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Empire's Blue Highways:

Li Daoyuan's *Commentary on the River Classic*

ABSTRACT:

This article examines the *Commentary on the River Classic* (*Shuijing zhu* 水經注) by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527), an official of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), and proposes a reconstruction of the textual ecology of *Shuijing zhu* from two perspectives that seek to shed light on the meaning and significance of this massive work. The first perspective is to contextualize Li's work in the commentarial tradition and draw attention both to the constraints faced by the commentator and to the creative potential of a commentary in its relating to the original text. The second is to put Li's work in conversation with contemporary southern writings on landscape and highlight the unique mode of space perception and representation that underlies this work. The article argues that Li Daoyuan constructs an infrastructure of rivers based on an imperial vision. Li's riverine system may be seen as a powerful emblem of the medieval Sui and Tang polities with their great canals that supplemented the rivers.

KEYWORDS:

Li Daoyuan, Shuijing zhu, empire, history, space perception, space representation, landscape writing, commentary

How did people think about imperial space in premodern times? By boundaries and borders, no doubt, but perhaps even more by routes and rivers. Rivers moved people and materials around, they transported grain to the capital, they spread imperial edicts and disseminated news to distant parts of the empire, and they extended imperial control and power. The sixth century saw a monumental work, the *Commentary on the River Classic* (*Shuijing zhu* 水經注), which was centrally concerned with rivers and the space defined by rivers. It was produced by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527), an official of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534), which ruled much of northern China during the period commonly known as the Northern and Southern Dynasties.

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Shuijing zhu provides a treasure trove of information for the study of early-medieval Chinese history and historical geography.¹ It has also been regarded by literary scholars as a source of outstanding landscape representations.² In the present article, I propose a reconstruction of its textual ecology from two angles that are not commonly adopted in what some scholars call *Li xue* 酈學 (Li Daoyuan Studies). First, I highlight the *commentarial* nature of Li Daoyuan's work and stress its subsidiary character, calling equal attention to the constraints faced by the commentator and to the creative potential of a commentary in its relation to the original text. Second, I put the work in conversation with contemporary writings on landscape and, by doing so, go beyond studying Li Daoyuan's citation of geographical sources. Such juxtaposition, as I will demonstrate, illuminates the mode of space perception and representation underlying *Shuijing zhu* as much as it sheds light on southern landscape writings.

The most important questions to consider are the meaning, and significance, of the composition of such a massive tome, which stood out even in an age of prolific geographical writing. To answer these questions, we must interrogate *Shuijing zhu* in a broader context and unpack its implications in an era when the Northern Wei and the southern regimes competed fiercely with each other on political, military, and cultural planes. In the ostensibly impersonal commentary, we can nevertheless hear the commentator speaking to us in an insistent first-person voice, sometimes forcefully, sometimes intimately, sometimes implicitly and with a swath of loud silence, as he controls and manipulates the reader's perception of a given river by granting it more commentary, or less – such textual size being wholly unrelated to the size or prominence of that river itself. Ultimately, Li Daoyuan constructs

¹ See, e.g., Jörg Henning Hüsemann, *Das Altertum vergegenwärtigen: Eine Studie zum Shuijing zhu des Li Daoyuan* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2017); Bao Yuanhang 鮑遠航, *Shuijing zhu yu Wei Jin nanbeichao dili wenxue wenxian yanjiu* 水經注與魏晉南北朝地理文學文獻研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2019); and chaps. 4–5 of D. Jonathan Felt, *Structures of the Earth: Metageographies of Early Medieval China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Asia Center, 2021).

² The view that *Shuijing zhu* should be read for landscape appreciation was promoted by the commentator Tan Yuanchun 譚元春 (1586–1637), who lamented the scholarly study of this work as “hideous notes of philology 考核醜記.” See Zheng Dekun 鄭德坤, comp., *Shuijing zhu yanjiu shiliao chubian* 水經注研究史料初編, in Wu Tianren 吳天任, comp., *Shuijing zhu yanjiu shiliao huibian* 水經注研究史料匯編 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1984) 1, p. 46. One of the earliest works on Li Daoyuan's landscape representation is Fan Wenlan's 范文瀾 *Shuijing zhu xiejing wenchao* 水經注寫景文鈔 (Beijing: Pushe, 1929), a selection of landscape depictions. For recent studies, see, for instance, Zhang Beibei 張蓓蓓, “Li Daoyuan's Humanistic Concerns in *Shuijing zhu*” 由水經注看酈道元的人道人文關懷, in *Chengda Zhongwen xuebao* 成大中文學報 29 (2010), pp. 23–50; Xu Zhongyuan 徐中原, *A Study of Shuijing zhu* 水經注研究 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe 2012).

an infrastructure of rivers fundamentally based on an imperial vision of the world, a network of waterways that connect distant places together, sometimes, as we will see, through textual associations alone. The waterways may have been of ink and the unified empire still largely imaginary at this historical juncture; but the riverine system may be regarded as a powerful emblem of the medieval Sui and Tang polities with their great canals that supplemented the rivers.

READING *SHUIJING ZHU* AS LITERATURE VS. A LITERARY READING OF *SHUIJING ZHU*

Shuijing zhu is a curious creation. The original work being commented upon, the *River Classic*, is purportedly a Han-era work, with interpolations from as late as the third century, recording 137 rivers in laconic language.³ Li Daoyuan, a Northern Wei official with a reputation for cruelty and erudition, composed a forty-*juan* (“scrolls” or “chapters”) commentary on it.⁴ Two things are habitually brought up in discussing the commentary. The first is that the original text of about 10,000 characters swells to approximately 300,000 characters when Li’s text is considered, and 1,252 waterways, besides numerous place names, are mentioned in the commentary.⁵ Second, the main part of

³ For a discussion and a useful list of bibliographic entries on the *River Classic* itself, see Zheng, comp., *Shuijing zhu yanjiu*, pp. 1–3. In English, see Hans Bielenstein’s “Notes on the *Shui ching*,” in *BMFEA* 65 (1993), pp. 257–83. A note about translation: I see no reason why *jing* must be translated into “guideline” or “guide” (Hüsemann, “*Shuijing zhu*,” p. 311; Felt, *Structures*, p. 279, n. 21) instead of “classic,” since the word *jing* is widely employed from early times to designate highly specialized treatises on such a subject as acupuncture, horse physiognomy, cattle, tea, and so forth, indicating simply an authoritative work of outstanding quality (just as the English word “classic” does), and is certainly not limited to canonical works in intellectual or religious traditions. All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁴ In the dynastic history *Wei shu* 魏書 compiled by Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572), Li Daoyuan’s biography appears in the “Biographies of Cruel Officials” 酷吏傳. See *Wei shu* (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980) 89, pp. 1925–26. The current version of Li Daoyuan’s commentary in forty *juan* is incomplete and riddled with textual problems. The main editions referred to in this article are *Shuijing zhu shu* 水經注疏, with commentary by Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 and Xiong Huizhen 熊會貞, coll. Duan Xizhong 段熙仲 and Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1989; hereafter cited as *SJZS*); and *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi* 水經注校釋, coll. Chen Qiaoyi (Hangzhou: Hangzhou daxue daxue chubanshe, 1999; hereafter, *SJZJS*). I consider the former, with its more useful notes, the better edition; Chen Qiaoyi’s *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi*, though more accessible to modern readers, is based on the so-called Palace Edition 殿本 collated by the Qing scholar Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), and some of Dai Zhen’s “corrections” are disputable. For a concise English account of the textual history of *Shuijing zhu*, see the entry “*Shuijing zhu*” by J. Henning Hüsemann, in Cynthia Chennault, Keith N. Knapp, Alan J. Berkowitz, and Albert E. Dien, eds., *Early Medieval Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2015), pp. 312–14.

⁵ The numbers of the rivers cited here are given in *Tang liudian* 唐六典 (completed in 739), and thus represent the *Shuijing zhu* version as seen in the eighth century; rpt. *Yingyin Wenxuan ge Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書, vol. 595 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), j. 7, p. 81.

the commentary consists of quotations from about 400 books, many of which are lost.⁶ Scholars commonly acknowledge that, as such, *Shuijing zhu* provides a wealth of information about waterways and historical geography from north to south, and preserves, in the form of excerpts, a vast number of earlier sources.⁷

As a commentary, Li Daoyuan's work is rooted in the commentarial tradition that had been well established by his time.⁸ Commentary was seen as a potent form in early-medieval times, so much so that Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 460s–520s), Li Daoyuan's southern contemporary, states that he wrote his great treatise on literature, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍), only because there were too many outstanding commentaries on the classics already:

To elaborate and propagate the sagely intent, nothing can compare to writing a commentary on a classic. Yet, Ru scholars such as Ma and Zheng have already expounded the classics most exquisitely. Even if one has a profound understanding [of the classics], it is not enough to establish a “discourse of one's own.” 敷讚聖旨，莫若注經，而馬鄭諸儒，弘之已精，就有深解，未足立家。⁹

Although Liu Xie is speaking of commentaries on Confucian classics in this context, his remark reveals a belief in the unique, and superior, position of commentarial writing to other forms of writing. As Michael Puett says of the complex role played by commentaries in the early tradition, contrary to the simple assumption that commentary is

⁶ Zheng Dekun counts 436 titles, only 91 of which are extant. See Zheng, *Shuijing zhu yinshu kao* 水經注引書考 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1974), p. 4. There are discrepancies in the number of sources, perhaps depending on whether one counts the titles of short pieces of writing such as poems and rhapsodies. See Chen Qiaoyi, “*Shuijing zhu wenxian lu*” 水經注文獻錄, in his *Shuijing zhu yanjiu erji* 水經注研究二集 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), pp. 408–520. Also see Hüsemann's alphabetical index of the sources (*Das Alttertum vergegenwärtigen*, pp. 265–356).

⁷ As the *Shuijing zhu* specialist Chen Qiaoyi points out, based on the current incomplete version of *Shuijing zhu*, only Tibet, the northern extreme of the northeastern region, and the modern Fujian are not included therein. “*Shuijing zhu jizai de Guangxi heliu*” 水經注記載的廣西河流, in *Guangxi minzu xueyuan xuebao* 廣西民族學院學報 1998.1, pp. 3–5. However, as will be discussed below, Li Daoyuan tends to be more comprehensive and accurate about northern rivers. Chen Li 陳澧 (1810–1882), for instance, states that Li Daoyuan made mistakes about nearly all of the southwestern rivers; cited in Zheng, comp., *Shuijing zhu yanjiu*, p. 158.

⁸ See Cheng Yu-yu's overview of early-medieval commentarial traditions and a brief discussion of *Shuijing zhu* in that context in “Text and Commentary in the Medieval Period,” in Wiebke Denecke, Waiyee Li, and Xiaofei Tian, eds., *Oxford Handbook for Classical Chinese Literature* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017), pp. 123–31.

⁹ “Ma and Zheng” refer to Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166) and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), renowned Eastern Han scholars and commentators. *Li jia*, literally “establishing a household,” is abbreviated from 立一家之言 (“establishing a discourse that belongs to one household”); see Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng* 文心雕龍義證, annot. Zhan Ying 詹鍈 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), p. 1909.

secondary, and thus inferior, to the earlier text, writing a commentary was really about how to “demonstrate the superiority of the latter text to the text it is ostensibly commenting upon.”¹⁰ This observation can be easily applied to the three major early-medieval commentaries on texts outside the Confucian canon.

Besides Li Daoyuan's *Shuijing zhu*, the other two monumental commentaries on non-Confucian texts from this period are Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372–451) commentary on *The Record of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志) and Liu Xiaobiao's 劉孝標 (462–521) commentary on *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語). *Sanguo zhi* is a work of history (*shi* 史), and *Shishuo xinyu*, a work of Masters Literature (*zi* 子). There is also an Eastern Han commentary to *Chu ci* 楚辭, authored by Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. early-second c.), that falls within the traditional bibliographic category of “Collections” (*ji* 集). A more pertinent precursor for Li Daoyuan, also closer in time, is the Eastern Jin scholar and writer Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) commentary on *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*), a work of mythical geography mixed with real geography and place names. Interestingly, Guo Pu is also credited with a commentary on none other than the *River Classic* itself. Like his *Shanhai jing* commentary, Guo Pu's *Shuijing zhu*, now lost, is recorded in the “Monograph on Bibliography” 經籍志 contained in the early-seventh-century *Sui shu* 隋書.¹¹

The fact that Li Daoyuan chose to write a commentary on a work of geography, which was considered a subsidiary of “history” in premodern China, no doubt speaks to a personal predilection for geographical matters and for tangible practical issues in contrast with ritual or philosophical topics;¹² that he chose *Shuijing* over *Shanhai jing* will be discussed below. Here let me briefly consider his preferred commentarial style.

Li Daoyuan makes no pretense to philology and does not offer glosses of words as do Wang Yi and Guo Pu. In light of its exhaustively supplementary nature, Li Daoyuan's commentary bears a much

¹⁰ Puett, “Text and Commentary: The Early Tradition,” in Denecke, Li, and Tian, eds., *Oxford Handbook*, p. 116.

¹¹ *Sui shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 33, p. 982. Yang Shoujing does not believe that Guo Pu authored any commentary on the *River Classic*, but he offers no evidence except for the fact that Li Daoyuan never cites from it. *Shuijing zhushu* 29, pp. 2453–54. Because of the brevity of Guo Pu's commentary (in merely three scrolls, or *juan*), it is likely that Guo Pu mainly glosses words without offering any substantial explanation of the places that a river passes through, and Li Daoyuan, being largely uninterested in glosses, does not cite from it because he does not find information therein that suits his own purpose.

¹² Of course the use of the word “geography” is a matter of expediency, since writings of *dili* 地理 (“principles, or patterns, of the earth”) are not the same as modern studies of geography.

stronger resemblance to Pei Songzhi's and Liu Xiaobiao's works: in all three cases, the commentators elect a form of writing demanding that they stick to the basic parameters set forth by the original text and parade their supreme command of other sources on the subject of the original. A close parallel can be observed between Pei and Li, as each man sometimes cites sources conflicting with the original text and/or with one another and then inserts his own voice evaluating and passing judgment on them, thus establishing his mastery and authority.¹³ Yet, such an approach is ultimately constrained by the sources at the commentator's disposal. In other words, the goal is to demonstrate the comprehensiveness of *the sources* to be presented on the topics covered in the original text, but in the absence of sources, silence ensues.¹⁴ It is also important to bear in mind that citing a source does not necessarily mean that the commentator endorses it; and as we will see later in this article, Li Daoyuan does not always approve of a source he cites. Rather, his aim, as a commentator, is to present all the information available on a topic in the original text. If he happens to have an opinion about the correctness or incorrectness of a source, he gives it in his own voice, often preceding such a statement with *an* 按/案 or *yu an* 余按/案 ("Note" or "I note").

Scholars sometimes take citations in *Shuijing zhu* as representing Li Daoyuan's personal opinion or read his mere list of citations as constituting a coherent synthesis by Li Daoyuan; at other times, they praise *Shuijing zhu* for the landscape descriptions found therein without considering the fact that many such descriptions are citations from earlier sources not authored by Li himself. The problem is aggravated not only by the numerous textual issues that plague *Shuijing zhu*, but also by the absence of quotation marks in premodern Chinese texts

¹³ See, for instance, Li's commentary on the Yang River's source; *SJS* 20, pp. 1679–84. Unlike Pei Songzhi, whose commentary on a work of history does not leave much room for stating personal empirical experience as evidence, Li Daoyuan reminisces about his personal experience of a locale on more than a few occasions.

¹⁴ As Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755) points out, this book "leaves no river out in 'all under heaven,' reaching Korea to the east and Jiaozhi in the south, but only neglects the Min 閩 [modern Fujian] region 是書於天下之水, 東方則朝鮮, 南方則交趾, 俱無所遺, 獨閩中不具," due to the fact that "from the Three Regimes down to the Six Dynasties, textual sources about Min were very few 自三代以至六朝, 閩之文獻寥寥." Zheng, comp., *Shuijing zhu yanjiu*, p. 180. Felt claims that Li Daoyuan, in order to construct a parallel between the Sinitic and Indian worlds, "purposefully excluded from his so-called comprehensive geography" the Mongolian Steppe, "even though he had sources available to him on these lands" (Felt, *Structures*, p. 242). Yet the only "sources" that Felt gives for the rivers on the Mongolian Steppe are the "Biography of Xiongnu" 匈奴列傳 in *Shi ji* 史記 and that in *Han shu* 漢書, neither of which includes any details about the few rivers mentioned therein or constitutes adequate textual resources for a commentator (Felt, *Structures*, p. 328, n. 95). This forms a great contrast with the copious textual records of India extant in Li Daoyuan's time.

in general. Even in cases where Li Daoyuan explicitly quotes from an earlier author, we are left to wonder where exactly the quotation ends and where Li Daoyuan's own remarks begin. This, nevertheless, is a salient point: the commentarial nature of *Shuijing zhu* is crucial to keep in mind for our own reading and use of this work to avoid the common pitfalls outlined above. Are we reading "Li Daoyuan" or an earlier author? How committed is Li Daoyuan to a claim made by an earlier author? How mindful, or mindless, is a commentator in assembling available data on a given topic in the original text? The only way of answering these questions is through careful, painstaking reading at both micro- and macro-levels.

In many cases, the vivid landscape depictions for which Li Daoyuan is now best known were not written by him.¹⁵ Since Li, a northerner living in the so-called Period of Disunion, had never set foot on southern soil all his life, the lively accounts of scenic places in south China that smack of firsthand experience were without a doubt composed by Southern Dynasties authors. Instead of discussing those cited passages in the context of *Shuijing zhu*, literary historians would do better to contextualize them within Southern Dynasties landscape writings and travel literature.

In fact, even in describing northern rivers, many of which Li Daoyuan indeed visited, his greatest passion remained that of a bibliographer and a scholar. Li was no nature explorer for the love of outdoors adventures. He said of himself in the preface: "I had no interest in visiting mountains when I was a child, and in adulthood I am not of a nature to 'inquire about the ford' 余少無尋山之趣，長違問津之性。"¹⁶ That is, from childhood to adulthood, he was not someone who would seek out "mountains and rivers" (*shanshui* 山水) for their own sake. He believes that erudition more than adequately makes up for empirical experience:

¹⁵ One good example is the celebrated passages about the Three Gorges on the Yangzi River that begins with, "For seven hundred *li* in the Three Gorges 自三峽七百里中." It was cited, without attribution, from *Jingzhou ji* 荊州記 by the southern writer Sheng Hongzhi 盛弘之 (fl. early-5th c.). Even though scholars know better, they still choose to discuss this passage in conjunction with *Shuijing zhu* and Li Daoyuan rather than, as is more proper, in the context of Southern Dynasties literature. See, for instance, Zhang Peiheng 章培恒 and Luo Yuming 駱玉明, eds., *Zhongguo wenxueshi xinzhuan* 中國文學史新著 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2007), vol. 1, p. 411; James Hargett, *Jade Mountain and Cinnabar Pools: The History of Travel Literature in Imperial China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2018), pp. 53–54; Corey Byrnes, *Fixing Landscape: A Techno-Poetic History of China's Three Gorges* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2019), p. 3.

¹⁶ *SJZS*, p. 1. *SJZJS*, "Shuijing zhu yuanxu" 水經注原序, p. 5. "Inquiring about the ford" is an allusion to an *Analepts* passage (18.6) in which Confucius sent his student Zilu to ask for directions to the ford.

Today those who examine a map to look for sites have heard all that is said about the various regions; however, those who walk the land and travel the realm can rarely reach the ford and achieve enlightenment. Even if [what one experiences] can approximate what one has heard before, one cannot help feeling uncertain. 今尋圖訪蹟者，極聆州域之說，而涉土遊方者，寡能達其津照，縱仿佛前聞，不能不猶深屏營也。¹⁷

In carrying out his work on the *River Classic*, his principal regret is the superficiality of his book learning:

With regard to my insight, I am cut off from the depths of the classics; with regard to my cultivation, I lack the knowledge of the essentials or the breadth of knowledge. Advancing, I do not possess the wit to “ask about one and know about two”; retreating, I do not have the intelligence to “observe one corner and understand [by inference] about the other three.”¹⁸ Concerning the one who studied in isolation without the benefit of hearing [instructions and discussions], the ancients pitied his shallowness; in the case of the one who has lost his books, a superior gentleman regrets his facing of the wall.¹⁹ Sitting in a quiet room, I seek to sound the watery depths; having discarded the boat, I probe the faraway: such an enterprise is difficult indeed. Nevertheless, peering at the sky through a tube, I manage to clearly channel some luminance of the contemporary age; I drink from the great river with the capacity of a mole-rat and attempt to measure the ocean with a ladle: it is all just to suit my own nature, nothing more.²⁰ Since I had much leisure and passed months and years in vain, I decided to transmit the *River Classic* and to elaborate and expand on this earlier text.²¹

¹⁷ 蹟 reads 蹟 (subtleties) in *SJZJS*, p. 5.

¹⁸ This is an allusion to *Analects* 7.8.

¹⁹ “Facing the wall” is another *Analects* phrase in 17.8.

²⁰ “To peer at the sky through a tube and to use a ladle to measure the sea 以筭闚天，以蠡測海” is a saying cited by Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (ca. 154–93 BC). Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), comp. *Han shu* 漢書 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1970) 65, p. 2867. “When a mole-rat drinks from a river, it drinks no more than a bellyful 偃鼠飲河不過滿腹” is from the “Free Wandering” chapter of *Zhuangzi*; *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, comp. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995) 1, p. 24. These sayings all speak of the limitation of something with a small capacity.

²¹ Li Daoyuan’s use of the word *shu* 述 (to transmit) is significant: as the frequent echoes of the *Analects* in his preface testify, the model of Confucius, who declared that he was one who would “transmit but not create 述而不作”; *Analects* 7.1), was a loud and clear subtext here. However the *Shuijing* positions itself, it became a “classic” as soon as it acquired a commentary from Guo Pu and from Li Daoyuan.

識絕深經，道淪要博，進無訪一知二之機，退無觀隅三反之慧。獨學無聞，古人傷其孤陋，捐喪辭書，達士嗟其面牆。默室求深，閉舟問遠，故亦難矣。然毫管闕天，歷筭時昭，飲河酌海，從性斯畢。竊以多暇，空傾歲月，輒述水經，布廣前文。

In the last part of this passage, Li Daoyuan wittily employs a series of boating and water metaphors – relinquishment of a boat; drinking from the river; ladling from the sea – to describe his own limitations, but he laments his lack of book knowledge and learned companions more than his want of empirical knowledge and geographical experience.²²

All in all, landscape depictions, especially those that we can be certain are by Li Daoyuan's own hands, only constitute a small fraction of the commentary. They are neither the main goal of this work nor the author's primary interest. Although *Shuijing zhu* was certainly read and circulated in premodern times, it is likely an exaggeration to claim, as is done by some scholars, that it exerted any significant influence on belletristic landscape or travel writings.²³ Such a massive tome was not easily available to readers in the age of manuscript culture: the eighth-century chancellor and scholar Du You 杜佑 (735–812) complained that it was difficult to get his hands on *Shuijing* with Guo Pu's and Li Daoyuan's commentaries, for which he “searched for a long time before acquiring a copy 訪求久之方得.”²⁴ Any claim about how *Shuijing zhu* must have impacted a medieval writer should consider that writer's access to a much larger number of works than in later times, as well as the important role played by encyclopedias in one's literary education.²⁵ Take Sheng Hongzhi's 盛弘之 *Jingzhou ji* 荊州記 (*An Ac-*

²² This does not mean that Li Daoyuan does not value empirical knowledge, as he cites his own experience as evidence on more than one occasion in the commentary. But his interest in rivers is primarily pedantic, he has visited only a fraction of the rivers recorded in the commentary, and he is keenly aware of his limitations.

²³ Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037–1101) couplet in “Sending Tea to Zhou Anru” (“Ji Zhou Anru cha” 寄周安孺茶) that mentions he “frequently read [the commentary on] the *River Classic* 水經亦屢讀” is sometimes cited, although he likely read *Shuijing zhu* for its information rather than for its literary qualities, as the nature of his reference to Li's commentary in his own famous “Account of the Stone Bell Mountain” (“Shizhong shan ji” 石鐘山記) indicates. In this account, Su in fact criticizes Li Daoyuan for failing to discover empirical truth through careful personal investigation as Su himself did. See *Dongpo xuji* 東坡續集 j. 1, in 蘇東坡全集 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1969), vol. 2, p. 26. Another oft-cited testimony is the late-Ming prose stylist Zhang Dai's 張岱 (1597–1684) comment that Li Daoyuan was supreme among ancients who wrote about landscape 古人記山水手太上驪道元, but by the seventeenth century Zhang Dai had already lost access to much of the early-medieval writings from which Li Daoyuan quotes liberally. Zhang Dai's remark is from his “Ba Yushan zhu” 跋萬山注, in *Zhang Dai shiwen ji* 張岱詩文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), p. 306.

²⁴ *Tong dian* 通典, collated by Wang Wenjin 王文錦 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988) 174, p. 4561.

²⁵ See Glen Dudbridge, *Lost Books of Medieval China* (London: British Library, 2001). For

count of Jingzhou) as an example: judged by the frequency with which it is cited by encyclopedias and commentaries, it was a very well-known and popular text in medieval times; thus, for his acclaimed quatrain, “Setting Out Early from White Emperor City” (“Zaofa Baidicheng” 早發白帝城), the poet Li Bai 李白 (761–762) quite possibly drew inspiration either directly from Sheng’s work itself or from encyclopedic sources – in either case, he did not have to rely on the mediation of Li Daoyuan’s colossal work.²⁶

Rather than trying to glean scattered “landscape depictions” in Li Daoyuan’s commentary and reading them as great specimen of belletristic literature,²⁷ I propose a different kind of “literary” reading of this work, both in its detail and as a whole, in the sense of focusing on Li’s rhetorical and linguistic strategies, and by placing it in its textual surroundings to illuminate its structure and motives as well as its contemporary literary context. This kind of reading necessarily begins with a close analysis of Li Daoyuan’s writing and its peculiar rhetorical thrust.

WHAT THE RIVERINE TRAVELER SEES: THE MODE OF “TRAVEL FU”

The majority of the *Shuijing zhu* entries begin with the flow of a river: the river “passes” (*jing* 逕).²⁸ The entry is largely in the format of quotations from earlier sources that reference the different places

the importance of encyclopedias in a medieval elite’s literary education and writing, see Xiao-fei Tian, “Encyclopedias and Epitomes,” in Denecke, Li, and Tian, eds., *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 132–46; and Christopher M. B. Nugent, “Medieval Encyclopedias,” in Jack W. Chen et al., eds., *Literary Information in China: A History* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2021), pp. 295–305.

²⁶ Sheng Hongzhi’s passage about the Three Gorges is variously cited in the seventh-century encyclopedia *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), j. 7, p. 122, and in the tenth-century encyclopedia *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1975), j. 53, p. 388. *Jingzhou ji* is cited more than forty times in the early-8th-c. encyclopedia *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962). With this in mind, we should reevaluate Richard E. Strassberg’s claim that “it was Li’s enchanted version that became widely read,” and that Li’s version was “based on his personal observation”; Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1994), p. 84.

²⁷ I should reiterate here that I am not opposed to reading parts of Li Daoyuan’s work as outstanding landscape representation, but first of all, one should always, whenever possible, distinguish between Li’s own writing and his quotation of an earlier writer. Second, one should consider a quoted text in its own textual ecosystem. Thus, in a proper literary historical account, Sheng Hongzhi’s *Jingzhou ji* should be studied along with Southern Dynasties geographical writings, landscape poetry, and anomaly accounts.

²⁸ The commentator breaks down the original *River Classic* text into sentences or phrases and directly appends his commentary below it (in modern typeset editions with its vertical reading layout), and by “entries” I refer to the sectioned commentary texts. Dai Zhen posits that the *River Classic* text refers to a river’s “passing” as *guo* 過 and Li’s commentary uses *jing*

the river passes, interspersed with Li Daoyuan's own comments. As I will demonstrate in this section, the mode of writing adopted by Li in these entries is primarily that of the "travel *fu*" (*zheng fu* 征賦). This is a mode of writing that allows the narrator to pass through places and contemplate people and events as markers that distinguish an otherwise generic landscape. In a travel *fu*, the gaze is never primarily directed at the "great outdoors" or the naked waterways, terrains, and plants; rather, it is directed at the traces of human civilization left on the face of the natural world.²⁹ The only difference is that in a travel *fu* the subject is always human – the author himself, the "I/eye," using a first-person narrative, whereas in *Shuijing zhu* it is the river that is figured as the subject of a meandering trajectory and constantly in motion. Seeming to possess a consciousness and a will of its own, the river plays the role of a solitary traveler, with Li Daoyuan as its sidekick, a Sancho Panza attending to his single-minded master. There is usually very little about the river itself – presumably all waters look alike – in the commentary; instead, Li focuses on the land mass through which a river runs. He perceives everything through the riverine traveler's eyes, which are directed outward at everything alongside the banks, everything but itself.

This particular mode of writing is most evident in the sixteenth chapter of *Shuijing zhu*. This chapter focuses on five rivers: the Gu River 穀水, the Gan 甘水, the Qi 漆水, the Chan 澹水, and the Ju 沮水. The river that concerns us here is the Gu River. As we will see, this riverine traveler takes Li Daoyuan on a journey that closely follows the footsteps of a famous human traveler from an earlier era, someone who had composed a travel *fu* on the very same itinerary. This human traveler is the Western Jin writer Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–304), and the travel *fu* in question is his "*Fu* on My Westward Journey" ("Xizheng fu" 西征賦). Li Daoyuan's narration of the Gu River's journey traces Pan Yue's journey almost step by step, geographically and textually, with the only

逕, a point that is generally accepted by scholars. See Wu, comp., *Shuijing zhu yanjiu shiliao*, vol. 1, p. 86. There is a minority opinion that Li Daoyuan may have authored both the classic and the commentary. While a dose of skepticism in dealing with early texts is healthy, the danger is that skepticism may seem to be a more sophisticated position to hold than credulity is and thus appears attractive for all the wrong reasons. In a number of places, Li Daoyuan either expresses his doubt about the *River Classic* or bluntly points out its errors; there is no evidence, nor can we establish any credible motive, for such an elaborate forgery.

²⁹ For a discussion of early and early-medieval travel *fu*, see David R. Knechtges, "Poetic Travelogue in the Han *Fu*," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Sinology* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), pp. 127–52; Xiaofei Tian, *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Asia Center, 2011), pp. 77–82.

difference being that it does so in the reversed direction: the riverine travelers, unlike the human travelers who would go wherever their business takes them, always flow eastward; their destination is usually a great river that absorbs them and, ultimately, the sea.³⁰

The Gu River is a small river, so small that “it does not appear in modern maps.”³¹ It originates from Mianchi county 黽池縣 (in modern He’nan) and flows into the Luo River 洛水 at Luoyang, less than a hundred miles away. In the original *River Classic*, the Gu River is given thirty-four characters in total:

The Gu River originates from the Guyang Valley in the Fanzhong Woods in the south of Mianchi county of Hongnong. To the northeast it passes north of Gucheng county. Then eastward it passes north of He’nan county, flows southeast, and enters the Luo River. 穀水出弘農黽池縣南墻塚林穀陽谷。東北過穀城縣北。又東過河南縣北，東南入于洛。³²

To the first sentence of the passage alone, Li Daoyuan appends a commentary of almost 2,000 words. After briefly commenting on the origin of the Gu River, he turns to the direction in which the river is flowing. I number the passages for the convenience of discussion.

(1) The Gu River continues to flow eastward. It passes south of the two cities of Qin and Zhao. This is what Sima Biao (d. 307) says in his *Sequel to the Han History*: “The Red Eyebrows set out from Mianchi, and were about to go to Yiyang from the south of Liyang.” People call them the Cities of Twin Profits. The elders said, “In the past, the Qin and Zhao kings gathered together for a meeting; each occupied one city. This is where the King of Qin made the king of Zhao play zither and Lin Xiangru made the king of Qin beat the pot.”³³ Furthermore, Feng Yi (d. 34) defeated the Red Eyebrows at this place by the river. Thus (Eastern Han) emperor Guangwu’s (r. 25–57) edict to Feng Yi states, “Although your pinions drooped at Huixi, you eventually flapped your wings and soared at Mianchi. As the saying goes, ‘What has been lost in the east can be regained in the west.’”³⁴

³⁰ An exception recorded in *Shuijing zhu* involves the Pei River 渭水 in the Korean peninsula that flows westward rather than eastward. Li Daoyuan was so intrigued by this that he asked a Korean emissary about it; *SJZS* 14, p. 1280; *SJZJS* 14, p. 261.

³¹ Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛, Ye Guangting 葉光庭, and Ye Yang 葉揚, trans. *Shuijing zhu quanyi* 水經注全譯 (Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 565.

³² *SJZS* 16, pp. 1363–74; *SJZJS* 16, pp. 285–87.

³³ This refers to the two kings’ meeting at Mianchi in 279 BC. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC), *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 81, p. 2442.

³⁴ *SJZS* 16, pp. 1363–65; *SJZJS* 16, p. 285. The battle between the Han general and the

穀水又東，逕秦趙二城南。司馬彪續漢書曰：“赤眉從睢池自利陽南欲赴宜陽”者也。世謂之俱利城。耆彥曰：“昔秦趙之會，各據一城，秦王使趙王鼓瑟，藺相如令秦王擊缶處也。”馮異又破赤眉于是川矣。故光武璽書曰：“始雖垂翅回溪，終能奮翼睢池，可謂失之東隅收之桑榆矣。”

This is a typical passage from *Shuijing zhu*: the flow of a river is described in terms of its passage through man-made constructions, the “Cities of Twin Profits,” evidenced by previous writings and the saying of the local (?) elders. The river is also marked by a historical event – in this case Feng Yi’s defeat of the Red Eyebrows, which once again is attested by a piece of previous writing, namely, Han emperor Guangwu’s edict to Feng Yi.

Then, after a brief passage punctuated with two mentions of *you dong* 又東 (“[the river] continues to flow east”), Li Daoyuan states:

(2) The Gu River continues to flow east and passes the former seat of Xin’an county, which is flanked by the river’s currents north and south. To the west the river touches Xiaomian. In the past, before Xiang Yu (232–202 BC) entered the Qin region in the west, he had buried 200,000 surrendered soldiers alive at this spot. His state was destroyed and he himself died – what a fit ending for him!³⁵ 穀水又東逕新安縣故城，南北夾流，而西接嶠。昔項羽西入秦，坑降卒二十萬于此，國滅身亡，宜矣。

(3) The Gu River then passes south of the Thousand Autumns Station. The post station had piled up the rocks as its walls, and people call it “Thousand Autumns Walls.” Pan Yue’s “*Fu* on a Westward Journey” states: “Though the post station was called Thousand Autumns, my son had not even a span of seven weeks.” It refers to this very post station.³⁶ 穀水又東逕千秋亭南。其亭累石爲垣，世謂之千秋城也。潘岳西征賦曰：“亭有千秋之號，子無七旬之期。”謂是亭也。

In the last passage cited above, Li Daoyuan directly refers to Pan Yue’s work, but any medieval reader familiar with Pan Yue’s rhapsody, whose canonical status was sealed by its inclusion in the sixth-century *Anthology of Literature* (*Wen xuan* 文選), would have already had an eerie sense of *déjà vu* by this point.³⁷ In 292, Pan Yue set out from Luoyang to go to Chang’an to serve as prefect there. He gives a detailed account

Red Eyebrows took place in 27; Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) 17, p. 646.

³⁵ *SJZS* 16, p. 1366; *SJZJS* 16, p. 285.

³⁶ *SJZS* 16, p. 1366; *SJZJS* 16, p. 286.

³⁷ Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), comp., *Wen xuan* 文選, with Li Shan’s 李善 (d. 589) commentary (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986) 10, pp. 446–48.

of his travels in the rhapsody. Below is an excerpt that focuses on the section of his journey through the Thousand Autumns Station, Xin'an, and Mianchi. The passages' numbers show the order of the sites Pan Yue passed through, reversing exactly that of the sites passed by the Gu River:

(3)

My infant son died at Xin'an;
we dug a pit by the roadside and buried him.
Though the post station was called Thousand Autumns,
my son had not even a span of seven weeks.
Though I try hard to emulate Yan and Wu,³⁸
in truth, I am deeply pained by my fatherly love.³⁹
夭赤子於新安，坎路側而瘞之。享有千秋之號，子無七旬之期。
雖勉勵於延吳，實潛慟乎余慈。

(2)

I look at mountains and rivers to contemplate the past;
disconsolate, in mid-road I pull in the reins.
How harsh the vicious cruelty of Xiang Yu!
He buried alive innocent surrendered soldiers,
Thus rousing the people of Qin to turn unto virtue,
and resulting in their revival by Lord Liu.
Deeds wicked and foul are wont to rebound;
in the end a clan was destroyed and the man himself butchered.
眇山川以懷古，悵攬轡於中塗。虐項氏之肆暴，坑降卒之無辜。
激秦人以歸德，成劉后之來蘇。事回沔而好還，卒宗滅而身屠。

(1)

As I pass through Mianchi, I am long in thought,
I halt my carriage and do not advance.
Qin was a powerful state of tigers and wolves;
Zhao was a burnt-out tree weakened by invasion.
Calmly entering upon danger, Zhao met Qin in a grand
assembly,
relying upon the great Lin, the renowned man of the age.⁴⁰

³⁸ Yan and Wu refer respectively to Yanling Jizi 延陵季子 and Dongmen Wu 東門吳 of ancient times. Both men lost a young son and tried to retain equanimity.

³⁹ David R. Knechtges' translation with minor modifications; see his *Wen xuan or Selections of Refined Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1987) 2, pp. 191-95.

⁴⁰ That is, Lin Xiangru 藺相如, the resourceful minister of Zhao who forced the king of Qin to play a musical instrument at the assembly after the Qin ruler made the king of Zhao play one.

Shamed that the eastern zither was strummed alone,
 he raised the western pot and thrust his blade.
 Insulted by the preposterous gift of ten cities,
 he lay claim to Xianyang and seized victory.

... ..

When Guangwu was covered in dust,
 he inflicted royal punishment on the Red Eyebrows.
 [Feng] Yi received the charge to smite the felons,
 he first drooped his pinions at Huixi.
 But Guangwu did not allow fault to obscure virtue,
 and in the end Yi flapped his wings and soared on high.

經澠池而長想，停余車而不進。秦虎狼之疆國，趙侵弱之餘燼。
 超入險而高會，杖命世之英蘭。恥東瑟之偏鼓，提西缶而接刃。
 辱十城之虛壽，奄咸陽以取雋。……
 當光武之蒙塵，致王誅于赤眉。異奉辭以伐罪，初垂翅於回谿。
 不尤眚以掩德，終奮翼而高揮。

The Gu River, flowing eastward to Luoyang, is going “backward” through the very sites observed by Pan Yue on his westward journey. As Pan Yue gazes at the “mountains and rivers,” he does not quite see them; instead, he sees the *past* with his mind’s eye (*xiang* 想, to visualize):⁴¹ the surrendered troops buried alive by the cruel Xiang Yu, the wise Emperor Guangwu and his general Feng Yi, the brave minister Lin Xiangru beating the king of Qin at the Mianchi meeting. Strikingly, this is exactly what Li Daoyuan’s riverine traveler sees alongside the river. Since Li Daoyuan explicitly cites Pan Yue’s rhapsody in his commentary, the overlaps are most likely not a coincidence; rather, Li Daoyuan is deliberately playing off Pan Yue’s rhapsody. He sees through Pan Yue’s eyes and even draws the very same moral lessons. The terrain between Luoyang and Mianchi surely presents plenty of natural sights, but in both cases the author is fixated on human events and constructions alone. Rocks, a natural formation, are visible to Li Daoyuan only as the walls of the post station. Both authors present a palimpsest of historical moments while remaining utterly oblivious to the physical landscape.

⁴¹ The word *xiang*, visualization or mental image-making, as noun or verb, was an important concept in the cultural discourse of the time. See Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 21–22.

AESTHETICS VERSUS HISTORY: A COMPARISON
WITH CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN LANDSCAPE WRITINGS

This line in Pan Yue's *fu*, "I look at mountains and rivers to contemplate the past 眄山川以懷古," sums up the peripatetic vision of the traveler in the "travel *fu*" and in Li Daoyuan's commentary: mountains and rivers are only meaningful anthropocentrically, as sites of human events.⁴² This mode of seeing nature as primarily a depository of traces of human-centered events and activities constitutes exactly the opposite of Southern Dynasties poetic writings on landscape.

During the fourth century, "mountain-and-water" (*shanshui*) as a fixed compound referring to natural scenery began to be used frequently in the south. The discursive formation of "mountain-and-water" indicates a larger cultural movement that was quite self-conscious about the unique development of an aesthetic appreciation of landscape; the capacity for such an appreciation was taken as a measure of the refined cultural sensibilities and spiritual endowment of a member of the early-medieval southern elite. By the late-fifth century, a tradition of belletristic landscape writings and landscape paintings was already well established in the Southern Dynasties. Many such writings focus on the spirituality-infused beauty of landscape itself and offer a way of escaping from society and history.

This type of nature-writing was perfected in the hands of Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), who became known as "the founding father of mountain-and-water poetry." In a typical Xie Lingyun poem, landscape is unmarked by any spatial and temporal coordinates, and

⁴² It is important to observe that, despite reminiscences about locales he personally visited in his younger years that are scattered here and there in the commentary, Li Daoyuan does not feel nostalgia about the past as Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) does in his "*Fu on My Journey*" ("Zhuanzheng fu" 撰征賦) (see Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 77–82; for a complete annotated translation of this *fu*, see pp. 287–340), or like some late-comer in a "post-Han" world. In this I disagree with Michael Nylan's view of Li Daoyuan's construction of an "empire of memory" in the "post-Han period of disunion"; see her "Wandering in the Ruins: The *Shuijing zhu* Reconsidered," in Alan K. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo, eds., *Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China* (Albany: SUNY P., 2010), p. 63. Since Nylan bases her article primarily on Shi Zhecun's 施蜚存 *Shuijing zhu bei lu* 水經注碑錄, which she somehow considers as the "best" of *Shuijing zhu* "editions" (p. 93, n. 1), rather than on the full commentary itself, her attention is disproportionately drawn to "ruins" where such epigraphical records are available, and her argument about Li's work as a whole is undermined. Shi Zhecun's *Beilu*, as a mere collection of stele records culled from *Shuijing zhu*, is not an "edition" of *Shuijing zhu* and certainly does not represent the full scale of the massive commentary. Li Daoyuan treats rivers and mountains as only meaningful anthropocentrically, but a full consideration of *Shuijing zhu* shows no evidence that Li Daoyuan is constructing an empire "that represents a collection of memories about the past... that cluster around and haunt a range of sites... even when—or rather, especially when—these sites are ruined or incomplete" (Nylan, "Wandering," pp. 64–65).

the poet is directly confronted with the striking beauty of anonymous nature.

- 石室山 The Stone Chamber Mountain⁴³
- 清旦索幽異 At clear dawn I seek out darkly hidden wonders,
放舟越垌郊 I let my boat go free, passing suburbs near and far.
- 莓莓蘭渚急 Currents are swift by verdant isles;⁴⁴
4 藐藐苔嶺高 mossy peaks towering high.
石室冠林陬 The Stone Chamber crowns the corner of the woods,
- 飛泉發山椒 a cascade is flying down from the hilltop.
虛泛徑千載 The vacant flow has passed through a thousand years,
- 8 崢嶸非一朝 the steep height has not been of one morning.
鄉村絕聞見 Yet it is severed from the villages' hearing and sight,
- 樵蘇限風霄 wood-cutters and herb-gatherers are limited by the windy haze.
- 微我無遠覽 Without me there would have been no such distant viewing,⁴⁵
- 12 總笄羨升喬 since early youth I have admired Qiao's ascent.
靈域久韜隱 The numinous realm has long been concealed,
如與心賞交 now it is as if communing with an appreciative mind.
- 合歡不容言 Such conjoined pleasure allows no words:
16 摘芳弄寒條 I pluck a fragrant blossom, playing with the cold branch.

The poem opens with a white-and-black contrast of the “clear dawn” and “darkly hidden wonders,” and with movement. The poet is quite the opposite of the sedentary commentator who claims to sound watery depths from the comfort of his study. The water in Xie's poem

⁴³ In Lu Qinli 遼欽立, comp., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 1164. Also see Gu Shaobo 顧紹柏, annot., *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu* 謝靈運集校注 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1987), pp. 72–74; Li Yunfu 李運富, annot., *Xie Lingyun ji* 謝靈運集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1999), pp. 49–50.

⁴⁴ This line is based on a line in Zuo Si's 左思 (fl. 280s–300s) “Rhapsody on the Wei Capital” 魏都賦: “The lovely isles are verdant and lush 蘭渚莓莓”; *Wen xuan* 6, p. 272. Instead of taking *lan* here literally as eupatorium, I understand it as referring to the luxuriant vegetation on the isles.

⁴⁵ *Weiwo* 微我 has a variant reading *weirong* 微戎, whose meaning is unclear, and which has not received satisfactory explanations from commentators. See Huang Jie 黃節, *Xie Kangle shizhu* 謝康樂詩注 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1967), p. 136; Ye Xiaoxue 葉笑雪, *Xie Lingyun shixuan* 謝靈運詩選 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), p. 96. I follow the emendation suggested by Lu Qinli here.

flows fast (“swift” and “flying” in l. 3 and l. 6); what it passes through (*jing* 徑 in l. 7, the same verb used in Li Daoyuan’s commentary numerous times) is, however, not human constructions, but Time: “a thousand years,” unmarked by historical events.

Human places and figures appear anonymously, as “the villages,” and negatively, since the wood-cutters and herb-gatherers do not see or hear anything and are confined by their physical limitations. In a bold statement in line 11, the poet claims sole credit for this “distant viewing” – not motivated by pragmatic goals such as gathering firewood or herbs, but by the spirit of adventure and exploration. Like the wood-cutters and herb-gatherers, the poet also picks something from the mountain, but it is merely a blossom (literally “plucking a sweet aroma” 摘芳), signifying a physical sensation and a mystical communion between nature and man that forbids language. The wood-cutter hacks the cold branch for kindling, but the poet *plays* with it, an act of intimacy and idleness, fulfilling an aesthetic instead of utilitarian function. It is a difference deliberately inscribed into the poem, a difference as much between two kinds of attitude toward nature as between two social classes: the poet, being a member of one of the greatest aristocratic clans of the Southern Dynasties, is distinguished from the crowd by everything – the sights he seeks and sees, the relationship he establishes with landscape.

The last four lines of the poem evoke Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427), the poet’s older contemporary. One of his most celebrated poems, “Drinking” No. 5 (“Yinjiu qiwu” 飲酒其五), contains the immortal lines, “Picking chrysanthemum at the eastern hedge, / distantly I gaze at South Mountain 採菊東籬下，悠然望南山。”⁴⁶ The poem ends with the enigmatic couplet, “In this there is a true significance; / I want to expound it, but have forgotten the words 此中有真意，欲辨已忘言,” with its unmistakable reference to Zhuangzi’s “grasping the significance and forgetting the language [used to convey the significance]” 得意忘言. Xie “rewrites” it in such a way that the loss of words, also occurring in the last couplet as a self-reflexive gesture pointing to the close of the poem, results in an enticing image of fragrant flower and cold branches, with the poet himself, the agent of plucking and playing, embedded in the scene.

We hear another text in the last lines of Xie’s poem, cited by Li Daoyuan in the chapter on the Three Gorges. This is a passage from *An Account of Yidu* (*Yidu ji* 宜都記) by Yuan Shansong 袁山松 (d. 401), Tao Yuanming’s and Xie Lingyun’s contemporary:

⁴⁶ Lu, comp., *Xian Qin Han Wei*, p. 998.

I had heard that the water in the gorges flows rapidly. Written records and oral accounts all warn people about the perils of coming upon the river, but no one has ever acclaimed the beauty of these mountains and waters. When I came to this place, I was delighted, and only then did I believe that hearing about something could never compare to seeing it in person. The layered crags and striking peaks, with their strange structures and extraordinary forms, are simply beyond words. The trees and plants, growing ever so lushly, rise above the rosy clouds and vapors. Whether one looks up or down, the more one gazes upon it, the better the view is. I lingered there for several days and nights and forgot to return. I had never seen anything like it in my entire travel experience. I was pleased with myself for having gained access to this marvelous view. Now, if mountains and waters had consciousness, they would certainly marvel at me, too, as the first person in a thousand years who appreciated them!⁴⁷

常聞峽中水疾，書記及口傳悉以臨懼相戒，曾無稱有山水之美也。及余來踐躋此境，既至欣然，始信耳聞之不如親見矣。其疊嶂秀峰，奇構異形，固難以辭敘。林木蕭森，離離蔚蔚，乃在霞氣之表。仰矚俯映，彌習彌佳。流連信宿，不覺忘返，目所履歷，未嘗有也。既自欣得此奇觀，山水有靈，亦當驚知己于千古矣。

Yuan Shansong imagines himself to be the “appreciative friend 知己” to the mountains and waters at the Three Gorges, the first such “in a thousand years.” Similarly, Xie Lingyun describes himself as someone who sees up close *and* appreciates the beauty of the Stone Chamber Mountain. His penultimate couplet leaves the referent of the “appreciative mind” ambiguous because he and the Stone Chamber Mountain are befriending each other. The communion between the poet and the landscape takes place without mediation – no historical personage or event intervenes.

CITATION: ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Many segments from Yuan Shansong's *Yidu ji*, including the passage cited above, are preserved in *Shuijing zhu*.⁴⁸ As a commentary, *Shuijing zhu* is largely comprised of citations, but unlike in Xie Lingyun's poetry, which, as scholars have observed, makes liberal use of earlier

⁴⁷ Yuan Shansong's *Yidu ji* is cited in *SJZS* 34, p. 2845; *SJZJS* 34, p. 596. Yuan Shansong's personal name is sometimes given as Song 崧. One of them must be a typographical error.

⁴⁸ Bao Yuanhang counts twelve citations from this work in *Shuijing zhu* 34 and 37. See his study of these fragments in *Wenxue wenxian yanjiu*, pp. 205–11.

texts and seeks to illuminate the landscape through discerning a pattern of intellectual concepts therein,⁴⁹ Li Daoyuan's citations largely serve to incorporate the landscape in a system of social and historical knowledge that helps name them, define them, and mark them in an imperial geography. His citations offer us, from another perspective, a glimpse into Li's spatial imagination and preferred mode of writing.

Zheng Dekun's study of the works cited in *Shuijing zhu* divides them into the four traditional bibliographic categories: Classics (*jing* 經), Histories, Masters' Works, and Collections. The number of historical works is by far the largest (208 titles), followed by Classics (84) and Masters' Works (62).⁵⁰ Under "Collections," Zheng cites 42 literary collections (*bieji* 別集), but this does not fully capture all the individual pieces of poetry 詩 and rhapsodies 賦 cited in the commentary. A cursory examination shows that, not surprisingly, Li Daoyuan cites rhapsodies profusely, which by my rough count amount to about fifty individual titles in total (see appendix 1).⁵¹ When it comes to poetry, poems from *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing*) come up most frequently, always in the form of "this place is the one mentioned/indicated in the Poem 即詩所謂" or "as the Poem says 詩云."⁵² *The Classic of Poetry* is, of course, one of the Confucian classics and as such carries the authority of antiquity and canonicity, but it was not regarded as belletristic literature. Apart from the *Shi jing* poems, there are, again by my rough count, sixteen mentions of individual *shi* poems by known authors from more recent centuries (see appendix 2).⁵³ One-fourth of the poems in Li's commentary are from Ruan Ji's 阮籍 (210–263) collection titled "Singing of My Cares" ("Yonghuai shi" 詠懷詩); all but three were written before the fifth century.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ See Stephen Owen's discussion of Xie's use of earlier texts, including Tao Yuanming's poetry as well as the *Lyrics of Chu*, in "Librarian in Exile," *Early Medieval China* 10–11.1 (2004), pp. 203–26; and Wendy Swartz's discussion of Xie Lingyun's use of the *Classic of Changes* in "Naturalness in Xie Lingyun's Poetic Works," *HJAS* 70.2 (December 2010), pp. 355–86.

⁵⁰ Zheng, *Shuijing zhu yinshu*, p. 4.

⁵¹ Tong Jun 童珺 identifies forty-seven rhapsodies in "Shuijing zhu yin fu kaolun" 水經注引賦考論, *Chifeng xueyuan xuebao* 赤峰學院學報 3 (2011), pp. 33–34.

⁵² Scholars count over fifty references. See Zhang Pengfei 張鵬飛, "Shuijing zhu yin Shi kao" 水經注引詩考, *Wenshi bolan* 文史博覽 18 (2006), pp. 25–26.

⁵³ That is, from the Eastern Han on. The list in the appendix does not, however, include songs or anonymous local ballads. For instance, Liu Biao 劉表 (142–208) is said to have sung the "song of wild hawks a-coming 野鷹來曲" (*SJZS* 28, p. 2378), and the Xiangyang locals made a ballad about governor Shan Jian 山簡 (253–312) (*SJZS* 28, p. 2381). The former is mentioned merely by title; for the latter Li Daoyuan quotes four lines.

⁵⁴ The three fifth-century poems are by Liu Jun 劉駿 (430–464; Song emperor Xiaowu, r. 453–464; referred to by his "child name," Liu Daomin 劉道民, in Li's commentary); Xie Zhuang 謝莊 (421–466); and Wu Jun 吳均 (460–520). *SJZS* 28, p. 2374; 39, p. 3247; 40, p. 3302.

Li Daoyuan clearly had good access to contemporary southern belletristic writings;⁵⁵ yet, he manifests little interest in *modern* travel/landscape poetry.⁵⁶ The southern poet cited in the commentary who was closest to Li's time is Wu Jun 吳均 (469–520), whose poetic style is known for, interestingly, an “ancient aura” (*guqi* 古氣), and the citation has nothing to do with landscape depiction.⁵⁷ Although Li apparently refers to Xie Lingyun's “*Fu* on Dwelling in the Mountains” (“*Shanju fu*” 山居賦),⁵⁸ the extant version of *Shuijing zhu* does not contain a single line from Xie's poems, even though many of Xie's poems describe a journey or an outing that could have been easily woven into Li's commentary on the southern rivers. At one point, he mentions that Xie Lingyun and his cousin Xie Huilian 謝惠連 (407–433) together composed “linked verse” by a great oak tree and inscribed it at the site, but does not quote a single line.⁵⁹ Li is deliberately selective in his citations, which show a strong preference for historical and geographical information. This forms an interesting contrast with the practice of later *Shuijing zhu* annotators: Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 (1839–1915), for instance, liberally cites from poems of the Southern Dynasties, Tang, and Song in annotating Li's commentary. Yang Shoujing's citations highlight the absence of such poetry in Li's commentary itself.

The fourth- and fifth-century southern elite experienced a heightened interest in the beauty of nature, even though the rise of landscape representation was “as much a movement inward as outward.”⁶⁰ They believed in “facing mountains and waters with a mystical profundity

⁵⁵ For instance, apart from the writers mentioned in the preceding note, Li Daoyuan cites from a prefatory account of “Dwelling in the Mountains” 山居序 written by Xiao Zilong 蕭子隆 (474–494), whom he describes as the “former Qi commandery prince of Sui 故齊隨郡王,” whose literary collection was in circulation. *SJZS* 24, p. 2013.

⁵⁶ Here I use the term “modern” deliberately: although it is widely taken to mean *our* modern times or the twentieth century, the word itself refers to a period related to the present or recent times as opposed to the ancient past, and also to a person holding views that depart from traditional values; and it is my intention to emphatically point out that Li Daoyuan felt no sympathy for the modern ways of thinking about landscape in the fifth century.

⁵⁷ This comment appears in Wu Jun's biography in *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973) 49, p. 698. The same can be said for Li Daoyuan's citation of Xie Huilian's 謝惠連 (407–433) “*Fu* on Snow,” one of the most famous Southern Dynasties rhapsodies. The rhapsody depicts an imaginary winter party held in his “Rabbit Garden” by the prince of Liang from the Western Han, and Li Daoyuan cites a line to illustrate the splendor of the actual garden in the past. *SJZS* 24, p. 2013; *SJZJS* 24, p. 427.

⁵⁸ It is cited as Xie Lingyun's “*Shanju ji*” 山居記, identified by Xiong Huizhen as Xie's rhapsody with his detailed self-annotations in plain prose. *SJZS* 40, p. 3330; *SJZJS* 40, p. 693.

⁵⁹ *SJZS* 40, p. 3313; *SJZJS* 40, p. 693.

⁶⁰ See the discussion of “introspective landscape” in Xiaofei Tian, “Chapter 3, From the Eastern Jin through the Early Tang (317–649),” in Stephen Owen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature Volume I: To 1375* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2010), pp. 213–14; also in Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 34–35.

以玄對山水,” a spiritual enlightenment that comes from within and illuminates the image of nature without.⁶¹ If the travel rhapsodies, just like Li Daoyuan’s commentary, are written in the spirit of “viewing the past 覽古” or “das Altertum vergegenwärtigen 存古,” a term used in the very title of Hüsemann’s meticulous study of *Shuijing zhu*, or in Xie Lingyun’s words, “filling my eyes are all ancient occurrences 滿目皆古事,”⁶² then in this new kind of Southern Dynasties landscape poetry, one can find an escape from history and empire. The direct encounter with the beauty of nature and the spiritual transcendence achieved through it allow no intrusion of the thoughts of the past.

As said above, scholars have discussed how Xie Lingyun’s landscape experience was informed by earlier texts such as the *Classic of Changes* or the *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chu ci*). Such use of earlier texts are, however, profoundly different from seeing historical events or personages in landscape. Indeed, Xie Lingyun’s poem, “Entering Huazi Hill: The Third Valley of Hemp Source” (“Ru Huazi gang shi Mayuan disangu” 入華子崗是麻源第三谷), may be read as a deliberate rebellion against the tyranny of history. It begins by marveling at the emptiness of a mountain devoid of ancient traces, and ends with what in my reading is a positive, even exhilarated, affirmation of the value of the present moment:

南州實炎德	The Southland is truly of the Fiery Humor,
桂樹陵寒山	with cassia trees rising over wintry mountains.
銅陵映碧澗	Bronze Mound shines by an emerald torrent;
4 石磴瀉紅泉	stone stairs spill over with a reddish spring.
既枉隱淪客	It once diverted the course of a recluse,
亦棲肥遁賢	gave roost to a worthy man fled into hiding.
險徑無測度	Perilous paths not to be fathomed and gauged,
8 天路非術阡	Heaven’s roads are no ordinary streets.
遂登群峯首	Ultimately I mounted to the highest of many
	peaks,
邈若升雲煙	so far-off I seemed mounting the clouds and mists.
羽人絕髣髴	Of the feathered folk, not the least semblance;
12 丹丘徒空筌	Cinnabar Hill is only the empty fish-trap.
圖牒復澌滅	Maps and documents have furthermore disap-
	peared,

⁶¹ The quotation is from Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371), “Stele Inscription for the Grand Marshall, Yu Liang” (“Taiwei Yu Liang bei” 太尉庾亮碑). Yan Kejun 嚴可均, comp., *Quan Jin wen* 全晉文, j. 62, p. 1814, in idem, *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987).

⁶² From Xie Lingyun’s poem, “On the Road to the East” 入東道路; Lu, comp., *Xian Qin Han Wei*, p. 1175.

碑版誰聞傳	who has heard of stone or wooden inscriptions transmitted?
莫辨百代後	None can make out anything after a hundred generations,
16 安知千載前	who can know what was here a thousand years before!
且申獨往意	For the time being let me just indulge my intention to go off alone,
乘月弄潺湲	in the moonlight I play with the bubbling waters.
恆充俄頃用	This always fulfills the use of a moment,
20 豈爲古今然	how can it be for past and present? ⁶³

While I agree with Stephen Owen's reading of the poem as Xie Lingyun the librarian "changing his goals" and turning to an "evacuated" landscape when his texts fail,⁶⁴ it seems to me that the poet finds this failure to find texts or immortals liberating rather than disappointing, because he can become absorbed in the present. He immerses himself in the moonlight and the water (l. 18), both silvery and fluid, often serving as a metaphor of the flow of time. The verb that the poet uses here (l. 18) is again *nong* 弄, like in the last line of "Stone Chamber Mountain": to play or toy with, indicating a sense of idleness and purposelessness. The poet's living experience of the here and now is good for a moment's use only, not to be transmitted to a hundred generations or a thousand years later, and he is content with it.

There is no space for such poems in Li Daoyuan's commentary. But how about his quotation of southern landscape prose writings, such as Yuan Shansong's descriptive passages from *Yidu ji*, that betray a rapture with the immediacy of nature's beauty? On the one hand, these quotations are such a tiny fraction of the massive commentary that they are not quantitatively meaningful; on the other hand, those places graced with such descriptive passages often do not have "history," as far as Li Daoyuan is concerned. In fact, for the section of the Yangzi River that prompts Yuan Shansong's ecstatic exclamations, Yuan Shansong himself and his sojourn constitute the very historical personage and event that, in Li Daoyuan's view, can serve as a distinguishing mark of a place. For instance, in mentioning a lovely hill on the Yangzi's southern bank, Li Daoyuan writes, "*When Yuan Shansong was serving as the commandery magistrate here, he once climbed to its top and looked around. Therefore his 'Account' says, 'From the southern side I got to the peak, which could accommodate about a dozen people....'*" 袁

⁶³ Stephen Owen's translation, with modifications, in "Librarian in Exile," pp. 207–8.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 210.

山松爲郡，嘗登之矚望焉，故其記云：今自山南上至其嶺，嶺容十許人 (*italics mine*).⁶⁵ Yuan Shansong's lyrical depiction is thus quoted, and incorporated, within the framework of local history, and Yuan is shown by Li Daoyuan as imprinting his presence on local history *as the administrator governing the locale on the emperor's behalf*.

EMPIRE'S BLUE HIGHWAYS

If the contemporary poetic writings on landscape (largely from the south) offer an escape from history and empire, then Li Daoyuan's work is, to the contrary, deeply embedded in the concerns of history and empire. By Li's time there were two works of geography that bear the name of *jing* ("classic"): there was the *River Classic*, and there was the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*. Both had already acquired a commentary before Li Daoyuan's time. Li Daoyuan's choice of the *River Classic* may have been motivated by a variety of reasons: the fantastic nature of many of the mountains, beings, and things in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* would not have suited Li Daoyuan's historical sensibility; perhaps more importantly, while mountains and seas do not move around, rivers do. Rivers connect distant places together; they are empire's blue highways that enable the flow of people, goods, and information.⁶⁶

A verbal construct is not just a text but also an event: it is an *act* of the author and an *occurrence* in the history of the times, and must be

⁶⁵ *SJZS* 34, p. 2847; *SJZJS* 34, p. 596.

⁶⁶ Cf. Bao Yuanhang's argument that *Shuijing zhu* was composed partly to serve the economic and military needs of the Northern Wei regime (Bao, *Wenxue wenxian yanjiu*, pp. 113–18). Felt claims that Li Daoyuan's "stated goal" is to compose a work both "all-encompassing in scope" (*zhou*) and "complete in detail" (*bei*) (*Structures*, pp. 12, 169, 213). Hüsemann also believes that, "Für Li Daoyuan sollte eine ideale Geographie sowohl umfassend (*zhou*) und detailliert (*bei*)" (p. 219). I find the argument about "comprehensiveness" a little overstated. Had Li's objective been comprehensiveness, he could have conceivably done the same with a commentary on *Shanhai jing*, which has a much more cosmological range than the *Shuijing*; he could even have gone off on his own to author an independent work of geography rather than being constrained by the framework of the *Shuijing*. The *Shuijing* itself is far from being "comprehensive and all-encompassing," and Li Daoyuan says as much in his preface: after criticizing a series of earlier geographical works, he directs his criticism at the *Shuijing* itself by saying, "Although the *River Classic* roughly connects the lineages of the waters, it lacks comprehensiveness [lit. comprehensive or wide-ranging reach]. These works [i.e., the works of geography cited in the preceding lines, including the *River Classic*] may be said to 'each speak of one's own aspiration' [a citation from the *Analekts*], but few can be comprehensive in their pronouncements 水經雖粗綴津緒，又闕旁通。所謂各言其志，而罕能備其宣導者矣。" Li Daoyuan never "states" the goal of being "all-encompassing." In fact, he excuses his commentary from being comprehensive by saying: "Whatever is not the regular source of a river, it is not within the scope of my commentary" 非經水常源者，不在記注之限 (*jingshui* refers to a river with a mountain source), and "what I do not know – I leave it empty [without filling in]" 其所不知，蓋闕如也. *SJZS* 1; *SJZJS* 5. In his preface, Li Daoyuan is forestalling any future criticism of incompleteness rather than stating a goal of being comprehensive: there is an important difference between the two.

read and interpreted as such. Li Daoyuan grew up during the reign of emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 (r. 471–499), an energetic, ambitious emperor of mixed Xianbei/Han ethnicities. Emperor Xiaowen moved the Wei capital from the old Xianbei powerbase Pingcheng 平城 (modern Datong in Shanxi) to Luoyang in 493 and launched a series of political reforms, with a clear intention of conquering the south.⁶⁷ In an edict issued in 493 rebutting a courtier who advised against the southern campaign, the emperor said, “Raising one’s arm and giving a shout, one may very well accomplish the enterprise of the Han 奮臂一呼, 或成漢業”⁶⁸ – a notion epitomizing the model of the Han empire in his own imperial vision. Of especially important bearing for our discussion of Li Daoyuan and his *River Classic* commentary is a court debate that took place in the fourteenth year of the Taihe 太和 era (490).

In the autumn of this year, emperor Xiaowen ordered his officials to investigate and determine the proper “Five Elements” category of the Northern Wei as based on the Five Elements theory of dynastic succession, as it was believed that the dynastic cycles followed the order of the Five Elements – Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood – and each dynasty embodied the virtue of one element.⁶⁹ One group of officials held that the Han dynasty, which was of the “virtue of Fire,” was succeeded by Cao-Wei 曹魏 (Earth), Jin 晉 (Metal), Zhao 趙 (Water), Yan 燕 (Wood), and then Qin 秦 (Fire), and that since the Northern Wei followed Qin, it should embody the “virtue of Earth.”⁷⁰ Another group, led by Li Biao 李彪 (444–501) and Cui Guang 崔光 (451–523), argued that Wei should emulate Han in its skipping over the immediate predecessor Qin and thereby directly succeeding the Zhou dynasty. In other words, Wei should, in their opinion, pass over the “short-lived and slight 促偏” states of Zhao, Yan, and Qin and claim direct succession to Jin, and the element representing the Northern Wei should thus become Water. This latter opinion won the support of many influential officials, and emperor Xiaowen decided to adopt it after four months of vigorous court discussion. In early 491 he issued an edict saying, “How could We contravene the deliberation of the worthy ministers of the court? We will accept it and go with the virtue of Water 朝賢所議, 豈朕能有違奪, 便可依爲水德.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Emperor Xiaowen’s announcement in 493 of his personally going on a southern military campaign was a big event in the Northern Wei court. See *Wei shu* 7B, pp. 172–73.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 47, p. 1048.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 181, pp. 2744–47.

⁷⁰ Zhao, Yan, and Qin were Hu-ruled states in northern China during the period of the Sixteen Kingdoms, which was brought to an end by Northern Wei’s emperor Taiwu in 439.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 181, p. 2747.

Li Biao, who held that the Northern Wei represented the “virtue of Water,” was a learned scholar and Li Daoyuan’s patron.⁷² Li Biao’s partner in the court debate, Cui Guang, was a member of the great Cui clan of Qingzhou 青州 (in modern Shandong) and may have had a connection with Li Daoyuan’s father, Li Fan 酈範 (428–489). Li Fan played such an important role in the Northern Wei army’s capture of Qingzhou from the southern Song regime in 469 that he was made Governor of Qingzhou soon afterward, and Li Daoyuan, still a young boy at the time, followed his father there.⁷³ Li Daoyuan began his official career under emperor Xiaowen’s rule, and he mentions several times in *Shuijing zhu* how he personally followed the emperor on his northern tours;⁷⁴ one of those tours occurred in the eighteenth year of the Taihe era (494): this was the first specific date in Li Daoyuan’s personal life that is recorded in the commentary.⁷⁵ A devoted servant of the state well-known for being “uncorrupted and diligent 清勤,” Li Daoyuan eventually acquired a reputation for his “harsh and fierce 威猛” governing style and “austere and cruel 嚴酷” punitive measures. His official biography appears under the section titled “Cruel Officials” in the *History of the Wei* – a section normally reserved for officials who employed excessive torture and execution. In or shortly after 515, a group of Man 蠻 people under his governance, whom he had treated harshly, made a complaint to the throne about Li’s “brutality and severity 刻峻,” and Li Daoyuan was subsequently dismissed from office.⁷⁶

For all his interest in sites of history and records of the past, Li Daoyuan was firmly rooted in the *present* that was the Northern Wei, a dynasty that by then had united north China for nearly a century.⁷⁷

⁷² Ibid. 89, p. 1925. Li Daoyuan was even implicated and suffered his first political setback when Li Biao got in trouble. Li Yanshou 李延壽, comp., *Bei shi* 北史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 27, p. 995. Also see Bao Yuanhang’s discussion of their close relationship (Bao, *Wenxue wenxian yanjiu*, pp. 123–27).

⁷³ *SJZS* 26, pp. 2206–207.

⁷⁴ *SJZS* 3, p. 237; 20, p. 1683; *SJZJS* 3, p. 44.

⁷⁵ “In the eighteenth year of the Taihe era, I followed Emperor Gaozu on his northern inspection trip 余以太和十八年從高祖北巡”; see *SJZS* 3, p. 235; *SJZJS* 3, p. 44.

⁷⁶ *Wei shu* 89, pp. 1925–26. Cf. Felt’s statement that *Shuijing zhu* “decenters the Sinitic central realm, integrating legitimate spaces for foreigners, barbarians, and frontier people to be meaningful historical agents,” and “Most references to Man in the *Shuijing zhu* are descriptions of the Sinitic states sending punitive expeditions against them” (Felt, *Structures*, pp. 176, 183). It is ironic that Li Daoyuan himself was very much part of that “punitive” force against the Man, and so severely persecuted those “meaningful historical agents” that they had to appeal to the “Sinitic central realm” for protection and rescue.

⁷⁷ The anonymous reader of this article has requested elaboration regarding my discussion in these pages vis-à-vis the branding of Li Daoyuan as someone with a “patriotic spirit 愛國主義精神” by Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛 (1923–2015). See Chen, *Li Daoyuan pingzhuan* 酈道元評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1994), p. 42. The identity of a loyalist to a dynastic regime

Shuijing zhu is as much a work of pedantic passion as one of an ideological conception of “all under heaven (*tianxia* 天下).” This is hardly surprising, considering how the southern regimes had themselves been hard at work in their discursive construction of empire and kingship, under the successive Song, Qi, and Liang dynasties. In building up the capital city Jiankang 建康 (modern Nanjing) both physically and discursively in the course of the fifth century, the southern rulers transformed their regime from a refugee dynasty into an *empire*, and turned Jiankang from merely “the home and government headquarters of a ruler” into “a planned monumental environment” and “a prime focus of culture.”⁷⁸

In the 480s Li Daoyuan was appointed court gentleman in the Northern Wei's Section for Receptions of the Imperial Secretariat 尚書主客郎, being responsible for the reception of foreign dignitaries at court.⁷⁹ That was a time when the Wei and Qi sent frequent diplomatic missions to each other; moreover, Li Daoyuan's patron, Li Biao, was an emissary to the southern Qi court more than once.⁸⁰ Li Daoyuan's exposure to southern dignitaries would have enabled him to become familiar with southern court rhetoric and gain access to southern writings. He was able to see the newest works produced in the south, such as the *History of the Song* (*Song shu* 宋書), presented to the Qi throne in 488 by the southern courtier, writer, and historian Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513).⁸¹

Two observations can be made about Li Daoyuan's *Shuijing zhu* that indicate an ideological inclination. First, his uneven allocation of space to northern and southern rivers is connected to the degree of importance in the hierarchy of his textual system. Second, while Li never holds back in correcting earlier records, his criticism of the southerners' accounts of northern geography is more emotionally charged and more intense.

is surely distinct from the anachronistic label of a nationalistic patriot in the nation-building discourse of the twentieth century. Unfortunately there is a conflation of “imperial” and “nationalistic” in Chen Qiaoyi's view of Li Daoyuan. In contrast, Bao Yuanhang, who represents a younger generation of Chinese scholars, has a much more nuanced discussion of this point in his recent book, putting quotation marks around Chen Qiaoyi's term *aiguo*, yet stressing Li's commitment to the Northern Wei regime (Bao, *Wenxue wenxian yanjiu*, pp. 105–8).

⁷⁸ A. G. Dickens, ed., *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty: 1400–1800* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 7. For a discussion of the empire-building in the south and the physical and literary construction of the capital city Jiankang, see Xiaofei Tian, “Representing Kingship and Imagining Empire in Southern Dynasties Court Poetry,” *TP* 102.1–3 (2016), pp. 1–56, esp. 23–39.

⁷⁹ *Wei shu* 89, p. 1925.

⁸⁰ *Wei shu* 7A, pp. 152–53, 155–56, 168.

⁸¹ As we can see from Li Daoyuan's criticism of Shen Yue's error in *Song shu* regarding a

For the first observation, we need to return to the nature of *Shuijing zhu* as a commentary, whose framework is constrained by the original *River Classic* itself. This point cannot be stressed enough. By my rough count based on the extant version, the *River Classic* gives a more or less even spread of rivers across north and south, with seventy-odd rivers in the north and sixty-five-odd in the south.⁸² However, twenty-six out of forty *juan* of *Shuijing zhu* are taken up by northern rivers. If we examine Li's representation of what had traditionally been considered the "four great rivers 四瀆," that is, the Yangzi River, the Yellow River, the Huai, and the Ji (江, 河, 淮, 濟),⁸³ we notice that the Yellow River takes up the first five scrolls (*juan* 1–5), whereas the Yangzi River, the great waterway of the south, takes up only three scrolls (*juan* 33–35); the Ji, a northern river, occupies two scrolls (*juan* 7–8); the Huai, whose origin is in modern He'nan but whose course mostly runs through modern Anhui and Jiangsu, is only given one scroll. Based on Chen Qiaoyi's 陳橋驛 statistics, Li's commentary on the Yellow River spans well over fifty thousand words and takes up one-seventh of the entire work; or, put another way, the Yellow River commentary is ninety times longer than the *River Classic*'s treatment of the river, whereas on average the commentary is only twenty times longer than the *River Classic* text.⁸⁴ In the *River Classic*, the passage on the Huai River runs 194 characters and that on the Wei River 渭水 (a major waterway in modern Shaanxi) is in 130 characters: these two records are more or less on a par in terms of word count. However, the Wei River in Li's commentary spans three *juan* (17–19) and thirty-two typeset pages, almost three times longer than its treatment of the south-traversing Huai.

The Gu River section is again enlightening. As mentioned earlier, it is a tiny river in modern He'nan; its narration in the *River Classic* totals thirty-four characters, matching the short length of the river rather well. To this section Li Daoyuan appends a commentary of al-

battle fought between the Northern Wei and the Liu Song; *SJZS* 25, p. 2140; *SJZJS* 25, p. 453. Also see n. 55, above, for Li's knowledge of the contemporary southern belletristic writings.

⁸² First, the count is based on the number of rivers listed under each of the forty *juan* of *Shuijing zhu*. Second, for rivers that traverse both northern and southern territories (again, largely defined here by political governance in the fifth century), I count rivers originating from the northern realm and flowing largely through northern territories as "northern," e.g., the Dan River 丹水 in chap. 20, which originates from Shangluo county (in modern Shaanxi) and flows southeast through modern He'nan, and eventually into the Han River in Jun county (in modern Hubei). Third, we should keep in mind the possibility of roughly equal distribution of rivers because of the allegedly missing part of the *River Classic*.

⁸³ Ying Shao 應劭 (140–206), *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義, cited in *Shuijing zhu*, in the commentary on the Yellow River; *SJZS* 1, p. 7; *SJZJS* 1, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *SJZJS* 5, p. 94.

most 8,000 characters, which is hailed as “the first long commentary in the whole book 全書第一長注” by Chen Qiaoyi.⁸⁵ The reason for the verbal extravagance is simple: the Gu runs through the city of Luoyang, the then capital of the Northern Wei. The same is true of the Ta River 滎水, which flows from modern Shanxi to modern Hebei. It is not a grand river, and is given a depiction in forty-seven characters in the *River Classic*. Yet Li Daoyuan devotes an entire chapter (*juan* 13) to this river alone and appends a commentary of about 6,000 characters, because the Ta River flows through Pingcheng, the former Northern Wei capital for nearly a century before emperor Xiaowen's move to Luoyang in 493.

In other words, the commentary gives much more space to the northern rivers, and in particular favors cities serving as political centers of the north-based regimes. In glaring contrast, in the entire commentary as it now stands, there is no mention of Jiankang (whether by this name, or by the earlier names Jianye 建業 and Jinling 金陵), which was the capital of the kingdom of Wu, the Eastern Jin, and the Southern Dynasties. Since the Yangzi River flows around Jiankang, this seems to be an unimaginable omission. Furthermore, the commentary on the Yangzi stops its discourse abruptly at Qinglin Lake 青林湖 on the boundary of Hubei and Jiangxi, before the river runs through Anhui and Jiangsu.⁸⁶ This, and the fact that there are a number of fragments about the lower stretch of the Yangzi River preserved in various encyclopedic, commentarial, and other sources, led the Qing scholar Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755) to speculate that a chapter on the Yangzi must have been lost (and presumably Jiankang would have been included in that missing chapter).⁸⁷ This is possible, but far from certain; more importantly, there is no evidence that indicates how long or detailed that purportedly missing chapter might have been.⁸⁸

Quan Zuwang's speculation is further complicated by the *River Classic* text and commentary about the Han River 漢水 (referred to as the Mian River 沔水 in *Shuijing zhu*). The Han/Mian River is a large

⁸⁵ *SJZJS* 16, p. 304.

⁸⁶ See *SJZJS* 35, pp. 609, 618.

⁸⁷ For the speculation made by Quan Zuwang, and a collection of the fragments, see *SJZJS* 35, pp. 612–16.

⁸⁸ The claim that *Shuijing zhu* is missing five *juan* is supposed to have been made in the great Northern Song book catalogue *Chongwen zongmu* 崇文總目 (presented to the throne in 1041), but *Chongwen zongmu* itself is incomplete, and the claim is known only from an indirect “quotation” in Ouyang Xuan's 歐陽玄 (1283–1357) preface to *Buzheng Shuijing* 補正水經 (also called *Buwang Shuijing* 補亡水經) by Cai Gui 蔡珪 (d. 1174). See Zheng, *Shuijing zhu yanjiu shiliao chubian*, pp. 7, 21 (Ouyang Xuan's name was changed to Ouyang Yuan 歐陽元 to avoid the Qing emperor Kangxi's name taboo).

tributary of the Yangzi: the *River Classic* states at the end of chapter 28, that it “flows southward to the north of the Shayi county of Jiangxia (modern Wuhan), and then southward into the Yangzi 南至江夏沙羨縣北, 南入於江”;⁸⁹ and then, at the beginning of chapter 29, “The Mian River merges with the Yangzi, and then flows eastward through Pengli Marsh 沔水與江合流, 又東過彭蠡澤.”⁹⁰ Since the Han and Yangzi are considered as merging together at Wuhan, the commentary should subsequently include a record of the Yangzi flowing from Wuhan onward, through modern Anhui and Jiangsu, all the way until it reaches the East China Sea. At a casual glance, the commentary appears to do exactly that. However, barely six typeset pages are given to the middle and lower stretch of the Yangzi from Wuhan on, even as it flows through territories with numerous noteworthy sites and places. Although Quan Zuwang believes that a fourth chapter on the Yangzi with greater details had once existed to make up for such curtness, one cannot help wondering.⁹¹

Those few pages also contain many inaccuracies: in two places Li Daoyuan calls out the *River Classic* for its errors, but he also makes mistakes of his own.⁹² He seems self-consciously uncertain about this section on the Han River, as he opines at its end:

It is just that the land in the southeast is low and the converging point of ten thousand waterways. Waves and lakes overflow, and a river is formed everywhere. As for tributaries like tree branches and crisscrossing channels, their lineages divide and congregate; it is difficult to know all the old streams and former watercourses. Although I have roughly followed the territories of the counties and sorted out the intertwined relations, I may not have obtained all the facts.⁹³ 但東南地卑, 萬流所湊, 濤湖泛決, 觸地成川, 枝津交渠, 世家分夥, 故川舊瀆, 難以取悉, 雖麤依縣地, 緝綜所纏, 亦未必一得其實也。

⁸⁹ *SJZS* 28, p. 2418; *SJZJS* 28, p. 508.

⁹⁰ *SJZS* 29, p. 2423; *SJZJS* 29, p. 511.

⁹¹ Chen Qiaoyi not only stresses the importance of reading the Yangzi River commentary together with the Mian River commentary but also goes so far as to believe that the “missing chapter” in Quan Zuwang’s speculation is in fact none other than chap. 29; see Chen, “Shuijing zhu Jiangshui zhu yanjiu” 水經江水注研究, in *Hangzhou daxue xuebao* 杭州大學學報 14.3 (September 1984), p. 112.

⁹² This is pointed out by Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695); *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi* 29, p. 524. As for Li Daoyuan’s observation of the *River Classic*’s mistakes, see *SJZS* 29, p. 2431; *SJZJS* 29, p. 512.

⁹³ *SJZS* 29, p. 2458; *SJZJS* 29, p. 516.

In contrast with the hesitant tone he adopts here, Li Daoyuan often speaks with great authority about the northern terrains, and his criticism of near-contemporary southerners' records has a harshness rarely seen in his disagreement with earlier geographical writings. For instance, in the section on the Ying River 潁水, to the *River Classic* text, "Then [Ying River] flows to the south and passes north of Nüyang county 又南過女陽縣北," Li gives the following commentary:

In the south of the old county seat, a tributary of Ru River flows, hence the county acquired its name (Nüyang/Ruyang, literally "north of Nü/Ru"). Kan Yin said: "This is a branch from the Ru River. Later it dried up, and was hence called 'the Dead Ru River.' Hence the word Ru 汝 is deprived of its water radical [and became *nü* 女]." I note that Ru and Nü are dialectal pronunciations, so the character changes according to the sound, and it is not necessarily true that, as Mr. Kan theorized, a character is changed according to a river's stoppage or flow.⁹⁴ 縣故城南有汝水枝流, 故縣得厥稱矣. 闕駰曰: 本汝水別流, 其後枯竭, 號曰死汝水, 故其字無水. 余按汝、女乃方俗之音, 故字隨讀改, 未必一如闕氏之說, 以窮通損字也.

Li Daoyuan's tone here is neutral, even gracious, as he uses the phrase "not necessarily 未必" in disagreeing with Kan Yin. This forms a sharp contrast with Li's similar criticism of the southern writer Liu Chengzhi 劉澄之 (fl. early-fifth c.), the author of *An Account of Mountains and Rivers Past and Present* (*Shanchuan gujin ji* 山川古今記):

Liu Chengzhi says, "Xin'an has a Jian River. It originates from the county's north. There is also a Yuan River, whose source I do not know." I investigated various geographical records and found no such "Yuan River." It is just that the graphs of Yuan and Jian look similar and so Jian from time to time is erroneously written as Yuan. Hence Kan Yin in his *Geographical Records* mentioned a "Yuan River [referred to] in *Yu gong*." Thereupon one realizes that errors happen in transmission and that one character was mistakenly written for another. This is all because Chengzhi did not use his head to think: if there was no such a river to begin with, how could he find a source for it?!⁹⁵

劉澄之云: 新安有澗水, 源出縣北, 又有淵水, 未知其源. 余考諸地記, 并無淵水, 但澗、澗字相似, 時有字錯爲淵也. 故闕駰地理志曰禹貢之澗水. 是以知傳寫書誤, 字謬舛真, 澄之不思所致耳. 既無斯水, 何源之可求乎.

⁹⁴ *SJZS* 22, p. 1818; *SJZJS* 22, p. 388.

⁹⁵ *SJZS* 16, p. 1371; *SJZJS* 16, p. 287.

Shortly afterward, Li Daoyuan again cites Liu Chengzhi, who says that a Xiao River, which flows into the Gu, originates from Tan Mountain. This sets Li off on a tirade against not only Liu Chengzhi but also another southerner Guo Yuansheng 郭緣生:

Liu Chengzhi also says, “[The Xiao River] originates from Tan Mountain.” Now, Tan Mountain is west of Yiyang county, and south of the Gu. There is no way that it can flow southward [into the Gu]. As I trace this theory, it surely must have come from Guo Yuansheng’s erroneous *Account of the Campaign*. Yuansheng was part of a military campaign, and made [geographical] inquiries along the way. This was not his homeland, so he could not possibly have any clear understanding. Today, the currents of the Xiao River flow northward, its water sparkling over the mud at the bottom. How could he say that it had dried up? Both were careless fellows!⁹⁶

劉澄之又云出檀山。檀山在宜陽縣西，在谷水南，無南入之理。考尋茲說，當承緣生述征謬志耳。緣生從戎行旅，征途訊訪，既非舊土，故無所究。今川瀾北注，澄映泥濘，何得言枯涸也？皆爲疏僻矣。

Guo Yuansheng once followed Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422; Song emperor Wu, r. 420–422) on his military campaign in 416–417 that successfully recovered, if only for a short time, Luoyang and Chang’an from the Later Qin regime. Like Dai Yanzhi 戴延之, another of Liu Yu’s officers, he too wrote an *Account of the Campaign* (*Shuzheng ji* 述征記);⁹⁷ they both are frequently cited in *Shuijing zhu* but receive some harsh criticism from Li Daoyuan.⁹⁸ The use of rhetorical questions in each of the above passages conveys a kind of vehemence that he seldom exhibits when he offers corrections to other, much earlier writings.

To accuse southern writers of a superficial knowledge of a land that is not their homeland evokes Li Daoyuan’s younger contemporary, a fellow Northern Wei courtier named Yang Xuanzhi 陽銜之 (fl. 540s). Yang wrote in his *Record of Luoyang Monasteries* (*Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記), whose preface is dated 547, twenty years after Li Daoyuan’s death:⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *SJS* 16, p. 1373; *SJS* 16, p. 287.

⁹⁷ See a discussion of these northern campaign records in Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 73–77, 82–88.

⁹⁸ At one place Li Daoyuan calls Guo Yuansheng “learned but not thoughtful 學而不思” (or, “he studied without reflection”). See *SJS* 19, p. 3419; *SJS* 19, p. 337. Li Daoyuan also expresses his discontent with Dai Yanzhi, bluntly saying that, “Yanzhi does not make any sense 延之不通情理”; *SJS* 25, p. 2130; *SJS* 25, p. 450.

⁹⁹ Yang Xuanzhi, *Luoyang qielan ji jiaozhu* 洛陽伽藍記校注, annot. Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1978) 2, p. 73.

The Gu River surrounds the city [of Luoyang]. Outside Jianchun Gate it flows eastward into Yang Canal under a stone bridge. The bridge had four pillars on the south side of the road. The inscription said that they were made by Ma Xian, chamberlain for palace buildings, in the fourth year of the Yangjia era [135] during the Han dynasty. In the third year of the Xiaochang era of our dynasty [527], a great rainstorm caused the bridge to collapse, and the pillars were buried under. The two pillars on the north side of the road, however, remain even today.

I, Xuanzhi, note that Liu Chengzhi's *Account of Mountains and Rivers Past and Present* and Dai Yanzhi's *Account of the Western Campaign* both state the bridge was built in the first year of the Taikang era [280] during the Jin. This is far from the truth. It should be noted that Chengzhi and his like were born the south of the Yangzi River and had never traveled around in the central land, and only passed through briefly because of a military campaign; nevertheless, they did not possess any first-hand experiences of past events. They would hear something on the road and then manufacture a contrived story about it. They have been misleading the later-born far too long.

穀水周圍遶城，至建春門外，東入陽渠石橋。橋有四柱，在道南，銘云漢陽嘉四年將作大匠馬憲造。逮我孝昌三年，大雨頽橋，柱始埋沒。道北二柱，至今猶存。銜之案劉澄之山川古今記、戴延之西征記並云晉太康元年造，此則失之遠矣。按澄之等並生在江表，未遊中土，假因征役，暫來經過；至於舊事，多非親覽，聞諸道路，便爲穿鑿，誤我後學，日月已甚。

In these remarks, as in Li Daoyuan's commentary, Wei pride dominates. The difference is that Li Daoyuan hardly ever admits his own lack of first-hand experiences of the south. On the rare occasion that he acknowledges his limitation, Li chalks it up to the fact that the lowly southeastern land has too many ancient waterways, as in the above-cited passage from the end of the Han River section.

A NORTHERN WEI COURTIER'S VISION OF THE "WORLD"

The discussion in the preceding section has shown how Li Daoyuan's monumental work is deeply informed by his position as a loyal courtier of the Northern Wei regime, one who spent his formative years of youth under the rule of an ambitious emperor eager to "accomplish the enterprise of the Han" and considering his dynasty as a direct successor to the Jin. Seen in the light of the north-south competition, Li Daoyuan's commentary is a strategic choice in forging powerful river-

ine ties between disconnected places far apart in actual space. Through what I call “associative stitching,” he uses the commentary as a nexus and extends his reach from the “Central Plains” to the land of Korea, to India and even the Roman Empire, as well as to the Cham kingdom in central Vietnam.¹⁰⁰ Viewed in terms of the macro-structure of the commentary, Li Daoyuan’s commentary forms a textual web that interconnects much of the known world of Li’s time.

The inclusion of India in the commentary – not in the original *River Classic* itself – deserves special attention: it illustrates how Li both follows the parameters set by the *River Classic* and ingeniously goes beyond them to promote his own agenda through the device of associative stitching; it is, as I will demonstrate below, Li’s most explicit attempt to subsume a foreign system – that of Buddhist cosmology – into the imperial imaginary.¹⁰¹

We need to return to the *River Classic* itself and once again remind ourselves that Li Daoyuan is, first of all, writing a commentary on a preexisting text. In other words, he may have considerable leeway in expanding on the original text, but he cannot choose or alter where and how it begins. The *River Classic* opens with a statement of the origin of the Yellow River:

Mount Kunlun is in the northwest, 50,000 *li* away from Mount Song; it is the center of the earth. It is 11,000 *li* tall. The River originates from its northeastern side. Winding around, it flows southeast and enters the Bohai.¹⁰² Then again it emerges beyond the Bohai, and flows southward to Jishi Mountain, at the foot of which is Stone Gate; this is where the River emerges and flows on southwest.¹⁰³ 崑崙墟在西北，去嵩高五萬里，地之中也。其高萬一千里。河水出其東北陬，屈從其東南流，入于渤海。又出海外，南至積石山，下有石門，河水冒以西南流。

¹⁰⁰ See *Shuijing zhu* chapters 1, 14, and 36.

¹⁰¹ Felt sees this as Li Daoyuan’s deliberate construction of an “Indo-Sinitic bipolar world-view” (i.e., treating “India” and “China” as a pair of equals) to correct Sinocentrism, which is the main argument in chap. 5 of his book (*Structures*, pp. 211–55). The argument, presenting Li as someone more in line with a present-day belief, is marred by fragmented evidence and misreading. I am inclined to agree with Hüsemann that Li Daoyuan is trying to integrate new geographical knowledge into the existing framework of a much older text, although I do not think that Li Daoyuan is merely doing it for the sake of being “comprehensive” (see n. 66, above). See Hüsemann, “Located Imagination—India in the *Shuijing zhu* of Li Daoyuan (?–527),” *ZDMG* 171.1 (2021), pp. 149–72, esp. 163, n. 59. Also see Alexis Lycas, “Le décentrement du regard géographique dans le *Shuijing zhu* de Li Daoyuan (i527),” *BEFEO* 104 (2018), pp. 241–66.

¹⁰² “Bohai” here refers to the Puchang Sea 蒲昌海, or Lop Nur, a former salt lake, now largely dried up, in southeastern Xinjiang.

¹⁰³ *SJZS* 1, pp. 1–66. Note that in *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi* Chen Qiaoyi follows Dai Zhen in

Li's commentary on this little passage of fifty-nine characters encompasses the entire first chapter or scroll of *Shuijing zhu*. In it, Li Daoyuan does several notable things: 1) he constructs a textual connection between the Yellow River and the lands of India and immediately problematizes it; 2) he complicates – if not undermines outright – the original text's statement regarding Mount Kunlun being the center of the earth by showing multiple theories regarding the name and location of Mount Kunlun; and 3) although he brings the Buddhist kingdoms of India into his commentary by citing liberally from Buddhist accounts, through a clever rhetorical move he undercuts the primary status enjoyed by the Buddhist lands in those accounts.

As we see above, the *River Classic* describes Mount Kunlun as being fifty thousand *li* away from Mount Song, the mountain near Luoyang. Mount Song is also traditionally known as the Central Mountain (*zhongyue* 中嶽), since Luoyang was, in a long-standing native tradition, the center of the earth.¹⁰⁴ To this Li Daoyuan appends a comment citing from a variety of sources to give different measures of distance between Kunlun and Mount Song/Luoyang, much shorter in several instances and longer in another. He then states:

Those several accounts [cited above] are all different. The road is blocked and long, and the *Classic* and the records are from a distant age and contain lacunae. Journeys by river or land diverge, and the routes also vary. With my shallow insight and superficial knowledge, this is not something I was able to explore in any detail. I am compelled to simply offer an account of what I know in order to mark the disparities.¹⁰⁵ 數說不同。道阻且長，經記繇繆，水陸路殊，徑復不同，淺見末聞，非所詳究，不能不聊述聞見，以誌差違也。

Desiring to come across as a responsible commentator, Li Daoyuan does not pretend that he agrees unreservedly with the viewpoint of the original text. Instead, he offers several differing theories and brings the reader's attention to their "difference." This implicitly encourages the reader to think twice about the assertion regarding the central location of Mount Kunlun in the original text. But Li also candidly admits that he is unable to adjudicate among these theories, accentuating the objectivity of his commentary and his position. In what follows, he reiterates this position of objectivity and cautions the reader repeatedly.

removing the last part of the sentence: 河水冒以西南流 (see *SJZJS* 1, p. 11).

¹⁰⁴ See Wang Bangwei's 王邦維 discussion in "Luozhou wuying yu tianxia zhizhong" 洛州无影與天下之中, *Sichuan daxue xuebao* 四川大學學報 4 (2005), pp. 94–100.

¹⁰⁵ *SJZS* 1, p. 5; *SJZJS* 1, p. 2.

Hence it is important for us to parse what Li Daoyuan's citations are and *how* he cites them (that is, when we still have the sources he cites), and to examine his own assessment of these citations.

In the longest section of chapter 1, Li Daoyuan quotes Shi Dao'an's 釋道安 (312–385) *Record of the Western Regions* 西域志 to identify Mount Kunlun with Mount Anavatapta,¹⁰⁶ and goes on to state, still based on Shi Dao'an, that the Xintou and Heng Rivers (the Indus and Ganges Rivers) are two of the six great rivers originating from Mount Kunlun. A relationship between the Yellow River and the lands of India is thus established.¹⁰⁷ He then embarks on a long narrative of the Buddhist kingdoms of India, stitched together from a variety of sources, including, most notably, the monk Faxian's 法顯 (ca. 340–421) travel account commonly known as the *Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* 佛國記.¹⁰⁸ But after liberally citing these sources, Li gives an account of how Dao'an, referencing the *Account of King Mu* 穆天子傳 as well as Fotudiao's 佛圖調 (i.e., Zhu Fodiao 竺佛調, fl. fourth c.) and Kang Tai's 康泰 (fl. third c.) works, tries to convince a contemporary monk Zhu Fatai 竺法汰 (320–387) that Mount Kunlun was indeed Mount Anavatapta.¹⁰⁹ At this point Li Daoyuan intervenes, saying,

As I examine Master Shi's [Dao'an's] remarks, I find that they do not offer good evidence [for the belief that Mount Kunlun is Mount Anavatapta]. The *Account of King Mu*, the *Bamboo Annals*, and the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* had lay hidden for ages,¹¹⁰ and the binding ropes [of the bamboo slips on which the works were written] have fallen off and disappeared; the slips are out of order and difficult to put back together. Later people did their best to connect the slips, but often they missed the original intent [of the authors] to such a degree that, when it comes to visit-

¹⁰⁶ *SJZS* 1, p. 13. Chen Qiaoyi follows Dai Zhen in giving the title as *Xiyu ji* 西域記; *SJZJS* 1, p. 3. Given the fluidity of titles in manuscript culture, we should regard both *Xiyu zhi* and *Xiyu ji* as correct, both referring to the one and same work. Master Shi 釋氏 is, as Yang Shoujing correctly identifies, Shi Dao'an, the eminent monk who was the first to adopt Shi as a surname, a practice subsequently adopted by all Buddhist clergy. His *Xiyu zhi* was frequently cited in encyclopedic sources such as *Yiwen leiju* and *Taiping yulan* (for these works, see n. 26, above).

¹⁰⁷ *SJZJS* 1, p. 3: "This mountain is the source of six great rivers; west of the mountain is a great river named Xintou' 其山出六大水, 山西有大水, 名新頭河." Later Li Daoyuan cites Kang Tai's 康泰 (fl. 3d c.) *Funan zhuan* 扶南傳, which identifies Mount Kunlun as the origin of the Ganges; *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi* 1, p. 4. As Yang Shoujing notes, Li Daoyuan "implicitly takes Xintou and Heng as two of those six rivers 蓋隱隱以新頭河恆水爲六水之二水"; *SJZS* 1, p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed discussion of Faxian's work, see Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 88–118.

¹⁰⁹ *SJZS* 1, pp. 57–58; *SJZJS* 1, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ *Account of King Mu of Zhou* and *Bamboo Annals* were works among a large cache of documents discovered in a Zhou-dynasty tomb in Ji 汲 commandery (in modern He'nan) in 279.

ing the land and investigating the rivers, they do not match the statements made in the canon; or when it comes to verifying the itinerary and measuring the journey, there is no correspondence [between the textual records and the physical reality]. Master Shi did not trace the larger aims of the various assumptions to their roots and demonstrate their subtle message to clarify their errors: this is not something that one feels right about.¹¹¹

余考釋氏之言，未爲佳證。穆天子、竹書及山海經，皆埋繯歲久，編章稀絕，書策落次，難以緝綴。後人假合，多差遠意。至欲訪地脈川，不與經符，驗程準途，故自無會。釋氏不復根其眾歸之鴻致，陳其細趣，以辨其非，非所安也。

It is clear that Li Daoyuan does not endorse Dao'an's identification of Mount Kunlun with Mount Anavatapta.¹¹² This is quite an anticlimax to the long narrative of the Buddhist lands, whose only rationale for being in the commentary is the assumption that the great Indian rivers, too, originate from Mount Kunlun, just as the Yellow River does. Yet, this "anticlimax" is perfectly understandable as a mode of commentarial writing: the commentator offers all the information available on a topic, and steps back to offer his own judgment on the matter.¹¹³

Li Daoyuan then goes on to cite from *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* and Guo Pu's commentary on it, as well as the Western Han work *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and observes that, even if the *Huainanzi* account "bears a vague similarity to Fotudiao's claim 髣髴近浮圖調之說," he finds that "[the claim about] the six rivers from Mount Anavatapta, and about the range of the two rivers from the Onion Range and Yutian, completely goes against all the classical and historical works [in the native tradition] 阿耨達六水，蔥嶺、于闐二水之限，與經史諸書全相乖異。"¹¹⁴ From here he goes on to cite Dongfang Shuo's 東方朔 (ca. 154–93 BC) *Record of the Ten Continents* 東方朔十洲記, and even more plainly states his mistrust of the Kunlun/Anavatapta equation, further interrogating the conflicting accounts of Mount Kunlun itself:

¹¹¹ *SJZS* 1, p. 59; *SJZJS* 1, pp. 9–10.

¹¹² Cf. Felt's belief that Li Daoyuan endorses Master Shi's equation of the two mountains (*Structures*, pp. 226–32). Felt gives an account of Master Shi's argument but does not cite Li Daoyuan's judgment translated above, and also mistakenly transposes Li Daoyuan's denunciation of Master Shi's error to some other unnamed author (*Structures*, p. 217).

¹¹³ For a similar example, one may refer to Pei Songzhi's citation of a source and subsequent refutation of it in his commentary on *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) 5, p. 161.

¹¹⁴ “今按山海經... 又按淮南之書...”; *SJZS* 1, pp. 60–61; *SJZJS* 1, p. 10. Cf. Felt's claim that there is a “remarkable consistency between traditional Sinitic geographies and newly introduced Buddhist geographies” (*Structures*, p. 226).

When we examine Dongfang Shuo's remarks, and the "fifty thousand *li*" statement made in the *River Classic*, it would be difficult to consider Fotudiao and Kang Tai as correct. Within the six directions, when it comes to the store of rivers and lakes, the big ones are not necessarily immense, and the small ones are not necessarily minute; those that are preserved are not necessarily in the realm of Being, and those that are concealed are not necessarily in the realm of Non-being. What is contained [within the six directions] is truly enormous! Amongst these places, there are more than a few that share the same name but exist in different regions, or whose designations become mixed up, so much so that even Fangzhang Hill in the Eastern Sea is also called Kunlun, and the Bronze Pillar of the Western Continent is also ruled by the Nine Abodes.¹¹⁵

考東方朔之言及經五萬里之文，難言浮圖調、康泰之是矣。六合之內，水澤之藏，大非爲巨，小非爲細，存非爲有，隱非爲無，其所苞者廣矣。于中同名異域，稱謂相亂，亦不爲寡。至如東海方丈，亦有崑崙之稱，西洲銅柱，又有九府之治。

Li then cites a slew of Daoist works including the *Classic of Divine Marvels* 神異經 (again attributed to Dongfang Shuo) and the "Mountain-opening Dunjia Diagram" 遁甲開山圖, as supportive evidence for his statement about Mount Kunlun and the Bronze Pillar.¹¹⁶ He subsequently concludes at the end of the first chapter commentary that it is, in his opinion, impossible for anyone to know the true location of Mount Kunlun:

Thus, what the space within Heaven, Earth, and the four directions incorporates is infinite. The subtleties and profundities cannot be fathomed with speculative reasoning; the myriad images are distant and deep, and cannot be traced with thought. If one cannot mount the twin dragons over the track of clouds, gallop the eight steeds on the extensive "tortoise's path,"¹¹⁷ match emperor Xuanyuan in visiting a hundred spirits, or emulate the Great Yu in assembling various noble lords at Kuaiji, then how could one possibly adjudicate between different schools such as the Confucians and the Mohists?¹¹⁸ 然六合之內，其苞遠矣。幽致冲妙，難本以情，

¹¹⁵ *SJZS* 1, p. 64; *SJZJS* 1, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ Li Daoyuan cites Zhang Hua's 張華 (232–300) "explanation" (*xu* 敘) of *Shenyi jing*, which suggests that he is referring to a version of *Shenyi jing* with Zhang Hua's commentary.

¹¹⁷ The tortoise's path means a very long path. Emperor Xuanyuan is the Yellow Emperor. The Great Yu is said to have summoned various lords from all over the realm and held an assembly at Kuaiji.

¹¹⁸ *SJZS* 1, p. 66; *SJZJS* 1, p. 11.

萬像遐淵，思絕根尋。自不登兩龍于雲轍，騁八駿于龜途，等軒轅之訪百靈，方大禹之集會計，儒墨之說，孰使辨哉？

This statement echoes Li Daoyuan's position set out at the beginning of his chapter 1 commentary, that he can only present conflicting accounts without being able to adjudicate. His chapter 1 commentary is thus brought to a full circle.

To sum up the above discussions: Li Daoyuan records the claim that Kunlun is the origin of the Indian rivers only to challenges its veracity; he advocates a cautious and skeptical approach that evokes rather than arbitrates, provokes rather than settles. But if so, one might ask, why include such an extensive account about the Buddhist lands of India in the middle of his commentary at all? I suggest that, at a basic level, Li aspired to be a responsible commentator and present all the available data and all the available claims to his reader so as to "integrate new knowledge," as Hüseemann says; and, just as importantly, there indeed were plenty of sources available to him that he could make use of.¹¹⁹ At a deeper level, he constructs a web of textual interconnections among the rivers in his known world in order to incorporate the Buddhist account of the world – which, given the fervent belief of the Northern Wei rulers, nobles, and courtiers at Li Daoyuan's time, would have been hard to ignore and undiplomatic to dismiss – while tacitly reminding them, his intended audience, of the potential fallacy of such an account. Indeed, especially if Li Daoyuan was not one who embraced Buddhism with the same passion as many royal family members and many of his peers at the court did,¹²⁰ what could be more effective than confronting those Buddhist geographical accounts rather than avoiding them altogether – since they were well known to his contemporaries in any case – and setting the conflicting accounts side by side to expose their contradictions?

To reiterate a point made earlier in this article: including a source in the commentary does not necessarily indicate the commentator's endorsement of that source, just as Li includes the "erroneous" claims made by southern authors only to criticize them and demonstrate his erudition. A good example is how Li Daoyuan undercuts the centrality of the Buddhist lands with a fascinating explanation of why Cen-

¹¹⁹ There were many Buddhist works from the fourth and fifth century that Li could have drawn upon, including first-hand travel accounts of India written by itinerant monks. For the unprecedentedly large scale of physical movement and the several different types of travelers in this period, see Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 15–18.

¹²⁰ We do not have any biographical information about Li Daoyuan's view of Buddhism, but in general there is scant attention to Buddhist sites in *Shuijing zhu* except in the first chapter, which indicates a disinterest in Buddhism. I will return to this point below.

tral India was designated by early-medieval Buddhist authors as “the Central Domain” (*zhongguo* 中國), a term traditionally reserved for the heartland of the Chinese civilization.¹²¹

From west of the [Punaban] River, there are the various kingdoms of India [Tianzhu]. Southward from this point on, it is all the Central Domain [*zhongguo*], where people are numerous and prosperous. Its food and dress are the same as those in the [Chinese] Central Realm, and so it is named the “Central Domain.”¹²²
自河以西，天竺諸國，自是以南，皆爲中國，人民殷富。中國者，服食與中國同，故名之爲中國也。

Here Li Daoyuan is citing from Faxian’s *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, but he misquotes the source text, whether deliberately or not, to make his own point – a point as crucial to understanding Li Daoyuan’s conception of the world as it is erroneous. Faxian’s text, as Yang Shoujing points out, states that the kingdom of Wuchang 烏長 (Skt.: Uḍḍāna) in North India had the same food and clothes as in Central India (*zhong Tianzhu*), which Faxian calls the Central Domain (*zhongguo*).¹²³ This is what Faxian says: “The Kingdom of Wuchang is exactly in Northern India, and its people all speak the language of Central India – Central India is known as the Central Domain – and its secular people’s dress, food, and drink are also the same as in Central Domain 烏長國是正北天竺也，盡作中天竺語，中天竺所謂中國。俗人衣服飲食亦與中國同。”¹²⁴

By saying “[the Central Domain’s] food and dress are the same as in the [Chinese] Central Realm,” Li Daoyuan is clearly marking off the second *zhongguo* as different from the first *zhongguo* and, most importantly, also as the norm and the standard that the first, Indic, *zhongguo* is measured against and compared with. In other words, the Indic *zhongguo* is named *zhongguo* not because it is where the Buddha obtained enlightenment there or because of any spiritual or moral superiority it might possess as a Buddhist holy site,¹²⁵ but because it is “just like”

¹²¹ See related discussion in Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 97–98. E.g., “The acknowledgment of central India as the center of the world and China as borderland was not universal in Faxian’s time, and indeed it was a source of contention among Faxian’s contemporaries” (*Visionary Journeys*, p. 98).

¹²² *SJZS* 1, p. 20; *SJZJS* 1, p. 4.

¹²³ *SJZS* 1, p. 20.

¹²⁴ Adachi Kirobu 足利喜六, annot., *Faxian zhuan kaozheng* 法顯傳考證 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), p. 79. Felt also observes the distortion of Faxian’s original meaning (*Structures*, p. 244), though he interprets the passage as presenting India as a land parallel to the Chinese “Central Domain.”

¹²⁵ “Buddhist scriptures sometimes reverse the argument, saying that the Buddha could only be born at the center of the world because otherwise his powerful substance would tip the earth off balance”; Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, p. 97.

the Chinese/Sinitic *zhongguo* in some of the most mundane aspects of its social, and secular, life!¹²⁶

With this observation, I will return to Li Daoyuan's implicit ideological leaning in *Shuijing zhu*. *Shuijing zhu* was informed by the vision of a Northern Wei courtier who had an intimate knowledge of the Wei court and the state machinery and who was also a pedantic commentator desirous of leaving his mark in the landscape of letters. The commentary unequivocally highlights the political centers of the Northern Wei realm, namely Pingcheng and Luoyang, the former and current capitals of the Northern Wei, as both cities are given disproportionately more prominence than what the little rivers flowing through them deserve or what the *River Classic* texts call for. Seen in this light, the inclusion of Buddhist lands in the very first chapter of the commentary, a place imposed on the commentator by the original text's positioning of the Yellow River and its alleged source Mount Kunlun, is a familiar move: here it is useful to be once again reminded that works of "geography" (*dili* 地理), such as Li Daoyuan's *Shuijing zhu*, were considered a subsidiary of the "History" category throughout premodern China, and the insertion of Buddhist kingdoms – even the Roman Empire – into a work like *Shuijing zhu* was perfectly consistent with the practice of any self-respecting premodern Chinese historian in writing the history of a realm, namely, the practice of incorporating accounts of borderlands and foreign lands, especially the realm's neighboring states.¹²⁷

Indeed, this is the same structural and rhetorical move made by Yang Xuanzhi in his *Record of Luoyang Monasteries*. This work is divided into five chapters (*juan*), respectively focusing on, in this order, the center (or Inner City), and then the eastern, southern, western, and northern sections of the city. Each chapter describes the monasteries and their nearby landmarks in one part of Luoyang. However, unlike any of the other parts of the book, the last chapter is mostly taken up by an extensive account of Song Yun 宋雲 and Huisheng's 惠生 trip to

¹²⁶ We should note that the understanding of this term here, *zhongguo*, tallies with Li Daoyuan's use of it in the other places in chap. 1 commentary: once at the beginning, and once again at the end. In his gloss of *River Classic*'s "Yellow River" 河水, Li explicates the term *du* of "sidu 四瀆 (four great rivers)," citing Ying Shao's *Fengsu tongyi*: "'Du means to channel; it is the means by which the filth and dirt of the Central Domain (*zhongguo*) can be channeled' 瀆, 通也, 所以通中國垢濁"; *SJZS* 1, p. 8; *SJZJS* 1, p. 2. Then, in his commentary on the last sentence of the *River Classic* text in this chapter, Li states: "[The Yellow River] passes through the Jishi Mountain and becomes the river of the Central Domain (*zhongguo*) 逕積石而為中國河." The phrasing evokes the statement made by the Eastern Han historian Ban Gu: "People all believe that [the Yellow River] flows invisibly underground and in the south emerges from Jishi Mountain, and becomes the river of the Central Realm (*zhongguo*) 皆以為潛行地下, 南出於積石, 為中國河云"; *Han shu* 96A, p. 3871.

¹²⁷ This is the practice of all dynastic histories, from *Shi ji* 史記 of the Western Han onward.

the Western Regions, and the only connection between their journey and the northern neighborhood of the city is the fact that Song Yun's residence was located there. Huisheng, a Buddhist monk, was commissioned by the powerful empress-dowager Hu 胡太后 (d. 528) to seek Buddhist scriptures from the Western Regions; Huisheng and Song Yun left Luoyang in 518, and returned in 521. The account depicts in detail the kingdoms they visited, and ends with Yang Xuanzhi's citation of the three sources for the account.¹²⁸

The structural particularity in the overall frame of *Record of Luoyang Monasteries* is a deliberate rhetorical strategy: it opens up the city of Luoyang, otherwise enclosed and self-contained, and connects it to the Buddhist states "out there," so to speak. The goal and effect of this rhetorical strategy are to afford a view of the Northern Wei through the eyes of the Other: in the words of the awe-struck ruler of the very Wuchang kingdom mentioned above in Faxian's travel account, it was the Northern Wei that was "the Buddhist kingdom" (*Foguo* 佛國), and the Wuchang ruler wanted to be reincarnated there in his next lifetime.¹²⁹ Incidentally, this is precisely what the monk Daozheng 道整, Faxian's travel companion, desired for himself, albeit in the opposite direction: Daozheng wanted to remain in Central India and be reborn there.¹³⁰ With a clever sleight of hand, Yang Xuanzhi turns the Northern Wei court at Luoyang into the Buddhist center.

To incorporate the faraway lands and then present an image of Self through the eyes of the Other is also what the southern historian Shen Yue does in the "Biographies of Yi and Man Peoples" ("Yi Man zhuan" 夷蠻傳) in the *History of the Song*, a work with which, as mentioned earlier, Li Daoyuan was familiar. Shen Yue records the letters sent to the Liu Song throne by the rulers of south and southeast Asian kingdoms. Without exception these letters portray Jiankang as a splendid Buddhist paradise "just like" Trayastriṃśa Heaven 如忉利天宮 or Mount Sumeru 如須彌山.¹³¹ Notably, this is the very section of the dynastic history in which Shen Yue situates an extensive discussion of Buddhism, as an act of expediency and an act of segregation:¹³² it is an act of expediency, since those letters by the Buddhist rulers are pervaded by Buddhist discourse and thus by association lead the historian

¹²⁸ The three sources are: *Account of Huisheng's Journey* 惠生行紀, "Biography of Daorong" 道榮傳, and *Family Record of Song Yun* 宋雲家紀. Yang, *Luoyang qielan ji* 5, p. 342.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 5, p. 298.

¹³⁰ Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, pp. 98–99.

¹³¹ Shen Yue, *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 97, p. 2381.

¹³² Ibid. 97, p. 2386.

to conveniently give an account of Buddhism after citing the letters; it is also an act of segregation, since the Yi peoples by definition constitute the ethnic Other and are geographically separated from the Song realm, and thus to frame the introduction of Buddhism in this narrative context becomes a symbolic gesture that creates a physical distance between the Liu Song realm and a foreign religion.

Like Shen Yue, Li Daoyuan connects the political centers of the Northern Wei with the faraway Buddhist lands only to produce a sort of segregation by confining a lengthy, focused discussion of Buddhist sites and events largely to one single chapter. To be sure, he does mention Buddhist temples in his commentary, but references are sparse and scattered, and are wholly disproportionate to the actual number of Buddhist sites in a given locale. For instance, he names only three temples in his account of Luoyang in chapter 16; yet, we learn from the prince Yuan Cheng's 元澄 (467–520) memorial submitted to the Wei throne in 518 that there were well over 500 temples in Luoyang at the time,¹³³ and Yang Xuanzhi states that there were 1,367 temples in Luoyang before the Northern Wei rule collapsed in 534.¹³⁴ With regard to the representation of Buddhism, the contrast between the first chapter of *Shuijing zhu* and the remainder of the text could not be more striking.

As a commentator, Li Daoyuan cannot but follow the structure set out by the original *River Classic*: even if he wanted to, he would not be able to begin his commentary on a river other than the Yellow River and its alleged source, Mount Kunlun. Li Daoyuan also strives to be a responsible commentator in the well-established commentarial tradition by presenting abundant information from sources available to him. In some ways, his position evokes that of Liu Xie, who struggled with what Stephen Owen calls the “discourse machine” that is the form of parallel prose.¹³⁵ But Li Daoyuan also has more control over his commentary than did Liu Xie, who is more hopelessly trapped within the medium that writes itself (especially in the hands of a lesser writer), for

¹³³ *Wei shu* 114, p. 3045.

¹³⁴ Yang, *Luoyang qielan ji* 5, p. 342. In this regard, two maps in Felt's monograph (*Structures*, pp. 246–47), respectively showing the number of references to stupas and to temples/monasteries in *Shuijing zhu*, both much more heavily concentrating on India instead of the Sinitic realms, are good illustrations of Li Daoyuan's lack of interest in the physical presence of Buddhism in the Chinese realm and ultimately in the religion per se.

¹³⁵ Owen, “Liu Xie and the Discourse Machine,” in Zong-qi Cai, ed., *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity and Rhetoric in Wenxin diaolong* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2001), pp. 175–92.

Li Daoyuan can, and does, have a voice outside the sources he *consciously* cites, offering his judgment above the cacophony of his sources.

In the final analysis, the rivers of ink in Li Daoyuan's commentary form a textual system of blue highways linking near and far sites and cities of the empire and the neighboring kingdoms together. Ironically, a travel account such as Faxian's *Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* shows us how one might navigate "in the world outside empire, in the territory where there are no preexisting roadmaps, signposts, and way stations;"¹³⁶ yet, the travel account is subsequently appropriated and integrated into a new vision of empire like *Shuijing zhu*.

CONCLUSION

This article began with a "literary" reading of *Shuijing zhu* by paying close attention to Li Daoyuan's language and rhetoric as well as taking into consideration the convention and context of the genre he chooses, namely the genre of commentary. Based on these observations, I suggest that *Shijing zhu* adopts the mode of the travel *fu*, which is the polar opposite of a distinguished strain of contemporary landscape poetry from the south. The travel *fu* focuses on anthropocentric events and is intensely interested in locales as intersections of history, culture, and society, whereas the southern landscape poetry focuses on the aesthetic and spiritual appeal of landscape with no particular interest in regional identities of the places, and offers a respite from empire and history. Just like in many traditional Chinese "mountain-and-water" paintings, whose very genesis is traced back to the Southern Dynasties, one can gaze at the beauty of an anonymous landscape and be transported beyond the mundane world of familial and social relationships, the burdens of history, and concerns of empire.

Li Daoyuan, in contrast, was deeply embedded in the imperial world order, and his focus betrays an intensely Northern Wei perspective. His worldview and ideology were rooted in the Northern Wei present. This might have been a period of "division," but that did not stop either the northern or southern regimes from envisioning "all under heaven" from the perspective of those earlier unified empires, Han and Jin. Li Daoyuan grew up serving the ambitious emperor Xiaowen, who, in a highly symbolic act, relocated the capital from the old dynastic powerbase Pingcheng to Luoyang, once the capital of the Eastern

¹³⁶ Xiaofei Tian, "A Chinese Fan in Sri Lanka and the Transport of Writing," in Diana Sorensen, ed., *Territories and Trajectories: Cultures in Circulation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U.P., 2018), p. 68.

Zhou, Eastern Han, and Western Jin, and appropriated the past of the Zhou, Han, and Western Jin dynasties as part of the Northern Wei's story. In parallel to emperor Xiaowen's aspiration to conquer the south and expand the Wei rule to "accomplish the enterprise of the Han," Li Daoyuan's monumental commentary on a specialized treatise on rivers – evoking the dynastic "virtue of water" – was a timely achievement in the discursive construction of an imperial vision. What, indeed, could be better than rivers in this construction project? They are the infrastructure that connects the diverse, separate units in a vast multi-ethnic empire; they are the blood vessels of the body politic; they are the ropes that tie distant places together.

In 527, the Northern Wei suffered an uprising: a southern Qi prince, who fled to Wei after the Qi was replaced by the Liang and married a Wei princess, revolted.¹³⁷ Li Daoyuan and his followers were surrounded by the rebels at a post station on top of a hill, with drinking water having to be drawn only from a well at the foot of the hill. They tried to dig their way to the well, but after digging down many feet, they could not get to the water. As they succumbed to dehydration, the rebels vanquished them. Li Daoyuan refused to capitulate and, along with two of his nephews, was executed.¹³⁸ Ironically, the commentator who wrote so voluminously on rivers met his end through deprivation of water.

Barely a year later, the Northern Wei descended into a series of civil wars that eventually led to its collapse in 534. Luoyang was devastated and deserted, once again reduced to ruins. But Li Daoyuan's commentary on the little Gu River survives: in it, Luoyang shines forth as a central intersection of history and culture, with a roster of brilliant personages dotting the pages like stars illuminating the dark heavens; it is the beating heart of the Northern Wei dreaming of the never-to-be attained glory of a unified empire.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- SJZS* *Shuijing zhu shu* 水經注疏, with commentary by Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 and Xiong Huizhen 熊會貞, coll. Duan Xizhong 段熙仲 and Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛
- SJZJS* *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi* 水經注校釋, coll. Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛

¹³⁷ This was Xiao Baoyin 蕭寶夤 (485–530), son of Qi emperor Ming (r. 494–498); *Wei shu* 59, pp. 1313–25.

¹³⁸ *Bei shi* 27, p. 996.

Appendix 1

楊雄, 河東賦
揚雄, 蜀都賦
劉歆, 遂初賦
班彪, 游居賦
馮衍, 顯志賦
班昭 (曹大家), 東征賦
傅毅, 反都賦
李尤, 平樂觀賦
張衡, 西京賦
張衡, 東京賦
張衡, 溫泉賦
張衡, 南都賦
王延壽, 靈光殿賦
王延壽, 夢賦
蔡邕, 述征賦
崔琰, 述初賦
曹操, 登臺賦
曹丕, 述征賦
王粲, 登樓賦
劉楨, 黎陽山賦
劉楨, 魯都賦
徐幹, 齊都賦
應瑒, 西征賦
繁欽, 避地賦
繁欽, 建章鳳闕賦
劉劭, 趙都賦
向秀, 思舊賦
楊泉, 五湖賦
成公綏, 大河賦
陸機, 行思賦
左思, 魏都賦
左思, 齊都賦
左思, 蜀都賦
左思, 吳都賦

潘岳, 西征賦
張協, 玄武觀賦
盧諶, 征艱賦
郭璞, 江賦
郭璞, 南郊賦
王彪之, 廬山賦
孫楚, 故台賦
孫放, 廬山賦
袁宏, 北征賦
傅逮, 述游賦
庾闡, 揚都賦
江統, 徂淮賦
劉琨, 通津賦
謝靈運, 山居賦
謝惠連, 雪賦

Appendix 2

古詩, 飲馬長城窟行
張衡, 四愁詩
王粲, 七哀詩
王粲, 贈士孫文始詩
阮籍, 咏懷詩 (“朝出上東門”)
阮籍, 咏懷詩 (“昔聞東陵瓜”)
阮籍, 咏懷詩 (“失勢在須臾”)
阮籍, 咏懷詩 (“駕言發魏都”)
石崇, 金谷詩集序
郭璞, 游仙詩 (“漆園有傲吏”)
成公綏 (失題): “誰謂鬼無知”
張協, 雜詩 (“朝登魯陽關”)
劉駿 (失題): “事有遠而合”
謝莊, 游豫章西山觀洪崖井詩序
吳均劍騎詩 (“劍是兩蛟龍”)
亡名 (失題): “徒矜野王道”