of the Life of Bai Juyi 易居白 (772-846 AD) ................. 130

APPENDIX B: Unannotated Translation and Interpretation of You Wu Zhen Si Shi (詩寺真悟遊) ......................................................................................................................... 133
PREFACE

There is certainly not much that can be added to a factual history of Bai Juyi and his remarkable poetry. Arthur Waley’s *Life and Times of Po Chu-I*, Howard Levy’s *Translations from Po Chu-I’s Collected Works* and Eugene Feifel’s *Po Chu-I As A Censor* are three outstanding works that give such an abundance of detail and insight that that one would have to look long and hard to come up with anything new.

The Old and New Tang Histories (書唐舊, 書唐新) authenticate many of the facts from these works and provide a reasonably accurate name-place texts and chronology for the researcher.

In this essay, pinyin(拼音) and old script, fantizi (繁体字) will be used throughout to designate names and places except in book titles. First time mention of important names and places will be given in old script form. All these texts have, as accurately as possible, been authenticated from the Old and New Tang Histories.

Also in this essay I shall attempt to provide a more intimate perspective of the poet’s inner social and spiritual motivations. Perhaps a more expansive soliloquizing from Bai’s own poems could add a fascinating new spiritual and emotional lustre to a portrayal of Bai’s inner animus by projecting his inner and outer monologues onto a modern screen.

I dare to presume this could be the closest one could get to an actual autobiography of the man without the embellishments one would most certainly get from an intensive study of the semantics of his poetic style (metre, parallelism, metaphors, allusions, etc.). The noted commentators, Waley and Levy, in their monumental treatments, do not linger as much as one might like on these more affective insights. Such considerations shall prompt me to make some caveats on the translations I will be making from source documents, the most prevalent one being the *Quan Tang Shi* (全唐詩).

Professor Jerry Schmidt and I, after a lengthy time of ruminating over a suitable thesis title, finally came up with the rather pastoral sounding ‘*Midst Everyday Life, Musings on The Ordinary, Influences of The Not So Obvious*’ which obliquely echoes the pervasive spiritual, philosophical and religious influences in the poet’s life. In this ‘new’ treatment, therefore, Bai’s ‘soliloquizings’ will hopefully appear as refreshing oases midst a vast array of well known historical and chronological facts.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Jerry Schmidt of the Asian Studies Department of the University of British Columbia for the courage and trust to take me on as a graduate student in the rather challenging field of Chinese Medieval Poetry and for patiently prompting in me further intellectual growth. For him, along with his colleagues Dr. Josephine Chiu-Duke and Dr. Alison Bailey, I would like also to extend my appreciation for helping me begin the transition from being a student to becoming a scholar. In particular, I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Bailey for the long time and tedious effort she spent in profitably challenging my questionable sources and citations and attempting to rid my draft thesis of innumerable grammar and punctuation mistakes.
DEDICATION

To My Partner and Long-Time Friend Roxanne
CHAPTER I: Introduction

It apparently was said of Bai Juyi that he felt he was viewed by some of his contemporaries as being too simple and ordinary in his poetic speech and by others as being too subtle. This likely reflected the influence of his early childhood and humble upbringing along with his genuine concern and compassion for the lives of ordinary people (百姓) while at the same time, as a seemingly committed Buddhist, attempting to diligently apply Confucian values as a government administrator and court remonstrator. His Buddhist education was undoubtedly filigreed with strands of Taoist thought that often blended imperceptibly with uniquely Buddhist patterns.

The ideological flux engendered by these radically different value systems produced a poetic character that blended a simple often bucolic nature with the desire to be an effective scholar-intellectual who was painfully aware of his administrative incompetency and his privileged status. Nevertheless, he continued to be driven to define and support those animating principles for a society that treasured outward order and inward peace. Bai dealt, his whole life, with the intellectual’s beleaguering questions, “Who am I, What do I really want to become, What’s really important in my life, How am I going to live?”

He believed the main purpose of poetic expression was to support and advocate Confucian morality in government and an enlightened sensitivity to the needs and sufferings of the lower classes. Though his poetry redounds with advice to the Emperor on proper governance, he himself admits to being most manually and administratively incompetent and useless when it came to governing.

His poetry was often deliberately simple and spoke to the heart as well as the mind. Because of this, he was accused by some of his contemporary critics as being banal and rather facile but he was, nevertheless, capable of great erudition and, as we shall see, of considerable allusiveness in his use of imagery and allegory.

He was a multi-hued personality and one of the most important poets of the Tang Dynasty period (618-905AD) whose influence on the social conscience of a nation reverberates to this day in China, Japan and Korea.
CHAPTER II: Biography of Bai Juyi (易居白 772-846AD)

2.1 Historical Context

The great and terrible An Lushan/Shi Siming Rebellion (亂叛明思史山祿安755-63) had occurred only sixteen years prior to Bai’s birth during the reign of Xuan Zong (宗玄 712-756). The country was still in deep shock having had its population decimated, within a decade, from approximately 53 million to 17 million. The ensuing political and social privations resulting from that period undoubtedly had a profound influence on Bai Juyi’s career and poetry. Ironically, from the bitter comes the sweet, as his poignant poem, The Everlasting Sorrow (歌恨長), describing the demise of Xuan Zong’s ill-fated prize concubine Yang Gui Fei (妃貴楊719-756), imprinted his name and poetic fame on the hearts of generations even to this day.

This rebellion sparked one of the great turning points in Chinese history. Virtually every aspect of social, cultural and intellectual life was affected. Great regions of the Tang Empire became politically independent as a consequence of the usurping power of the foreign military generals and governors on the northern border regions. These leaders had originally been in the hire of the Tang emperors to protect China against a plethora of restive northern tribes such as the Uighurs and Turks. An Lushan, himself, was of Sogdian descent. Other regions such as Silla (Korea), Nan Zhao (詔南) and regions of present-day Vietnam all asserted autonomy from a much weakened China. The alienation of the farmers and peasant land owners had begun prior to this time by the end of the 7th century, with the break up of small farmers’ life-plots, the countless falsifications of census registers, the consequent reduction in the tax base and the growing exploitation by the rich and powerful families of, in Confucian terms, the most important sector

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2 Levy, p.4

3 全唐詩卷 435.19
of the population, the common people. To financially support the armies in the border regions, local officials were forced to brutally extract ever-increasing taxes from the dwindling number of peasant farmers whose plight was discreetly but powerfully represented to successive Emperors in Bai Juyi’s poetry. Thus reading his own words in the poem ‘An Old Man from Tu-Ling’:

An Old Man of Tu-Ling (叟陵杜)

An old man of Tu-ling, dwelt in Tu-ling,
Each year growing in his meagre field of a qing or more of area.
The third month rainless, a drought arose, the young wheat grew not, mostly yellowed and died.
Frost fell in the ninth month, autumn soon got cold;
Before the ears of corn ripened, they greened and withered
The official in charge clearly knew but didn’t report it.
He hurriedly taxed and forcibly extracted, seeking a good showing for himself.
To get the tax I pawned the mulberries and sold the land, next year what will I do for food and clothing?

Stripping the clothes from my body, snatching the rice from my mouth.
Oppressors of men and despoilers of things are ravenous wolves, why must hook-like claws and saw-like teeth eat human flesh?
(transl. Levy, p.18)

Fifty years before Bai’s birth, Mahayana Buddhism (大教佛乘) and Chan Buddhism (宗禪) were approaching their pinnacle of popularity during the reign of Empress Wu.

Fazang, the protean intellectual of the Hua Yan School, and Hui Neng, the sixth patriarch of the Chan lineage, were both invited to the Court although many scholars such as Josephine

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5 全唐詩 卷 427.10
Chiu-Duke believe Hui Neng never actually attended. Fazang, in particular, ‘collaborated’ with the Empress in extending the knowledge and influence of Buddhism throughout the realm in return for supporting her claim to a new dynastic legitimacy.

Bai, socially and spiritually influenced by these zenith times of Buddhism, lived from the reign of Dai Zong (宗代 r.763-780) to that of Wu Zong (宗武 r.841-847). During and after his tenure as Court Censor (808-810), partly due to his Buddhist induced compassion for the underprivileged, he was exiled on several occasions because of his outspokenness on social-political matters.

Contemporary with Bai Juyi were the great prose writer and philosopher Han Yu (愈韓 768-824) and his close associate Li Ao (翱李 772-836). Both were strongly anti-Buddhist and strove to have the faith regarded as a ‘dangerous’ foreign religion, detrimental to traditional Confucianism. Han Yu’s famous diatribe, before Emperor Xian Zong (宗憲 806-821) in 819 about the Buddha’s finger bone and the hysteria of the masses over its alleged spiritual efficacy contributed later on, in no small measure, to a terrible proscription against Buddhist monks and their considerable landed wealth.

Both Han Yu and Li Ao were predecessors of the new Neo-Confucian movement. But here Bai Juyi did not seem to be involved. Even though he was supportive of the actions against the material excesses of Buddhism, he nevertheless was still committed to its spiritual and intellectual tenets.

2.2 Family, Education and Friends

Bai Juyi was born on February 28, 772 in Henan province during the reign of Dai Zong (宗代, reign 763-780). His father Bai Jigeng (白季庚) died at 65 when Juyi was only 22 years old, making it difficult to continue with his education and study for official examinations. Bai Jigeng was a magistrate in Xu Zhou (徐州) under the aegis of Li Zhengji (李正己).

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7 For more details on Li Ao in this context, see the work of T.H. Barrett while for Han Yu, the work of Charles Hartman is worth consulting.
The family was often poor but seemingly able to provide a good basic education for Bai and his younger brother Bai Xingjian (白行簡). His grand-father, Bai Huang, and great-grand-father, Bai Wen, were poets of minor repute. Likely from them Bai was influenced early on in poetical expression.

Even at four or five years of age he was composing poetry with the appropriate tones and rhymes. At about eleven or twelve he, precociously, put together a ditty on ‘parting’ called ‘Escorting the Warrior Cao back to Sichuan’ (蜀歸曹士武送)8;

Flowers fall and birds chirp gaily, returning south goes along with your bucolic mood. The moon is suitable for lodging by the Qin-ling. Springtime is good for travelling to Sichuan by the river.

Flowers fall and birds chirp gaily, returning south goes along with your bucolic mood. The moon is suitable for lodging by the Qin-ling. Springtime is good for travelling to Sichuan by the river.

, 人们 envy your leaving at this propitious time. (transl.en)9

Around 786, when Bai was fourteen, a great drought forced the family to split up, with him resituating in Suzhou (蘇州) and Hangzhou (杭州). While there he exhibited a strong sense of family responsibility for the welfare of some of his uncle’s children living near Xu Zhou. Thus in a poem ‘On the south of the river, seeing off a northern guest, entrusting him to convey a letter to my brothers in Xu Zhou’ (書弟兄州徐寄憑因客北送南江)10

From my garden area, looking disconsolately, what’s the use, the waters of Chu and the hills of Wu are ten thousand or more li away. Today, because of this (kind) gentleman, I

8 Quan Tang Shi Peng Dingqiu 1645-1719 et al., comps., 1705.; 全唐詩 卷 436_62; a probable reference to Cao Cao (曹曹 155-220) and the time of the crushing of the Yellow Turban Rebellion.
9 Chinese to English translation done by Earl Naismith (transl.en)
10 二集山香白, 卷13, p.62
Like most teen-agers wanting to spread their wings and get out on their own, Bai Juyi perversely welcomed the conditions causing the family to split up. He first justifies to his family the need to leave the family homestead, comparing himself to young birds that eventually have to leave the nest. Thus, in his allegorical poem about some swallows, ‘The Swallows Poem as explained to Old Man Liu’ (叟劉示詩燕), he says;

On the rafters there was a pair of swallows, the male with the female, lightly fluttering together.
They held in their beaks some (nest-building) material which they daubed between the rafters. There was a nest there with four growing young ones -------
(transl. en)

He is probably trying to remind the old man that he too, when he was young, went through the same experience. The allusion to the four nestlings and him being one of four children in the Bai family likely was not lost on ‘old man Liu’ (who may have been Bai’s own father). So, Bai might have added, be sympathetic and supportive when one wishes to strike out on one’s own. Perhaps there was even an oblique reference to his parents to hurry up and locate a spouse for him so he could legitimately take off.

Later in his life, having spent ten years as a refugee in the coastal regions around Yue Zhou (越州), he seemed a little sadder and wiser about being away from the old homestead. His dreams betrayed a bit of homesickness as we see in his poem ‘Buildings by the River Looking Forward to Home’ (歸望樓江) and particularly the telling sentence;

Dreams at night about my village

and

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11 一集山香白, 卷I, p.2
12 Waley (Life and Times) p. 149 quotes ‘Yue Zhou as being within easy reach of Hang Zhou (杭州)’
13 全唐詩 卷 436.73
Furthermore he was realizing how carefully he had to husband his resources as well as his health to fulfil his social responsibilities to family and state. Written, as a rapidly maturing eighteen year old in his poem ‘Work While Sick’ (作中病)\(^\text{14}\), he laments;

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{For a while now I’ve laboured to make do, I haven’t learned how to take care of myself.} \\
\text{During my youth I had a lot of illnesses, this body, how is it going to make it to old age?}
\end{align*}
\]

(translation)

But make it he did, to seventy-four years of age! In this broad interim he maintained his strong Confucian based concern for family, shepherded many children from orphaned or destitute relatives, achieved the highest academic status available in the land, served in administrative posts throughout the country, played the political game at court winning some and losing some, enjoyed a couple of retirement sinecures, and died a Chan Buddhism adept.

As a family man, Bai had two daughters of his own, his beloved ‘Golden Bells’ (金鑾子 809-811) and Luozi (羅子) who was born in 817, later married off, providing him with some grandchildren. Though quite ill at the time of Golden Bell’s passing, he nevertheless had to supervise her burial along with the transferral of the coffins of many of his pre-deceased family members to the family plots at Xiagui. What an emotional low he must have had to endure, especially with his mother having just passed away, then being obliged to leave his job and enduring a mandatory three year mourning period. In poems he wrote on Golden Bells, he reflected on his own mortality and the increasingly attractive ‘safe’ haven that Buddhism and spiritual detachment offered in dealing with his present (and future) sufferings. Thus in his poem ‘Remembering Golden Bells’ (子鑾金念)\(^\text{15}\), he writes,

\(^{14}\) 全唐詩 卷 436.66
\(^{15}\) 全唐詩 卷 433.20
In my forties, I was sickly and declining, tender and silly was she at three. She wasn’t a boy but it was still better than nothing at all, in times I needed consolation she was a comfort. One day she took off on me and left. No trace of her was found anywhere. Moreover I remember her being so young with her letter blocks, babbling away while still learning to speak. Then realizing that kindred love, is a collection of anxiety and melancholy. I only thought about when she wasn’t even conceived, reasoning to dispel the hurt and suffering. I dismissed from my mind those days already spent, but on three occasions, I shifted from cold detachment to warm nostalgia. Today, my heart was saddened when I happened to meet her former wet-nurse.

You together with your parents for eighty six ten-day periods. Of a sudden no longer seen, already three or four Springs. Form and substance basically unreal; vapors accumulate, perchance take body shape. Favored love is originally in error, affinity combines and one is a parent for a time. Remembering this on the verge of enlightenment, relying on it to send away the sad and the bitter. I temporarily settle down through reason, but I am not to forget my feelings.

(transl.en)

When he was about forty eight years old he waxed nostalgic on children, in particular his nephew Tortoise and his daughter Luozi, with a poem called Playing with Tortoise (龟弄). Bai
actually sounds rather maudlin, even nostalgic, for a lost innocence and the suffering he feels that love costs. However, at this point we are happy to see his continuing genuine affection for young ones. His observations are warmly avuncular. The deeper spiritual tremors can, however, be detected between the lines giving us a foretaste of discussions later in this thesis. Notice the overlay of moods in this well-crafted poem!

I have a nephew going on six, the name he goes by is ‘playful tortoise’.
I have a daughter born three years ago, for her name we call her ‘talkative son’.
One is beginning to learn how to laugh and talk, and one is able to recite poems and songs.
In the morning they gambol close around my feet, in the evening they sleep pillowed against my clothes.
You were born oh so late, my year’s traces are already fraying. Matters of mutual affection when young, oh how memorable, peoples’ thoughts when they get older are more loving and kind. Wine initially may be really sweet but in the end it will be consumed, the moon may be full but finally it will wane.
Also with conjugal love, in the end becomes costly sorrow and worry.
This weariness is universally the same, am I able to leave this in peace? (transl. en)

His fatherly concerns combined with his compassionate nature in reflecting sympathetically on the lot of women in society. Indeed, when one studies his poetry on this topic, there is ample evidence to suggest he had genuine feminist sympathies. In particular, for his wife, he exhibits laudable devotion in his poem *Giving Intimacy*, the first two lines of which read;

| Living as intimates in the | 生為同室親，死為同穴塵． |

16 全唐詩 卷424.30
same room, dying as dust in
the same grave.
Others esteem and
courage one another, how
much more, then, you and I.
(transl. en)

Then, concerning the problem of spousal remarriage, Bai seems full of sympathy for the sad
plight of the woman (and the new opportunities for the man) as evidenced by this extract from his
poem *A Woman’s Burden* \(17\)

I would like to refer to another matter, to alter this day, your
heart thoughts.
People say a husband and wife are intimates, equitably united
as one flesh.
Up to the very border of life and death, how could it ever be
said that suffering and joy could be equal?

Once a wife’s husband dies, for the rest of her life isolation and
loneliness keep watch over her.
Just like a bamboo strip in the midst of the woods, neglected,
the wind blows and it snaps.
Once gone there’s no return, withered by death, one can still
enfold the moment.
Can’t a man, when his wife dies, have a short time of grief?
He should be like a willow by the front door which, with the
arrival of Spring, easily opens up and flourishes again.
When the wind blows and snaps off a branch, another grows in
its place.

(transl. en)

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\(17\) 全唐詩 卷 435.20

\(18\) Bai Juyi seems to be sceptical that sorrow and happiness emerge from the same Buddhist stem cell of suffering and illusion.
If Bai Juyi had a soul mate, it would have to be his close friend Yuan Zhen (稹元 779-831) whom he met during the Placing Exams in 802. Otherwise, Bai had, in addition to his family, the typical range of vocational and avocational associates and colleagues. In the latter category are included some who were admirers of his poetry. There were also a number of Taoist and Buddhist monks whom he had befriended.

Amongst his near and extended family members, he had a strong Confucian sense of duty and responsibility. With his younger brother Xingjian (行箭) for example, he deeply regretted having to work so far apart from him. He says as much in the last part of his poem Writing a Letter to Xingjian (簡行寄)20,

Gloomily my eyebrows are drawing more and more together, silently from my mouth come a few words. How could one wish it like this, I look up and ask with whom I could join in merriment.
In the Spring of last year you went on an expedition to the West, engaged in matters between the Ba and Shu. This Spring, having been demoted to the South, I had to cope with an illness alongside a river estuary. We are parted from one another by six thousand li, between a land and sky extremely far away. Nine out of ten letters don’t get to you, how can I break through the sorrow in my face. Thirsty men dream more of drink while starving men dream more of food. Ever since Spring where are my dreams: they’re with my eyes facing towards Dong Chuan.  

Many of his professional, or “vocational”, friends were classmates who had written the advanced exams with him and many of whom had gone on to become important government

19 Waley (Life), p.29
20 西詩 卷 433.52
officials and high office holders. Four of the most important ones were mentioned quite clearly in this following poem *Feel like departing to a distant house* 感逝寄遠 
written towards the end of his life. The context reveals a lingering amalgam of certain Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist ideas still operative in Bai’s psyche. We shall read more about this in Chapters III and IV.

Yesterday I heard this one had died, today I heard that one had died.
Of every three I knew, two have became ghosts.
Those who have died I won’t see again, how sad they are long gone.
And what about those still surviving, they’ve gone many thousands of li away from me.
Those with whom I’ve been most intimate, how many can I count on the fingers of one hand.
The prefects Tong, Guo, Li, and Feng only these four gentlemen.
Yearning for each other we’ve all become old chaps, in a floating world like flowing water.
While travelling greeting old acquaintances with sighs, withered and scattered like this with each passing day.
At what time (or place) to have a glass of wine, to begin to look into each other’s eyes and laugh.

(transl. en)

Bai was quite bright and poetically precocious but, as previously mentioned, due to his father’s untimely death was not able to properly study and prepare for provincial examinations until he was twenty-seven. So successful was he, however, that in 800AD he attained Advanced Scholar (进士) status, opening up opportunities for official promotion and high government rank.

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21 詩唐全 卷432.54
22 Waley (Translations), p. 208, referring toYuan Zhen (d. 831), Cui Xuanliang (d. 833), Liu Yuxi (d. 842) and Li Qian (d. 821).
Many of his classmates became good friends and allies. Together in the various levels of government they became an influential force in government politics.

But getting to that point was anything but easy, having to endure years of study and privation just to be ready to show his intellectual prowess. And then, additionally, he had to ingratiate himself to a benefactor in high places who could vouch for his character and genealogy. Modern Western politicians would totally and completely recognize these gauntlets and trials-by-fire that have to be run for anyone aspiring to high political office. The main difference is that, in China of that day, once you made it, you were in there for life and deployable at the pleasure of the Court and, alas, the growing influence of the eunuchs. In a pre-exam-required fu-poem, he elaborated on the protocols of managing certain types of poem composition styles, to test his rhyme skills and his allusion recognition abilities.

All this was quite a challenge, approaching the culmination of many years of study with barely enough money to cover his travel and room and board expenses. He really was a pauper praying to become a prince for his family’s as well as for his own sake. He was well within reach of that goal. Waley describes a rather forlorn scene of Bai arriving full of hopes in Chang An,

I set out alone, in tattered furs on a lean horse—
Dong, dong went the sound of the drums, through darkness and red dust.
At evening I came to Chang An with no one to take me in.

Hoping beyond hope, Bai pulled off a First Class in this most prestigious of examinations. Shortly after, he composed a poetic paean of praise for this long anticipated break in the clouds of seemingly endless study. Within its lines emerges a veritable mini-biography of important scarlet threads in Bai’s life, education, family, friends, wine, music, ambition and self-deprecation.

及第後歸覲留別諸同年

(After getting my passing grades, I return to bid farewell to all my classmates)

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23 Bai’s plea for patronage in his application letter ‘To Chen I send these writings’ 書事給陳與; 二集山香白, 27. 19: At the beginning of 800, Bai sent 20 pieces of miscellaneous prose and 100 poems to Chen Jing to convince him of Bai’s worth to stand as a candidate for the government examinations. (Waley, ‘Life and Times’, pp. 18-19)
24 ‘Hitting the Target Square in the Middle’ 賦鵠正中射; 二集山香白, 25, 67.2
25 Bai was adept at all the poetic styles of his times but preferred the ungarnished ‘fu’ style for its relative simplicity and straightforwardness, akin to the pre-Han ‘old style’, and often included prose and musical components. For more details in this exam situation, consult Waley (Life and Times…) p.16.
26 Waley (Life and Times --), p.17
27 全唐詩，卷 428.36
For ten years I’ve been studying intensely, once up there I somehow did well. I pulled off a so-so mark, my parent’s congratulations will be the beginning of my honour. Six or seven of my classmates accompany me out of the emperor’s city.

My curtained carriage grandly moves off, spindly flutes raise their sounds at my leaving. Pride in myself reduces the departure pains, being slightly inebriated lightens the long road ahead. Lightly and sprightly dances the horses’ hooves, the sentiments that take me home this fine Spring day.  

(transl. en)

十年常苦學，一上謬成名。擢第未為貴，賀親方始榮。時輩六七人，送我出帝城。軒車動行色，絲管舉離聲。得意減別恨，半酣輕遠程。翩翩馬蹄疾，春日歸鄉情。

While in Chang’an he met the aspiring scholar, Yuan Zhen (779-831), with whom he became a life long friend and confidante. Though they met infrequently during the course of their professional careers, their personal relationship as fellow poets was very cordial and well known throughout the country. They met only a few times, usually in Chang An, or passing one another in and out of exile. To sustain and nourish their friendship, they corresponded through poetry. These poems became the stuff of popular literature and, collected together, became one of the first texts to be printed and distributed amongst the general population.28 Both high and low read their poetry not so much for the moral, historical and intellectual content but for the simplicity of style and the sentiments expressed in them. Two of Bai Juyi’s poems, written in 806 and 816 respectively, “The Song of Unending Sorrow (長恨)” and “The Song of the Lute (琵琶行)” resonated at the deepest emotional level not only within China but even in Japan and Korea.

Most of Bai’s other close friends were from amongst the classmates and examiners with whom he shared the rigors of the examinations. People like fellow students Cui Jun (772-832), Wang Qi (760-847), Cui Xuanliang (772-833)29 and the examiner Gao Ying (740-811), who

28 Hinton, p. xviii
29 Waley (Life), p.32
tried to stamp out unmerited access and queue-jumping by more unscrupulous candidates.\textsuperscript{30} On this charge we have seen that Bai himself was not totally innocent.\textsuperscript{31} These and others formed a core of politically active scholar-intellectuals a number of whom were quite energetic in pursuing interests not necessarily in harmony with those of Bai Juyi.

2.3 Government Service

After earning his Civil Service Examination credentials, Bai’s work life followed a predictable pattern of advancement, the details of which, including his official titles, are described in Appendix A. The peak of his political influence occurred while he was an Imperial Critic or Censor from 808-810 in the State Chancellery at the Emperor’s court in the Capital at Chang An. In this position he had almost daily access to the emperor on national policy matters and frequently crafted documents concerning local and foreign matters over the ruler’s signature.

Prior to this, in 806, he had been a Director of Administration at Zhou Zhi (盩厔) in Shaanxi\textsuperscript{32} where one of his duties had been to oversee tax-collecting. As many of his poems will show, doing this gave him an on-site perspective of the sufferings of the common people and the underhanded, sometimes brutal, machinations of local yamen (門衙) officials in extracting their ‘dues’.

The following year he was appointed to the Hanlin Academy\textsuperscript{33} (翰林學院) where he prepared imperial edicts then later, in 808, beginning his tour of duty in the Imperial Court as a Censor (or Remonstrator) acting as ‘His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition’ in matters of government policy and personnel\textsuperscript{34}. Perhaps because of the embarrassing forcefulness of some of his remonstrations, he was transferred in 811 to a department concerned with revenue, census and demographics for the Chang An capital area.

\textsuperscript{30} Waley (Life), p. 23
\textsuperscript{31} See footnote 18 about Bai’s own application letter.
\textsuperscript{32} Feifel, p.20
\textsuperscript{33} The Hanlin Academy was an elite scholarly institution founded by Xuanzong in the 8th century AD in China to perform secretarial, archival, and literary tasks for the court and to establish the official interpretation of the Confucian Classics, which were the basis of the civil-service examinations necessary for entrance into the upper levels of the official bureaucracy.
\textsuperscript{34} For a more detailed description of the duties of a Censor, consult Eugene Feifel’s Po Chu-I As A Censor, Mouton and Co., 1961.
Bai, in 808, had been exceedingly appreciative of the position offered him, almost unbelieving of his good fortune at jumping over many others with longer services and superior credentials. It may have been that the young emperor Xian Zong (宗憲 806-821) had heard of him through his poetry and, viewing him as a kindred spirit, facilitated this move. At any rate, Bai wrote a typically obsequious, sycophantic, but not insincere, ‘letter of acceptance and gratefulness to the emperor’. Through all its obfuscating self-denigration there rings an element of genuine humility and truth when he says;

‘- - I wonder how an insignificant man like myself, stupid and unenlightened, can be found capable of occupying such an office. I feel even less qualified when I recall that I am but a mediocre scholar from rustic surroundings and a petty official from the provinces. I had reconciled myself to a ‘life in the mud’ and had given up hopes of ‘riding in the clouds’. How could I dream of being promoted by the emperor’s grace to serve him at his side? (Feifel, p.186)

Family bereavement and illness kept him out of commission until 814 when he was given a quasi-sinecure as counsellor and tutor to the crown prince. However, poetry continued to pour forth from his fertile writing brush often with stinging attacks on corvees, militarism, official abuses and bureaucratic oppression, excessive taxation, and court hedonism. He saved some of his most potent missile-missals for the court eunuchs who not only unfairly abused the people but also engaged themselves shamelessly in court power politics. In this regard, one should not view Bai’s actions as a vigilante-like ‘crusade against injustice’ per se but rather as the actions of someone who genuinely felt he was just doing his job as a responsible Confucian scholar-intellectual. He and Yuan Zhen, felt it was the duty of poets through their poetry to address social ills and influence public affairs. Thus, he says in one of his letter/poems to Yuan concerning the reaction of some of the court sycophants to his poetic indictments,

Those close to the mighty and eminent looked at one another and lost colour.
Those controlling the government clenched their fists in anger and,
Those in military power gnashed their teeth.36

35 集山香白, 一十四卷, ‘書獻遺拾授初’ literally ‘tidying and picking up after the emperor’
36 Levy, p. 15
Not surprisingly, Bai soon found himself relegated, in 818, to a governorship far away from Chang’an, to Zhongzhou (忠州) in Sichuan. Two years later he was posted back to the capital to assume a minor post in the Board of Punishments but the political tawdriness was still there and he found himself to be an unwilling onlooker to continuing intrigues and corruption.

In the second case, when the matter was serious and personal enough, Bai would literally hand deliver his memorial to be read out before the emperor in open court.

With health precarious, he was assigned to a couple of relatively easy jobs as Governor of Hang Zhou from 822-824 then of Su Zhou from 825-826. Surprisingly, he seemed to muster enough administrative energy to have had, under his auspices, a protective embankment built around Hang Zhou’s West Lake. In gratitude, the local hierarchy dedicated a memorial to him at this site.37

By this time in his life Bai probably learned not to make too many waves and gingerly avoided siding with any of the court cliques in the performance of his duties. Thus said, he was probably deemed ‘safe enough’ and compliant enough to handle two of highest positions in Government service, that of Superintendent of the Imperial Secretariat in 827 and that of Vice President of the Board of Punishments in 828.

In 829 he got for himself a genuine sinecure as guest, or tutor, to the Crown Prince. The latter seldom, if ever, availed himself of Bai’s services. Thus he was freer than he had ever been to indulge his insatiable poetic muse.38

From 831-833 he filled a titular post as Mayor of Luoyang and led a carefree and peaceful life until his death in 846.

2.4 Political Activities

Most revealing about his administrative and political activities are some of his poems which express in his own words how he felt and reacted to events in his places of work.

As a government employee, Bai Juyi faithfully and diligently practiced Confucian ethics but eventually became so dismayed by the interminable political strife at the capital amongst opposing court cliques that he came to prefer postings away from Chang An.

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37 Waley (Life and Times…), p.156
38 Waley (Life and Times..) p. 190
Actually, even before his Civil Service Examinations, he had had a glimpse of what life could be like in the political arena when he heard of the government proceeding with the forced expropriation of land belonging to the well-known, admired and deceased military General Ma Sui (馬燧 726–795). In what was possibly the first political poem he ever wrote, 墓軍將高過
(Going to the Tomb of the Great General Ma Sui), he took a subtle swipe at the court eunuchs who, he believed, were behind this tactless move.

Yet all these concerns had to take second place while he found himself some employment. Two readily fertile areas were writing tomb inscriptions and memorials, or marketing one’s self as an assistant to high officials like provincial commanders to take care of official correspondence. Of course the plum positions sought by most Metropolitan graduates were positions at court, working one’s way up the hierarchical ladder coveting and getting jobs like Omissioner or Censor, bringing the fortunate candidate right into the throne room, to present before the emperor himself. These court positions were highly stratified and hierarchical, often designated numerically with an accompanying flowery honorific. Remuneration was often in cash and/or in kind with edibles or fabrics.

Bai’s official ‘work’ life, spanning almost 37 years (803-840), has been chronicled quite well by Howard Levy.

Let us look first at tomb inscriptions (墓誌銘). People with education like Bai’s were often sought out by those less literate to formularize and aggrandize personal and family histories into stone transcriptions for posterity. More will be said about this in the next section especially for our poet’s own rather unusual tomb inscription. The poetic text thus created would then be subcontracted to a skilled stone calligrapher/artist for completion and installation of the tombstone. Our poet did such an inscription for his maternal grandmother, details of which are described in a tomb tablet inscription he wrote about her.

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39 集山香白, XIII 63.5
40 The name ‘高’ was mistakenly used for ‘馬’, see Waley (Life and Times..), p. 17, 218 (p.17, line 33). See later in this essay p.68 for a translation of this poem.
41 For more details, see Charles Hucker’s <A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China, Stanford University Press, 1985>.
42 Levy, p. 2. See Appendix A
43 唐故坊州郿城縣尉陳府君夫人白氏墓誌銘， 白香山集二, 25.7: (transl.en) ‘Tang old Shaanxi prefecture county, (this) government officer’s lady (mother) of the Bai family line, (her) tomb inscription’
His search for gainful employment certainly did not preclude him writing verse. In fact, it could safely be said that he was addicted to versifying and his income paid the bills for this compulsive activity. Yet he did have family responsibilities so he had to get out and find some steady income commensurate with his newly won credentials. So he joined a number of others at a nearby ‘Board of Civil Office’, for a so-called Placement Examination (試考置安). Bai chose an employment category requiring the forming of ‘Judgments (判)’ on matters legal, moral, ritual or even of social etiquette. These judgments (判審) had to be rendered in the very convoluted Pan Ti (題判) style of the day, a kind of legalese involving archaisms and allusions that only few fellow scholars could interpret. Merely eight candidates satisfied the judges, amongst whom were Bai and Yuan Zhen. The two of them were given jobs as Collators of Texts in the Palace Library. The salaries were small but there was a food allowance and working hours were minimal, giving them ample time for poetry. Amongst the first of these poems was one depicting him with a rather reserved contentment for his attainments, taking a delicious pride in his modest living estate and quasi-sinecure, facing the racetrack of social and political responsibility like a cosseted Confucian colt. Here are a few lines describing a little of his new estate,

The emperor’s city, frontier of fame and wealth, when the cock crows there is no peace in the residence. Only those slow and indolent, with the sun high in the sky, still haven’t combed their hair. Meagre talents are hard to use on large issues, being in charge of proofreading in the Secretariat. In a 30-day period, I visit the office only twice, as a result fostering my inherent laziness. I’m provided a thatched cottage with 4 or 5 rooms, a solitary horse and a couple of men-servants. My salary is 16000 copper cash and my monthly grain allowance is more than enough. Already I have no worries or cares about food and clothes, and few worldly matters to constrain me. This is to my liking and causes me to feel young again, so day by day I usually feel peaceful like this.

(transl.en)

帝都名利場，雞鳴無安居。帝都名利場，雞鳴無安居。 獨有懶慢者，日高頭未梳。小才難大用，典校在秘書。 三旬兩人省，因得養頑疏。茅屋四五間，一馬二僕夫。俸錢萬六千，月給亦有餘。既無衣食牽，亦少人事拘。如晏常日日，心年少使遂。如晏常日日，心年少使遂

44 For a fuller description of these baffling complexities see the Old Tang History 書唐舊 153.2
45 全唐詩 卷 428.1
46 一集山香白, 卷 56.1
During this relative idyllic period of being a ‘kept official’, he seems not to have taken too seriously to heart the labour, sweat and tears of farmers in the countryside having to pay their grain taxes to keep him in comfort. The exactions of local officials to get their tax dues sometimes bordered on the cruel and depraved. In bad crop years like 803-4 some farmers had to strip off their roof tiles to pay up. Even notable scholar-officials like Han Yu (愈韓) protested to the court of De Zong (宗德 780-805) about these excesses but only got banished for their pains.\(^{47}\) By the end of the latter’s reign, the court eunuchs had acquired considerable executive and military powers.

Particularly frustrating and discouraging for Bai were the machinations and court intrigue of these eunuchs. They were master power players in juggling political blocs, compromising effective policies suggested by officials such as Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen and even effecting exiles and assassinations to achieve their ends. A poem he wrote in 812, when he was 40 years old, reflected the consequent apprehensions he had for the safety of his household in having to pay a grain-tribute for one of his retirement periods.

粟納^48 Paying the Grain Tribute

有吏夜叩门，高声催纳粟。 有吏夜叩门，高声催纳粟。
家人不待晓，场上张灯烛。 家人不待晓，场上张灯烛。
扬簸净如珠，一车三十斛。 扬簸如珠，一车三十斛。
犹忧纳不中，鞭责及僮仆。 犹忧纳不中，鞭责及憧仆。
昔余谬从事，内愧才不足。 昔余谬从事，内愧才不足。
连授四命官，坐尸十年禄。 连授四命官，坐尸十年禄。

47  Waley (Life), p.34
48  全唐詩 卷 424_44
49  One hu is about 50 litres.
to others the excess of my large granary.  
(transl. en)  
常闻古人语，损益周必复。  
今日谅甘心，还他太仓谷。  

As the above poem shows clearly, Bai Juyi had to pay taxes like everyone else. He was all too aware, however, of how these were often misused or squandered on seemingly frivolous pleasures of the court and its sycophants. See what he has to say about this, for example, in his poem on;

賦重  Heavy Taxes

昨日輸殘稅，因窺官庫門。  昨日輸殘稅，因窺官庫門。  
繒帛如山積，絲絮如雲屯。  繒帛如山積，絲絮如雲屯。  
號為羨餘物，隨月獻至尊。  號為羨餘物，隨月獻至尊。  
奪我身上煖，買爾眼前恩。  奪我身上煖，買爾眼前恩。  
進入瓊林庫，歲久化為塵。  進入瓊林庫，歲久化為塵。  
(transl.en)

In citing these abuses, he had to be very discreet. His criticisms, through his poetry or by means of a full-blown memorial, were usually scrutinized closely by coteries of rather capricious officials and eunuchs before ever seeing the light of day before the emperor. As official Censor however, from 808 to 810, he had the privilege of making his case before the emperor himself.

In 814, Bai Juyi was particularly critical of the way the government handled a military campaign against some northern tribes. He had also just written a number of poems satirizing the rapacity of government officials and calling attention to the suffering of the masses. For this and other similar remonstrations, his enemies at court found ways to have him banished but over time, with the evolution of court cliques, he was recalled and given newer, important posts. In late 807, for example, he was made a Hanlin academician and, in 808, became a Censor or Official critic to the Emperor Xian Zong (宗憲 806-821). If a matter were of minimum  

50 全唐書 p. 4674
importance, he would critique it in writing but if it were of major significance, he would take his chances and make an oral remonstrance before the emperor himself.

Bai and Yuan felt themselves so severely hampered by the conservative court cliques that they decided to enlist their poetry to get their political message out. They both felt that the prime purpose of poetry was to stir government conscience for the amelioration, by local officials, of the lot of the common people and particularly the benighted oppressed farmers. It was said that Bai even chastised his near contemporaries, Li Bai and Du Fu, for not speaking out more forcefully in their poetry for social justice. He even tried to initiate a renaissance of Yue Fu (府樂) poetry which, in times past, had been collected by the governing powers to gauge the feelings and extent of popular discontent.  

Shortly after the coincidence of his mother’s death in 811 and three years mourning at Xia Gui, the onset of serious illness and the tragic loss of his daughter Golden Bells, Bai decided that he was more of a recluse by nature than an efficient politician. One can almost hear him thinking that ‘life is too short and too dangerous to fight the giants’ so he relented somewhat on his aggressive thrusts for social improvement and sought out those posts that afforded him ample time for reclusive reflection and poetry usually in locations far from the capital and court intrigue.

His postings, in and out of official exile, included the governorships of Zhongzhou, Hangzhou and then Suzhou. His term in Suzhou was really a sinecure, for one found him, at the age of fifty-three, enjoying a second youth endlessly socializing and enjoying himself. He retired after two years due to illness but rallied sufficiently to assume the governorship of the Province of Henan. From 829, for the next 13-odd years, he held several nominal posts and became more intimately involved with Buddhism, particularly with the Chan sect and its doctrine of immediate enlightenment. Yet by contrast, he seemed very Confucian with regard to poetry as a medium for conveying social instruction. In this regard, however, Arthur Waley contends that there were “no moral didactics whatsoever in much of his best poetry and that most of his stanzas were inspired by some momentary sensation or passing event such as a single laugh or sigh”.

In like spirit Hinton sums up the denouement of Bai Juyi’s life:  

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51 Hinton, p. xviii  
53 Hinton, p. xix
Although he wrote a great many poems in his social roles, it is almost always the poems of solitude that probe the deepest. It was also in Xia Gui that he began to establish the philosophic depths of his poetics of idleness. Like all intellectuals of his time, he was well versed in the thought and practice of Taoism and Chan but it was in Hsia-kuei that he began to seriously explore these spiritual dimensions. Upon his return to Chang-An, he began to study with Chan masters. The Taoist/Chan philosophy of acceptance (of the transitory and illusory nature of life), certainly answered to Bai’s recluse-nature and together they assured his political detachment.

We shall have more to say later about the philosophic and religious side of Bai Juyi in Chapter III.

When Bai was 59, he lost his very dear friend Yuan Zhen and watched helplessly as the government began an institutional pogrom against the Buddhist community\textsuperscript{54}. He took some small consolation in knowing that the reasons for this were due mainly to the social and material abuses rife within the Buddhist community at that time, matters of which he also took a dim view. However he still retained a devout interest in its intellectual and spiritual tenets. Ironically, the Daoists, whom Bai castigated for many of their flagrantly superstitious beliefs, escaped unscathed presumably because they were not viewed as a ‘foreign religion’ and who may, in fact, have been major instigators behind the persecutions.

At that time, knowing his own end was nigh, he began collecting up large amounts of his poetry to store in a few prominent monasteries in the mistaken assumption they would be safe there. In 845, the brewing storm against Buddhist excesses grew into a conflagration of destruction with most of the monasteries in the land being sacked and destroyed. Gone irrevocably, were the last few years’ accumulation of Bai’s precious poetry. Fortunately, for us, over 3000 of his extant poems and memorials were preserved in private collections or court documents. It is from these, over many centuries, that we shall hear Bai Juyi’s voice once again.

2.5 Bai Juyi’s Poetry and Memorials

‘A Confucian at work and a Buddhist in his heart’, could well describe this man of many passions; stirred by humanity’s sufferings, motivated to change his society, wanting to make a difference in his world, frustrated with his own incompetencies, riven by workplace and

heartplace conflicts, aware of his fame, puzzled, yet assertive about his identity and chagrined with his mortality.

Only modern-day writers would so analyze and categorize what, to a medieval personage such as Bai Juyi, would otherwise just be a personality continuum. Indeed, within the Daoist/Buddhist complex constituting the inner human space of Tang society, the whole meaning of ‘identity’ was illusory and sub-titled in socio-religious nomenclature and iconography. Adding a tragic-comedic dimension to this human scenario is the Confucian choreography imposed on the scholar-intellectuals, like Bai Juyi, to make a living, feed their families, observe the proper rites and serve the emperor.

Bai Juyi’s Confucian persona was quite evident in old style poetry (詩古府樂) as well as regulated poetry (詩體近詩律). It was ‘de rigueur’ for an up and coming bureaucrat to couch his persuasions in the style best suited to the occasion. Bai seemed equally at home in both although he preferred the old style in making persuasive cases on behalf of the inarticulate masses for social justice. Many of these were didactic and culminated in firm recommendations for social reform, improvements in political responsibility, administrative efficiency, and accountability.

2.5.1 In His Poems of Social Concern

Bai Juyi composed over a hundred didactic poems in the ‘New Music Bureau’府樂新 style based mainly on old folksongs. He wanted to be an ombudsman for the people and their legitimate grievances against bad government policies. He knew that, in the past, the court had relied on this style of song poetry (popular song ditties) to gauge the mood of the people so he deliberately framed their concerns in this style to get directly to the throne without being thwarted by the moat of opposition from court sycophants like the eunuchs and dissolute officials. He was so successful in this, effectively scandalizing and infuriating those reprobate leaches on court luxury that they machinated to have him exiled to some ‘safe’ place far from the capital. One of his poetic tactics was to use a didactic style, as was expected of him as a court counsellor, and discreetly imbue his criticism with allusion and allegory.
To illustrate, he wrote the poem The Man From Duling (ref. sect 1.1) to express his concern with the oppression of the farmer-peasants by rapacious tax-collectors.

Then there were thousands of women kept for good parts of their lives in the imperial harems. Though they may not have lacked for material comforts, most were, in Bai’s estimation, wasted as women. The fact they were not ‘free’ but caged like animals, offended his spiritual sensitivities. Notice how he expresses these feelings in some of the last lines of his poem of The White-Haired Person of Shangyang (上人髮白陽)\(^{55}\):

A person of Shang Yang, distressed most of all. 上陽人，苦最多。

Distressed in youth, distressed in old age, distressed throughout her life, how come? 少亦苦，老亦苦，少苦老苦兩如何。

Have you not seen Lu Xiang’s elegant fu-poem from the past, now won’t you look at my song, about the white-haired one of Shang Yang? 君不見昔時呂向美人賦, 又不見今日上陽白髮歌。

(transl. en)

Bai also wrote a number of poems of social criticism on the scandalously wide gap in the standard of living between the rich and the poor. None were more poignant than Buying Flowers (花買),\(^{56}\)

Late in a spring day in the emperor’s city, lots of noisy clamor of horses and carts. 帝城春欲暮，喧喧車馬度。

Throughout the streets peony season was in full bloom, the people following behind each other to buy some. 共道牡丹時，相隨買花去。

Some expensive some cheap, the prices change, look at the flower’s blooms before paying. 貴賤無常價，酬值看花數。

For the fine flowers pay a hundred measures of superb material, for cheap flowers five pieces of silk. 灼灼百朵紅，戋戋五束素。

They set up tents and curtains to protect them, on the sides

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\(^{55}\) 全唐詩, 卷 426_7

\(^{56}\) 舊唐書 p. 4676
woven twig fences shield them.  
Sprinkled with water and roots re-enveloped in mud, when they are moved they retain their colour.  
Families follow this tradition by habit, everyone lost in enchantment.  
An old farmer who had left his field, happened by a sales stall.  
Gazes down and emits a long sigh, a sigh that no one can appreciate.  
For a single clutch of profound colour, is worth the taxes on ten households.  
(transl. en)

Of all the excesses a government can perpetrate against its own civilians, it is the military conscription of its most defenceless eligible citizens who were rounded up and forced into battle often after a forced march of hundreds of kilometres under the most inclement of conditions. Bai Juyi realized that such crisis situations were the result of bad planning and unwise policy measures on the part of the government. Although he probably had the present leaders in mind, he carefully cited an incident under an earlier emperor, during the Tian-bao reign (742-756), to protect himself against court reprisals. The poem he produced to expose these appalling situations was The Old Man from Xin Feng with a Broken Arm (翁臂折豐新)\(^57\). Its poignancy demands a full exposition for it shows in a multiplicity of ways his skills as a writer. Hinton’s translation, quoted below, provides rather dramatic reading.\(^58\)

This type of human drama touched Bai very deeply and he depicted it artistically, sympathetically and empathetically. It also reveals an impressive array of literary and historical skills in, what this writer believes, is an allegory of Bai’s own life.

\(57\) 金唐詩 巻426_9 \\
\(58\) Hinton David, The Selected Poems of Po Chu-I, New Directions Book, 1999, p. 18
When I was born at my home village in the district of Hsin-feng [Xinfeng], it was an age of sage rule, never a hint of wartime campaigns, so I grew up listening to the flutes and songs of the Pear Garden, knowing nothing at all about spears and flags, bows and arrows. Then suddenly in the Tian-pao [Tianbao] reign, they began building armies, and for every three men in the household, one was taken away, taken and hurried away. And can you guess where they all went? To Yun-nan [Yunnan], a march five months and ten thousand miles long, a march everyone kept talking about: how you face the Lu river and malarial mists that rise and drift when pepper blossoms fall, how great armies struggle to cross the river’s seething floodwaters, and before they make it across, two or three in ten are drowned. North of home, South of home, wailing filled villages everywhere, sons torn from fathers and mothers, husbands torn from wives, for people knew what it meant to make war on the southern tribes: ten million soldiers are sent away and not one comes back alive. It was all so long ago, I was hardly twenty-four back then, but my name was listed on those rolls at the Department of War, so in the depths of night, careful to keep my plan well hidden, I stole away and found a big rock, and hacked my arm until it broke. Too lame to draw a bow or lift banners and flags into the wind, I escaped: they didn’t send me off to fight their war in Yun-nan [Yunnan]. It was far from painless, the bone shattered and muscles torn, but I’d found a way to go back and settle quietly in my village. Now sixty years have come and gone since I broke this arm: I gave up a limb, it’s true, but I’m still alive, still in one piece, though even now, on cold dark nights full of wind and rain, I’m sleepless all night long with pain and still awake at dawn. Sleepless with pain but free of regrets, for I’m the only man in my district who lived to enjoy old age. If I hadn’t done it, I’d have ended where the Lu river begins, a dead body, my spirit adrift and my bones abandoned there, just one of ten thousand ghosts drifting above southern graves, gazing toward their home, all grief-torn and bleating. “When such elders speak, how can we ignore them? Haven’t you heard the story of Sung Kai-fu [Song Kaifu], Prime Minister in the Kai-yuan [Kaiyuan] reign, how he nurtured peace by
refusing to reward frontier victories? Haven’t you heard the story of Yang Kuo-chung [Yang Guozhong], Prime Minister in the Tian-pao [Tianbao], how he launched the frontier campaigns to flatter the emperor, how the people were wild with anger before he won anything? Just ask him, ask the old man from Xin-feng [Xinfeng] with a broken arm.

It certainly is tantalizing to see Bai Juyi, here, reflecting back on the horrendous An Lu Shan rebellion resulting from flawed politico-military strategies that ‘rewarded’ victorious foreign frontier generals with more power to levy conscription-corvees to keep the borders safe, consequently robbing the land of its innocent youth, diminishing farm manpower, and unconscionably increasing the tax load on those left behind. Scandalously, thousands of those in ‘religious orders’, Daoists and Buddhists, were not only granted exemption from the draft but were tax-exempt. Bai’s protestations against these abuses, through his poetry and personal representation, went nowhere.

In this powerful narration, Bai Juyi may well have, allegorically, been the ‘old man’ with his Confucian writing-arm broken and ineffective, ashamed of the suffering he himself has avoided as a government official exempted from the hideous call-up. It seems so clear that he is calling for relief for those suffering, particularly those shouldering unbearable tax loads. But his protestations seemed to fall on politically deaf ears, effectively castrating him as a positive change-agent in policy matters. Rebuffed and disillusioned he began his slow but steady retreat into his own inner space seeking religious succour from the siren call of Buddhist/Chan release. This odyssey is described further on, in greater detail, in his poem 詩寺真悟遊. He is the omniscient, universal voice in the poem, party to information and data that no ordinary ‘old-man’ would possess. His allusion to a time of ‘Sage rule in a Pear Garden hearing only flutes and songs’ is hauntingly reminiscent of Tao Yuanming’s Peach Blossom Spring⁵⁹ untainted by the world’s dusty net. His descriptions of ‘malarial mists that rise and drift when pepper blossoms fall’ and the self-deprecating ‘too lame to draw a bow or lift banners and flags into the wind’ remind one of similar strains from some of Bai Juyi’s poetry.

⁵⁹ 陶潛明 (365-427) ‘桃花源記’, see David Hinton’s translations The Selected Poems of Tao Chien, Copper Canyon Press, 1993. Bai Juyi was greatly influenced by the Taoist tones of Tao Yuanming’s poetry.
2.5.2 Poems of Personal Pleasure, Poems of Nature

Bai Juyi took great delight in the beauties and powers of nature, joining the company of his great predecessors Li Bai (白李 701-762), Wang Wei (維王 701-761) and Du Fu (甫杜 712-770), in crafting exquisite descriptive verse. He was also very enamoured of wine, playing his lute and corresponding with close friends in poetry. As he became more immersed in Buddhism/Chan reflection, his poetry assumed a more autumnal, ephemeral, allusive and iconic quality, the acme of which was his Temple Poem 詩寺真悟遊 to be discussed in detail later. Many of his poems of pleasure were written in the regulated Shi (詩) style and occasionally quatrains. These types of poetry were not as didactic or as assertive as his non-regulated ‘old style’ (詩古).

2.5.3 His Delight in Poems of Nature

Many of Bai Juyi’s poems were spontaneous and off-the-cuff, engendered by the visual, audio and olfactory stimuli of the moment. The imageries are often bucolic, occasionally involving religious structures, such as temples, or natural phenomena like softly falling rain. Thus, in strolling At Yi Ai Temple 愛遺寺:

Lounging in the sun, sitting overlooking a stream, searching for flowers, I pass by a temple.  

弄日临溪坐，寻花绕寺行。  

Often I hear the birds conversing, all over the place there are sounds of streams.  

时时闻鸟语，处处是泉声。  

(transl.en)

Or, in the equally bucolic Rain At Night (雨夜):

60 全唐詩 卷 439.73  
61 Copy of Bai Juyi poem ‘yeyu 夜雨’ March 18, 2009 <zhidao.baidu.com/question/41730934.html>
The early cricket chirps recovers and takes a rest, the dying lamp almost flickers out then flames up again.

On the other side of the window I know it’s evening and that it’s raining, the first sounds are on the banana leaves.

(transl. en)

Sometimes, in his nature imagery he injects a moral, philosophical or didactic tone such as in his poem Autumn Butterfly (蝶秋)62. In the last line of the poem, below, Bai refers to the cranes who seem to be able to rise above the earthly clamour. He felt concerned about the frenetic pace of human life. At court, intrigues and the competitive craze often lead to frustration, banishment and even death. The Daoist tried not to enter the fray, the Buddhist attempted to withdraw and obtain Karma benefits for rising above the battle. This, the crane did and lived considerably longer because of (or despite?) it.

Autumn blossoms purple flourishing, autumn butterflies yellow scattering. Under the flowers, butterflies new and small fly and play, flocking east and west. Day and night a cool wind comes, confused, disorderly flowers fall in clusters. Born by day to die together by night, each follows its own order of species. Don’t you see the thousand year cranes, mostly nesting in the hundred foot pines. (transl. Levy, vol.1, p.34)

Also in his poem The Mountain Pheasant (雉山)63, Bai allegorically asserts that it is better to be in a sinecure away from the capital and live more modestly than to be at court and enjoy opulence yet worry about intrigue. This seems to be what Bai Juyi is trying to say with this rural

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62 全唐詩 卷431.14
63 詩唐全 卷431.18
imagery. For us this could translates into ‘better to live in relative poverty and be free than to be well fed and marked for the kill’.

Five paces, a mouthful of grass, ten paces a drink of water.
The mountain pheasant follows life in accord with its nature.
Above the rafters (of a nearby bridge) there is neither net nor arrow and below there is neither kite nor hawk.
Thus cocks hens and fledglings get to finish their allotted years.
Alas, there is the chicken under the eaves and the goose within the pond.
Since they receive the favour of (their owner’s) rice and grains they inevitably have the worry of being sacrificed.

( transla. Levy, Vol.1, p.34)

2.5.4 Poems About Himself

He confesses unashamedly to an addiction to poetry in ‘Reciting poems alone in the Mountains吟独中山’. He is probably one of the first poets to place his poetic interests above that of being a scholar-official pursuing a government career.

Every man has an addiction, my addiction is in writing verses.
Countless attachments have all disappeared, this fault alone has not gone.
Each encounter with a beautiful landscape, or meeting a good friend.
My voice raises to sing a stanza, suddenly it seems I’m with a divine spirit.
Since I’ve been travelling on the river, I spend half my time in the hills.
Sometimes after I develop a new poem, I go by myself up the East Rock road.
I lean against the cliff of white rock, then hand over hand climb while grabbing onto green cassia branches.

64 全唐詩 卷 430.5
My mad singing surprises the groves and gullies, some apes and birds peek at me. Fearing the world's sneers, I deliberately move towards a place where there are no people.

(transl. en)

Noted commentators, like Waley and Owen, have speculated on Bai Juyi’s poetic motives, on spontaneity or premeditation. Owen, for example, wonders if Bai was just yielding to a muse-driven poetic utterance or if, in fact, he were deliberately choreographing an ostensibly ‘impromptu’ moment with imbedded moral content.\(^{65}\) This writer is inclined to think it was a combination of both since, i) Bai admits openly in some of his other poems to being almost congenitally enslaved to poetic expression and ii) being quite concerned about how his verse is received and regarded and the fame or notoriety accruing therefrom. Whatever Bai Juyi’s motives were for writing some of his poetry, one might wonder if he were aware of the notoriety his skills were bringing him and the ego enhancing self-estimate it stimulated.

Dealing directly with this query, Zhang Su-zhen (真素張) has written an interesting exploratory essay, ‘Fame and Identity: Reading the Poetry of Bai Juyi”, on this latter aspect of Bai Juyi’s persona\(^{66}\). In it she comments that Bai Juyi’s fame was recognized by the emperor Xianzong himself, also that Bai’s poems were written everywhere, “in temples and postal stops” and that everyone, “including noblemen, women, cowboys and horse peddlers” were chanting them. She adds that the poet himself wrote in 書九元與;


\(^{66}\) Zhang, Su Zhen (真素張), *Fame and Identity: Reading the Poetry of Bai Juyi*, paper presented to Professor Jerry Schmidt, UBC, September 2006.
“自長安抵江西三四千里，凡鄉校、佛寺、逆旅、行舟之中，往往有題仆詩者：土庶僧徒、孀婦、處女之口，每每有題仆詩者”

“My poems have always been written on country schools, temples, inns and travelling boats during the journey of three to four hundreds of li from Chang-an to Jiang-xi province, in the mouths of intellectuals and citizens, monks, widows and young girls, my poems have always been cited”.

(p.2)

Zhang adds that no poet, not even Du Fu or Wang Wei, put such a high premium on his writings as did Bai Juyi quoting from the preface to 集詩山香白；

詩家好名未有過於唐白傳者
“No one was as fond of fame as was Bai Juyi of the Tang” (p.3)

Furthermore that he was likely the first to regard himself as uniquely a poet in apposition to the traditional scholar-intellectual-censorial role to the emperor and government;

生計拋來詩是業，...
‘Throwing aside my livelihood, composing poetry is (now) my career …’ (p.11)

And that Bai was quite ready to admit he was a person of reknown;

海內聲華並在身，箋中文字絶無倫。
‘Fame and glory of the world belong to me,
The writing in my bookcase is unrivalled’

Coupled with the confidence of his fame;
Like many poets, Bai found wine both a stimulant to poetry and a delicious soporific. It seemed to hold at bay, or at least mitigate, the excesses of his ‘poetry demon (魔詩). Zhang noted that Bai used it:

As a stimulant,

“酒狂又引诗魔发，日午悲吟到日西.”

The craze for wine arouses the obsession for poetry again, I sing sadly from afternoon to dusk. (p.16)

As a soporific,

‘行亦携诗箧，眠多枕酒卮’

I carry the poetry case even when walking; Falling asleep so often, I rest my head on the goblet. (p.16)

And as medication,

‘不独适情性，兼用扶衰羸，于中我自乐，此外吾不知’

Poetry not only makes me feel comfortable, but it also helps my weak old body----I find happiness in it, that’s all I know! (p.17)
2.5.5 Bai Juyi’s Memorials

During the years 808-810, Bai Juyi was the imperial censor to the emperor Xian Zong (憲 宗 reign 806-821). In this position he had daily entry into the emperor’s presence and offered criticism of the events and decisions emanating from the court’s policy makers. In many ways it was an invidious role and brought him into conflict with many powerful court officials and eunuchs whose positions were directly jeopardized by his ‘memorials’. It was his duty to be the empire’s ‘official opposition’ as Censor or Omissioner. If he could be faulted for anything, it was carrying out his duties with honesty and great diligence. The power latent in his writing, often crafted with devastating subtlety, went to the very heart of an issue exposing malevolent motives in powerful people. The result, not unexpectedly, was his removal from court and, in some cases, exile.

It is very difficult to get a clear understanding of the import of some of the text used in these memorials since Bai used names, events, facts and happening that would have been well known to the emperor but very obscure to us today even for reasonably well-informed Chinese scholars. Furthermore the legalese used in some of the prose documents was apparently quite convoluted and complex making it very difficult to make sense of, especially in translation. Suffice to say, Bai Juyi was very expert at it and often had to compose documents dealing with foreign relations and, in fact, representing the will of the emperor over His ‘signature’.

As a Censor Bai had, if he wanted, the direct ear of the emperor but only used this privilege if the situation were serious enough such as a flagrant misuse or abuse of government administrative or personnel policies. Typically the Ruler was surrounded by an insulation wall of court sycophants and eunuchs, preventing him from knowing what really was going on in the empire particularly in the provinces where ruthless governors often made shocking exactions from the burdened farmers. Bai was also very aware of enmities that could be incurred against him if he were too ‘officious’ in doing his job. Banishment, imprisonment or even death might await him for pursuing a cause too efficiently. Consequently he seemed to have developed three strategies for dealing with problems. First, if the problem concerned behavioural matters, such as the number of women the emperor kept in his private seraglio then Bai would write a memorial and be assured that the ruler would read it and take appropriate action. Second, if the situation contravened existing policies and demanded direct advice to His Majesty, such as the way his close colleague Yuan Zhen was dealt with in doing ‘too good’ a job at uncovering fraud and
avarice in the provinces, then Bai would request and get an immediate audience\(^{67}\). Others in the open court however would hear what Bai had to say and, if unfavourable, would try to incite indirect reprisals against him. If Bai knew this ahead of time, he would ask that his memorial be read privately by the emperor and not discussed in open court. Third, if the matter were severe enough that open or private disclosure could get Bai into serious trouble then he furtively used his poetry, with appropriate allusions, in the court of public opinion to arouse outrage against the perceived malefactors\(^{68}\). This likely was the reason for the 50 political poems he wrote under the banner of Xin Yue Fu (府樂新) intended to enlist sympathetic intellectuals to his cause\(^{69}\).

To illustrate the first case, Bai sent a Memorial\(^{70}\) to the Emperor petitioning him to release more ladies from his harem. So many of these women spent virtually their whole lives confined within the court’s ‘rear chambers’ never to know the joys and satisfaction of family. Bai’s compassionate Buddhist heart probably groaned over this but he could not moralize to the emperor\(^{71}\) so he approached it on an economic basis and as a matter of Heaven honouring more royal virtue. He pleads;

\[-\text{the court has to buy food and clothing for them and has to supply the funds needed for their sustenance and well-being. These ladies suffer from loneliness, for they are separated from their families and relatives and are denied a married life. It is fitting to adopt measures which will reduce the expenses incurred in this manner and will comply with the natural longings of these women:} -\text{I reverently suggest that if Your Majesty considered granting freedom to more of them, your august virtue would be pleasing to Heaven and the heartfelt gratitude of the ladies would certainly bring about the harmony of yin and yang. Your magnanimous deed would fill a bright page in the annals of history and would continue the virtuous examples of the imperial ancestors.}\ (\text{Feifel p.210})\]

To reinforce his feelings about this type of abuse to women “guilty” only of their attractive appearance or advantageous family connections, Bai wrote a number of poems, such as

\(^{67}\) For more details on Yuan Zhen’s ‘officiousness’ see Feifel, p. 156
\(^{68}\) See Feifel, p.35-39.
\(^{69}\) Levy (Vol.1 p.15) records 172 poems in the ‘didactic category’ of which 50 were assembled as Xin Yue Fu.
\(^{70}\)集山香白 卷41,91 ‘人内宮後放揀請’ (‘Please select and let go (some of) the inhabitants of the rear chamber’)
\(^{71}\) Bai likely had concubines of his own! So it is not unlikely that he was quite sincere about the YinYang implications of so many women being removed from their natural cycle of social functions.
the The White-Haired Person of Shang Yang (人髮白陽上), to graphically describe the sad fate of the unwedded. Here is a portion, written in the first person singular:

(I’m) a Shang Yang person, my young and beautiful look is gradually declining as white hairs newly grow. Green cloaked eunuchs guard the palace doors, once closed, on Shang Yang so many Springs ago. Near the end of Xuan Zong’s reign, I was first chosen to enter, sixteen was I going in, now I’m sixty.

Those chosen at the same time were a hundred or more. At the same time more than a hundred came to be selected, withered and wasted years, really injurious to my body.

(transl.en)

In the second case when the matter was serious and personal enough, Bai could memorialize the throne directly, even ask to speak to the emperor in closed court, that is, with a bare minimum of attendant officials around. One such matter concerned his very close friend Yuan Zhen who had run afoul of certain corrupt court sycophants for doing his job of monitoring local provincial administrations too officiously. Bai actually wrote three memorials, so incensed was he by the unfair treatment Yuan was receiving! More grave, in Bai’s estimation, was the threat Xian Zong’s ruling would have of seriously compromising effective censorial action on government officials in future. In the third of these memorials to Xian Zong, Bai sums up as follows;

The reason I presume to annoy and inconvenience YM (Your Majesty) again and again is because I believe that, though the specific harm at stake is insignificant, the issue involved is enormous. Because of this I wish to speak with the greatest of emphasis. If YM regards my words as loyal and if there is no other way left to cope with this situation, may

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72 全唐詩 卷 426.7, refer also to p.26 for some of the last lines of this poem.
73 Properly called tai jian (監太)
74 集山香白，二十四卷，‘狀三第稹元論’. Feifel (pp. 238-241) gives a full translation of the memorial given on behalf of Yuan Zhen. Only the last paragraph of it is shown above.
I wish that YM will issue a supplementary order changing his (Yuan’s) appointment and making him an ‘official on leave’ in the capital. He will then be spared from serving under a provincial governor (who is his foe). This would be in the interest of YM’s government and would gratify the general opinion. I respectfully hope YM will give close attention to this case, the decision for which rests with the imperial will. I submit my report with reverence and with respect.

A powerful reaction to this presentation saw Yuan removed and sent into exile from which he was never to return to such high position. Bai Juyi’s own position was jeopardized by such zealoussness resulting in an exile as well. Ironically, one of the few times they were in touch with each other was in passing each other in ships going in opposite directions, one into and the other out of exile. They seemed to be each other’s dearest friend frequently sharing poetic sentiments by mail. For example one of Bai’s epistles to Yuan catches him in a mood of melancholic reminiscence; his Eastern Slopes Autumn(al) Thoughts—Letter to Yuan (東坡秋意，寄元八)\(^\text{75}\)

 Sparse fields on the banks of a slope; walking alone my abundant thoughts.
The autumn lotus, on sick leaves has white dew large as pearls.
I suddenly recall the two of us enjoying this area, in the northeast corner of Qujiang\(^\text{76}\).
The autumn pools had few visitors, only you and I and that was it.
Chirping crickets hidden in red knotweed and emaciated horses stepping on green overgrown grassland.
Then as now, everything was at the beginning of the sunset of autumn.
Seasons and sights are painfully similar, times and circumstances are still lean.
There are only men who are scattered apart; year after year I get no letter.
(transl. en)

75 全唐詩 卷 429.26
76 A famous lake inside the Tang capital where successful examination candidates would gather together to celebrate their suc
In the third case, when situations of concern were so potentially explosive as to pose a direct threat on Bai’s life, as when he wished to speak out against rapacious military corvees, he used poetry to politically sensitize power brokers about the morality and social consequences of their ill-advised actions. Frequently, in these cases, Bai showed how much of an ombudsman for the people he really was. For example, in one of his Xin Yue Fu poems, The Old Man from Xin Feng with a Broken Arm (翁臂折豐新)\(^\text{77}\), he satirically complained about the extent to which some in an earlier epoch would go to escape conscription at the hands of uncaring, often brutal, local officials vying to fill military quotas thus;

From villages to the North and South come sounds of crying and grief, sons leave fathers and mothers, husbands leave wives. Everyone says that, overall, in military expeditions to the South, countless numbers go but none return alive.

At the time I was an ‘old man’ of 24, ------

(transl. en)

村南村北哭聲哀，兒別爺娘夫別妻。
皆雲前後征蠻者，千萬人行無一回。
是時翁年二十四，------

2.5.6 A Sombre Poetry: His Aging and Tomb Inscriptions (銘誌)

Bai was increasingly, and whimsically, aware of the decaying forces in his body with advancing age. Religion became a more potent palliative for him as he echoed the Ecclesiastes theme ‘vanity, vanity, all is vanity!’ Taoist/Buddhist terminology infused more and more of his poetry, such as in the following poem where he quotes from the Zhuang Zi (子莊 ca. 4\(^\text{th}\) cent.BCE) about achieving transcendental bliss.

詠遙逍\(^\text{78}\)
(a chant on being free and unfettered)

Although I don’t feel attached to this body, I’m not bored with this body.
This body, how do I feel attached to it, countless causes of coercion and vexation. This body why should I be bored with it.

亦莫戀此身，亦莫厭此身。
此身何足戀，萬劫煩惱根。
此身何足厭，一聚虛空塵。
無戀亦無厭，始是逍遙人。

\(^{77}\) 全唐詩 卷 426.9, see the full translation by Hinton on p.28. \(^{78}\) 全唐詩 卷 434.56
It’s only an assemblage of empty worldly dust.

Not feeling attached to it and not being bored with it, this is the beginning of becoming free and unfettered.

(transl.en)

Having said that, however, he injected a lightly leavening note on life’s last ‘burst of bloom’ in his sagely written letter, (耳順吟，寄敦詩、夢得) to Dun Shi (敦詩) and Meng De (夢得) about the glories of the 50-60 age interval as years of ‘respectful listening’.

Thirty to forty, our desires pulling us along, seventy to eighty, hundreds of nagging illnesses. From fifty to sixty, however, these wickednesses are not there, indifferent to fame or gain, peace and quiet, one is at rest. Already passed through love and covetousness’ keenness, Only in my pre-eighties emaciation and confusion.

But not yet without strength of limbs to seek out mountains and streams, to still desire the sound of flutes and strings. Leisurly I open some new wine and sample a few cups, intoxicated I recall some old poems and chant a stanza. Dun Shi, Meng De, there’s no need to begrudge others their years of ‘respectful listening’.

(transl.en)

He sighed deeply over the transiency of life while admiring the verdant growth of the peach tree, then lamenting its inevitable decay and demise. In his third poem on Getting Old (首三老歎 三) he vents these feelings in verse with moving melancholy:

The year before last, I planted peach pits, this year they are transformed into blossoming trees. Last year a new baby infant, this year already

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79 全唐詩 卷 441.41, ‘A Recitation Pleasant to the Ear sent to Dun Shi and Meng De’
80 全唐詩 卷 433.7
learning to walk. One is startled by the way things begin to grow, unaware that the body deteriorates and ages.

It’s gone! Oh. How we wish otherwise; the years of youth can’t be retained. Thus, today, I intend writing about this, sending it everywhere to my family and friends.

If in the years of vigor there’s no joyous pleasure then, when you’re older, you should repent of this.

(transl.en)

Regarding his tomb inscriptions, he composed both an internal and external one! Bai Juyi gives a rather self-effacing and, at the same time, self-glorifying assessment of himself in the ‘external’ tomb inscription which he wrote and had titled “The Biography of a Drunken Poet (銘誌墓生先吟醉)". Shinohara believes this was really a parody of a conventional biography. The ‘internal’ inscription was, it is generally believed, an elegy modeled after that of Bai’s favourite poet Tao Qian (潛陶 365-427) and followed a more conventional, socially approved structure.

This personal/formal aspect of his memorial was very much in line with what Shinohara describes in his article “Structure and Comunitas in Po Chu-Yi’s Tomb Inscription” where ‘Comunitas’ describes a persona congruent with peer level communication and assessment while ‘Structure’ equates to a more socially hierarchical (Confucian) persona. Shinohara’s rather academic description of these qualities seems to reflect, prosaically speaking, a Buddhist/Confucian split personality to which Bai Juyi was able to give marvelous expression. It was certainly unusual for anyone to write their own obituary and eulogy/elegy before they had died. But then Bai Juyi was a very unusual person. Some might even say he was a ‘legend in his own mind’!

81 集易居白 刊四第 p.1503
Bai’s ‘external’ prose inscription is rather laconic yet whimsical, reflecting the influence of Chan philosophy on his self-identity and worth. Only the last part of it, written to his wife on the night of his death, conveys the summative expression of his life’s purpose and worth. Shinohara’s paraphrase of it below, poignantly captures the heart-cry of someone who in some way speaks for all of us.

“On the night of his death, Bai Juyi told his wife and nephews that he was fortunate to have lived a long life and to have achieved a high official standing, and that he had become famous without having done anything to benefit the people. He then instructed them that his funeral should be very simple and that they should erect only one stone in front of his tomb on which his ‘Biography of a Drunken Poet’ is to be carved. After these words, Bai Juyi ended his life. The inscription then concludes in a conventional manner with a verse, but with the unusual feature again that the verse was composed by Bai Juyi himself. The verse sings of the unreality of death and the pointlessness of attachment to life, using phrases that are distinctly Buddhist and Taoist: “Le Tian! Le Tian! He lived between Heaven and Earth for seventy-five years. His life was a floating cloud; his death was like the casting of an old integument (as by snakes and cicadas). What was the cause of his coming? What was the condition of his going? Our nature does not change. Our body changes frequently. It is over! It is over! Where would I not go? And what justifies hating or loving this life?””

( transl. Shinohara p. 386)

2.6 Summary

Bai Juyi grew up in the latter half of the Tang Period in the ominous aftermath of the An Lushan rebellion with a huge amount of political uncertainty and economic distress. Though his
family included minor government officials, he had to struggle to succeed at examinations. The early death of his father retarded his eventual acquisition of Jin Shi status, being the first in his family to do so. The suffering he endured, coupled with the strong social influence of Buddhism engendered in him a strong sympathy for the hardships of the masses and prompted in him a life-long struggle with political corruption. At the same time, maturity brought an awareness of growing spiritual interests antithetical to his deeply felt Confucian convictions of loyal steadfast service to the Emperor.

His poetic interests moved from being the utilitarian hobby of a scholar-intellectual to becoming a driving passion. He always believed it should be used for moral, didactic purposes enhancing the Confucian basis for human behaviour and national governance. Yet he found himself giving utterance, through his poetry, to expressions of feelings which, to his pleasant surprise, were far more popular with the people than his didacticisms.

As a high political officer, his outspokenness on political matters got him into trouble with court sycophants causing him to be demoted or exiled on a few occasions. When these struggles became too difficult to cope with he gradually retreated into the heady speculations of Buddhist release and Chan meditation. His well-known Temple poem You Wu Zhen Si Shi seems to be a poetic projection of his growing alienation from the struggles inherent in being a Confucian official towards philosophical speculation and increased personal quietude.
CHAPTER III: Buddhism in Tang Dynasty China (618-905 AD)

3.1 Introduction

Buddhism, like the Tang Dynasty itself, had its own trajectory of growth, peak and decline. Important individuals, like Empress Wu (武后 624-705), Fa Zang (法藏 643-712), Bai Juyi and Du Fu (杜甫 712-770) played out their own dramas within the great socio-political scenarios of their day. The interaction and interpretation of all these dynamics are assuredly very complex, particularly if we take a slice of the historical time continuum without a reasonable understanding of the antecedents of the age. There are many levels of interpretation and viewpoints each with their own perspectives of the era.

Arthur Wright, for example, in his book *Buddhism in Chinese History* presents a brief, concise ideological, anthropological panorama partitioning a two thousand year span into five main periods in which the Tang Period is viewed as ‘The Period of Independent Growth’. 83 Kenneth Chen, by contrast, exhibits a more straightforward historically interpretive approach in his book *Buddhism in China* viewing the Tang Period as one in which Buddhism attains its ‘Maturity and Acceptance’. 84 He gives more of a conventional rubric of names, dates and events with a far more detailed description of the intricacies of Buddhist life and thought with its spin off influences on art, literature, language, phonology, science and medicine. Perhaps, subliminally prompted, both Chen and Wright seem to follow the classical Gibbon-esque ‘Rise and Fall’ theme. Chen, it could be said, gives a far more informative treatment of Buddhism’s ‘decline’ on into the Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty period (907-1278).

Furthermore, it is a bit misleading to talk of the ‘decline of Buddhism’ when what we may really mean is the decline of its influence on Chinese thought and practice of the day. As an intellectual, philosophical force it still exerts a powerful influence on many modern societies though, ironically, not that much in India, the country of its origin.

Important as these well researched perceptions are, the whole motivation of this essay is to augment our understanding of the influence of Buddhism in Tang society with how Bai Juyi might have perceived it and how this might explain his social and cultural behaviour. After all, he had the benefit of a more intimate experience of the affective influences of Buddhism on the life of his society than anything we might conjecture. Thus, in his poem *Travelling to Wu Zhen Temple* (遊悟真寺詩), many of the influences of contemporary Buddhist iconic, religious and cultic, art forms, with all their theological implications, are very evident. This will be dealt with at more length in Section 4.1.

From the Han period on 85, Buddhism, Taoism and, to a lesser extent, Confucianism, began to feed off each other’s epistemologies, each legitimizing the other as belief systems in the eyes of, i) the common people ii) the scholar-intellectuals and iii) the landed court aristocracies. We shall look a little more closely at the interaction of these three belief systems later.

By the time of the cosmopolitan Tang period, the first group was benefiting significantly from Mahayana compassion and spiritual succor while acquiring a sense of social equality midst the hierarchical strictures of Confucianism. The scholar-intellectual class, for its part, had become quite enamoured of the mental stimulation of Buddhist thought as much if not more than its salvatory blandishments. It seems reasonably clear from his poetry that Bai Juyi esteemed the intellectual aspect of Buddhism far more than its materialistic acquisitiveness and ostentation. More will be said about this later. However, in the opinion of this author, it was quite likely the insatiable desire of certain members of this class for a more explicit clarification of Gautama’s ‘implicit philosophies’ that spurred the development of the many schools, sutras and sects culminating in the virtual annihilation of catechistic doctrine within the Chan School. The vigor and depth of these inquiries contributed to enduring and profound spill-over benefits in the areas of the arts, music, liturgy, iconography, language, architecture and literature.

There seems little doubt that Chinese society had, over this period, undergone a radical transformation in its world view becoming, as many would contend, a truly Buddhist society. Whether as cause or effect of this, Tang society had become very multicultural with expansive, open and protected borders. Its commerce and arts were at their historical peaks with its muscular arms extended to all the world around it. The An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) would soon change all this!

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85 漢朝 (206BC-220AD)
The third group, not unpredictably with its entrenched social privilege and self-interest, tended to view Buddhism as a political tool and a vehicle for the preservation of power. Nowhere is this more evident than in the drama and intrigue of the Fazang/Empress Wu symbiosis of the mid-Tang period involving the soteriology and eschatology of the faith.\footnote{Chen, Jinhua, Fazang and Wuzhenshi: With a Special Reference to his Daoist Ties, \textit{The Journal of the Royal Asian Society}, Vol.16.2, 2006, p.196}

Philosophically, such universal themes as Reality, Dualism, Morality, Causality, and Identity, were endlessly debated among the three major belief systems with interesting, sometimes disastrous, political consequences. Chinese Buddhist verse was so replete with philosophical spin that one had to have quite an academic grasp of the faith’s major principles and derivative corollaries. Even Xie Lingyun (謝靈運 385-433) seemed a little spaced-out in trying to make sense of it. He wrote;

\begin{quote}
All things are tainted by Causation,
Six directions of Reincarnation bind us fast.
Seven stages of cognition succeed each other,
Round nine abodes we are forever moving.
How painful are the Five Aggregates,
How wearisome the Four Causes….\footnote{Xie Lingyun, \textit{Inscription on the Buddha Shadow}, Guan Hongming ji, xv, p.199b.}
\end{quote}

(transl. Frodsham (Anthology) p.xxix)

Notwithstanding, Bai Juyi was particularly interested in the intellectual stimulation of the claims made by the plethora of philosophical positions of the various schools and sects. He also seemed to have had a predilection for Buddhist phenomenology as evidenced in his long poem about Wu Zhen Temple.

The fact that Buddhism was, in its beginnings, a religion foreign to China and Chinese thought, ultimately presented to scholar intellectuals like Han Yu (韓愈 768-824) opportunities to severely reduce its influence. Buddhism, he challenged, was too inward looking and self-centered to benefit a pragmatic and basically materialistic society such as China’s. He was saying what an increasing number were thinking, leading many towards the development of Neo-Confucian ideas the seeds of which were being productively planted during Tang times and bearing rich fruit during the following dynastic periods. It is almost certain Bai Juyi was exposed
to this new ideology but apparently did not commit to it as did Han Yu and Li Ao (李翱 772-836).

3.2 Buddhism’s Fundamental Principles and Ideological Evolution in the Tang Period

There is quite convincing evidence that Bai Juyi was, at least cerebrally, a committed Buddhist who seemed also to revel in the esoteric and artistic expression of Buddhist phenomenology. The BTC epistemological triad might, however, have blurred somewhat the Buddhist distinctives embedded in Bai’s psyche. A quick review of what these were and their evolution over the Tang period follows.

From the time of Buddhism’s entry into China, around 65 CE, to the end of the Tang dynasty in 905 CE, the Buddha’s Four Noble Truths along with the Noble Eight-Fold Path formed the touchstone, or axiomatics, of virtually all the doctrines to follow. Attempts to state explicitly these doctrines implicit in Shakyamuni’s ‘Fundamental’ assertions defined the various schools and sects that were subsequently established.

Since ‘perception’ and ‘inference’ were generally accepted as valid means of expressing metaphysical knowledge, often expressed in ontological ‘dharma’units, it is easy to see from a Western perspective how different interpretations of these metaphysical notions would produce their own schools of thought. The notion of ‘person’, or pudgala (人), for example, serves as an illustration. Some schools, like the Pudgalavada, viewed the pudgala as a replacement for the Hindu ‘atman’ bearing the burden of karma from one transmigration to another. Some schools viewed the pudgala as only an illusory quantity, others as a definable entity while others saw it as something in-between.

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88 Buddhism-Taoism-Confucianism (BTC)
90 Arya astangika marga (八正道 ba zheng dao)
91 A dharma (法) or phenomena unit is ‘that which gives state or condition to the orderly arrangement of parts which makes a thing what it is’, Humphreys, C., *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*, Curzon, 1984. p.65.
92 Humphreys, p. 154
To a great extent, the permutations and combinations of the interpretations of metaphysical entities such as ‘mind’ and ‘senses’, defined the schools adhering to them. The argumentation and disputations surrounding their doctrinal interpretations may initially appear rather philosophically labyrinthine especially for those in the West accustomed to Aristotelian logic and the notion of the Excluded Middle. It clarifies things somewhat to realize that Buddhist ‘logic’ tends to follow a 4-pole argumentation axiology, that is;

i) Yes
ii) No
iii) Either Yes or No
iv) Neither Yes Nor No

After Buddha’s death, the philosophizing on his thoughts, attempting to divine what Shakyamuni actually meant, prompted such a proliferation of schools and sects that by the end of the Tang period the Chan School (禪宗) virtually dismissed the efficacy of all doctrine and catechism in attaining enlightenment. Rather, it turned totally to inner spiritual dynamics believing that, with proper training, these could effect total enlightenment within one’s own lifetime.

The Shakyamuni Buddha (佛 ca.560-410 BC) himself seemed uninterested in philosophical speculations except where they were directly helpful in leading to and achieving enlightenment. This, of course, benefited the vast majority of the population who were not intellectuals but rather illiterate common folk. For them the Dharma path often became belief in the efficacy of a developing Buddhist liturgy.

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94 Bodhi (菩提 pu ti) or Nirvana (涅槃 nie pan) or ‘a ride across the bitter sea of mortality’ (苦海 ku hai), Soothill p.228
Before describing the network of Buddhist schools extant in the Tang period, let us see where Bai Juyi might have been ‘doctrinally’ located. In one of his poems\(^95\) he admits to mutually alloyed interests in both Taoism and Buddhism:

For this material body my great master is Lao Zi, For the uniformity of all things I study Zhuang Zi

(translation: en)

And later on in the same poem:

To quell disorder I return to Chan and stabilize, To keep a balanced spirit I conform to sitting and being empty. (translation: en)

While in another poem\(^96\):

I entreat the master to cure this illness, but he only advises me to read the Lankavatara Sutra\(^97\). (translation: en)

As we shall see in a later section devoted to Bai’s spiritual interests, he was also quite familiar with the Vimalakirti\(^98\) and Lotus Sutras\(^99\). While many of the

\(^95\) 白香山集 Vol.1, p. 25, 渭村退居--- ‘Retreating to a Wei River Village to Reside’
\(^96\) 白香山集 Vol.1, p.29, 晚春登大雲寺--- ‘Late Spring Climbing to Big Cloud Temple’
\(^97\) Its most important doctrine asserts the primacy of ‘consciousness’ as the only reality. Its ‘mind only’ emphasis rejects the erroneous dualism of ‘subject/object’ that ties one to the wheel of rebirth: Takakusu, p.101
\(^98\) This sutra advances Mahayana over Hinayana teachings, emphasizing non-duality and ‘emptiness’ or sunyata: Takakusu, p.17.
Buddhist schools included these sutras as part of their creedal structure, their emphasis seemed to depend on how they enhanced the distinctives of their own particular philosophical stripe.

From the beginning of the Tang Period, there flowed various interpretations and derivative forms of Shakyamuni’s gospels. Each had their champions and apologists to suit a broad spectrum of intellectual tastes and preferences. Arguably, the most prominent of these were;

i) the Tian Tai School (宗台天)
ii) the Hua Yan School (宗嚴華)
iii) the Jing Tu School (宗土浄)
iv) the Chan School (宗禪)
v) the Fa Xiang School (宗相法)
vi) the Zhen Yan or Tantric School (宗言眞)

Of these, the first four mentioned were probably the most influential and enduring in China.

The Tian Tai School was founded by Hui Wen (文慧 550-577) and Hui Si (思慧 514-577) and completely systematized by Zhi Yi (顗智 531-597) thus justifying him, in the eyes of many, as the first Patriarch of the School. Its teachings are briefly summed up in the ‘three-fold’ truth of; 1) void 2) temporariness and 3) mean, that all component things are made up of dharma units, that the platonic ideal (noumenon) of the phenomenon are not separate entities but rather one, each interpenetrating the other\(^{100}\). Perhaps most important for the religious believer is the belief that his phenomenal daily existence is an integral part of the Buddha’s life, that there exists an Absolute Mind, that concentration and insight is efficacious. As with many of the other schools, including the ones in the descriptions that follow, the Tian Tai had a very powerful

\(^{99}\) Allegedly recording Shakyamuni’s own words some 500 years after his death, this sutra initiated the notions of Mahayana’ism and Bodhisattva while asserting Buddhic eternity: Takakusu, p.131.

\(^{100}\) Chen, p. 311. (author’s note: In mathematical, topological language Chen’s observation could be construed as a one-to-one equivalence and congruence between each point in one-dimensional space with every point in n-dimensional space \(n= 1,2,3,\ldots\). Indeed this could be what Chen is trying to say philosophically when he comments that “this (notion) is intended to show the interpenetration of all the dharmas and the ultimate unity of the universe. There seems little doubt, to this writer, that exponents of these doctrines, both in Tian Tai and other schools, were trying to explain as well as they could the very challenging concepts of Universals, Infinite Sets, Null Sets, Congruence, Similarity, Exclusivity and Complimentarity. But even these mathematical notions may be inadequate in this context since they are ultimately based on two-pole logic rather than Buddhism’s four-pole axiology.)
gnostic appeal to Chinese intellectuals and literati. In this sense, however, it provided only one of the many training routes to enlightenment or salvation.

The Hua Yan School is based primarily on the Avatamsaka (Garland) Sutra (華嚴經) which is considered to be ‘the milk from which comes all its other products’. It is a sutra in which the initial mystical doctrine of the Buddha is elucidated. When Shakyamuni first preached it, virtually no one could have understood its implications unless they were already a bodhisattva. Manjusri (殊文) was one such and was alleged to be living on Qing Liang Mountain (山凉清) continually proclaiming its truths.

Fa Shun (順法557-640) and Zhi Yan (儼智 602-668) were the first masters in the transmission of the doctrine but it was up to Fa Zang (藏法643-712) to systematize everything and he, like Zhi Yi in the Tian Tai school, is considered to be the actual founder of the school. Its central doctrine evolved from their theory of causation which was unique from similar tenets of some other schools in that it stemmed first from pure ideation. One authority describes the process as beginning with action-influence (起緣咸業) following from the theory of causation by ideation-store (起緣耶賴) which itself stems from Thusness or thagata-garba (藏來如) meaning ‘that which conceals the Buddha’.

Regarding the important noumena/phenomena relationship, Hua Yan maintained a one-to-all relationship unlike Tian Tai which upheld a one-to-one relationship. Taken to its logical conclusion, the one-to-all theory saw Buddha as the solitary convergent point at infinity producing, in Chen’s words ‘a totalistic system modeling a religious sanction for political totalitarianism so avidly sought by Empress Wu and contemporary Japanese emperors.’ More will be said later about Empress Wu and her close association with the brilliant and astute Fa Zang in discussing the interaction between Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism during the Tang period.

The Pure Land School assumes as its principal canon the Sukhavatiyuha sutra (光佛壽經) or simply the Amitabha sutra (經佛光), the word itself meaning ‘a land of bliss’.

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101 Soothill, p. 248
102 Takakusu, p. 109. Allegedly, the name ‘Manchu’ of the last dynasty in China is derived from Manjusri’s name.
103 Takakusu, p. 113
104 Chen, p. 319
105 Soothill, p. 383
called Sukhavati. There were two versions of this sutra, a longer and shorter one. The longer seems to offer salvation through faith in works or faith and works whereas the shorter requires only faith in and prayer for, Amitabha.\textsuperscript{106} Parallels with aspects of Western Christianity in its Christology and soteriology are striking viz. the salvatory figure, salvation by faith, the typology of heaven. Furthermore, as early as the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century, we read of Nagarjuna (樹龍 c.100-200) prefiguring the notions of Hinayana and Mahayana and a works/faith ‘salvation’ respectively. Without using the actual names of the Lesser and Greater Vehicles, he asserted that Amitabha-pietism would guarantee a place in the land of bliss.\textsuperscript{107} To assist in this spiritual translation, the benevolent Amitabha commissioned his closest associate, the compassionate Avalokitesvara (音觀)\textsuperscript{108}, to act as an intermediary in conveying the faithful to the Pure Land.

The \textit{Chan School} was, in many ways, a reaction to the plethora of eclectic, gnostic speculations and liturgical rituals endemic in the other schools. The initial infatuation with new ideas, thought styles and iconic imageries introduced by Buddhist missionaries from the Han period on, seemed intellectually at least, to be wearing a little thin except perhaps for those like Bai Juyi who continued to be enthralled by its intellectual, artistic and philosophical aspects.

Indeed, what hope was there for the common man (or woman) with limited intellectual development in ever grasping the emotional and psychological disciplines necessary for the attainment of enlightenment? For these, the attractions of Chan as an extension of the folk-friendly Mahayana bodhisattva tradition seemed very appealing. In the considered opinion of this author, the sudden enlightenment side of Chan with its emphasis on the efficacy of dhyana (contemplation) or chan(禪) leading to prajna(般若 ‘wisdom’) the supreme wisdom, tugged strongly at Taoist epistemological roots and spiritual practices. As important, the inherently practical, this-worldly side of the Chinese character seemed to respond much more favorably to the Chan emphasis on maintaining basic social responsibilities within this world in apposition to the other-worldly stance of Buddhism. Not surprisingly, the Chan sect came to be viewed as ‘atheistic Buddhism’ by many. For a multitude of others though, it proffered to the layman an opportunity for enlightenment in his own lifetime.

\textsuperscript{106} Chen, p.338
\textsuperscript{107} Takakusu, p.166; Nagarjuna’s Dasabhumi Sutra (經地大) and Vasubandhu’s commentary on it (親世 c.420-500) imply such.
\textsuperscript{108} Chen, p.340; literally meaning ‘a lord who is seen’ thus his Chinese name Guan Yin (音觀)
The Indian Bodhidharma (菩提達摩 ca. 526) is generally regarded as the first patriarch of the Chan School. His doctrines concerning enlightenment were efficiently transmitted until the sixth Patriarch Shen Xiu (神秀 600-706) encountered a southern monk, Shen Hui (神會 670-762), who railed against the former’s doctrine of gradual enlightenment in favor of complete instantaneous enlightenment. Shen Hui had to endure an exile for his views but survived some subsequent political strife to see the Patriarchate pass to Hui Neng (慧能 638-713) who became the first Patriarch of the Southern Chan School and founder of the School of Sudden Enlightenment (教頓). Meanwhile the Northern School’s ongoing doctrinal influence seemed to dissipate to the point that the history of Chan in China virtually became the history of the Southern School.

One of Bodhidharma’s doctrines that was transmitted through to the Southern School was that of Inner Enlightenment, frequently emphasized in the Lankavatara Sutra and extolled by Bai Juyi in his poems (ref. footnote #9). In this sutra, words are strongly de-emphasized for the communication of ideas in favor of bodily movements such as eye twitches and nostril movements to communicate Buddha’s message. Sub-sections of Chan such as the Lin Ji branch (臨濟) and the Cao Dong branch (曹洞) both subscribed to Lankavatara precepts but the silent introspection methods under the guidance of a master in the latter branch were likely more appealing to Bai Juyi’s sensitive intellect than the shouts, bells and whistles often used in the Lin Ji group.

In this regard, Henry Rosemont comments clearly and tersely:

(Chan ) emphasizes the unity of wisdom and practice, the reality of “sudden awakening”, the importance of meditation, the use of “shock tactics”, the centrality of the student-teacher relationship, and the celebration of enlightenment narratives.

Because so much emphasis was placed on the mind rather than actions or doctrine, the Chan School has often been referred to, as the School of the Buddha’s Mind (佛心宗), as a

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109 Chen, p.354
110 Chen, p.356
111 Chen, p.359
philosophy without an epistemology, as a religion without a creed. The true state it seeks is no special state (實相無相); the dharma gate to be passed through is not really a gate (法門無門); the redemptive knowledge guaranteeing salvation is no knowledge at all (聖智無智).\textsuperscript{113}

The power of these ideas which breathed spontaneity and carefree romanticism encouraged the liberation desires of the age particularly after the horrendous depredations of the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763).\textsuperscript{114} The poetry of the famous Tang poets Li Bai (李白 701-762) and Du Fu (杜甫 712-770) gave startling witness to this cataclysmic historical event.

3.3 Buddhism’s Encounter with Taoism and Confucianism: During the Period of Independent Growth (ca. 589-900)\textsuperscript{115}

We have already read briefly of some of the Taoist and Buddhist influences in Bai Juyi’s poems and in Chapter Three a much more detailed look will be given. But it is fairly safe to say that many others of the Tang literati such as Wang Wei (王維 701-761), Li Bai and Du Fu were similarly imbued with these three strands of ‘religious’ thought yet manifesting quite unique responses to the inculcation of their values.

To use a familial analogy, the three ideological BTC strands that the above worthies likely met, could be represented, respectively, by a stern, authoritarian and pragmatic father, a permissive, libertarian and slightly hedonistic mother, and a single child who plays outside every day with foreign kids who speak his language but in strangely endearing maternal tones bidding him to follow them to their tree fort to discuss strategies of escape from the strictures of home life.

Thus Bai Juyi, as one of the up-and-coming literati, was a typical product of his age exhibiting, through his education, a strong sense of preparation for social responsibility and accountability. And yet with maturity came an increasing realization of the tawdreness of the self-serving, often corrupt political and social influences around him particularly the frequent

\textsuperscript{113} Takakusu, p.163
\textsuperscript{115} Wright, p.65: This time period represents, in Wright’s view, a period of increasingly self-sustaining and independent Chinese Buddhism from the time of Wen Di(文帝) of the Sui Dynasty(隋朝 589-618) to shortly after the great pogroms of 842-845 under Wu Zong(武宗 reign 841-847) of the Tang Dynasty(唐朝 618-905).
capriciousness of court activities and decisions. He referred to all these influences as part of the ‘world’s dusty net’\textsuperscript{116} Not unpredictably, this disenchantment drove him inexorably more inward to seek spiritual succor and release from the incessant demands of his work life.

Macroscopically, the doctrinal faces of the BTC ideologies were well established with their respective polemicists and apologists vying for social and political influence over the hearts and minds of, according to Wright, a two-class peasant-based society\textsuperscript{117}.

Confucianism, with its emphasis on individual morality, ethics and the proper exercise of power by the rulers still dominated the educational curricula for aspiring intellectuals.\textsuperscript{118} But from the end of the Western Han Dynasty (漢朝) in 23 AD, it increasingly ceased to command the social emotional cohesion of former times and began defaulting to the intellectually innovative and sparkling new Buddhism from India which cloned in its wake a reformulated and reinvigorated Taoism.

The ascendant ideology, Buddhism, rose to its socially advantaged high ground arguably due as much to its political patronage and stimulating artistic iconography as to its social compassion and latent spiritual values. At first, its precise and complex Sanskrit-rooted explanations of reality and sense-data experience based on propositional knowledge had little purchase on the Chinese intellect and linguistic expression. But the currency of compassion did enable it to cash into the needs and sufferings of the Chinese common people, concerns for which did not require significant cognitive skills. So from the time of the first Indian missionaries around 62 AD, Buddhism saw it needed to develop a second, more cerebral, arm of outreach to the elite of Chinese intellectual and court society. In this regard they used, as a Trojan horse, the great storehouse of abstruse Taoist concepts such as The Way(道), Virtue(德), Name(名), Constancy(常), Being and Non-Being(為 and 無為) and Purity(樸) to act as recognizable vehicles for their own equally abstruse teachings.

\textsuperscript{116} From his poem ‘放言五首二’ 世途倚伏都無定，塵網纏卒未休 ‘The world's way to rely on or take refuge in, is all uncertain, the dusty net leads us along by the hand, entangles us and ultimately provides no rest’

\textsuperscript{117} Wright, p.6: Professor Wright is echoing Redfield’s views of an elite/peasant society whose traditions are, respectively, literate, rational, self-conscious and unselfconscious and uncritical.

\textsuperscript{118} ‘The ethical teachings of 禮 meditation, 孝 filial piety, 義 righteousness, 信 trust, 仁 humanity, and 忠 loyalty, 孟子 Mengzi’s teachings, the five classical books 書經 History, 詩經 Songs, 易經 Changes, 春秋 Spring and Autumn, and 禮經 Rites.'
One of the more important points of resonance occurred with Taoist quietism about ultimate knowledge and reality. The Buddhist school of Madhyamika (中觀論)\(^\text{119}\), whose main doctrine seemed merely to be a dialectic process, negated the reality of all phenomena while insisting on the existence of an ineffable Void or Sunyata (空性), an inexpressible type of knowledge.\(^\text{120}\) Sunyata, in turn, leads to the notions of absence of absolute identity and the inter-penetration of all things, ephemeral states forever in flux. Taoists could understand this process with a caveat, of course, that these intermediate blending states were real and detectable. But these ‘minor’ differences did not detract from their essential conceptual commonality. On other metaphysical topics such as ego, desire, nirvana, and enlightenment, there was enough conceptual harmony to warrant the erection of whole Chinese schools around one or more of their firmly held views. The *Tian Tai School*, for example, seemed to take as its summum bonum the notion of the ineffable Madhyamika-Buddha nature determining everything while the *Hua Yan School* strongly emphasized that their ‘everything’ was the interaction of the countless dharmas within a cosmology which WAS the Buddha nature. Ironically, it is *Chan* that seems to be the most Taoist of the Chinese schools in that it comes very close to Laozi’s assertions that desires per se are acquired through discernment and management of phenomenal distinctions. Thus the Sage and the Buddha nature converge in the state of primordial purity (樸). Not surprisingly, Chan would ditch formal cognitive learning for efficacious affective exercises leading one towards ‘sudden enlightenment’ and the realization that nothing, no other process, can bring one any closer to the indescribable Buddha nature\(^\text{121}\).

Just as Taoist terms were used to translate Buddhist ideas, so Buddhist institutions like monasticism, temple construction, dramatic and performing arts were models of social service and avenues to political influence that Taoism could not afford to ignore. Buddhist evangelism had gone ‘on-line’ as it were and the Taoists had a lot of catch-up to do while improving upon whatever traditional societal influence they may have had. Initially, they had to learn how to be a ‘religion’, to draft a system of doctrines and beliefs, to be able craft statues and images, to have their own temples to lodge them in, to develop a literature for influencing political tastes and

\(^{119}\) Based on the teachings of Nagarjuna (龍樹 ca. 150-250)

\(^{120}\) Compare this view with dialectic materialism (辯証唯物主義) which is, ideally, an upwardly spiralling atheist materialistic political process culminating in a mythical communistic state where all things are supposedly held in common.

enhancing their role and position in society. Their copying was so extensive and complete that Confucians had some difficulty in distinguishing between them and the Buddhists. Any dispassionate philosophical on-looker of the day might easily have commented, after a bit of head scratching, that Confucianism was the political party of THIS world while Buddhism/Taoism was the increasingly undifferentiated party of ANOTHER world.

### 3.4 Prevalent Schools during the Life of Bai Juyi (772-846)

Most, if not all, of the major Buddhist Schools previously mentioned had varying degrees of presence during Bai Juyi’s lifetime. They seemed always to be contending with their Taoist homologues and career Confucians for political support. The latter group had the market all to themselves in terms of governance expertise but the other two parties were much more concerned with influencing government policies as they touched on self-serving matters such as minimizing taxation, avoiding military conscription and soliciting for temple maintenance and construction. To the degree they were able to influence the scholar-literati and/or court officials, they were able to acquire political and government support for the propagation of their beliefs as well as tangible assistance for community service and the erection, maintenance and improvement of temple and monastery properties.

Furthermore, since the time of Sui Wen Di (隋文帝 reign 581-605), there had developed a policy of culturally reuniting the two distinct northern and southern parts of the country. To do this, Emperor Wen first recognized the appeal that CTB had for the various levels of society then by adroitly acknowledging each for political gain and support he established the beginnings of government offices for controlling and directing their operations. He further realized that Buddhism had a disproportionately much wider following in the north and south so he, and later Tang emperors, deliberately used it as an important vehicle for cultural unity and dynastic legitimacy. Above all, they did not want to see the religious establishment become a ‘government within a government’.

So Wen Di presented himself as the grand patron of the faith, supporting Buddhist establishments and clergy, heavily underwriting the construction of temples and monasteries, and even going into battle under ‘icons of the faith’. This style of rule continued

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122 Chen, p.473
123 Wright, p.67
until the time of Empress Wu (武后 reign 684-705) who magnanimously presented herself as the 
reincarnation of the messianic Maitreya (彌勒 mile)\textsuperscript{124} and who, in 691 officially gave imperial 
favor and priority to the Buddhist establishment, in particular the Hua Yan(Avatamsaka) School 
of Fa Zang (法藏 643-712).\textsuperscript{125}

Just as the Taoists had won considerable favor with prior Tang emperors for helping the 
founder Gao Zu(祖高 reign 618-627) ascend the throne so now Buddhism, in particular 
the Hua Yan School, ascended to the peak of its influence, under Empress Wu’s patronage, well 
into Bai Juyi’s era (772-846).

Hua Yan’s highly sophisticated and intellectually complex philosophical structure served 
the political and refined spiritual interests of the Empress and her inner court. She and the shrewd 
Hua Yan patriarch, Fa Zang, performed brilliantly in helping to legitimize her reign both as a 
woman and as head of the new Zhou (周) Dynasty(684-701).

Concurrently competing with Hua Yan’s influence, however, were the more plebeian, less 
intellectual, social and spiritual needs of the common folk who were being increasingly attracted 
to the wordless doctrines of Chan as it tapped ever more deeply into readily recognizable Taoist 
roots. In fact, one wonders if Chan were, after all was said and done, any longer Buddhist! It 
seemed quite evident that it eschewed the external trappings, including the scriptures, of the 
various sects. Moreover, it concentrated on a this-worldly life style extolling simple hard work in 
sharp contrast to the ‘escape-the-dust-of-this-world’ mentality. Perhaps for these reasons it 
managed to avoid the worst of the persecutions against Buddhism from 845 onwards.

\textit{3.4.1 Fa Zang and the Hua Yan School}

The relationship between Fa Zang and the Empress Wu is very complex but some threads 
of details are necessary to understand the interesting connections between Hua Yan, Chan and 
Bai Juyi with respect to the latter’s perceptions of Buddhism\textsuperscript{126}. As a champion of Hua Yan’s

\textsuperscript{124} Soothill, p.241.
\textsuperscript{125} Founder of the East Asian Avatamsaka (Flower Garland) tradition. Texts on this describe a cosmos of infinite 
realms upon realms, mutually containing each other. The vision expressed in this work was the foundation for the 
creation of the Hua Yan school of Chinese Buddhism which was characterized by a philosophy of interpenetration.
\textsuperscript{126} See the bibliography for the writings of Jinhua Chen for a more extensive and detailed treatment of the life and 
writeings of Fa Zang.
sectarian interests within Tang society, Fa Zang was motivated, vis-a-vis Empress Wu, to muster political wisdom and craftiness along with his spiritual convictions. He was quite aware that he and the Hua Yan School were being used mainly as vehicles of government while at the same time acknowledging the Empress’ apparently deep ‘faith and belief’ that she was a Maitreya figure. Fuelling her conviction were aspects of Hua Yan’s theology asserting the convergence of the interdependence and interpenetration of all things in a type of singular Buddhist ‘godhead’ which reinforced Wu’s autocratic beliefs. Perhaps more important for her political legitimacy, she believed some Buddhist scriptures had foreordained the Maitreya figure to be a woman. To that end it is alleged she had some verses deliberately reinterpreted to reinforce that belief.

Around 704, the Empress began to show more than just a passing interest in Chan Buddhism. Whether guided by genuine philosophic interest in the spiritual efficacy of ‘sitting and meditating’ or by an awareness of the growing political interest in Chan’s growing popularity amongst the intellectuals, she had ordered a new translation of one of that sect’s most important epistles, the Lankavatara Sutra, the sutra Bai Juyi would show great interest in almost a hundred years later.

Apparently, Fa Zang was not invited to participate in this process perhaps because of his philosophic disapproval of Chan or, more likely, that the empress knew he might have been disinclined to acknowledge any increased political approval for it.

Wu’s health was beginning to fail around this time and the problem of succession loomed large. She, of course, had favourites to succeed her but, unknown to her, some court sycophants of the previous Tang house had their own preferences and planned a palace coup.

Anticipating that some sort of campaign was needed to promote her wishes for a peaceful transition within the reigning Zhou dynasty, Empress Wu had asked Fa Zang to head up her ‘election committee’. But, as some late-breaking evidence seems to indicate, these pro-Tang supporters were able to subvert Fa Zang to their cause obtaining some strategic information from

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127 As Jews await the Messiah, Muslims anticipate the Imam Mahdi and Hindus look for the coming of Krishna so Buddhists expect the Maitreya. The prophecy of the arrival of Maitreya is found in the canonical literature of virtually all Buddhist sects.
128 Chen Jinhua, Fa Zang the Holy Man, Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Vol.28, Number 1, 2005, p.19
129 Ibid. p.23
him facilitating the eventual overthrow of the Zhou House.\textsuperscript{130} It is conceivable that Fa Zang was acting in his self-perceived role as ‘mediator between Heaven and Man’ by preventing, or at least minimizing, the convulsions resulting from any resistance to an inevitable reversion to Tang rule with possible dire consequences for the Buddhist community at large and for himself personally. As matters turned out, however, the subsequent Tang rulers from Zhong Zong（中宗 705-710）to Xuan Zong（玄宗 713-756）honoured the memory of Fa Zang for his role in the restoration in 705 and continued to use his skills as an efficient ‘peaceful’ warrior against the country’s enemies and as a proficient holy man in a continuing Buddhist realm.

Without doubt Fa Zang was a ‘man for all seasons’ and a giant of his times. He seems quite deserving of the epitath afforded him by Chen:

Fa Zang’s reputation as a great Buddhist expounder and translator, and especially his role in the 705 court coup were certainly chief factors contributing to the pre-eminent position that he had managed to achieve (or maintain) in this period. However, evidence shows that, not unlike his relationship with Empress Wu and his status under her regency and rule, Fa Zang’s continuing success as a Buddhist leader also depended to a large extent on the service that he rendered to the Tang rulers through his mastery of some esoteric (or even shamanistic) skills which made him a top candidate whenever the capital area was threatened by some natural calamities like drought.\textsuperscript{131}

To illustrate, in the Winter of 711, a great drought loomed ominously in the country and Fa Zang was called upon by Ruizong (睿宗 reign 710-713) to exert his mystical powers to cause snow to fall and remedy the situation.\textsuperscript{132}

\textit{3.4.2 The Chan (Zen) School}

It could be said that by Bai Juyi’s time, the main Buddhist schools had, philosophically, gone about as far as they could go. Few, if any, new sutras were arriving from India. Virtually all the existing doctrines had been successfully translated and assimilated into Chinese thought styles. Buddhism, as an intellectual spiritual force, was passing its peak in its ancient homeland.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid. p.24
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid. p.30
and imminently about to do the same in China especially with the advent and ascent of Neo-
Confucianist ideas. It seemed that Buddhism was inclined to turn all its deliberations into a huge
intellectual exercise and logical deliberation only to lose touch with Shakyamuni’s main intent of
cultivating, in a practical way, the true realization of the Buddha that ‘is already within’. In this
regard, Hui Neng’s theological coup-de-grace on the inefficacy of word-based doctrines and the
concomitant reassertion of the wordless doctrines of practical self-realization resonated with the
Chinese psyche which took to this idea with great alacrity.

Bai himself, referred often to Chan’s meditative influences. For example, in his poem Self
Understanding (白解), written around 830 he comments;

Fang Zhuan in a past life was a Chan student,

Wang said that he, in a previous life, felt
compelled to paint.
I too fix (as in a trance) on what I was
foreordained to do, my debt load over many
lifetimes being song and poetry.

If it weren’t so then how come these wild
and crazy intonings?

The more so after getting ill than before!

( trans. en)

And again in his poem on Reading a Chan Scripture (讀禪經);

We have to know that various things we look
at are not what they appear to be,
if we remain in ‘no remainder’ then there is
yet a ‘remainder’.

As words appear forget them and at that
moment you’ll understand,
talking about dreams within dreams is a
double emptiness.

How can one obtain the double fruit of
seeking flowers in an empty sky,
even more within the flaming brilliance of
the Sun locate fish? 
If perturbations are from meditation then meditation is perturbation, 
not meditating, no movement, such is the way it is.

(trans. en)

It seems quite evident from the last few lines of the above poem that Bai Juyi was, like Hui Neng, well on his way to doubting the existence of the Bodhi Tree.\textsuperscript{133} In fact, Bai may have arrived at the same state of mind as had Shen Guang (神光 487-593) when the latter asked Bodhidharma (fl. 526) to explain the ‘teaching of the seal of the mind of all Buddhas’. The first Chan patriarch is alleged to have replied that ‘this most important key of Zen is that the truth of the mind of the Buddhas is not attained from another.’\textsuperscript{134}

One of Hui Neng’s later followers was Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一 709-788) the leader of the Hongzhou School 宗州洪 of Chan Buddhism during the middle part of the Tang dynasty. He, along with his devoted disciple Baizhang Huaihai (海懷百 720-814), were generally recognized as central personages in Chan history and their records were taken as key statements of Chan orthodoxy of the time.\textsuperscript{135}

In the latter part of the Tang Dynasty the ‘Five Houses of Chan’ came to dominate Chan expression. These were Caodong (宗洞曹), Linji (宗濟臨), Guiyang (宗仰潙), Fayan (宗眼法), and Yunmen (宗門雲). Although not separate schools, they represented distinctive styles of teaching carried out by certain Chan masters and perpetuated by their students.\textsuperscript{136} Bai Juyi was particularly drawn to the Caodong school because of the relative calmness of its intellectual, spiritual ‘shock methods’.

\textsuperscript{133} Reference is to Hui Neng’s famous poem meriting him the robe as sixth patriarch of the Chan (Zen) school of Instant Enlightenment. For an English translation see ‘Bamboo in the Wind’, \url{http://www.bamboointhewind.org/teaching_formless.html} March 19, 2009
\textsuperscript{134} Nan Huai-Chin, The Story of Chinese Zen, Chas. E Tuttle Co., North Clarendon, Vermont, 1995, pp.69
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. P.107
3.5 Summary

Bai Juyi was around 28 years old, in 800, when he began making serious inquiries about Buddhist beliefs, including the ‘Four Noble Truths’ and the ‘Noble Eight Fold path’. His earlier poetry revealed a deep compassion for the sufferings of the peasantry, likely the result of upbringing by parents who had been influenced by Buddhist teachings. It is quite clear in many of his poems that though he was guided by Confucian principles in the dispatch of his government responsibilities, there was strong evidence of Taoist influences mixing with his growing Buddhist beliefs.

Though he may have agreed with the Court authorities in striking out against the material excesses and affluent ostentation of Buddhism, he still remained quite enamoured of its spiritual, intellectual and artistic aspects. This will be elaborated upon in chapters three and four.

The evangelistic infiltration into China of radically new ways of interpreting the human condition, based on Shakyamuni Buddha’s Four Noble Laws and the Noble Eight Fold Path came at a most propitious time in China’s history. Around 68AD were found the first records of an established Buddhist community in Peng Cheng (彭城). This likely indicates an earlier period of proselytizing and incubation coinciding with the breakdown of the moral influence of institutional and liturgical Confucianism and the desire for more compassionate influences in the lives of the Chinese and the pursuit of a belief system in which they could divest themselves of a bankrupt morality unable to deal with widespread suffering and the corrosive sense of impermanence.

Armed with the formidable analytical tools of a very refined Sanskrit/Pali language, Indian intellectuals tried to give analytic voice as well as compassionate evangelistic fervor to Shakyamuni’s thoughts. An ocean of new thoughts and ideas blossomed amongst the resulting plethora of Buddhist schools and their supporting sutras. These washed over into Chinese society exerting profound social, spiritual and artistic influences lasting well over a thousand years.

The peak of Buddhist political influence likely occurred during the Empress Wu’s reign (684-705) with the death of the great HuaYan patriarch Fa Zang in 712 marking the beginning of

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137 Waley(Life and Times of Po Chu-I), p.26
138 Propitious also because of increasing Buddhist proselytizing over China’s southwest borders motivated by the much earlier efforts of the Mauryan King Asoka (260-218 BC) to create an empire based on righteousness making the moral and spiritual welfare of the people his main concern.
139 Gernet, p.214
140 Wright, p.24
a slow, steady decline. The terrible An Lushan Rebellion, spanning 755-763, had led to some degradations in the practice of the faith such as the dropping of educational standards of novitiates who literally bought their monkhood certifications, the money for which went to replenish court coffers emptied by the interminable conflicts.\textsuperscript{141}

The death of the great Buddhist poet-painter Wang Wei in 761 followed by that of the two outstanding poets Li Bai and Du Fu in 762 and 770 respectively, were likely still quite fresh in Bai Juyi’s mind. In 819, when Bai was forty-seven, he likely heard of the blistering tirade that the famous Han Yu made against Buddhism before the Emperor Xian Zong(806-821) for its other-worldly and self-centered ways, followed later by a great proscription in 845. The practice of Chan was least affected by this since it was viewed as much closer to traditional Taoist roots and more practically contributing to social life than were the other Buddhist schools.

Although Buddhism was subsequently viewed by later Neo-Confucians as a sect for the illiterate, uneducated masses, it continued, as with Bai Juyi, to act as an intellectual lodestone and spiritual stimulus for many disparate scholar-literati.

\textsuperscript{141} Ch’en, Buddhism in China, p. 243
CHAPTER IV: Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism in the Poetry of Bai Juyi

4.1 Introduction

Bai Juyi was born into a society spiritually permeated with Taoist-Buddhist values and socially driven by the Confucian ethic. He was imbued from his early years with the sacred and secular spirits of his age so it was virtually inevitable that expressions of their efficacy in his life should show in his poetry.

Throughout his life he exhibited a strong sense of Confucian morality while manifesting fundamental disagreements with Taoist philosophy and practices. He particularly disagreed with the Taoist view of Nature as being too mechanistic.\textsuperscript{142}

Through the chronology of his verse one can discern quite clearly his emotional shift from civic and social paternalism to an internal, meditative pursuit of Buddhist withdrawal and quietude. His \textit{New Music Bureau (府樂新)} style of poetry illustrated clearly his initial motivations as a Confucian scholar-intellectual to deal didactically with contemporary social and moral issues by referring back to the initial wisdom of Confucius expressed through the \textit{Yi Jing (經易)} and its ten appendices, the \textit{Shi Yi (翼十)}\textsuperscript{143}. But the stains of moral degradation in high places and the destabilizations of political caprice inexorably exacted their toll on his virtuous spirit as he began to flee more and more inward to the solace of Chan detachment and quietism.

Of particular concern at this juncture, however, is to be a little clearer about how Bai intellectually and spiritually perceived himself in the BTC\textsuperscript{144} mosaic as expressed in his poetry. How accurately did he perceive himself, through his poetical interpretations, of the main doctrines of each of the three systems taken in isolation as well as in combination with each other?

It might be helpful to consider the following simplistic partitioning of the salient philosophies and beliefs of the BTC triad which likely influenced Bai’s perceptions of his own personal, social and cosmological identities.

\textsuperscript{142} Waley (Life and Times of Po Chu-I), p.21
\textsuperscript{143} Fowler, p.42
\textsuperscript{144} Buddhist/Taoist/Confucian
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSONAL IDENTITY</th>
<th>SOCIAL IDENTITY</th>
<th>COSMOLOGICAL IDENTITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONFUCIANISM</td>
<td>Filial piety, respect the sages of the past, submission to elders, emperor veneration, fit in with, support and improve the hierarchical social order</td>
<td>Heaven, Earth and Man, Mandate of Heaven, Yin Yang type dualism, physical and natural evolution according to the Book of Changes (Yi Jing 經易) et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control, self-improvement, attain to sagehood, realistic, materialistic, pragmatic</td>
<td>Non-intervention in political/social affairs, quietist, shun earthly distractions</td>
<td>Be in harmony with the universe, live as long as possible while following the Tao to become an immortal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAOISM</td>
<td>Vital facet of the Heaven/Earth/Man chain, non-action (為無), seek physical immortality guided by the teachings of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi in the Dao De Jing (經德道), non-dualist</td>
<td>Compassion for all sentient beings, a mendicant meditative life is meritorious with tolerance, love and kindness to all, detachment from societal structures as the source of sufferings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUDDHISM</td>
<td>Non-dualist, free will, self-identity and perceived reality is illusory, infinity of action-moments all of which interpenetrate on a Karmic balance sheet, to exist is to suffer (Four Basic Laws), evasion of suffering (The Eight Fold Path), efficacy of meditation</td>
<td>Accumulation of sufficient karma credits through detachment, meditation and good works to achieve nirvanic release,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He unquestionably absorbed the teachings and practical wisdom of the Confucian classics exhorting him to moral improvement, filial piety, reverence to family, and obedient service to the Emperor. Respecting these teachings provided an opportune avenue for employment and position
in government service. The examination system facilitated progression by merit, favouring Bai Juyi’s humble social beginnings. However, although the system was open to all strata of society, the exams themselves hardly challenged the creative intellect of his fellow aspirants in either the Classics or the Literary examinations. Many of those preparing were “bored rather than inspired by their studies, and became very critical of the literary artifice and often highly allusive rhetoric that convention demanded in the examinations”. Not surprisingly, most of the intellectuals of the period, including Bai Juyi, found most of their cerebral stimulation in the ‘foreign’ religion of Buddhism and, paradoxically, the anti-intellectual, anti-text oriented Chan movement.

In this context, it is worth repeating that the repository of Confucian learning shared by most of Bai’s contemporaries became a seedbed for later Neo-Confucian ideas when Buddhism’s popularity waned after the proscriptions against it from 842-845. But Bai, by this time, was enthralled by Chan and did not seem to manifest any intellectual interest in the ideas of this new movement articulated so strongly by Li Ao (772-836).

The Tang rulers and aristocrats had, for their own political interests, strong sympathies for Taoist and Buddhist teachings. However, they realized that Confucianism offered the only workable theories for an operative system of government, management of court rituals and conduct of foreign and domestic affairs. One wonders if Bai really understood and appreciated the philosophical-political counterpoises required for the Tang society of his day to work successfully and efficiently. Studying his poetry should shed some more light on this. It may be that he understood it too well, even if only intuitively, for we see him repeatedly avoiding any commitment to party factions to avoid as much as possible the fateful recriminations against the out-of-favour group at court. He worked very hard in his own self-confessed inefficient and incompetent way to make a positive difference in the court driven regime. Though well paid, sinecured and occasionally exiled, he chafed and suffocated under the court’s capricious demands, referring to it often in his poetry as part of the ‘world’s dusty net (塵網)’.

Taoism (家道) was, in many ways, the spiritual alter ego of the Tang intellectual. The spirit of its teachings certainly seemed to antedate highly structured Confucianism though the respective founders of the two belief systems lived around the 6th cent. BC. Taoism emphasized moderation, quietism or non-action (為無), spontaneity, emptiness (性空) and non-ego based

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145 Wright, p. 87
146 Soothill, p.277, Sunyata, Kongxing,
(法我無) humanism. Arthur Waley felt these attributes were enshrined as the Three Jewels (寶三) of Taoism as illustrated by this extract of the Dao De Jing (道徳經) by Laozi (老子).\(^{147}\)

I have three treasures. Support and protect them!

The first is pity; the second, frugality;

the third, not to attempt to be the ‘first of all things’ under heaven.  

(transl. en)

Waley also alleges that when Bai was pursuing his Jin Shi (士進), and later passing his ‘bar exams’\(^ {148}\), there was a prevalent ‘old-fashioned Han-Confucian view’ that Lao Zi was the master of Confucius and that Confucian Ethics was only a derivative distillation of the rather ineffable, often paradoxical Taoist metaphysics. Apparently Bai attempted to resolve some of the contradictions between the two systems when he dealt with a problem concerning Knowledge and Learning. Bai thus certainly seemed to exhibit a philosophical turn of mind in asserting that while Taoism seemed to disparage formal learning vis-à-vis Confucius’ insistence on its absolute necessity, Lao Zi meant his comments only for pedants whereas Confucius intended his comments only for those who ‘ignored the teaching of the Sages’\(^ {149}\).

Bai Juyi was likely instructed at an early age in BTC orthodoxies by his parents and teachers. Quite likely he had learned of the competing spirits of political and moral philosophy during the contentious ‘One Hundred Schools of Thought’ period (ca. 770-221 BCE)\(^ {150}\) and of the politically quietist, intellectually introspective and sometimes paradoxical thought streams of the Daodejing, of the mythical Lao Zi and of the very real Zhuang Zi. He likely puzzled over the Taoist disdain of matters of state and administration, of elaborate rituals and of codified systems of social and ethical behaviour especially when these were central concerns of Confucian thought in a society where there were prescribed relationships for each individual.


\(^{148}\) The *Pan Ba Cui* (萃拔判) examinations tested a candidate’s legal aptitudes.

\(^{149}\) Waley, (Life and Times of Po Chu-I), p. 21

\(^{150}\) Compare Mao’s disastrous 动运花百 adventure of 1956-57
Bai certainly seemed to exemplify the above mentioned ‘three jewels’ while often giving expression to them using Buddhist terminology. This is not so surprising since Buddhism had long adapted Taoist and Neo-Taoist vocabulary to ingratiate itself to the Chinese psyche and intellect, in particular through the use of the much-favoured Qing Tan (清談) dialogue.\(^{151}\) So successful was this adaptation that many scholars like Bai Juyi sometimes had difficulty distinguishing intellectually between the two belief systems. However, he seemed to give equal acknowledgement to both in his poetry while emotionally and spiritually revelling in certain Buddhist classics like the Lotus and Lankavatara sutras.

As we shall see later in more detail in his poems, he displayed a rather precocious interest in the typical Chinese obsessions with the pains of parting from family and close friends. Also, likely because of Buddhist influence, he exhibited a genuine concern for the sufferings of the people coupled with a sharply tuned Confucian sense of justice.

Bai, for all his poetic genius, was a scholar-intellectual typical of his times. He was a product of an era that saw the Confucian-style governance of the Tang Empire undergoing massive changes after the An Lushan Rebellion, the emergence of arbitrary influence and abusive power of eunuchs, the exactions on a virtually helpless peasantry subject to ever-increasing taxation pressures and the bitter frustrations of dealing with a capricious court-based command structure. Because of his compassionate nature, he must have been terribly upset at the memory of the hideous massacre of the citizens of Chang An by the Uighurs in 762 as a ‘payoff’ for their complicity in helping the Tang finally defeat the seemingly invincible An Lushan.\(^{152}\) Also, the passing of Wang Wei, Li Bai, and Du Fu was likely still fresh in Bai’s mind. Buddhist influence on politics, culture and social life was just passing its peak from the heady days of Empress Wu (后武 d.705) and Fazang (法藏 d.712) of the Hua Yan School while Chan(禪) was extending its pragmatic, non-intellectual belief systems in direct proportion to the decrease in popularity of the more worldly Buddhist interests.\(^{153}\)

\(^{151}\) Wright, p.45: A Daoist-oriented Qingtan (“pure conversation”) movement that advocated freedom of individual expression and hedonistic escape from the corrupt court politics, mainly thru the Wei/Jin dynasty period (220-420 AD).

\(^{152}\) Gernet, p.715

Against this historical backdrop, even some of Bai’s more allusive poetic statements begin to make more sense as he pronounced on the social ills of his day and also on many of the questionable court decisions initiating and exacerbating these ills.

A quick assessment of Bai Juyi’s cultural and intellectual aptitudes is that he was sensitive, ambitious and possessed of an amazingly retentive and versatile memory with a strong sense of social responsibility. It seems he early decided to ‘live by his work rather than for it’ and like most up-and-coming but disillusioned social climbers realized that ‘dreams die first’ followed by a quasi-rationalistic, self-purging, spiritual bereavement period. In this, he was not that different from those of this or any other age. What did place him ‘out-of-the-box’, however, was a disarming honesty he had about his own incompetencies and his amazing ability to versify with a quality and skill that placed him in the top rank of poets of the Tang Age. Indeed, he is now regarded by an increasing number of modern day scholars as the very first ‘professional’ poet as opposed to most other scholars of his day who versified as a hobby while pursuing career responsibilities. To be quite clear, Bai did feel very strongly about poetry dealing with socio-economic issues in a way consistent with being a tactful Confucian court critic while respectfully serving the Emperor with assertively honest advice. But he also expressed his own personal feelings and whimsies in, what we might call today, his ‘poetry for the masses’. Surprisingly, to him, this turned out to be far more popular with the common folk than his poetry of social criticism.

Let us now look at a number of Bai’s poems which illustrate many of the above concerns particularly as they impinge on the BTC triad.

4.2 Bai Juyi and Confucianism: Zeal and Ambition Leading to the “Dusty Net”

The struggles of committing to study the Confucian classics for so many years had finally paid off. In 800, after many family related interruptions, Bai at 28 years of age, finally passed the Jin Shi exam. He was now on his way to becoming more of a good filial son and to ‘saving’ his country! He had worried that his low pedigree might somehow disqualify him. But the examiners

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154 See Harold Robbins’ 1977 novel on scepticism about oneself in society.
155 See for example: the article by Zhang Su Zhen (張素真), *Fame and Identity:Reading the Poetry of Bai Juyi*, unpublished essay for Professor Jerry Schmidt, UBC Dept. Of Asian Studies, Sept. 2006
had been fair in assessing his superior merit. The examinations were over and he bad farewell to his classmates while setting out for home and the accolades of his family (refer to his poem on page 16).

Bai was quite emphatic about his filial role of willing subservience to the Emperor De Zong (宗德 780-805). He wrote a submissive, almost obsequious prose passage to himself ten days after the exam results came out, referring to Gao Ying (高 740-811) the Chief Examiner who had acknowledged Bai’s superior merit;

“I swear that till my dying day I will continue to repay what my lord (Kao Ying) has done for me, and repay him in this sense: that I will strive to do only what he would wish, that I will further his plans….I must make all my actions conform to a strict standard and all my writings must inculcate the highest principles. I must make a practice of studying at set times and never be idle or put study aside. As to advancement in this world, I must let it come of its own pace and not go out of the way to force myself…. I have obtained a first class in the examination and have in so doing made a name for myself; but that is no reason to be puffed up or satisfied.”

One might wonder at the sincerity of the above noble affirmation of service when we look at extracts from his poem (閑一適) concerning some attitudes towards his first job. It certainly seems that the sincerity of his Confucian work ethic is a little bit questionable, at least as far as his self-confidence and energy levels are concerned. It seems he had found himself a bit of a sinecure!

He exhibited a penchant for Confucian political didacticism even before winning his Jin Shi when he obliquely spoke out against the court eunuchs who had taken away from legitimate heirs land belonging to the late great general Ma Sui (燧馬). There is also a hint of disdain for the quality of graveside tears shed by the general’s coterie of friends.

156 Waley(Life and Times of Po Chu-I), p. 23
157 Literally ‘This leisure completely suits me’. See p. 21 for a more complete discussion of the poem.
On the plain to a new tomb a body is entrusted, in the city (Chang An) who are these people in his former home? His music room and guest pavilion, on no day will he return, the wild grasses and mountain flowers again long for Spring. His dependant guests will vainly shed empty tears, a moist handkerchief in the wind midst the white poplars.

(transl: en)

The poem about General Ma Sui was a forerunner of other more elegantly composed verses composed by Bai Juyi against the corrupt and immoral practices of local government officials and especially against the court eunuchs operating with impunity against those having fallen out of court favour. The above poem selection may not appear at first glance to cite anyone in particular for a legal infraction but it seemed well known at the time that some court eunuchs had forcefully twisted the arm of General Ma’s son Ma Chang to hand over the property to the emperor who promptly turned it into the Fengyi Garden. But, as Yang Xiaoshan points out, Bai himself would soon qualify for a low-accountability, cosseted style of residential living befitting many newly appointed scholar-intellectual novitiates. Indeed the following early political poem of his on housing-protocols, tips one off to a rather interesting dichotomy in Bai’s satire (fengyu 喻諷) and sense of comfort (xianshi 適閑), on the ostentation and questionable legitimacy of many urban mansions compared with the domicilic largesse he considered acceptable for himself. It was not so much the style and structure of the edifice that he criticized as much as the immoral social wastage within. He bluntly distinguishes between these two perspectives in one of his ‘estate poetry’ poems Shang Zhai (宅傷) Distress over the Manor, which manor, ironically, belonged to the same General Ma Sui.

158 《全唐詩》卷 436_70
159 Waley, p.17
160 Yang Xiao shan, p.128; Ma Sui was a Tang General who had suppressed the revolts of 781-785.
161 Yang op.cit . p.129 Bai Juyi and the notion of li yin (隱吏) ‘hermitage in officialdom’
162 集易居白 pp. 31-32
What family raised this mansion, with vermilion gates fronting on the main thoroughfare?

In the kitchen there is meat gone bad, in the warehouse (copper) cash is attached to disintegrating strings.

Who can convey my words that question your heart and soul?

What about the endless number of humble folk, are you so hardhearted you can’t help them from the hunger and cold?

How come the attendance on one frame, still wishing to protect it for a 1000 years?

Do you not see the Ma family manor, now made into Fengcheng Garden?

(Transl. by en)

In his Jin Shi qualifying essays, Bai exhibited an aptitude for philosophical discourse by attempting to define a synthesis between the Taoist and Confucian ideologies. He particularly dealt with latent contradictions on Learning and Nature/Cosmology, the philosophical details of which are provided in the following three footnote references. Regarding Taoism, he puzzled over how it could countenance ‘getting rid of learning in order to be happy’ while Confucianism advocated ‘without learning, one is bound to come to a fall’. As to the regulations of the Universe, the Taoist mechanistic ideas of Wang Chong (27-97 AD) conflicted, in Bai’s mind, with the non-Cartesian and more Confucian views of Zou Yan (305-240 BC). Bai nimbly proposed conciliatory explanations for these contradictions, as well as for others, likely earmarking himself, as a result, for high government work later on.

Bai’s Xin Yue Fu (府樂新) or New Music Bureau Style poems, formed the core of his expressions of social criticisms against the most blatant grievances of his day. In this, they show...

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163 Ideas expressed in the Lun Heng (衡論, "Critical Essays").
164 As expressed in Yin Yang philosophy during the Hundred Schools of Thought era.
165 Waley(Life and Times), p. 21
Bai Juyi as the consummate Confucian court critic earning himself the position of official Court Censor or Imperial Critic from 808-810 and the undying hatred of many court sycophants, including eunuchs, whose selfish interests Bai threatened.

Two of the objects of Bai’s righteous wrath were the cruel predations of the aforementioned eunuchs and the unjust imposition of onerous taxes. His poetry offered an effective way to scandalize court officials, through ‘public pressure’, into accepting some of his political solutions. By effectively using political allegory and inference in his poems he was able to arouse some public outrage against the rapacious actions of eunuchs and many unwise taxation decisions while minimizing harmful repercussions to himself.

Regarding the sycophantic court eunuchs, Bai was undeniably outraged at the mischief they caused as we read in The Old Charcoal Seller (翁炭翁). In the poem’s last lines, the yellow coated official and white shirted boy likely indicate a court eunuch with his young acolyte.

The charcoal seller, felling firewood and baking charcoal in the southern mountains. His face is covered with dust and ash and has a look of dirt and smoke, his temple hairs are bushy grey with ten blackened fingers. The money for selling the charcoal, how can he manage on that, also for the clothes on his back and the food in his mouth? Pitiably, the clothes on his body are mainly single-layered, these cold days he anxiously hopes for better charcoal prices. The night brings a foot of snow outside the city, at dawn the wagon harness turns half over in an icy rut. The ox is tired, the men are hungry and the sun is already high, outside the gate of the South market, in the middle of mud they stop. Prancing up, two riders come, who can they be, a yellow coated official and a white shirted boy. Their hands hold an official dispatch and they call out an imperial order, they turn the wagon around while cursing at the ox and

賣炭翁，伐薪燒炭南山中。滿面塵灰煙火色，兩鬢蒼蒼十指黒。
賣炭得錢何所營？身上衣裳口中食。
可憐身上衣正單，心憂炭價願天寒。
賣炭翁，伐薪燒炭南山中。
夜來城外一尺雪，曉駕炭車轡冰轍。
牛困人飢日已高，市南門外泥中歇。
翩翩兩騎來是誰？黃衣使者白衫兒。
手把文書口稱敕，回車叱牛牽向北。
一車炭，千余斤，宮使驅將惜不得。
半匹紅紗一丈綾，系向牛頭充炭值。

166 全唐書 卷 427_12
lead it northward.
A whole wagon of charcoal, a thousand or more catties, the palace official takes off, and to begrudge him this is not allowed.
Half a roll of thin red silk gauze and just over three metres of silk fabric, tying it up against the ox’s head serving as the value of the charcoal.

(transl: en)

Ultimately, he despaired of ever restoring to the realm the moral ethics and intents of the Confucian Odes and he began to allow his mind to tap into his heart’s spiritual resources for the increasingly attractive balms of Buddhism. He seemed to becoming more reflective of his personal and political incompetencies while at the same time warning others, through his poems, of the hazards of political ambition. For example, in one of his poems, appropriately enough entitled \textit{Canticle to Clumsiness (詠拙)}\textsuperscript{167}, he comes down on himself rather hard:

\begin{quote}
What one is endowed with is cunning and clumsiness, what one cannot transform is his own nature.
What one is vested with is good or bad fortune, what one cannot change is one’s destiny.
My predisposition is to be stupid and clumsy, my destiny is to be poor and obtuse.
Ask me how I know, what I know really has a cause.
I once raised two feet, and studied the steps of men in the world of mortals.
From this I knew my nature was clumsiness, I couldn’t understand these turnabouts like wheels.
My six quilled wings were once vigorous, flying towards high official positions.
From this I knew my options were limited, but crashing on I did not hesitate to go forward.
I yearned for high rank and despised the lowly, found pleasure in wealth and loathed poverty.
All these things between heaven and earth, how am I different from other men?
If my nature and fate are careless like this, then opposing
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{167} 全唐詩 卷 429_28
them will effect bitterness and suffering.

(transl. en)

And again, in his poem about Zhu Chen Village (朱陳村)\(^{168}\), written in 811 when he was 39 years old and envying the idyllic pastoral life style of this tight community of simple hardworking folk, he bemoaned his own shortcomings as a filial son. He writes mid-way through:

Below, I have wife and children responsibilities, above I have to favour emperor and parents.
I undertake for my family together with affairs of state, looking at all this I’m really not up to it!

(transl. en)

One year later in 812, during one of his retirement periods, he wrote in another part of the poem *The Grain Tribute* (納粟)\(^{169}\), translated in full on page 22, how ironic it was to give back grain, to yamen officers, which he had accumulated in abundance while an active government official. Again he castigates himself for perceived administrative inabilities:

Once I erroneously engaged myself in public life, inwardly conscience stricken at my lack of ability.
Successively awarded four official posts, I sat like a corpse collecting ten years of salary.

(transl. en)

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\(^{168}\) 全唐詩 卷433_1

\(^{169}\) 全唐詩 卷424_44
Because of the painful awareness of his administrative inabilities and his disenchantment with the world’s ‘dusty net’, he gradually divested himself of official concerns while acknowledging his congenital attachment to writing verse, admitting as much in his poem *Alone Chanting in the Mountains* (山中獨吟)\(^{170}\):

Every man has a weakness, my weakness is in writing sentences and verses. Innumerable life commitments have all disappeared, but this defect alone (my poetry) has not left. (transl. en)

As if deliberately slighting the well known understanding that the Confucian scholar-intellectual should be the first to confront society’s problems and the last to enjoy its pleasures, Bai Juyi admitted to a lassitude of soul and spirit that he, regretfully, called laziness (慵). From beginning to end, in his poem ‘*Ode to Lethargy*’ (詠慵)\(^{171}\), he wrote self-deprecatingly, using humorous metaphors, about this aspect of his personality. Here are a few lines:

My house is broken, but I am too lazy to re-thatch it, my clothes spent, but too lazy to sew them. There’s wine but I am too lazy to pour, no different from a wine vessel invariably empty. I have a zither but I am too lazy to play it, the same as not having any strings on it. (transl. en)

While one might be tempted, at this stage of his life, to view Bai as a Confucian anti-hero\(^{172}\), he did offer succor through the comforts of wine to those tempted by ambition and enmeshment in the world’s ‘net’. Thus in a series of poems globally entitled *Recommending Wine* (勸酒) he

\(^{170}\) 全唐詩 卷 430_52 \\
\(^{171}\) 全唐詩 卷 429_29 \\
\(^{172}\) by *antihero*, in this context, is meant a developing personality whose character is increasingly antithetical to traditional Confucianism.
wrote one called \textit{Better Come Drink Wine With Me} (不如來飲酒)\textsuperscript{173}, in which he euphemistically refers to the anxiety-filled world of high government office as ‘blue clouds(青雲)’.

Don’t climb up to the blue clouds, the blue clouds are filled with love and hate.
‘Self-worthy’ men boastful of their wisdom and intelligence, tangling each other up in struggling for political power.

They swallow the bait thence become fish cakes, like moths they get fried when they strike the lantern’s flame.
It would be better to come and drink wine, and get yourself wilfully and steamingly sozzled.\textsuperscript{174}

(transl. en)

By the time Bai was 55 years old, in 827AD, the emperor Wen Zong (文宗 827-841) had begun his reign and our Confucian poet scholar had virtually abdicated any further involvement with political processes. At this time, according to Waley, many of Bai’s poems portrayed himself as a doddering old man whose mental acuity had declined to the point where he could no longer take any effective interest in what was going on. He even congratulated the emperor on the relative peace and prosperity of the country. This seemed very insincere and intended only to deflect away suspicions of him by the eunuchs who had obtained virtually absolute executive authority and who were fomenting many of the savage vendettas that were crippling the administration.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{173} 全唐詩 卷 450_36
\textsuperscript{174} Similarities and sympathies by Bai Juyi with Tao Yuanming’s poetry and drinking songs are very compelling here: \textit{Tao Yuanming} (陶淵明) also known as \textit{Tao Qian} (陶潛 365–427).
\textsuperscript{175} Waley (Life and Times--), p. 181
4.3 Taoism and Buddhism in Bai Juyi’s Poetry

Paralleling Bai’s declining active involvement in political affairs was a corresponding increase in spiritual and intellectual interest in Buddhism (佛) and Chan (禪). Although he remained in government service for the rest of his life, it finally came home to him, particularly after his mother’s death in 811, that he was becoming more of an urban hermit with a reclusive nature antithetical to that required to be a vigorous and effective statesman.

As Hinton succinctly expresses it;

While in mourning at Xia Gui (下邽), Bai Juyi began to establish the philosophical depths of his poetics of idleness. Like all intellectuals of his time, he was well-versed in the thought and practice of Taoism and Chan, but it was in Xia Gui that he began to seriously explore these spiritual dimensions. And upon his return to Chang An, he began to study with Chan masters. The Taoist/Chan philosophy of acceptance certainly answered to Bai’s reclusive nature, and together they assured his political detachment. 176

Our poet’s tendency towards Chan and his realization of the inadequacy of textual formulations to convey Buddha’s mind was strongly inferred in a line of his poem *In the Late Fall, Climbing to the South Building of Big Cloud Temple to Present a Gift to Buddhist Monk Chang* (樓南寺雲大登春晚, 師禪常贈)177 where he writes,

I entreat the master to cure this illness, but he only advises me to read the Lankavatara Sutra.

(transl. en)

His tendency to couple Taoist and Buddhist spiritual authorities, in areas such as nonduality and meditation, has already been touched upon. Thus in his long poem, *A Poem with a Hundred Rhyming Lines on ‘Sending Hanlin Funds to Cui Shilang Retired from the Ministry of Rites Who has Moved to Another Home’*, (韻百一詩人舍錢林翰、郎侍崔部禮寄，居退村渭)178 he adds,

176 Hinton, p. xix
177 全唐詩 卷 439_14
178 全唐詩 卷 438_1
To quell disorder I return to Chan and meditation,
To preserve my spirit I conform to sitting and being empty. (transl. en)

But we shall deal more at this point with the motivations for these spiritual pursuits and the psychological/intellectual imperatives driving him to make sense of the dilemmas of life and living as he encountered it.

His association with Taoist/Buddhist priests and temples bears strong testimony to his desire to develop spiritual strength by which he might wean himself away, externally, from worldly cares and concerns as well as, internally, from strong emotional sentimentalities and fears of aging and death. One of the summative expressions of the efficacy of Buddhist teachings on Bai’s life and thoughts is his long poem You Wu Zhen Si (游悟真寺) to which much of the last chapter is devoted.

When Bai refers to Taoism and Buddhism, it is often with reference to their philosophical aspects and he viewed with a jaundiced eye claims made by some Taoists about such ‘practical applications’ as extending one’s natural life by chemical or alchemical means. The two belief systems, in Bai’s mind, were always parallel and occasionally converged as we see in the last line of his poem Rising After a Nap and Peacefully Sitting (睡起宴坐)\(^{179}\)

Performing Chan along with sitting and forgetting, together converging, the roads no different. (transl. en)

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\(^{179}\) 白香山集一，卷 7, 15
And again in his poem about *Writing about Events at My New Home in Xin Chang in 40 Rhymes (or 80 lines)* (新昌新居書事四十韻)\(^\text{180}\)

The Sanskrit Buddhist Scriptures, the twelve parts, the words of the abstruse document (of Lao Zi’s) five thousand words.
(transl. en)

In 839, at age 67, he alluded to an early attachment to Buddhist/Taoist thought in the preface to his set of 15 poems *Written While Sick* (病中詩十五首)\(^\text{181}\)

Quite early dwelt my heart on Buddhism, roaming in the tracks of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, because of my illnesses I regard my body, as expected it’s showing gains.
(transl. en)

Just how early he exhibited this interest he does not mention. There certainly was every political inducement to do so since the court supported both belief systems with an edge given to Taoism. In the context of his other writings however, he seemed to evidence a strong predilection for the more intellectual side of things. Yet even here there was a growing philosophical scepticism about the ineffability of some basic truths, about the Tao(道) for example in his poem *Reading Chan Scriptures* (經禪讀)\(^\text{182}\).

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\(^{180}\) 全唐詩，卷 442_51
\(^{181}\) 白居易集, Vol.3, p.787
\(^{182}\) 白居易集 Vol.2, p.716
One should know that in all apparent distinctions there are no distinctions, like (on the other hand) something is left over even though nothing remains. Beyond speech, forget the words for a moment, in a dream talking of the dream is a two fold emptiness. Within empty blossoms how can one again obtain fruit, in the glare of the this world's (watery) mirage, how can one hunt for more fish. Change (perturbation) is Chan and Chan is change, if there's no Chan there is no moving, seemingly approaching what seems.

(Transl. En)

But perhaps one of the most compelling reasons for Bai’s ever-deepening absorption into Buddhist/Chan thought was his concern for establishing more of a balance in his emotional life and not to get so carried away with his feelings. In today’s juridical jargon he may have been yearning after a little more probity in dealing with social and domestic matters. Thus he even felt conflicted on what we today would consider a quite acceptable display of nostalgic remorse in reflecting on his deceased three year old daughter Golden Bells. In the poem Remembering Golden Bells (念金鑾子)\(^{184}\), for example, he exhibited this rather unnatural (to us) constraint on genuinely sincere emotional feelings.

Furthermore, Burton Watson is quite convinced that “(Bai) yearned to achieve a state of greater emotional equilibrium, to become less a prey to passing feelings, and he believed that Buddhism could help him achieve this goal.”\(^{185}\) Watson substantiates this view by quoting an excerpt from Bai’s poem ‘Singing Thoughts’ (詠懷)\(^{186}\):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bad times and good do not come from you;} \\
\text{Joy and sorrow do not come from Heaven;} \\
\text{Fate you can do nothing about,} \\
\text{But you can cause your mind to be at peace.}
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^{183}\) Soothill p.224; \(^{(Sk. Sthiti)}\) has many meanings derivative of the notion of ‘abiding’. Perhaps the most suitable one for this context is \(^{(Sk. Sthiti)}\) ‘abiding, being, the state of existence, one of the four characteristics of all beings or things i.e. birth, existence, change(or decay), death (or cessation)’. So Bai might be envisioning a more Taoist-like dynamic process rather than a passage through static states.

\(^{184}\) 全唐詩 卷 433_20


\(^{186}\) 白香山詩集, 卷 7
Then also from Bai’s poem, *Giving a Gift and Raising a Matter with the Monk Ding Guang* (題贈定光上人)\(^{187}\) the poet seems to become aware of what we now know as psychosomatic illness in saying:

> I seem to have become aware how the mind reflects stealthily on the body.  
> (transl. en)

> 我來如有悟，潛以心照身

And later in one of his poems on sickness (病氣)\(^{188}\), he adds,

> I have come to realize that each bodily abnormality stems from the passions, (but) from which of these can one obtain peace (and tranquility)? You may ask if the root cause of these troubles are deep or shallow, (and wonder if) this body is born together with sickness.  
> (transl. en)

> 自知氣發每因情，情在何由氣得平。  
> 若問病根深與淺，此身應與病齊生。

There seems to be no attempt to separate the body/mind interface in Bai’s thinking. Indeed he anticipates what modern science has only recently come to recognize as a legitimate diagnostic pursuit in understanding many human emotional ills. He may have been able to think beyond this tendency in attributing physical maladies to an objectification of bad karma traits from previous existences.

Buddhism offered a ready-made panacea for some of these emotional/spiritual problems that Bai Juyi was avid to take advantage of. In particular, the notions of Emptiness, Illusion and Non-Duality were of considerable help in dealing particularly with the problems attaching to ageing. To illustrate, consider what Bai says in his poem *In The Morning Combing My Hair* (早梳頭)\(^{189}\),

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\(^{187}\) 白香山詩集. 卷 9  
\(^{188}\) 白香山詩集. 卷 14  
\(^{189}\) 白香山詩 卷 9
If you don’t study the ways of emptiness, (then) how can the afflictions of old age be remedied.

If you haven’t yet laid hold of the mind of no-birth, (then, though) white-haired, you’ll still die young.

(transl. en)

And even more explicitly in his poem White Hair (白髮)\textsuperscript{190};

From times past, birth, old, age and death, these three sicknesses that have dogged us so long.
Unless one achieves the state of no-birth, no medicine in this world can effect a cure.\textsuperscript{191}

Consistent with his practice of sitting and meditating (坐禪), he often went on fasts and retreats, \textit{zhai} (斎), occasionally practicing the \textit{Eight Gate Precepts} (八關戒)\textsuperscript{192}. These were mostly month-long social abstinences including destruction of any form of life, violence, sexual offences and carousing which, by and large, he had little trouble handling except for two formidable ones, excessive wine and singing. Both of these were vital ingredients in the creation of his poetry but, though he admitted to controlling his drunkenness, his compulsive penchant for versifying never seemed to let up. See what he says in his short quatrain on \textit{Leisurely Chanting} (閑吟)\textsuperscript{193};

Ever since I arduously studied Buddhist Emptiness, I’ve annulled the variety of all my life’s intentions.
There exists now only the demon of poetry that’s not yet vanquished, (for) whenever there’s a breeze or moonlight, out comes the poesy.

(transl. en)

\textsuperscript{190} 全唐書 卷 432_33
\textsuperscript{191} B. Watson, op.cit. p.8
\textsuperscript{193} 全唐詩 卷 439_92
One might think that Bai was rationalizing the effectiveness of his desire to achieve complete Buddhist Emptiness by maintaining that this compulsion to versify was merely a lingering reincarnation from a previous life. See what he says in *I Love to Chant Poems* (愛詠詩)\textsuperscript{194};

I sit leaning against a cord bed casually reflecting, that in a previous life I must have been a poet-monk. (transl. en)

And again in *Self-Explanation* (*'in light of my dreams'*) 自解(朗之及夢尚書)\textsuperscript{195};

I also look fixedly at what was foreordained for me, over many prior existences a debt burden (to be paid off) by these poems. Otherwise, how come this wild intoning, and me producing more poems since I’ve been sick than before. (transl. en)

Like most spiritually-driven intellectuals, Bai, with his aspirations, seems to have finally realized that intellectualism and ‘pure reason’ were a dead end. Tapping into the streams of Buddhist Thought and Process may have ultimately mesmerized him. Perhaps at the ripe old age of 73, in 845, his memory, consciously or unconsciously, was prompted again to recall Kasyapa’s epiphany before Shakyamuni, that the True Teaching does not rely on words or thoughts but is ‘separately transmitted outside of doctrine’ that is, it is through a sudden revelation or spiritual epiphany. Likely, because of this, Kasyapa has been regarded as the first patriarch of the Chan(Zen) sect.\textsuperscript{196} In a rather nostalgic vein, Bai seems to catch the spirit of this in his poem

\textsuperscript{194} 全唐詩 卷 446_60
\textsuperscript{195} 全唐詩. 卷 458_11
\textsuperscript{196} Nan Huai-Chin, p.69; Kasyapa was the only follower that understood the Buddha's "silent teaching", making him the first Patriarch of Chan. Bodhidharma was the 26\textsuperscript{th} patriarch from that time but regarded, in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century, as the first patriarch of Chan in China.
During a Vegetarian Spring Festival, I Feel Like Expressing Some of My Deep Yearnings (齋居春久，感事遣懷)\textsuperscript{157}.

Abstaining from meat, I sit (and meditate) for 30 days, with playing and singing going on all around me. The evening moon is bright (especially when) I stop drinking, my eyes are too hazy for someone wanting to see flowers. I hang on to what I’ve learned, to regard all things as empty, really knowing that thoughts are just so much worldly dust. (But) I still remember casual conversations and laughter, and have not yet forgotten old acquaintances and close friends.

(Transl. en)

There seemed to be a strong spiritual (Taoist/Buddhist) bivalence in Bai’s psyche, prompting him to enjoy the pleasures of the world while at the same time to long for release from the attachments that brought him varying degrees of psychological and physical suffering such as death of loved ones, ageing and parting from friends and family. Witness his candid self-disclosure of what we might call today a ‘split personality’ in some lines of the poem \textit{In Obeisance Presenting a Memorial To The Emperor, Then Returning To Idly loafing About} (拜表回閒遊)\textsuperscript{158}

Early in the morning I purpose to present a memorial to the emperor calling myself a court officer, in the evening I go out for a stroll as a countryside gentleman. Bodhidharma passed on Intentions decreeing the cessation of thoughts, Lao Zi urged us to be on the lookout to get rid of similar carnal desires. With the Eight Gate Abstentions and vegetarian-dieting the days melt away, singing unrestrainedly one last song while drunk I see off the Spring.
The wine store, the Dharma Chamber, the Abbot’s room, in all this, how is it that I’m two kinds of personality? (transl. en)

His ambivalence about the efficacy of Taoism and Buddhism in his own personal spiritual life does not seem to hide his desire to be remembered by posterity either as a poet or as a spiritual/emotional helper or Bodhisattva. Arguably, the flowing post-death, re-integrative anonymity of Taoist belief didn’t appeal to him even though in the following poem In and Out of the Family (在家出家) he uses the images of the crane, lotus and bamboo as Taoist/Buddhist icons of health and longevity. But one thing seems abundantly clear, that Bai is resigned to his fate within a relaxed and determined mood of Chan detachment disregarding the ‘Confucian’ calls of wife and children.

Food, clothes, I make excuses to evade my family responsibilities, henceforth, family matters are no longer shared.

In my nightly rest, my being is flung like a bird into the forest, in the morning my spirit is with the monk begging for food.

Distinct cries of of numerous cranes under the pines, a spot of cold light, a lantern thru the bamboos.

In the middle of the night I settle myself into the Buddhist (Lotus) cross-legged position, my daughter calls out and my wife shouts at me more but I don’t answer. (transl. en)

Around the age of 74, he wrote two ‘antiphonal’ poems, (The visitor is asked questions) 客有說 and (Answering, the guest replies) 答客說 in which there is a tantalizing crossover of Taoist/Buddhist iconic imagery and promises of immortality, which are blithely swept aside in favour of Bai Juyi’s caregiver persona hopefully returning as a Bodhisattva from the Tushita heaven of wonderful joy (兜率陀). Whether or not he qualified for this lofty role is left for the reader to ponder as Bai, seemingly frivolously, tries to describe his own ultimate parousia.

199 全唐詩 卷 458_49
200 全唐詩 卷 459_88, 89
A man returned here from across the seas, in the deep recesses of the oceans and mountains he saw storied buildings and terraces. Amongst them he saw niches for celestial beings with one of them empty, many said this awaited the arrival Le Tian (Bai Juyi). (transl. en)

I have studied the Empty Gate (and I have to say) I am not a student of celestial beings, I’m afraid what was told you was an empty story. The hills and oceans are not the places I shall return to, even if I should return it will be from the Tushita heaven. (transl. en)

4.4 Summary

Sympathetic Western readers, conditioned to ‘the happy ending’, might feel good about Bai Juyi seeming to have attained the culmination of his lifetime ideals, of acquiring a fair degree of social/spiritual freedom with a pension more than adequate to meet all his creature needs. On the other hand it is also very interesting to see how his political and administrative inabilities and failures coupled with the stresses and strains from an unbending social integrity expedited his flight towards release from the tensions of the workplace to the bucolic blandishments of an idyllic buddha nature in full fluid flower and grandeur.

There is a Biblical saying; ‘Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it’ 201. To what extent was Bai Juyi influenced by his formative Confucian upbringing with its strong emphasis on filial piety, classical education and pursuit of social/political position and to what extent were these ideals compromised, blended or replaced?

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201 Proverbs 22:6
by Taoist/Buddhist virtues? If we look at his last recorded poem, written shortly before his death in 846, it seems Bai has returned to the family hearth portraying, among other things, a concerned father and husband tending to the sometimes disruptive exigencies of domestic life. Whatever spiritual reality was about to absorb him into its womb, it seemed he purposed to yield up his mortal coils within a not untypical Confucian context. The poem’s title seems to support this view as Bai gives to his family (and posterity) a final accounting, almost like a brief oral tomb-inscription. Buddhist/Taoist resonances seem minimal if at all! But this may just mean that the family was not sensitive to, or comprehending of, his spiritual proclivities.

From the irony in the third and fourth lines below, one gets the impression that the transition from his ‘full-time’ government job to a half-salary pension was somewhat stressful in supporting his family and near relatives.

Poetically Relating My Ills To All My Family (自詠老身示諸家屬)

My age has attained 70 years, obtaining a salary of 50,000.
Man and wife growing old together daily, my sister’s son living with us for a period.
The gruel was satisfactory and tasted new, warm robes were exchanged for silky floss material.
Where we lived, even though we were reduced to poverty, all the family members were still lucky to be together.

My bed is placed under the plain screen, my stove is shifted in front of the blue curtain.
Book sounds, my grandchildren reading aloud, seeing the hot water simmering, prepared by servants.
Writing rapidly I reply to overdue letters, I remove from my clothes money due for medicine.
Taking care of other minor household details, I crawl over onto my back and sleep facing the South.
(transl. en)
It is now quite apparent from Bai Juyi’s poetry that he was genuinely interested in the intellectual and philosophical aspects of Taoism and Buddhism but moved eventually to the more text-muted practices of Chan. Though he was much less interested in the liturgy, mantras and ritual practices of these belief systems, he did seek out the company of like-minded monks and priests. He was infatuated with religious iconography and frequently visited, even resided, in temples and monasteries vicariously sharing the cold warmth of spent statuarial spirits.\(^{204}\)

This latter aspect will constitute the matters of concern and discussion in the next chapter.

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\(^{204}\) In Bai’s Temple (遊悟真寺) poem, for example, he had ‘warm’ memories of those now represented by ‘cold’ statuary in the temple halls. He was a lay Buddhist monk ‘On duty all night in Xian You Temple’ 《全唐詩》卷 428.30 (仙游寺獨宿) and frequented many other temples such as Xi Lin temple 《全唐詩》卷 430.16 (西林寺).
CHAPTER V: Temples, Caves and Landscapes in Bai Juyi’s Poetry

5.1 Introduction

Although Bai Juyi was often creative in his poetic styles, he also was a selective beneficiary of the moods, allusions and imageries of the poetic genius of prior generations. As we prepare to discuss his well-known Temple Poem, it might be helpful to very briefly discuss a bit of the evolution of the two very important themes of Reality and Landscape within the context of Taoist/Buddhist places of worship and veneration.

Typical of Bai Juyi’s times was an abiding interest by many scholar-intellectuals in ‘all things Buddhist’, including the objective projections of the faith in temples, caves and sacred locations. Many, including Bai Juyi, were particularly interested in the emblems, statuary, and iconography of the faith. These were often located in remote mountain areas where a degree of seclusion and proximity to the grandeur of nature could be reasonably guaranteed. Indeed, there seemed to be a direct relation between the location of remote Taoist ‘holy’ mountains from time immemorial and the construction of some sort of shrine or temple, located, either in, on, or by the mountain precincts. To the extent that these gave havens of refuge, worship and succour from the stresses and obligations of secular life, they became very popular amongst all social strata and afforded opportunities for the establishment of monastic communities, for their care and upkeep as well as for providing a repository for Taoist/Buddhist scriptures and images.

To the extent that ‘heroes of the faith’ (Confucian Sages, Taoist Immortals, Buddhist Bodhisattvas) figure prominently in Chinese poetry, whatever the religious persuasions might be, Confucian, Taoist or Buddhist, there seems to be a definite parallel in the eulogizing of their virtues. So the Confucian sage, the Taoist immortal and the Buddhist saint often attain their respective ‘heavens’ and just as often find earthly re-instatement in worshipful stone imagery. It will be very interesting to see how Bai Juyi acknowledges his heroes in the Temple Poem You Wu Zhen Si Shi.

Many of Bai’s spiritual and nature imageries, particularly in 詩寺真悟遊, reflect those of earlier poets like Xie Ling-yun(謝靈運 385-433), Wang Wei(王維 701-761), and Du Fu.
For example, in Xie’s poem \textit{Guo Bai An Ting} (亭岸白過)\textsuperscript{205}, the poesy is redolent with flora, fauna and nature imagery so prevalent in Bai’s poetry, with the angst and stress of government service unmistakably evident in poignant metaphors.

\begin{quote}
On these sandy dikes I shake the world’s dust from my clothes, and leisurely stroll into my tumbleweed house. Through the rock-strewn gorge a near by stream goes trickling, while distant mountains glint thru the sparse trees. So hard to find words for their airy kingfisher blue, so easy for a fisherman to live. On these green shores I listen, grasping the creepers, Spring and my heart have now become as one. The call of yellow birds among the oaks, the cry of deer browsing among the duckweeds. Sadly I recall those men of a hundred sorrows, but delight in your joy at the baskets you received. Joy and sorrow come and go in return, now failure daunts us, now success makes us glad. Rather than this, I prefer to be free forever, From all the world I choose simplicity.

(\textit{transl.} Frodsham p.125)
\end{quote}

The descriptions of wildlife and mountain landscapes, so rhapsodically portrayed in Bai’s verses, are pre-figured somewhat in Du Fu’s ‘Mountain Poem’ \textit{Shan Si} (寺山)\textsuperscript{206} written after he made a trip to the sacred caves of ‘Cereal Storage Mountain’ \textit{Mai Ji Shan} (山積麥)

\begin{quote}
There are a few monks left in these remote shrines, and in the wilderness the narrow paths are high. The musk deer sleep among the stones and bamboo, the cockatoos peck at the golden peaches. Streams trickle down among the paths, across the over-hanging cliff the cells are ranged.

野寺殘僧少，山園細路高。
麝香眠石竹，鸚鵡啄金桃。
亂石通人過，懸崖置屋牢。
上方重閣晚，百里見秋毫。
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{205} From Xie Kang Le Shi Zhu (注詩樂康謝) p.41
\textsuperscript{206} 詩唐全 卷225_54
Their tiered chambers reaching to the very peak, and for a hundred *li* one can make out the smallest thing. (transl. Sullivan p.7)

Both Xie Ling-yun and Du Fu represent poetic styles representative of their times each of which had a significant influence on Bai Juyi’s poetry (and prose). With the former, for example, one sees the epitome of landscape verse in the full flower of the fusion of Taoist/Buddhist ideals, its soft hopeful edges in marked contrast to the sharp, brooding and danger-filled early Confucian-age poetry of Qu Yuan (原屈 ca.340BC-278BC).

To illustrate, examine Frodsham’s translation of Qu’s poem *Zhao Yin Shi* (士隱招)207,

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Thick grows the cassia, in the folds of the mountains.  
Lovely the lattice-work, of branches intertwining.  
Dense are the mountain-mists, towering the rocks.  
Dangerous the deep ravines, where waters hurl.  
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In a similar vein, the reader is likely also aware of the almost suicidal moaning and despair of the morally burdened Confucian scholar-intellectual represented in Qu Yuan’s classical *Li Sao* (騷離 ‘Encountering Sorrow’).209

The sites and locations of these sacred sites have interesting histories all their own but, for the most part, are a little beyond the scope of this essay. The thematic threads we shall be tracking in the section to follow will deal mainly with Bai’s spiritual and social realities, as well as landscape perceptions, between 806 AD, when he wrote *The Everlasting Wrong* (歌恨長) and 816AD, *The Lute Girl* (行琶琵). For it was in this interval that he composed his *Temple Poem* likely prompted in no small part by his mother’s death in 811 coupled with the time available to him from the consequent three year mourning period at his country home near the Wei River (河渭). Although there is no direct evidence, in all probability it was through his mother’s influence that Bai early acquired a soft spot in his heart and mind for Mahayana Buddhism and a renewed appreciation of the moral (Confucian) discipline that both parents had instilled in him.

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207 *Chu Ci*, 辭楚, xii, 士隱招, p.1b: Qu Yuan was a legendary Court official in Chu 楚 who grew very despondent about the moral health of his country, in particular the corruption of high court officials prompting him to commit suicide by drowning

208 Frodsham (Anthology), p.xxx

Not surprising then that we find, in this the longest of his poems, a kind of summary assessment of his spiritual journey to the age of 42, culminating in some universal moral prescriptions.

Without prematurely giving away the plot of the poem, it might enhance the reader’s appreciation of it by having a few glimpses from other poems Bai had written describing his fulsome acquaintanceship with temples and his friendship with the monks who served in them. The imageries and reflections in them on ‘Reality and Landscape’ form a small preview of what we shall find in 詩寺真悟遊. Bai’s affections for the monastic life style were so pronounced that one could easily believe that he would have fully pursued holy orders and become an ordained monk had it not been for the conflict this would have posed for him continuing to carry out his government duties along with his sense of obligation to support his family and growing number of dependents.

Thus, in a few lines from the first poem Enjoying an Early Summer Moonlight while Lodging at a Temple (月玩宿因，觀元開遊正校諸同夏首),210 we find Bai reflecting on how pleasant it is to share a temple visit with like-minded friends while enjoying moonlight-blessed glasses of wine.

I, together with three friends who were seeking a name for themselves in the capital. Whose government tasks were minimal, idly languishing more than they ever had since leaving home. Deeply in thought we perused the Taoist temple, enjoying a time of heart repose in this place. Buying wine and moving to the temple’s western veranda, waiting for the moon we slowly sipped our wine. Soon the moon’s golden spirit appeared, as if together with us it were waiting.

(transl.en)

Then again, from his poem Lodging By Himself At Xian You Temple (仙游宿獨寺),211 he expresses how he much prefers to be alone, accountable only to himself while luxuriating in the warm spiritual cradle of the temple.

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210 全唐詩 卷 428_4
211 全唐詩 卷 428_11
The sand crane standing at the top of the stairs,
the moon an open door on the deep pool.
In the midst of this I made my lodging, not being
able to tear myself away for two evenings.
Happy with my lot in the quietness, pleased not
to have anyone with me to hasten me home.
Henceforth I shall travel alone, and not plan to
bring anyone along.
(transl.en)

Even while doing evening duty in the palace, while managing never ending government
documents, he would often doze off and dream of his favourite vacation spot at *Xian You* (仙游)
Temple and its enchantingly serene surroundings.\(^{212}\)

At the (palace’s) western window I took a break
from drafting imperial edicts, the outside pines and
bamboos were deeply still and silent.
The moon came out and a quiet wind emerged,
suddenly it was like evening in the hills.
My thoughts transformed into a vision of the South
West, a dream portraying me as a guest at Xian
You Temple.
In sleeping I heard the sound of the palace’s water
clock, and thought it the dripping of a mountain
stream.  (transl.en)

Even during his exiles he sought breaks from his government work to find spiritual solace
and refuge in the surrounding hills. At a time when others of his peers were off planning and
fighting battles, he belittled his own incompetency to do anything really constructive while
indulging himself in his contemplations such as those at Xi Lin Temple (寺林西)\(^{213}\)

In the morning I act as a public clerk, while in the
evening I become a guest of the sacred hills.
Resourceful men labour at thinking of strategies;
military officials strain themselves at preparing for
expeditions.

\(^{212}\) 全唐詩 卷 428_30

\(^{213}\) 詩唐全 卷430_16
Left alone are those with negligible skills, to doodle amongst the hills midst streams and pebbles. (transl. en)

獨有不才者，山中弄泉石。

But perhaps the most graphic and tempestuous imagery pre-figuring Wu Zhen Si Shi are the breathtakingly dramatic lines from Bai’s Incense Burner Mountain poem (頂峰爐香登)\(^{214}\). Here the raw, wrenching power of agitated nature forms the turbulent frontier curtain between the mountain top’s incense of peace and the nether world’s ants’ nest of endless stress and strain. In viewing the poem, here presented almost in its entirety, the reader cannot help but be awed by the cumulative pageantry of Bai’s language and feeling, brought forward to vividly describe, in very large strokes, his spiritual journey in the poem 詩寺真悟遊.

Clambering up using trailing plants treading on dangerous rocks, my feet and hands labouring, my eyes continually looking up and down for purchase. On the same outing were three or four friends, two of them dared not go up with me. When we reached the highest crest, the view dazzled me and my spirits were turned topsy-turvy. At the yawning heights of over ten thousand feet, with a shelf width of only around a metre. Unless the scope of your seeing and hearing is poor, how can you know the vastness of the universe. The rivers and waters are as narrow as a string, Pen’s city wall is as small as a man’s hand. In entangling me how vexatious it is, I can’t cast off this world’s yoke. Returning to get rid of thinking of my own laments, I bend my head low and conform (again) to the way of the ants. (transl. en)

攀蘿踏危石，手足勞俯仰。

同遊三四人，兩人不敢上。

上到峰之頂，目眩神恍恍。

高低有萬尋，闊狹無數丈。

不窮視聽界，焉識宇宙廣。

江水細如繩，湓城小於掌。

紛吾何屑屑，未能脫塵鞅。

歸去思自嗟，低頭入蟻壤。

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\(^{214}\) 詩唐全 卷 430_30
5.2 Background to Bai Juyi’s *Temple Poem ‘Wu Zhen Si Shi’* (詩寺真悟遊)

Bai wrote this long poem when he was 42 years old, during the mourning period for his mother at his country estate by the Wei River. At first glance, it may appear a little maudlin and extravagant but viewed within the context of his life experiences up to that point, it seems entirely consistent with where he was spiritually, polemically (as a Confucian) and professionally (as a poet).

It would not be too excessive to say that Bai Juyi was quite enraptured with the ornamentation and pageantry of Buddhist temples. There seemed to be a quiet passion that bubbled occasionally to the surface of his verse, with a religious awe that nimbly sprang from his pen. Nor was it unusual for the temple environment to have this effect on other stressed Confucian intellectuals seeking spiritual solace. According to Kenneth Chen;

> Buddhist temples with their shaded nooks and corners, their architectural beauty, their gilded images of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and their beautiful illustrations provided a welcome change to the hungry eyes of the multitudes, who had to put up with drabness, squalor, and overcrowding in every day life. Furthermore, many members of officialdom, outwardly paying lip service to Confucianism, were inwardly relying on Buddhism for support and solace.\(^{215}\)

Waley seems a little sparse in his praise for the spirit of the poem, seeing it as merely a regurgitation of styles and structure’s from Bai’s previous poetry.\(^{216}\) Viewed, however, as a pre-emptive tomb inscription, one can view it as a sort of summary assessment of the poet’s spiritual and professional life with heart-felt exhortations to those others wishing to make sense of the great issues of life. The similarity with John Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’, written at another time and in a strikingly similar spiritual context, is rather compelling.\(^{217}\)

The things that made *Wu Zhen Si* temple so attractive to Bai Juyi were likely very similar to those aspects that caused the great Hua Yan expositor, Fazang, to be so enamoured of it. In his detailed article on Fazang and Wuzhensi, Jinhua Chen masterfully describes the geography and history of its location, the temple’s rich ornamentation, the interesting Daoist/Buddhist...

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\(^{216}\) Arthur Waley (Temple Poem), George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1923, p.60

ecumenism that transpired there and, ultimately, the staging ground it provided for Fazang in performing his legendary snow and rain rituals for Ruizong (宗睿 662-716, r.710-712)\(^{218}\).

But perhaps more importantly, Chen’s article vividly portrays the environment of the temple and the religious practices that took place there, whose names and descriptions figure so prominently in Bai Juyi’s poem.

The temple itself was situated about 25 km. west of Chang’an, located in the Wuzhen valley of Mt.Zhongnan (南終) in Shaanxi (陝西) province, 9 km. East of Lantian (田藍). The temple precincts were actually composed of two sections, one, an upper temple, was located in the valley of Wuzhen itself surrounded by lush bamboo groves while the lower temple was situated nearby on the banks of the Lanshui (水藍) river. Founded around 600 AD by the Sui Buddhist monk Jingye (業淨 564-616), there was a veritable continuous succession of great Buddhist personages such as Huichao (超慧 546-622), Facheng (誠法 563-640) and Fazang himself, who dwelt there for varying periods of time, consummating, for our purposes, in Bai Juyi’s well-known visit there in 814. Bai’s preoccupation with the Avatamsaka Sutra (經嚴華) provided strong affinities for the veneration of the Lotus Sutra at Wuzhensi where it played a very central and predominant role in facilitating a spirit of ecumenism amongst various Daoist and Buddhist sects such as Pure Land, Sanlun, and Tiantai.

In fact, Bai cites, from his temple poem, the stirring devotion of one of the meditation masters as being so effective that the ‘slab of stone’ on which he achieved liberation was specifically called ‘the mind-pacifying stone’,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It is said that in the past there existed a master,} & \quad \text{云有過去師，坐得無生禪。} \\
\text{who sat on it (the stone slab) and obtained a state of contemplation without birth and rebirth.} & \quad \text{(transl. en)}
\end{align*}
\]

Many of the geographical and construction features of the temple and its iconography, as well as the allusions to deceased Daoist/Buddhist personages that Bai knew about, are sprinkled liberally and allusively throughout the poem.

Even prior to the Tang period, Wuzhensi had acquired quite a reputation for its splendid scenery and exquisite ornamentation. Additionally, in its environs were grottos, Buddha-statues and inscriptions about which many famous later poets such as Wang Wei, Meng Jiao (751-814) and, of course, Bai Juyi, wrote testimonial poems. Not surprisingly, some of their descriptive vocabulary overlapped, spotlighting even further the salient features of the temple set in its splendid location.\textsuperscript{219}, noticing, for example, in Meng Jiao’s poem \textit{You Zhongnan Longchisi} (寺池龍南終遊)\textsuperscript{220} that even---

\begin{quote}
  flying birds can’t reach the place where the monks reside on Zhongnan’s summit. Dragons live in the pool imparting a regular green color to it, the mountains look fresher after the rain falls. Walking up towards the sun’s whiteness, I sit and recline beside clear streams.

  The terrain is cold, stunting the growth of the pines and sweet-smelling osmanthus, the rocky defiles render the mountain paths chancey. The evening chimes accompany the guests on their way back home, the sounds (and their echoes) increase as they descend from the distant heavens.

  (transl. en)
\end{quote}

The green-coloured pool Meng refers to, may be the very deep jade pool that Bai Juyi alludes to in one of the lines of his temple poem viz.

\begin{quote}
  A green jade pool over three hundred meters deep, and emerging from it gold dishes with writing on them.

  (transl. en)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid. pp. 185-186
It could be speculated that these dishes were the dharanis (咒), or mantras written on small slips (簡投), used by devotees like Fazang who threw them into these sacred waters to render rituals they were about to perform more efficacious.\textsuperscript{221}

Chen suggests the possibility that it could have been another more inaccessible pool called *Bai Lian Chi* (池連白) situated in the vicinity of one the highest nearby peaks but then, upon further consideration, believed it was a comparatively smaller *tan* (潭) ‘deep pool or pond’, much closer to the actual monastery\textsuperscript{222}.

Wuzhensi’s long associations with Daoist influences was not lost on Bai Juyi as he mentions climbing up the mountainside to pay his respects at a shrine to some Immortals (祠仙謁上卻); recalling a place on nearby Mt. Fuju (舉覆) where Wang Shun(順王) achieved his immortality\textsuperscript{223}; the herb-drying terraces (台藥晒); and a field of excrescences (mushrooms?) and atractylis (thistles?) (芝朮).\textsuperscript{224}

So, although Bai’s musings in his temple poem were likely drawn from a common pool of experiences reflecting the spiritual temper of his times, shared by a number of his poetic contemporaries, their imagery is so uniquely and passionately fashioned as to cause one to believe he was truly divinely inspired.

5.3 Annotated Translation and Interpretation of *You Wu Zhen Si Shi* (遊悟真寺詩)\textsuperscript{225}

Just as a brief preamble to the poem’s interpretation, the reader will likely notice the unmistakeable spiritual quality of Bai Juyi’s reflections as he poetically parallels the trajectory of his life with his peregrination through the precincts of the Wu Zhen Temple. That they possess this rhapsodic quality is consistent with the remarks made by Stephen Owen, the great authority on Tang poetry, who wrote that it was not until Bai Juyi that one encountered “true religious and devotional poetry”.\textsuperscript{226} In this vein, Burton Watson adds a rather interesting observation that this

\textsuperscript{221} William Soothill, Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms, Paragon Book Gallery, New York, 1934, p. 252
\textsuperscript{222} Jinhua Chen (Fazang and Wuzhensi) p.190
\textsuperscript{223} Wang Shun Mountain is named after him, also called Jade Mountain where Lantian Jade is quarried. For a fuller story refer to <http://www.jadevalley.com.cn/tour.htm>
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid. p.192
\textsuperscript{225} 全唐詩 卷 429.33
\textsuperscript{226} Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese Middle Ages, Essays in Mid-Tang Literary*
poetry of Bai’s was often laced with intertwining Taoist/Buddhist, liturgical and iconic imagery, portraying it as rather flippant and irreverent compared to Western standards.\(^{227}\) Regarding the Taoist/Buddhist influence, one may recall Bai’s comments translated earlier in this essay.\(^{228}\)

For this material body my great master is Lao Zi,  
For the uniformity of all things I study Zhuang Zi  
To quell disorder I return to Chan and meditation,  
To preserve my spirit I conform to sitting and being empty.  
(transl.en)

He delighted in visiting temples and monasteries regarding the monks therein with respect and great reverence. The peace and tranquility he found in these locales were a great comfort to him as in *Around Yi Ai Temple* (遠愛寺)\(^{229}\) where he enjoyed the flora, fauna and landscape the images of which flood *Wu Zhen Si Shi*.

Expectantly Approaching the Temple Mountain

The autumn of Yuan He’s ninth year, the eight month, the moon’s first quarter.  
I made an outing to the temple of Wu Zhen on Wang Shun’s hills.  
Going to the mountain still 4 or 5 li away, I first heard the pleasant murmur of flowing waters.

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\(^{227}\) Watson, p.4.  
\(^{228}\) 全唐詩 卷 438.1  
\(^{229}\) 舊唐書 p.4892 Refer also to section 1.5.2 for some of the poem he writes.
From here, leaving my chariot and horse, I began to wade through a bend in the Blue Stream. My hand leaning on a green bamboo staff, feet treading on shoals of white pebbly stones. Gradually a strange detachment (greeted) my ears, hearing (no longer) the noise of man’s world.

手拄青竹杖，足蹕白石灘。漸怪耳目曠，不聞人世喧。

In 814, during the reign of emperor Xian Zong (憲宗 806-821), Bai Juyi was just finishing the mandatory three year mourning period for his mother. He was, at that time, still deeply lamenting his failed attempts to save his dear friend Yuan Zhen from exile a few years prior and emotionally despondent over his seeming complete lack of political potency at the eunuch-ridden court now dominated by powerful provincial military governors. These accumulated frustrations contributed to a spiritual hiatus impelling him ever more forcefully into the soothing intellectual balm of Buddhist detachment from worldly affairs and the seductive beckonings of Chan release. Two years later he was to write a very popular poem about a Lute-Girl, allegorizing his own situation, in which he gives vent to the emotional pathos of a once beautiful courtesan having outlived her usefulness and soulfully singing her dirge of disillusionment on a lute.\(^{230}\)

It may not have been the first time that Bai had visited Wu Zhen temple but at this juncture in his life he seems quite clear that this trip enabled him to detach himself, if only momentarily, from the worries and petty ideas (曠), as well as the noise (喧) of his Confucian responsibilities. While still a mile or two away his ears welcomed the beckoning comforts of a mountain stream’s timeless murmurings (潺).

\(^{230}\) A Chinese plucked string instrument called the Pipa (琵琶)
Leaving One World for Another

From the bottom of the mountain looking to the top, at first doubting it could be climbed. Who knew there was a path in there, twisting and bending, leading to the mountain’s craggy top? Our first breather was under the flagstaff, another rest beside the stone shrine. The shrine room’s length was over 12 meters, the entrance way wasn’t bolted or (even) closed. I bowed my head to peep in but couldn’t see anyone, stoney hair hung down like women’s tumbling hair. White bats were frightened and took off, with a pair flying off like tumbling snow. Turning my head and gazing over at the temple door, a green precipitous valley-like walkway lined with bright red wall fixtures. It was as if a thumb had furrowed the mountain-side and placed a temple in the middle of it. Within the gate there was no level ground, the land was narrow with a broad empty sky. There were rooms and verandas together with terraces and halls under the heights above, following the ridges and peaks. On rocky plateaus with no earth on them, there were many skinney-looking trees and shrubs but they were tough and firm. Roots and stems tightly enfold the rocks, curling around them like worms and snakes. Pines and Osmanthus stood in disordered rows, through the four seasons fragrant and lush. On the slender, delicate and green twig ends, pure blown musical sounds emanate like bowstrings in the wind. Where neither sunlight nor moonlight penetrate, greens and shades each other o’er spread. A hidden bird occasionally peeps, listening to it sounding like a shivering cicada.

山下望山上，初疑不可攀。
誰知中有路，盤折通岩巔。
一息幡竿下，再休石龕邊。
龕間長丈餘，門戶無扃關。
仰窺不見人，石發垂若鬟。
驚出白蝙蝠，雙飛如雪翻。
回首寺門望，青崖夾朱軒。

如擘山腹開，置寺於其間。
入門無平地，地窄虛空寬。
房廊與台殿，高下隨峰巒。
岩崿無撮土，樹木多瘦堅。
根株抱石長，屈曲蟲蛇蟠。
松桂亂無行，四時鬱芊芊。
枝梢嫋青翠，韻若風中弦。
日月光不透，緑陰相交延。
幽鳥時一聲，聞之似寒蟬。
Without exaggerating Bai’s perceptions of the scenes before him, one could easily imagine the hazardous path up the mountain as a metaphor for the process of extracting himself from his wearisome and perilous social existence for the arduous but rewarding realization of nirvanic release.

The rest stations at a flagstaff (幢幡) and a stone shrine (石龕) had an inspirational quality to them since the former was probably a colourful buddhist banner fluttering on a bamboo staff signaling, to Bai perhaps, some degree of spiritual attainment while the latter may have contained mummified bodies of deceased monks in miniature temples. These personages may, in fact, have been former associates of Bai Juyi whose memory he deeply respected. The other statuary within the temple may well have been reminders to Bai of the spiritual quests of these Buddhist priests with their constancy creating a nostalgic envy within himself. All these images, including those that follow, seem to be consistent with the slow but sure transition, in the poet’s life, from the dedicated Confucian persona to that of a life-weary recluse.

The trees, though, are tough and firm holding on to the hope of a rewarding transformation. Universal order is illusory as trees stand in disorder while their twig ends sing their coldly beautiful songs of evanescence, and sentient beings, like the hidden bird, await their imminent release from the clutches of worldly reality.

Bai’s vivid description of the glorious surroundings resembling a mountain ‘furrowed by a giant thumb with the temple placed within it’ may remind one of similar images from earlier

231 Waley (Temple), p.103
232 See Jinhua Chen, “The Statues and Monks of Shengshan Monastery: Money and Maitreyan Buddhism in Tang China”, Asia Major 19.2: p.144 where he states ‘Bai Juyi maintained a long-lasting friendship with a Shengshansi monk and two of his associates demonstrating his genuine interest in Buddhism and for this monastery. This may explain why he chose it as one of the four monasteries to which he sent a copy of his poem collections”. In this connection see also Jiu Tang Shu (舊唐書) 166, p. 4358.
poets, such as Yu Xin (庾信 513-581) who wrote a dedicatory prose poem for the Seven Buddha Cave at Maichisan (麥積山):\textsuperscript{233}

It is as if one were to mount a carriage and pierce the mountains, carving out great niches, bestriding the peak ridge, an infinite medley of stars overhead and all the land spinning around far below. The walls are covered with inscriptions taken from holy scripture; in the niches are multiplied the representations of the Buddhas. A Moon-Disc Palace is carved and a Hall of Mirrored Flowers. The wall of rock is cut across a broad face, and chambers carved in the darkness of the mountain peak.

At that time, Buddhism was writing a bright historical page with temples and caves being carved out of sheer mountains and hillsides with a such a passionate dedication that, whole families came out to gaze with awe at the sheer cliff, and to watch the masons, carpenters, plasterers and painters at work high up on the galleries, challenging each other, ad majorem gloriam dei, to feats of physical daring and technical skill, (the ultimate rewards of which were) rebirth in paradise awaiting both donors and craftsmen.\textsuperscript{234}

But by Bai’s time, this fervor seemed to have worn off and these holy places were no longer as well taken care of. The state of maintenance that our own poet may have encountered is aptly portrayed in this restatement of Du Fu’s Mountain Temple poem, also set in Maichisan.\textsuperscript{235}

In the remains of these abandoned temples, there are only a few monks left, the paths up to these mountain gardens are quite high. There are musk deer sleeping midst the rocks and bamboo, parrots peck at the golden peaches. Scholars have to cross jumbled up stones, cell-like rooms are installed by the precipices. The tiered pavilions rise up into the evening, for a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{233} Sullivan, pp.5-6
\item \textsuperscript{234} Ibid, p.4
\item \textsuperscript{235} 全唐詩 卷 225.54
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Nearing the Temple Precincts and Retrospection

At the Main Rest Place for guests we stopped, and went forward to sit down but not for an extended rest. Shortly we opened the Northern Door, a measureless space clearly opened up before us. Stroking the eaves the rainbow shreds and disintegrates, coiling around the rafters, the clouds circle around. Through a reddish sunlight interspersed with rain, overcast and clear skies forming similar flowing patches. In wild greenery, clustered grasses and trees, my field of vision taking in completely the plain of Qin.
Bai had not travelled this way before. It was a new but promising journey. It held out the promise of release from the sufferings of soul and spirit if he could but carry on. He wanted to rest yet also to move on with the embryonic stirrings of release growing ever more urgent.

The ‘Northern Door’ could refer to a window or door in the northern aspect of the room he was standing in but it could have been a spiritual reference to the great northern school of the Mahayana Chan sect236 within which Shen Xiu (神秀) championed the doctrine of gradualism through text-based studies and contemplation while Hui Neng (慧能) advocated immediate release through meditation. It was said that when Shakyamuni lay dying he had his head pillowed to the north (北枕) indicating the direction of his doctrinal views on the mode of nirvanic release.237

The subsequent idyllic scene connotes a semi-eccstatic experience as Bai describes the heavens themselves conspiring to impress him with their awesome natural beauty. So transported is he that objects of impressive size and grandeur like the whole plain of Qin, the Wei River and the Han...
Tombs seem much less imposing while fellow pilgrims far below appear as insignificant dots on a barely visible winding trail.

The Temple Up Close and Very Personal

Straight before us were a number of pagodas with wind-bells singing at their four corner-extremities. Pomelo-plant cornices together with doors and windows, numerous and precise in their gold and jade.

It is said in times past, *Jia Ye Fo* (the Buddha Kasyapa) sat in this place and achieved Nirvana. To this day his iron bowl is here, still, at the bottom, his hand (finger) traces are worn in.

To the West there opens the Jade Image Hall, a multitude of white Buddha statues sit with their shoulders close together.

We roused ourselves, shook the dust from our clothes and paid homage to these icy, snowy countenances. Like layered frost were the Buddhist monks’ robes, beaded hail were their glorious tresses.

We pressed closer together, on the look-out for ghost-like deeds, (but) these outward signs were neither carved nor engraved.

Next, we climbed to *Guan Yin’s* chamber, from a distance smelling the odours of wing celtis (sandalwood). At the top of the steps we took off our shoes and with restrained steps went up onto some clean mats.

Bai reverses his rearward gaze and advances into the treasure hall of his spiritual dreams, into the receiving and sending chambers of worthies who have fought the good fight and who entered into the
joy of their eternal bliss. With almost ecstatic imagery, the poet rhapsodizes over the auras of the immediate penultimate sound and light perfections pursuant to victory over (detachment from) life and death. One such hero, the Buddha Kashyapa (迦葉) was a pre-figure of Guatama Buddha and not to be confused with Kasyapa the disciple of Guatama. He supposedly lived about 600 billion years ago and attained Buddhahood status when he was 20,000 years old. His begging bowl remained to that day, in Bai Juyi’s mind, as perhaps possessing perpetual talismanic properties which would help him to reach nirvana (槃湼 nie pan) where Kashyapa now sits.

Bai’s artistic flourishes on the temple décor, and the personages represented therein, illustrate the significant influence of Buddhism on Tang scholars and poets by invariably having something laudable to say about the temple structure and ambience as well as about its founder, acolytes, deceased saints and benefactors. Both in this section and the next, Bai highlights salient architectural features while offering oblique platitudes to Buddhist saints like Guan Yin and Guatama. The former was ‘one of the self-denying bodhisattvas who abstained from entering Buddhahood so he could better assist erring humanity.’

The Jade Image Hall may be referring to an image of the Buddha (玉佛) with a series of other ‘lesser’ buddhas in conversation (白佛) with him. Before paying homage to these personages, Bai dramatically portrays ‘shaking off the world’s dust from their own clothes.’ The text itself (抖擻塵埃衣) could suggest that he divested himself of his own clothes. Certainly we see a hint the Chan ‘sudden

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239 Waley (Temple), p.105; Soothill p.316 describes Kashyapa Buddha as the third of the five Buddhas of the present kalpa and the sixth of the seven ancient Buddhas.
240 Soothill, p.256a
242 Waley(Temple), p.105.Guan Yin (觀音) is ageless and is venerated as an Immortal. She is sometimes referred to, in the West, as the Goddess of Mercy. In her male form she is known as known as Avalokitesvara.
243 Plate 34 ‘Buddhas and Worshippers’ in Sullivan’s text may well closely depict this scene.
release’ in the attempt to enliven and rouse one’s self to actively shake off secular encumbrances. Thus freed he seems then to appreciate the other worldly exquisiteness of some carvings, believing that these could not possibly have been done by unenlightened human hands. And thus unburdened he is able to more easily ascend to the temple of Guan Yin (觀音堂).\footnote{Waley (Temple) p.103. (Guan Yin (Avalokitesvara) was one of the self-denying bodhisattvas who abstained from entering Buddhahood in order better to serve erring humanity.)}

The Inner Sancta

On the six main hall pillars were arrayed jade mirrors, four seats had been laid out in hammered gold. The black night from its own bright light, needed not lamp or candle light. These numerous treasures together dipped and rose, high, green jade waist pendants and coral streamers. When the wind rose they sounded like heavenly music, the sound made as they touched each other like a graceful woman’s velvety walk. White pearls hang like congealed dew, red jewels dripping like blackish-red blood. Embellishing the Buddha’s bun-like hair, acting together as the seven treasure hat. In twin vases of white-coloured glaze, their expression like cold autumn waters. At a distance from the vases, we see buddhist relics revolving around like golden red pills. A jade flute, from what period is this? An Immortal presence bestowing this for Zhi Yuan (Jetavan). It blows a sound like the autumn’s crane, perhaps even making spirit immortals (maharishis) descend. It was in the middle of autumn, the fifteenth day of the month and a full

六楹排玉鏡，四座敷金箋。
黑夜自光明，不待燈燭燃。
眾寶互低昂，碧佩珊瑚幡。
風來似天樂，相觸聲珊珊。
白珠垂露凝，赤珠滴血殷。
點綴佛髻上，合為七寶冠。
雙瓶白琉璃，色若秋水寒。
隔瓶見舍利，圓轉如金丹。
玉笛何代物，天人施祇園。
吹如秋鶴聲，可以降靈仙。
是時秋方中，三五月正圓。
寶堂豁三門，金魄當其前。
The treasure hall’s three open gates, a golden spectre presented itself before me.
Both moon and jewels sent out sparks together, brilliant rays contending with a fresh beauty.
The moon shines and cools the heart and limbs of those it touches, the whole night long I didn’t want to sleep.

In this ‘Holy of Holies’ he reviews, in a seeming swoon of ecstasy, his spiritual pilgrimage fraught with doctrinal emblems blossoming forth in allegorical verse with the temple’s six pillars representing the 六節 or six stages of bodhisattva development; the jade mirror representing the ephemeral transiency of life with the jade alluding either to the Buddha (佛玉) or to the ring (玉環) worn in one of the hands of the ‘thousand-handed’ Guan Yin; the heavenly music resembling the sensuous movement of women’s velvety garments hinting at an arabesque towards the flute sounds of the Garden of Jetavan at which point Bai wishes for these sounds to have a leavening influence on still-earthbound spirits. Lingering on in the refreshment of his ecstatic mood, he reflected on the three generously open gates (trividha-dvara) representing purity of body, speech and thought, filling him with an incredible lightness of being. Being thus Dharma ‘qualified’, he possibly saw before him the golden phantasm of the indestructible Buddha (金剛身) followed by multi-coloured emanations of crystal pure light. Any residual fatigue in his earthly frame fell away, no need had he then of restful sleep.

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245 Soothill, p.133
246 Ibid, p.195
247 Near Benares, here Buddha preached most of his sutras and the first monastery was founded according to Waley(Temple) p.106. The Jetavaniyah (制多山部) are a Hinayana sect (Soothill, p.250).
248 Soothill, p.79
Beyond the Temple, Musings and Wonderments

At dawn I sought the Southern Pagoda Road, where disorderly bamboos hung down in beauty and grace. In the lonely forest I didn’t come upon anyone, a cold butterfly fluttered by. Mountain fruits whose names I did not know, hanging down and lushly lining both sides of the way. Enough here to cure any hunger or lack. I plucked and tasted them, some were sweet and some sour.

To the South of the road, the spirit of the Blue Dell, with purple umbrella and white paper (spirit) money. If, in the year, there was water on the land an edict went out to cause the people to grow ping fan (2 kinds of plants used in offerings). Using the land deliberately for peace and quiet, they dedicate offerings to the dead without meat, fish, or the smell of mutton (vegetarian foods proper for a monk to eat).

Four or five rocks are piled perilously high, uneven towering and trimmed only for the time being. What did the Divine Forces have in mind for all this, piling them on the cliff’s eastern slope. Deserted and slippery, no trace of humans, mosses speckled like a flowered scroll. I came to these stones and climbed them right to the top. (then) yawning almost beneath my feet, an unfathomably deep chasm.

I was quite dizzy and some of my friends took off on me, I did not dare bend my head to look. A wind arose from under the rocks, was very unkind to me (grabbed me) and twirled me about. My clothes fanned out like a feathered wing just about to embark on a lofting
flight. Precarious three-sided peaks, dagger-like and assembled like swords. Often white clouds passed by, breached through and revealing blue sky. In the north-west it was setting sun time, the evening sunlight, red hues all around. Extending far beyond the emerald green scroll-like screen, descended (the cinnabar tablet. In the south-east it was time for the moon to rise, the evening airs boundlessly darkened.

It may be that Bai Juyi sought out a buddhist stupa in which relics were often found. He could be allegorizing, suggesting the image of bamboos being ‘free’ to assume an unconstrained but appealing disorderly state. Bai’s use of simile finds prior saints in the guise of delicious fruits which satiate both thirst and hunger.

A local, non-buddhist, spirit with ‘white’ money, for use in the underworld, encourages the common people to sacrifice with special types of plants. Perhaps this will placate the ancestors and keep the land in peace. Neither fish nor meat nor mutton should be offered or eaten as befitting the practices of faithful monks who, one assumes, were vegetarians.

Bai is then mysteriously translated to a high place where he begins questioning the purposes of the Divine (Creative) Forces (造物力量) for the jagged majestic scenery which seems so permanent. This seeming reference to a ‘divine figure’ may, in fact, be referring only to gods who, in Buddhism, are themselves subject to karma rules. He was climbing mountainside rocks wondering why the ‘Great Architect’ made them that way when suddenly he experienced a Chan-like epiphany transporting him

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249 Some Mahayanists, where relics are concerned, may have been given to fanciful and wishful interpretations of some sutras. Buddha is purported, in the Mahaparinibbana Sutra, to have forbidden monks to have anything to do with the cult of relics, See Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought*, Routledge, 2000, pp. 257n, 258n.
beyond the permanency of the non-sentient world (mountains) into the nirvanic clarity of emptiness.

The imagery of his fantasy flight with majestic horizons bespeaks an altered spiritual state. The words and phrases he uses are quite reminiscent of prior poetic greats like Wang Wei who were similarly ecstatic about giving a figurative voice to the splendours of high-level, natural phenomena. From this vantage point Bai was now able to scrutinize the actions of the Atman of all creation motivating the great orbs of the universe. As for the night, it was but a cold and transient reflection of the elixir cinnabar tablet-shaped sun.

The Deep Pool and Nature’s Challenging Grandeur

From the one hundred zhang (approx. 330 meters) depth of the bluish-green pool (in the temple grounds) rise out the golden discs with writing on them. The Lan River’s colours resemble its name (indigo dye), day and night regularly babbling. With winding circuits it revolves, like green rings around the mountain’s curves, as I look down. Either it spreads to act as a slow stream, or it surges to act as a rushing torrent.

From the deepest and clearest recesses of the pool, float up the dragon’s frothy saliva. I worked my way down to it on my side, and perched precariously on the cliff-edge, it was quite difficult and dangerous. I grasped trailing plants while treading on trees fraught with crookedness, while below, one by one, some ape-like creatures were drinking by the mountain stream. In a whirl of snow arose a white egret, while in bright and beautiful movements the red sturgeon frolics. I decided to rest in this place to wash and rinse myself, clean up and go deal with some bodily vexations. Shallow or deep all was crystal clear, mind and...
The deep pool reflected the transience and cold evanescence of the moon. Cold, passing and illusory are they all, Bai may have thought.

Ecstatic images of his own spiritual transcendence thrust on him the opportunity, indeed the necessity, of facing putative bodhisattvas, but then of deciding to momentarily turn away from nirvanic release to minister to those still on their gnostic journey, to stimulate and encourage them towards enlightenment.

His eyes turned downward to the winding Lan River ethereally twisting and spiralling smoothly back to the world of men, passing through occasionally troubling rapids of life, affronting men’s hearts with the flood dragon’s saliva (蛟龍涎). Perhaps this stream represents the dharma path within which,
and from which, other non-human sentient beings, like the monkeys (猿), egrets (白鷺), and sturgeons (紅鱣) find release, through his example, to another karmic existence.

Within the river’s cleansing balm, Bai seems to derive Chan purging from the deceptions of thinking (腦) and ego deliberation (肝). In grateful wonderment, he seeks vainly for the source of this boon. In the midst of the Eastern Bank’s glorious jewels, Bai reflects on some past worthies, like Bian He of Chu, who were unrequited in their protestations of loyalty and service and whose radiance shone through the cloying world of men to the cold radiance of emptiness in which there is no further suffering.

This quest for moral purity may have seemed a little daunting as he viewed the highest peaks of the surrounding mountains, particularly the lofty White Lotus peak, lying just beyond the reach of mortal men.

Heroes of the Faith, Loyal in the Heart

It is said that in the past a master had said he would sit in deep meditation till he reached ‘emptiness’.

The place where he sat is called the ‘settled-heart’ stone, generations of elders have handed this down. However, I went back up to pay respects at the Ancestral Temple of the Immortals, tendrilled vines (still) grew (thick and) unbroken. In the past, it is said that Wang Shi ascended to the dark heavens and

Clouds have gone, Buddhist meditation follows. 虛雲逝，無生禪。

His name is the heart stone, elders passed it down. 虛名為心石，長老世相傳。

But I went to pay respects at the Immortal Shrine, vines still grew (thick and) unbroken. 卻上謁仙祠，蔓草生綿綿。

In the past, it is said that Wang Shi ascended to the dark heavens and 昔聞王氏子，羽化升上玄。

250 Chan, being meditatively non-textual, would minimize the efficacy of analytic thinking for ‘sudden enlightenment’ thus cautioning adherents that there is no need to tax one’s brain (不要用腦過度). Valuing ego and personal identity are, in the same vein, viewed as impediments to attaining enlightenment as illustrated in such psychological and emotional identifiers as ‘being heart-broken or terror-stricken’ (肝膽俱裂) or ‘being unsurpassed in valor’ (肝膽過人).

251 Bian He (卞和) of the Chu period suffered mutilation because he had offered to his prince a gem which the court experts had rejected but which afterwards, turned out to be genuine.
became immortal.

His westward terrace, where some medical herbs were drying in the sun on a terrace, still facing the zoysia pungens (a ‘magical’medical herb) field.

At times again on clear moonlit nights, we can hear up above the yellow crane’s call.

I turned and looked for the painted dragon hall, where (appeared) the mottled beards of two ancient men. One could think they hear a sermon time, a joyful celebration at the engraved altar.

Again returning to the spring (a place of repose), in the cave below, changing back into meandering dragons.

In front of the steps from a round hole in the stone, when rain is coming, there arose a lot of white smoke.

In the past, there was a Buddhist monk who copied scriptures, body still, heart pure and dedicated.

Moved by pigeons beyond those clouds, flying in flocks (beating) a thousand wings.

They came and added water to his inkstone bowl, then went and drank up springwater from the bottom of the cliff.

Each day three times they returned, each time regularly without fail.

When the book was finished, it was called Sage Holy Monk, his followers named him Yang Nan.

He chanted this lotus blossom Buddhist hymn, repeatedly and completely, innumerable times.

His body deteriorated but his mouth didn’t, until his tongue became a red lotus flower.

Today his skull bones are not seen, but the stone frame (where he sat) still

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exists.
Water colour drawings of Wu are (still)
on the walls, whose calligraphy colours
are still as fresh as before.
On a white screen is writing by Master
Chu, the ink colours as if freshly dried.
Spiritual occasions together with
unusual remains, looking around
without exhausting (what still is to be
seen).

Perhaps Bai was reflecting on the spiritual and emotional posture he would like to have found
himself in. It is very likely that he was still trying to control his passionate emotions and bring some
balance to them. We are very fortunate that he at least gave poetic voice to these mood variations since
it was considered rather unusual for scholars of his day to express their feelings the way he did. He
struggled very hard to bring some equilibrium to these proclivities only to run into a brick wall with
his two most obstinate passions, wine and music. He puts it this way in a couple of his poems;

Sorrow and joy only bring harm to my body and
spirit

I know my illnesses are caused by emotional
stress. (transl. en)

Reflecting on the ‘generation of elders’, who seemed to have managed their own emotional
stability, he pines for his own ‘settled heart stone’ (定心石) perhaps prompting the vow he made to
himself after the deaths of his children, daughter Golden Bells and son A-cui in his poem on Self-
Awareness (自覺二首)

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253 From 白香山集, 卷 9 (題贈定光上人)
254 Ibid, 卷 14 (病氣)
255 全唐詩 卷 433_31
I swear by the waters of wisdom, forever to wash away the world’s vexations.
I will not put myself again in an (emotional) bind with the ties of love of wife and children, even more not to plant the roots of melancholy and sorrow. (transl. en)

There is thus little doubt about Bai’s desire for a more detached emotional grounding, to be in a posture of peerless meditation, contemplation and self-abnegation, to develop an attitude of mind which was settled (Samadhi 定) and fixed on the Pure Land and its glories (定心三味).

In a burst of triumphant poetry he adds that others, like the Buddhist monk Wang Shi likely made it to nirvanic release, also the sage holy monk Yang Nan (杨難) who sang the sutras until his body withered and only his lips were left (身坏口不坏), formed into a red lotus flower.

In citing the great eight century painter Wu Daozi (吳道子 680-740) for his ever fresh Buddhist frescoes (定心三味) or the noted calligrapher Chu Suiliang (褚遂良 596-658) for the eternal subtlety of his lines, it is not quite clear whether it was their spiritual qualities or their works of art that Bai found so laudable. Perhaps they were just familiar images that resurrected themselves as he set his mind and feet towards home wishing that he could tarry longer in this spiritual tryst.

Reveries, Regrets, Return and Rededication

After wandering around for five whole days, I still wish to return and linger 一遊五晝夜，欲返仍盤桓。
some more.
I myself as a mountainraised person, by accident of my times, was dragged into the world’s net. Leading me along causing me to read books, pushing and pulling me to become an up-to-date efficient government official. Since then, I’ve climbed to the position of literary scholar and, once again, unworthy to be an Admonisher (in the Censorate). My clumsy forwardness (frankness) didn’t suit the times, rather useless and not earning the pay I got. Because of this I felt ashamed of myself and rather guarded, self-pitying and experiencing little enjoyment. Unintentionally my physical strength was sapped and, before my time, my physical frame became emaciated. Ever since I took off my hat pin and silk girdle (retired from official life), I began to feel distant from my misery and suffering. To the point now of wandering around streams and mountains, overflowing with mischievous self-indulgence. With unrestrained extravagance I break the trammels and fetters, and go where I want to with no let or hindrance. Like a fish released from its fishbowl into the sea, to go back again, no way, never! My body marked by a lay buddhist’s dress, my hand holding some writings by Nan Hua. Finally I’ve come to these hills to live, forever declining the world’s fringe. Myself now more than forty years old, henceforth living idly to my life’s end. If I should expect seventy years then there are still thirty years left to me.

我本山中人，誤為時網牽。
牵引使讀書，推挽令效官。
既登文字科，又忝諫諍員。
拙直不合時，無益同素餐。
以此自憤悱，戚戚常寡歡。
無成心力盡，未老形骸殘。
今來脫簪組，始覺離憂思。
及為山水遊，彌得縱疏頑。
野麋斷騄縛，行走無拘攣。
池魚放入海，一往何時還。
身著居士衣，手把南華篇。
終來此山住，永謝區中緣。
我今四十餘，從此終身閑。
若以七十期，猶得三十年。

(transl. en)
The ‘accident’ that Bai refers to as having dragged him into the world’s net may or may not have had anything to do with bad karma, or by life choices made by his parents, or by himself. Rather it might have just been a legitimate statement of indifference and self-perceived incompetence that the poet genuinely felt. However this sense of shame and self-pity cast its dismal blanket over him, it was what eventually affected his physical health and robbed him of some of life’s joys.

Later on, back in his own Confucian universe, the poet pleaded for and received permission to retire from public life claiming ill health. Almost immediately he says he began to feel better and exults in being able to wander around mountains and streams doing what he wanted without let or hindrance. He seems to have donned some sort of lay Buddhist dress and retained a copy of the Nan Hua (of the Zhuangzi?) as a constant companion. There was no way he was going to return to his Confucian-style fishbowl. Prophetically, he anticipates a seventy year life span with thirty more years to go. He lived until he was 74!!

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258 This was probably a written testament from Hui Neng’s southern section of the Southern Sect (南宗) or Bodhidharma School. The phrase (南顿北渐) meaning ‘southern immediate, northern gradual’ refers to the method of enlightenment which separated the two schools.
CHAPTER VI: Conclusions

Bai Juyi’s story was of an unusual man at an extraordinary time. He rose from the conventional to perform the extraordinary then proceeded to achieve the unheard of. From modest beginnings, he was swept along by his literary abilities to the top ranks of the Tang intelligentsia guaranteeing, for himself and his family, security and recognition.

Confucian dogma gradually yielded to maturity and the spiritually softening influences of Buddhist compassion and the assurances of transcendent glory in his lifetime. His poetic hobbies transformed into weapons of didactic righteousness, from useful skills they became resonances of bucolic delight giving expression to feelings both mundane and transcendent. Never before had a high official, with such courtly presence, proclaimed himself a professional poet, a karma inheritor of uncountable moral consciences of their ages like Qu Yuan so many centuries prior.

Promoted by Xianzong over the heads of other more senior officials, he used his superior prose/poetic skills to frame important official documents and influence the Emperor, as much as possible, to make morally wise decisions in the management of the country’s human and material resources. He had mixed success in doing this since his zeal in using his poetic gifts for social criticisms and in writing memorials was very effective though sometimes, being too openly critical, getting himself and others into trouble, sometimes resulting in exiles. Such was the case with his colleague Yuan Zhen with whom he formed a very close and inspiring friendship. Together they created their own genre of poetry which found its way into the hearts and minds of the whole country.
Inexorably, he became more and more disenchanted with court intrigues, especially the political machinations of the emperor’s eunuchs, and sought emotional release and spiritual succour in Buddhism.

While abhorring this religion’s material excesses, he was fascinated by the intellectualism of its ideas and its iconography. Gradually, he veered towards the non-text oriented blandishments of Chan, particularly the brand that promoted ‘instant enlightenment’. This explains the epiphanal flavour of Bai’s spiritual exultations in the precincts of the Wu Zhen Temple.

True to the emotionally conservative tenor of Confucian scholar-intellectualism, he became ashamed of his proclivities for effusive outbursts, such as in the case of grieving for his daughter Golden Bells, and sought in Buddhism and Chan the fruits of detachment that would mute these disturbing emotional perturbations. Because of, or despite, these ‘redeeming’ personality qualities, he was very concerned about the servility of women in Tang society as well as the unfair and patently corrupt behaviour of some government officials and eunuchs towards the common people.

Though he often berated his own skills and competencies, his performance as court censor, local administrative official and district governor earned for him some commendation. It is arguable that he deliberately used this self-deprecation to diplomatically avoid high political positions which could pose great danger to him and his family in the world of local level politics and sycophantic court machinations.

Bai Juyi’s Temple Poem is, to this author, an autobiography of the ‘pilgrim’s progress’ of an earnest man’s passage through life trying to leave society better than he found it. The poetic skills and passions that he used to express these desires, coupled with a proprietary compulsion
that his words be preserved for posterity, have happily bequeathed to us today a fuller knowledge of the temper of his times.
CHAPTER VII: Suggestions for Further Study

It would be unnatural for any discussion of such an important historical and literary figure as Bai Juyi to not acknowledge possible avenues of research tangential to this brief treatment of his life and poetry in such an important, some would say epochal, period of Chinese literary history.

Regretfully, space in this essay did not allow for any discussion of the meters and styles with which Bai Juyi wrote his poems. These contribute as much, if not more, to the literary and emotional interpretation of his verse. He wrote often on how ‘good’ poetry should be written and deserved the belated plaudits of succeeding generations that he indeed was medieval China’s first professional poet.

Modern day advocates of social equality for women might be encouraged to hear more details from this ‘this eighth century voice’ challenging the entrenched Confucian attitudes of his day which relegated women to subservient and demeaning sexuality roles. A male voice attempting to soften the somewhat harsh sexist tones of modern day writers such as Germaine Greer and Margaret Atwood could benefit from the sympathetic tones of some of Bai Juyi’s poetry concerning women.

Arthur Waley and Eugene Feifel have written in some detail about the legal and administrative aspects of Bai Juyi’s official career including some of his judicial renderings as censor, and as a district governor. It would be interesting to see more study done of ‘Bai the Legal Officer’, of his judicial decision-making and how efficiently and wisely he took account of
the Tang Code’s penal differentiations according to the various social groupings such as gender, official status, age and mental capacity in giving judgments.

Regrettably little is known or preserved about the musical rhythms, beats and cadences to which some of Bai’s poetry may have been set. From our knowledge of Han Yue Fu and Bai’s own Xin Yue Fu poetry, it is tantalizing to think there may have been some musician-lyricist teams at work during the Tang period but no records exist to substantiate this. Certainly Bai’s moving Pipa poem, involving some of the well known instruments of that period, coupled with a knowledge of the prevalent poetry beat patterns, could give an efficient start to an intensive study on probable musical scores. Perhaps a very achievable study could be broached on the relationship between the relationship of the Chinese poetry and music of the day with contemporary thought.

Lastly, Buddhist influences have made profound changes to Chinese life and thought. There seems to be still many possible areas of study open to inquiry including, to mention only one, the influence of Buddhist musical and liturgical expression on Chinese intellectual thought through to the end of China’s medieval period.
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APPENDIX A: Chronology of the Life of Bai Juyi 易居白 (772-846 AD)\textsuperscript{259}

772 Born Feb.28 in Xin Zheng (鄭心), a small town in Honan (南河), 16 years after the An Lu-shan (山祿安) rebellion; Descended from a long line of petty bureaucrats; Grew up in an age of political disorder; childhood and youth spent in poverty and insecurity.

794 His father Bai Ji Geng (庚季白), died at Xiang Yang (陽襄) in northern Hubei (北河) where he had served as an assistant governor.

798 Passed his Provincial Examination at Xuan Zhou (州宣)

800 Passed the Advanced Scholar (士進) examination, as the 4\textsuperscript{th} among 19 candidates. He was the first in his family to do so and guaranteed him a brilliant career potential.

801 Passed the Pan Ba Cui (萃拔判) examination which tested one’s ability to form obtuse legal judgments (判).

803-805 Collator of Texts in the Palace Library (Bi Shu Sheng Jiao Shu Lang 郎書校省書袐)

806 Special Imperial Examination were prepared for Bai and Yuan dealing with questions framed by the Emperor himself (Xian Zong 宗憲 806-821) relating to current problems of State. Likely, as a consequence, Bai was appointed Clerical supervisor (Xian Wei 慰縣) at Zhou-Zhi (厔盩) near Chang-An (安長)

807 Collator and Arranger in the Hall of Assembled Worthies at Chang-an (Ji Xian Jiao Li 理校賢集)

807 Made a member of the illustrious Hanlin Academy (Han Lin Xue Shi 士學林翰).

808-810 Imperial Censor to the Left (遺拾左) the political apex of his career. Salary 25,000 cash per month. Acted as a Critic in the State Chancellery; critiqued administration and the Sovereign policies as his Confucian-oriented conscience dictated; composed his most important poems of social criticisms (Xin Yue Fu 府樂新) about sixty in number.

\textsuperscript{259} These details from Feifel’s Po Juyi As A Censor pp20-21
810 Intendant of the Metropolitan Finances Jing Zhao Hu Cao Can Jun (軍參曹戶兆京)

811-814 Resigned to observe the official mourning period for his deceased mother at Xia Gui (邽下) the Bai family home in Wei Cun (村渭) above the Wei He River (河渭).

814 Appointed as Advisor-to-the-Left of the Crown Prince (Tai Zì Zuo Zan Shan Da Fu (夫大善贊左子太).

815 Transferred (banished?), at the instigation of political enemies after the assassination of Wu Yuan Heng (蘅元武), to serve until 818 as Marshall of Jiang-chou (Jiāng Zhōu Sì Ma 馬司洲江) a minor administrative post along the Yangtze River.

818-820 Promoted and assigned as Governor of Zhong Zhou in Sichuan (Sì Chuān Zhōng Zhōu Čī Shí 史刺州忠川). The political fortunes of friends at the capital in Chang-An closely affected the assignments he received.

820-821 Served at Chang-An (安長) in different posts. The eunuchs gained power in 821 with the accession of Emperor Mu-tsung (宗穆 821-825), and seven of the next eight emperors were indebted to their support. The influence of the eunuchs and factionalism came to characterize Chang-an politics, inducing Bai Juyi to prefer provincial to capital politics.

i) Assistant Secretary for the Supervision of the Barriers (Sì Mén Yuán Wài Láng 郎外員門司)

ii) First Secretary in the Bureau of State Guests (Zhu Ke Láng Zhōng 客主中郎)

iii) Grand Secretary in the Imperial Secretariat (Zhōng Shū She Ren 舍書中人)

iv) Honorary title of Grand Pillar of the State (Shāng Zū Guō 國柱上)

822 Governor of Hang-Zhou (Hāng Zhōu Čī Shí 史刺州杭), a post which Bai thoroughly enjoyed and in which he had considerable personal leisure.

824 Chief Gentleman-in-Waiting to the Crown Prince in Loyang (Lúō Yang Tai Zi Zuo Shù Zì 阳落 子庶左子太). Approaching middle age, Bai bought a house in Loyang and regarded this secondary capital as his home away from home.

Governor of Suzhou (Sū Zhōu Čī Shí 史刺州蘇) where he was quite busy. Jing Zong (宗敬 825-827) was emperor. Later he applied for sick leave to get a respite from his work.
827 Head of the Palace Library in Chang-an (Chang An Bi Shu Jian 監書秘安長). Wen Zong (宗文 827-841) was on the throne.

Vice-President of the Board of Punishment (Ministry of Justice) Xing Bu Shi Lang (郎侍郎刑).  

828-33 Served at Loyang in several posts such as;  
i) 829 Advisor to the Crown Prince (Tai Zi Bin Ke 客賓子太) (3,1)  
ii) 831 Governor of Loyang Province (He Nan Yin 尹南河) (3,2)  
iii) 833 Again advisor to the Crown Prince (3,1) 80-90,000 cash per month.  

836 Emperor Wen Zong (宗文 827-841). Bai is refused the governorship of Dong Zhou (Dong Zhou Ci Shi 史刺州同). Appointed Second Tutor to the Crown Prince Tai Zi Shao Fu (傅少子太). Ennobled as Marquis of Feng Yi Xian (侯縣翊馮) with the revenues of 300 households.  

Suffered a stroke which crippled his left leg. He downsized his home and property, releasing horses and concubines, to reduce household expenses.  

Bai officially retired on a half-salary pension.  

841 New Emperor Wu-Zong (宗武 841-847)  

Bai resigned from official life as president of the Ministry of Justice (Xing Bu Shang Shu 書尚刑).  

Most of the poetry and verse written in these last few years of his life were lost. He wrote a preface to the end of his collected works in 845, stating that there were 3480 items (of poetry and prose) in all. The most complete extant edition contains 3578 items.  

Bai died at Loyang, requesting that he not be buried at the family home in Xia Gui (邽下) but at the Xiang Shan (山香) monastery outside of Loyang. His burial place was thronged with visitors. He was given a posthumous title as Vice President of the Office of State Affairs (Shang Shu Zuo Pu Ye 僕左書尚 射).
APPENDIX B: Unannotated Translation and Interpretation of You Wu Zhen
Si Shi (詩寺真悟遊) 260

Expectantly Approaching the Temple Mountain

The autumn of Yuan He’s ninth year, the eight month, the moon’s first quarter.
I made an outing to the temple of Wu Zhen on Wang Shun’s hills.
Going to the mountain still 4 or 5 li away, I first heard the pleasant murmur of flowing waters.
From here, leaving my chariot and horse, I began to wade thru a bend in the Blue Stream.
My hand leaning on a green bamboo staff, feet treading on shoals of white pebbly stones.
Gradually a strange detachment (greeted) my ears, hearing (no longer) the noise of man’s world.

Leaving One World for Another

From the bottom of the mountain looking to the top, at first doubting it could be climbed.
Who knew there was a path in there, twisting and bending, leading to the mountain’s craggy top?
Our first breather was under the flagstaff, another rest beside the stone shrine.
The shrine room’s length was over 12 meters, the entrance way wasn’t bolted or (even) closed.
I bowed my head to peep in but couldn’t see anyone, stoney hair hung down like women's tumbling hair.
White bats were frightened and took off, with a pair flying off like tumbling snow.
Turning my head and gazing over at the temple door, a green precipitous valley-like walkway lined with bright red wall fixtures.
It was as if a thumb had furrowed the mountain-side and placed a temple in the middle of it.
Within the gate there was no level ground, the land was narrow with a broad empty sky.
There were rooms and verandas together with terraces and halls under the heights above, following the ridges and peaks.
On rocky plateaus with no earth on them, there were many skinney-looking trees and shrubs but they were tough and firm.
Roots and stems tightly enfold the rocks, curling around them like worms and snakes.
Pines and Osmanthus stood in disordered rows, through the four seasons fragrant and lush.
On the slender,delicate and green twig ends, pure blown musical sounds emanate like bowstrings in the wind.
Where neither sunlight nor moonlight penetrate, greens and shades each other.

260 全唐詩 卷 429_33
Nearing the Temple Precincts and Retrospection

At the *Main Rest Place* for guests we stopped, and went forward to sit down but not for an extended rest.
Shortly we opened the Northern Door, a measureless space clearly opened up before us.
Stroking the eaves the rainbow shreds and disintegrates, coiling around the rafters, the clouds circle around.
Thru a reddish sunlight interspersed with rain, overcast and clear skies forming similar flowing patches.
In wild greenery, clustered grasses and trees, my field of vision taking in completely the plain of Qin.
The Wei River was too minute to see, the Han Tombs small like a closed fist.
While looking back at the path (we had taken), a reflection of a windy, twisting red fence.
Distinctly on the mountain were people, one following another they could distantly be seen.

The Temple Up Close and Very Personal

Straight before us were a number of pagodas with wind-bells singing at their four corner-extremities.
Pomelo-plant cornices together with doors and windows, numerous and precise in their gold and jade.
It is said in times past, *Jia Ye Fo* (the Buddha Kasyapa) sat in this place and achieved Nirvana.

The Inner Sancta

On the six main hall pillars were arrayed jade mirrors, four seats had been laid out in hammered gold.
The black night from its own bright light, needed not lamp or candle light. These numerous treasures together dipped and rose, high, green jade waist pendants and coral streamers. When the wind rose they sounded like heavenly music, the sound made as they touched each other like a graceful woman’s velvety walk. White pearls hang like congealed dew, red jewels dripping like blackish-red blood. Embellishing the Buddha’s bun-like hair, acting together as the seven treasure hat.

In twin vases of white-coloured glaze, their expression like cold autumn waters. At a distance from the vases, we see buddhist relics revolving around like golden red pills. A jade flute, from what period is this? An Immortal presence bestowing this for Zhi Yuan (Jetavan). It blows a sound like the autumn’s crane, perhaps even making spirit immortals (mahrishis) descend. It was in the middle of autumn, the fifteenth day of the month and a full moon. The treasure hall’s three open gates, a golden spectre presented itself before me. Both moon and jewels sent out sparkles together, brilliant rays contending with a fresh beauty. The moon shines and cools the heart and limbs of those it touches, the whole night long I didn’t want to sleep.

Beyond the Temple, Musings and Wonderments

At dawn I sought the Southern Pagoda Road, where disorderly bamboos hung down in beauty and grace. In the lonely forest I didn’t come upon anyone, a cold butterfly fluttered by. Mountain fruits whose names I did not know, hanging down and lushly lining both sides of the way. Enough here to cure any hunger or lack. I plucked and tasted them, some were sweet and some sour.

To the South of the road, the spirit of the Blue Dell, with purple umbrella and white paper (spirit) money. If, in the year, there was water on the land an edict went out to cause the people to grow ping fan (2 kinds of plants used in offerings). Using the land deliberately for peace and quiet, they dedicate offerings to the dead without meat, fish, or the smell of mutton (vegetarian foods proper for a monk to eat). Four or five rocks are piled perilously high, uneven towering and trimmed only for the time being.

What did the Divine Forces have in mind for all this, piling them on the cliff’s eastern slope. Deserted and slippery, no trace of humans, mosses speckled like a flowered scroll. I came to these stones and climbed them right to the top. (then) yawning almost beneath my feet, an unfathomably deep chasm. I was quite dizzy and some of my friends took off on me, I did not dare bend my head to look. A wind arose from under the rocks, was very unkind to me (grabbed me) and twirled me about.

六楹排玉鏡，四座敷金鈿。
六楹排玉鏡，合為七寶冠。
黑夜自光明，不待燈燭燃。
黑夜自光明，不待燈燭燃。
眾寶互低昂，碧佩珊瑚幡。
眾寶互低昂，碧佩珊瑚幡。
風來似天樂，相觸聲珊珊。
風來似天樂，相觸聲珊珊。
白珠垂露凝，赤珠滴血殷。
白珠垂露凝，赤珠滴血殷。
點綴佛髻上，統為七寶冠。
點綴佛髻上，統為七寶冠。
雙瓶白琉璃，色若秋水寒。
雙瓶白琉璃，色若秋水寒。
隔瓶見舍利，圓轉如金丹。
隔瓶見舍利，圓轉如金丹。
玉笛何代物，天人施祗園。
玉笛何代物，天人施祗園。
吹如秋鶴聲，可以降靈仙。
吹如秋鶴聲，可以降靈仙。
是時秋方中，三五月正圓。
是時秋方中，三五月正圓。
寶堂豁三門，金魄當其前。
寶堂豁三門，金魄當其前。
月與寶相射，晶光爭鮮妍。
月與寶相射，晶光爭鮮妍。
照人心骨冷，竟夕不欲眠。
照人心骨冷，竟夕不欲眠。

曉尋南塔路，亂竹低憐娟。
林幽不逢人，寒蝶飛翩翩。
山果不識名，離離夾道蕃。
山果不識名，離離夾道蕃。
足以療饑乏，摘嘗味甘酸。
足以療饑乏，摘嘗味甘酸。
道南藍穀神，紫傘白紙錢。
道南藍穀神，紫傘白紙錢。
若歲有水旱，詔使修蘋蘩。
若歲有水旱，詔使修蘋蘩。
以地清淨故，獻奠無齋膻。
以地清淨故，獻奠無齋膻。
危石疊四五，嵬欹且TRGL。
危石疊四五，嵬欹且TRGL。
造物者何意，堆在岩東偏。
造物者何意，堆在岩東偏。
冷滑無人跡，苔點如花箋。
冷滑無人跡，苔點如花箋。
我來登上頭，下臨不測淵。
我來登上頭，下臨不測淵。
目眩手足掉，不敢低頭看。
目眩手足掉，不敢低頭看。
My clothes fanned out like a feathered wing just about to embark on a lofting flight.
Precarious three-sided peaks, dagger-like and assembled like swords.
Often white clouds passed by, breached thru and revealing blue sky.
In the north-west it was setting sun time, the evening sunlight, red hues all around.
Extending far beyond the emerald green scroll-like screen, descended (the cinnabar tablet).
In the south-east it was time for the moon to rise, the evening airs boundlessly darkened.

The Deep Pool and Nature’s Challenging Grandeur

From the one hundred zhang(approx.330meters) depth of the bluish-green pool (in the temple grounds) rise out the golden discs with writing on them. The Lan River’s colours resembles its name (indigo dye), day and night regularly babbling.
With winding circuits it revolves, like green rings around the mountain’s curves, as I look down.
Either it spreads to act as a slow stream, or it surges to act as a rushing torrent.
From the deepest and clearest recesses of the pool, float up the dragon’s frothy saliva.
I worked my way down to it on my side, and perched precariously on the cliff-edge, it was quite difficult and dangerous.
I grasped trailing plants while treading on trees fraught with crookedness, while below, one by one, some ape-like creatures were drinking by the mountain stream.
In a whirl of snow arose a white egret, while in bright and beautiful movements the red sturgeon frolics.
I decided to rest in this place to wash and rinse myself, clean up and go deal with some bodily vexations.
Shallow or deep all was crystal clear, mind and body could be reflected on.
But entranced by the stream’s clarity, I looked to its bottom, longing to search for, while not knowing its source.
The Eastern Bank is rich with strange stones, like an accumulated brick-work of cheap dark green gems.
Warm and smooth expressing outwardly, and containing in itself, precious yufan jade gems.
Bian He died long ago, fine gems moreover are often cast aside.
Sometimes a radiance is discharged, linking the night with the stars and the moon.
At the central dome of the highest peaks, leans the sky on a reddish black pillar.
If a (spotted lizard?) can’t climb it, how can I be able to clamber and grope up it?
At the top is the White Lotus Pool, a plain white flower covering the clear billows.
I’ve heard the name but could not reach it, the place in question not being in the world of men.
Then again there was a flat rock, big like a square shaped brick.
Stuck in halfway up the cliff, and hanging down ten thousand ren (80,000ft) from it.
Heroes of the Faith, Loyal in the Heart

It is said that in the past a master had said he would sit in deep meditation till he reached ‘emptiness’.

The place where he sat is called the ‘settled-heart’ stone, generations of elders have handed this down.

However, I went back up to pay respects at the Ancestral Temple of the Immortals, tendrilled vines (still) grew (thick and) unbroken.

In the past, it is said that Wang Shi ascended to the dark heavens and became immortal.

His westward terrace, where some medical herbs were drying in the sun on a terrace, still facing the zoysia pungens (a ‘magical’ medical herb) field.

At times again on clear moonlit nights, we can hear up above the yellow crane’s call.

I turned and looked for the painted dragon hall, where (appeared) the mottled beards of two ancient men.

One could think they hear a sermon time, a joyful celebration at the engraved altar.

Again returning to the spring (a place of repose), in the cave below, changing back into meandering dragons.

In front of the steps from a round hole in the stone, when rain is coming, there arose a lot of white smoke.

In the past, there was a Buddhist monk who copied scriptures, body still, heart pure and dedicated.

Moved by pigeons beyond those clouds, flying in flocks (beating) a thousand wings.

They came and added water to his inkstone bowl, then went and drank up springwater from the bottom of the cliff.

Each day three times they returned, each time regularly without fail.

When the book was finished, it was called Sage Holy Monk, his followers named him Yang Nan.

He chanted this lotus blossom Buddhist hymn, repeatedly and completely, innumerable times.

His body deteriorated but his mouth didn’t, until his tongue became a red lotus flower.

Today his skull bones are not seen, but the stone frame (where he sat) still exists.

Water colour drawings of Wu are (still) on the walls, whose calligraphy colours are still as fresh as before.

On a white screen is writing by Master Chu, the ink colours as if freshly dried.

Spiritual occasions together with unusual remains, looking around without exhausting (what still is to be seen).

Reveries, Regrets, Return and Rededication

After wandering around for five whole days, I still wish to return and linger some more.

I myself as a mountain-raised person, by accident of my times, was dragged into the world’s net.

Leading me along causing me to read books, pushing and pulling me to

雲有過去師，坐得無生禪。

號為定心石，長老世相傳。

卻上謁仙祠，蔓草生綿綿。

昔聞王氏子，羽化升上玄。

其西曬藥台，猶對芝朮田。

時復明月夜，上聞黃鶴言。

回尋畫龍堂，二叟鬢髮斑。

想見聽法時，歡喜禮印壇。

復歸泉窟下，化作龍蜿蜒。

階前石孔在，欲雨生白煙。

往有寫經僧，身靜心精專。

感彼雲外鴿，群飛千翩翩。

來添硯中水，去吸岩底泉。

一日三往復，時節長不愆。

經成號聖僧，弟子名楊難。

誦此蓮花偈，數滿百億千。

身壞口不壞，舌根如紅蓮。

顱骨今不見，石函尚存焉。

粉壁有吳畫，筆彩依舊鮮。

素屏有褚書，墨色如新幹。

靈境與異跡，周覽無不殫。

一遊五晝夜，欲返仍盤桓。

我本山中人，誤為時網牽。
become an up-to-date efficient government official.
Since then, I’ve climbed to the position of literary scholar and, once again, unworthy to be an Admonisher (in the Censorate).
My clumsy forwardness (frankness) didn’t suit the times, rather useless and not earning the pay I got.
Because of this I felt ashamed of myself and rather guarded, self-pitying and experiencing little enjoyment.
Unintentionally my physical strength was sapped and, before my time, my physical frame became emaciated.
Ever since I took off my hat pin and silk girdle (retired from official life), I began to feel distant from my misery and suffering.
To the point now of wandering around steams and mountains, overflowing with mischievous self-indulgence.

With unrestrained extravagance I break the trammels and fetters, and go where I want to with no let or hindrance.
Like a fish released from its fishbowl into the sea, to go back again, no way, never!

My body marked by a lay buddhist’s dress, my hand holding some writings by Nan Hua.
Finally I’ve come to these hills to live, forever declining the world’s fringe.
Myself now more than forty years old, henceforth living idly to my life’s end.
If I should expect seventy years then there are still thirty years left to me.

(transl. en)