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Bamboo Branches Out West: *Zhuzhici* in Xinjiang

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Balikun [Barköl] and Urumqi lie at the base of snow-covered mountains, making this region frigid and snowy. But their topography is level, and water and grasslands are ample [...] Over the more than twenty years since the region came under imperial rule, the climate has gradually turned milder, and all five grains can now be grown there. Civil administrative districts have been created, local officials appointed to serve, and a heavy contingent of [imperial] troops stationed to defend it. The high officials in charge there enjoy the full confidence of the Emperor, whose grand plan to assert our rule over this land [in 1759] has been proven to be brilliant and farsighted.¹

巴里坤、烏魯木齊依雪山之背。故寒冷大雪。然地平坦。水草足。自歸王化以來二十餘年。氣候漸和。五穀皆生。置郡縣。設守令。鎮以重兵。統以親信大臣。一時之鉅制雄圖。煌煌乎規模宏遠矣。(Qishiyi, 1:6b–7a)

THE AUTHOR OF this passage, a Manchu official named Qishiyi 七十一 (*zi* Chunyuan 椿園, ?–1785), resided in Xinjiang for almost a decade during the 1760s–70s. He was one of a number of Manchus and Mongols who were entrusted by the court with consolidating Qing power in

1 All translations of the poems are my own.

the wake of the series of campaigns that brought about the destruction of the Zunghar Khanate in 1759. Following his stint of service, he penned a widely circulated prose account, *Xiyu wenjianlu* 西域聞見錄 (Record of things seen and heard in the Western Region) about various parts of the vast territory of Altishahr (the Tarim Basin) and Zungharia. In this particular passage, he makes the claim that direct imperial rule had delivered not merely a more peaceful order, but at least by implication, a milder climate, too. And in other sections, he extolls the economic and social or cultural progress that had been made over the territory stretching from Hami to Kashgar during the halcyon years of the mid-Qianlong era (1736–95).

Such praise for the benign effects of Qing rule is echoed by several eminent Han officials who also served in the region. These men went to Xinjiang, not as imperial confidants, however, but as exiles. Among others, they included Lu Jianzeng 盧見層 (1690–1768; exiled to Ili, 1740–42), Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805; exiled to Urumqi, 1769–71), Hong Liangji 洪亮吉 (1746–1809; exiled to Ili, 1800–02), and Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785–1850; exiled to Ili, Yarkand, and Khotan, 1842–45). Like Qishiyi, each of them left an influential literary account of his experiences, but instead of prose, all four are famed primarily for their poems, and especially those they wrote as *zhuzhici* 竹枝詞 (literally “bamboo branch lyrics”).² Although none of them speaks of changes to the physical climate of the region, each extolls the social climate—that is, *fengsu* 風俗 or the mores and customs of the local people—and the transformations (in Qishiyi’s phrase, *wanghua*) resulting from the beneficence of the Great Qing. The physical climate may not have become mild enough to allow bamboo to thrive there, but the infusion of literary talent had transplanted this genre of lyrics to new soil.

Needless to say, it was already clear during Qishiyi’s time that not all was quite as placid as his testimonial suggests. In 1765, just a few years

2 Lu Jianzeng left 13 *zhuzhici* (*Hang'ai zhuzhici*), Ji Yun 160-odd (*Wulumuqi zashi*), Hong Liangji 42 (*Yili Zhuzhici*), and Lin Zexu 24 (*Huijiang zhuzhici*).

after the routing of the Zunghars, a revolt in Uqturpan (or Ush Turpan, west of Aksu) resulted in the slaughter of about 2300 civilians by Qing troops. The realignment of power in the region did indeed stimulate nearly unprecedented economic prosperity over the next century, especially in the urban centers of Kashgar, Urumqi, Yarkand, and Khotan. But it also directly caused the displacement of significant numbers of rural villagers from the Tarim Basin oases, some of whom fled into the Pamirs and other mountainous regions, where they were receptive to the Sufi *Hezhuo* 和卓 (*khwaja*, local leaders) who sometimes preached rebellion against the Qing “infidels” and their allies, the beg elites. Kashgar, in particular, was regularly contested by such rebels, and with the intermittent support of the Kokand Khanate or of elements therein, a succession of “Khwaja Wars” laid waste to this and other oasis cities in the 19th century (Kim 2016, Chapters 2–3).³

Were these Han exiles naïve toward the complexity of the problems surrounding them? Their service there was hardly voluntary, and their distance from home and family (who rarely accompanied them into exile) caused them no small discomfort and heartache. We might reasonably assume that they were at least marginally less enthusiastic toward their subjects than were bannermen such as Qishiyi. But although they occasionally complain about excessive taxation or corrupt officials, their poems tend on the whole to accentuate the positive. *Zhuzhici* written in mid- to late-Qing Xinjiang portray diverse ethnic groups, including Turkis (Uighurs) (Millward and Perdue 2006, 52),⁴ Mongols, Kazakhs, Han, and Hui, living in relative peace, with little if any mention of rancor or rebelliousness toward the imperial authority embodied by these poet-officials. To the contrary,

3 According to Kwangmin Kim, much if not all of the unrest in Xinjiang after 1760 can be attributed to the impoverishment of local farmers who were either driven off or enslaved by begs in order to reclaim or develop their land in the oases.

4 Modern western scholarship tends to view the use of the term Uighur as anachronistic before the late-19th century, when Turkic-speaking groups began adopting it as an ethnonym.

these poets express a palpable sense of empathy, and seemingly earnest affirmation of the bonds of common humanity toward the subjects of their writing. Their poems can even be viewed as testimony of a lyrical impulse, one that is especially evident in bamboo branch lyrics, to achieve an affective communion with their subjects that served as a balm to homesickness in this vast, unfamiliar landscape.

In the following pages, I will attempt to demonstrate how at least some *zhuzhici* voice an apparently genuine desire to promote interethnic understanding and comity among the diverse constituents of Xinjiang society during the 150 years or so of direct Qing rule. Previous landmark studies of Han exile literature by Laura Newby (1999) and Joanna Waley-Cohen (1991) have argued that their writers' engagement with native cultures and peoples tends toward the superficial, and/or is transparently motivated by a self-interested concern with glorifying or justifying the dynastic authorities toward whom they too were beholden (Newby 1999, 468). Some of these writers merely repeat hearsay and inaccurate or grossly oversimplified information gleaned from earlier reportage, and few if any gained extensive linguistic or cultural expertise about the local peoples during their usually limited stints of service there. Nevertheless, despite such shortcomings, we can detect hints of what in some recent theoretical attempts to guide ethnographic writing has been termed the enactment of "humane sympathy," meaning the recognition of a common humanity shared by observer and subject that also acknowledges the inevitable differences, even the "radical chasms," that separate diverse ethnic or other groups. In doing so, these poems may even offer potential insights for avoiding the privileged, non-indexical vantage point that is allegedly all too tempting for ethnographers to assume. In explicitly seeking to fuse their voices with those of their subjects, the bamboo branch lyricists may not always achieve perfect harmony, but their efforts are nonetheless worthy of examination for the affective impulses they manifest. Contemporary Chinese scholarship, in contrast to most Euro-American literature on this topic, tends to affirm the efficacy of

this form of poetry as a vehicle for the expression of cross-cultural empathy. This essay represents an attempt to address how some of the features of *zhuzhici*, such as their use of indigenous vocabulary and description of customs and lifestyles, convey the desire to understand and to partially bridge the chasms that separated these poets and their readers from the subjects about which they wrote.

THE SPREADING BRANCHES OF *ZHUSHICI*

By the time *zhuzhici* reached Xinjiang in the 1740s, it had been nearly a millennium since the Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) composed the eleven poems that are generally regarded as having inaugurated this genre. His seven-character quatrains are written in a folksong-like style which he claimed to have based on the tempo and lyrics of music performed by the inhabitants of the bamboo-carpeted mountainous regions of Sichuan and Hunan to which he had been exiled. During the intervening centuries between Liu's lifetime and the mid- to late-Qing period, *zhuzhici* were *not* for the most part written by banished officials, and in fact, most are set in the imperial capital, cities of the Yangzi River delta, and other provinces within China proper. But they retained and further developed what early commentators like Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105) identified as Liu's superlative ability to “channel [local] customs” (*dao fengsu* 道風俗) that were distinct from the relatively homogeneous highbrow culture of the classically trained literati (Wang Liqi et al. 2003, 1:3).⁵ As a result, they came to be regularly selected for inclusion in regional gazetteers—where many have been preserved—and even to be written expressly for them. Moreover, this reportorial function is augmented in a significant number of Ming and Qing era poems by glosses that supply information relevant

5 While there is no consensus over the formal features of *zhuzhici*, most traditional critics regarded them as distinguishable from *jueju* (over 90% are written as seven-character quatrains) by their considerably more colloquial tone and lexicon, and also their avoidance of allusiveness or tonal parallelism. See Sun 2014, 23.

to the content of the poems. By the 18th and 19th centuries, when *zhuzhici* once again came to be written by exiles about the far-flung regions to which they were posted, some include appended glosses of several hundred characters for a single four-line poem—that is, many times longer than the poem itself.

Although *zhuzhici* of Xinjiang comprise a relatively small proportion of the total corpus of this poetry, they have attracted considerable interest, in part due to the prominence of authors like those listed above. Similar to poems about other parts of China, they present descriptions of regional “landscapes and customs” (*fengtu renqing* 風土人情) in lyrical form. What most distinguishes the Xinjiang poems from others is their subject matter: references to the Persian-derived scripts, the Islamic or other non-Han rituals and cultural practices, the heavily-bearded, light-haired, blue-eyed features of some residents, the harsh, arid climate, and the vast, sparsely-populated terrain, all mark them as distinctly exotic, even alien, compared to poems set in other parts of the empire. Moreover, in contrast to *zhuzhici* about other non-Han subjects such as those of Tibet, Manchuria, or Taiwan, all of which were also either relatively recent or still unexplored additions to the empire, many Xinjiang poets juxtapose their findings to references to Han and Tang Dynasty historical accounts of the Western Regions (*Xiyu* 西域). Furthermore, regular migration to and from the Gansu Corridor, as well as long-term garrisoning of imperial troops, had implanted sizeable Han, Hui, and Manchu populations in Urumqi and other communities, where their significance to the local economy, and roles in initiating or maintaining inter-communal contact, also intrigued these transient poets.

In the last decades of the Qing, Chinese poet-travelers produced *zhuzhici* about places ever more distant from the genre’s origins in the luxuriant, bamboo-forested landscapes of Sichuan and Hunan, eventually extending as far as Europe and North America, where historical precedents of contact with China, and cultural or political affinities with the latter, were few to nonexistent. While the migration of this poetry into Xinjiang foreshad-

owed these subsequent literary forays “beyond the seas,” the former can be distinguished from the latter for their setting within the geographically contiguous realm of the *yunei* 域內—the imperial domain—under Qing suzerainty, and thus at least rhetorically anchored both to loyalty to the sovereign, and to the literary and historical antecedents of earlier dynasties. *Zhuzhici* of Xinjiang consistently celebrate the region’s various cultural and ethnic components as undergirded by the common political foundation of the *dayitong* 大一統, the grand unity brought about by the 1759 conquest that these writers explicitly traced to the powerful empires of the past, and even further back to the ritual classics (*Sanli* 三禮) and other ancient Confucian texts that articulate the ideal of peaceful coexistence (*taiping* 太平) within the known world (*tianxia* 天下) (Zhu 2011, 32–34). In short, they weave the warp of the exotic sights and sounds of contemporary Xinjiang with a weft of historical familiarity and interethnic solidarity, derived from textual sources of both the less as well as the more distant past.

It should also be pointed out that *zhuzhici* comprise but one genre within the larger corpus of Qing poems by Xinjiang exiles or other visitors, who wrote in Old-Style and Regulated Verse, *yuefu* 樂府, *fu* 賦, *ci* 詞, and other classical forms, as well. And while many of these other poems also describe and comment on the customs and landscapes of the region, *zhuzhici* are unique in being conceived as a form of succinct note-taking, recording the poet’s observations about the human and natural environments. Rather than focusing first and foremost on deeply personal experiences—that is, the *sine qua non* of the lyrical tradition—as other poems written by often homesick, travel-weary exiles typically do, they functioned in many cases as a kind of proto-ethnography (Wang Huibin 2012, 48–57). At the same time, they retain qualities of the lyric in their display of emotional resonance and identification with their subjects. As such, they bear more than a passing resemblance to what has been called “lyrical ethnography,” whose proponents like Andrew Abbott and Kent Maynard advocate the cultivation of empathy or “humane sympathy” of the writer toward his or

her subjects. Such writing has been contrasted with the predominant, so-called “narrative mode” of ethnography, the rhetorical features of which are thought to at least partially seal off the researcher from the temporal and spatial context of his or her subjects of analysis (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010, 18).

Drawing comparisons between *zhuzhici* and ethnography can only go so far; after all, *zhuzhici* never developed into an empirically based, methodologically rigorous vehicle for analyzing the subjects with which its writers engaged. Nevertheless, we can identify over the historical arc of Xinjiang *zhuzhici* the rise and maturation of an ethnographically oriented, descriptively rich—even “thick”—mode of composition, from some of the earliest examples by Lu Jianzeng in the early 1740s, to the far more comprehensive sequences of poems and their accompanying annotations by late-Qing figures such as Xiao Xiong 蕭雄 who wrote around 1890 (Song 2010, 39–41). They exhibit something like the identification of the lyrical voice with the object of observation that has been proposed as a corrective to various shortcomings in contemporary ethnographic methodologies. And whatever the ethnocentric biases of their writers, or their inability to probe deeply into the Islamic or other cultural practices they observe, they still manage to illustrate something of what Abbott identifies as the capacity of the lyrical approach to confront the “disturbing fact of human difference” with the knowledge that this very “difference—in the guises of mutability and particularity—is something we share” (Abbott 2007, 73). By elucidating, in a lyrical form, the mutability and particularity of human difference, a significant number of *zhuzhici* encourage commiseration, tolerance, and respect—in other words, the enactment of human solidarity—across multiple ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries.

A Silk Scarf Flutters, While Horse Manure Smolders

At the beginning of the year, greetings are faithfully exchanged

After praying skyward to Buddha, bows go to the surrounding kin
Beyond the home, etiquette prescribes that the commander is hailed
first

Raising a *khata* up high, [we] proclaim, “*sain*”

Note: Popular custom requires that lengths of plain silk, called *hada* (*khata*), be presented to superiors. “*Sain*” is a word of greeting [in Mongolian].

Lu Jianzeng, 1742

正朔欽遵賀新歲 佛天參罷拜周親
出門禮數先臺長 哈達高擎道塞因
註：俗以素帛獻尊長，名曰哈達。塞因其請安之詞。
盧見曾，「杭霽竹枝詞」
(Bi 2015, 14a)

Accused of malfeasance committed while serving as salt commissioner (*yanyunshi* 鹽運使) in Yangzhou, Lu Jianzeng was one of the earliest Han officials sent to Xinjiang, specifically to Ili. He left an entire *juan* of poems (*Yayu shanren chusai ji* 雅雨山人出塞集) about his experiences both en route and at his destination that, thanks to his fame as a patron of scholars and artists in Yangzhou and across Jiangnan, gained a wide audience. His *zhuzhici* comprise only thirteen poems within this collection, all of them under the title *Hang'ai zhuzhici* (from Mo. Khangayn, a toponym that refers to the Mongol-inhabited forested regions to the north and west of the Gobi Desert, from Central Mongolia to Northern Xinjiang and Southern Siberia). The presentation of *khatas* remains a widely practiced ritual in Mongolian and Tibetan society, and the greeting “*sain*” (“*sain uu*”) is still in common use, too.

Beginning in this elevated register of ritual greetings to deities and superiors, the second poem of the sequence turns to a more pedestrian custom, that of proscribing whips from being carried into the interior of a

yurt. And in the third poem, we learn about the heating system inside of those yurts:

Pairs of shit bags are draped over saddles
 We had no time to gather kindling and straw!
 Seeing halos around both the sun and the moon, we felt a premo-
 nition
 And prepared for a days-long blizzard

對對阿籠馱馬鞍 樵蘇及早莫盤桓
 月闌日暈曾先覺 準備連朝蘇魯汗
 (Bi 2014, 14b)

A note explains that the Mongolian “*along*” refers to “shit bags” for carrying horse manure, the primary fuel for heating and cooking inside the yurt. The word “*suluhan*” is similarly glossed as “blizzard.”⁶ This same topic is treated in another poem in the same collection, a quatrain (a *jueju*, not *zhuzhici*) entitled “Horse Manure” (*matong* 馬通), but without employing any indigenous vocabulary. Praising dung for its efficacy as fuel, here Lu adopts neither the idiom nor the identity of a Mongol, but rather speaks in the voice of the visiting Han official that he was, expressing relief that he is still able to imbibe this koumiss properly heated up, since icy weather has prevented his party from gathering kindling:

New Year’s koumiss has uncommon merit
 An overflowing cup seems as efficacious as medicine
 Routes to collecting firewood and straw cut off, and ice filling the
 hearth
 Our hymns of praise should be made to horse manure

6 “Suluhan” is presumably a variant of *shuurga*, which in modern Mongolian means “storm.”

| | |
|---------|---------|
| 乳造屠蘇著異功 | 渤尊本草效誰同 |
| 樵蘇路絕水填竈 | 德頌還應上馬通 |

(Bi 2014, 4a)

What distinguishes Lu's *zhuzhici* from his *jueju* is not only its indigenous vocabulary, but also its vernacular tone and earthy evocation of local customs. As Lu explains in the last of the sequence of thirteen poems, he has transposed Liu Yuxi's roughhewn "southern barbarian" mode, born amidst the mist-shrouded bamboo forests of the southwest, to an equally demotic tune of the arid northwest:

Long ago [Liu Yuxi's] lyrics described southern miasmatic rains and
 mists
 The barbarian rustics of Wuling (Hunan) all sang them
 These foreign musical airs and crude, earthy tunes,
 Can easily be sung to [northern] barbarian flute accompaniment as
zhuzhici

| | |
|---------|---------|
| 瘴雨蠻煙舊有詞 | 武陵夷俚悉歌之 |
| 侏離風境傖儻調 | 好拍胡笳唱竹枝 |

(Bi 2014, 15a)

In other words, while both his conventional regulated verse and his *zhuzhici* treat many of the same topics, only the latter adopt the "crude" and unintelligible lyrics of the indigenous residents (Song 2012, 13). And employing such voices, the latter poems do not merely praise the horseshit that warms wine; they enter the world of the manure-shoveling locals who, noticing signs of inclement weather while exchanging khata in New Year rituals, hurry to replenish their manure stocks to settle in and await the coming "suluhan."

MARRYING WHILE MOUNTED

The human subjects of Lu's thirteen-poem sequence are consistently portrayed as pastoralists for whom equestrianism permeates multiple aspects of their lives both inside and outside of their yurts. This includes the all-important rituals of courtship and marriage, which are enduring themes not only of Lu's poems (four of the thirteen concern weddings), but also in those of the eminent official Lin Zexu:

In a brocaded saddle, he goes to meet a flower-like girl
 Riding his noble steed, the boy shouldn't brag
 At his waist is tied a double-ended whip
 We'll see who reaches mother-in-law's home first

Note: When the time for concluding a marriage grows near, husband and wife compete to see which one can beat the other on horseback.

Lu Jianzeng

錦韉迎得女如花 驍騎兒郎莫浪誇
 腰裏一雙齊縱轡 看誰先到阿婆家
 註：親迎將近則夫婦爭馳以先到為采。
 (Bi 2014, 14b)

Most of her relatives tie up silken threads,
 Which hang down several feet in red strands below her hair, trailing
 the floor
 Her head covered by this new veil, she is helped onto her mount
 Tonight, the groom will come to grab his woman
 Lin Zexu, 1845

宗親多半結絲蘿 數尺紅絲散髮拖
 新帕蓋頭扶上馬 巴郎今夕捉鶯哥

林則徐，「回疆竹枝詞」

(Qiu et al. 2007, 7:355)

These poems are separated not only temporally by the century that elapsed between the two authors' respective terms of exile, but also by cultural and physical distance: while Lu's is set among Mongols in the far north, Lin wrote of the Muslims in the southwestern Tarim Basin (Liao 2006, 122–26). But not only do they share the prominence of the horse as a participant in such festivities, women's equestrianism fascinates both poets. As in much of the rest of Central Asia, horsemanship binds bride to groom and vice versa, both in ritual and in daily life (Sumer et al. 1991, 14–15).

To conventional literati sensibilities, the public display of women's riding skills might have appeared slightly outré, perhaps even lewd. Yet there is no hint here of such disapproval, in marked contrast to the following *zhuzhici* by Huang Xieqing (黃燮清, 1805–64) about mounted European women on the streets of Shanghai:

Her hair twirled into a floral bun like a nautilus shell
 And clothed in narrow sleeves and a long skirt, she rides a lithe horse
 Supported as she descends from brocaded saddle, she walks off
 shoulder to shoulder

The dust she stirs up is far from comely

Author's note: When foreign women go out, they do so on horse-
 back, or walking shoulder to shoulder with male foreigners.

華鬢圓轉字盤螺

窄袖長裙細馬駝

扶下繡鞍聯臂去

生塵從未解凌波

自註：夷婦去游，或乘馬，或男夷聯臂而行

(Qiu et al. 2007, 2:835)

Even though Huang's poem does not call forth the same warm feelings as Lin's and Lu's respectively do, it conveys something of what Abbot has defined as the essence of lyrical ethnography: "the use of a single image to communicate a mood, an emotional sense of social reality" (Abbott 2007, 83). Whether brides and horses, or scarves and horse dung, such vivid, arresting tableaux bring forth the concrete realities of the social and physical setting that alert the reader to both stark differences, but also to the common emotional substrate of the nuptial pleasures that are shared by humankind as a whole. Their locally inflected, powerfully emotive language highlights the unfamiliarity of daily life in the far west, while simultaneously tugging on the chords of empathy that are shared with these poetic visitors and their implied readership across cultural and spatial divides.

HARMONIZING WITH THE KORAN

The emotional tenor of these poems may for the most part be of pleasurable, humorous, or noble feelings, but that does not mean they lack the rancor, jealousy, and other negative emotions that inevitably arise in the course of human relations. Consider the following two poems:

The youth finds his way to the girl's home
 Arguing over trifles, each rejects the other
 But on the wedding day, they quickly come to agreement
 Recitation of the Koran becomes the marriage contract
 Author's Note: "*duosi*" means young woman [in Turkic].
 Xue Chuanyuan, ca. 1815⁷

少年覓得朵斯居

反目無端各棄予

7 Unlike the other poets treated here, Xue, a native of Jiangyin (Jiangsu), and a provincial graduate (*juven*), never visited Xinjiang. His poems are based on reports he heard from a recently returned official, one Li Ecun 李義村 (Xue 1815, *juan* 14:5b).

草草婚期多意合 念經即是議婚書
 自註：朵斯，少女也。薛傳源「竹枝詞」
 (Qiu et al, 2007, 7:359)

When a marriage is concluded, surprisingly, all six rituals are per-
 formed
 There are four types of marriage, and for each, vows are recited
 afresh
 For all, the mullah's instructions are followed scrupulously
 Foreign incantations and sounds of the flute stir up the phoenix hall
 Xiao Xiong, ca. 1890

婚嫁居然六禮周 結縭有四記從頭
 由來悉聽阿訇命 梵語簫聲擾鳳樓
 蕭雄《西疆雜述詩》
 (Qiu et al, 2007, 7:349)

The suppression of the Sufi Jahariyah (Ch. Zheherenye) Sect and the execution of its leader, Ma Mingxin (1719–81) in Gansu, the succession of Khwaja Wars in Kashgar and Yarkand, and other religiously-inflected flashpoints across the region periodically aroused Qing suspicions toward Muslim religiosity. But strife among Muslims themselves, whether between loyalist begs and rebellious Sufis or the mosaic of various ethnic groups there also contributed to rising tensions. The full-blown civil war known variously as the Dungan Revolt or Shaanxi-Gansu Muslim Revolt of ca. 1862–77 temporarily severed Xinjiang from Qing control, and resulted in massive suffering all across the Northwest. Antipathy and mistrust toward Muslims ran so high in Gansu and Qinghai that Hui were barred from living within walled cities until well into the 20th century (Lipman 1997, 141). One would expect to see some hint of this contentiousness in the poems of the nineteenth century, and Xue Chuanyuan's theme of nuptial

disharmony might be a subtle allusion to such wider social turmoil. Intriguingly, in his poem it is the invocation of the Koran that imposes order, an indication that religious authority could also be seen to soothe rather than inflame tensions, in the home and perhaps beyond, as well.

The conciliatory effects of religious piety are especially evident in the poems of Xiao Xiong (?–1892), a native of Hunan who served with the Hunan Army (Xiangjun) in Xinjiang and elsewhere in the Northwest for over a decade in the 1860s–70s. As he notes in glosses to various different poems, which he only composed over a decade later, he sought to illustrate how relative peace and harmony had prevailed in the region over most of its history. (Qiu et al. 2007, 7:320–21) As in the above poem by Xue Chuan Yuan, Xiao emphasizes the calming, stabilizing influence of Islam, embodied by the *abong* or mullah (from the Persian *akhund*), in maintaining order in the four accepted ways of concluding a marriage (which, as the extensive gloss explains, range from parental arrangement, to elopement, to the holding of a kind of marriage fair, each overseen by religious authorities). The recitation of Arabic scripture may lend an exotic air, but these marriages all follow the succession of the same six rites (from proposal to consummation) that regulate marriages among Chinese, too. And while Turkic melodies sound inscrutable to Chinese ears, the exhilaration of marital consummation is far from unfamiliar to these poets and their readers, a fact that the allusion to the phoenix hall (women’s quarters) appears intended to confirm.

A BLUR OF COLOR

Xiao Xiong’s poems and copious appended glosses provide by far the most comprehensive account of any *zhuzhici*—giving them perhaps the best claim to being lyrical ethnography—documenting the daily lives, beliefs, rituals, and physical environment of the region’s various ethnicities, both Muslim and not. (Mi 2014, 135) Many of his poems treat themes of difference intertwined with strands of similarity, presenting them in lyrical-

ly affective images in the poems as well as in his notes. In the following example, entitled “Women,” (*funü*) he adroitly inserts this theme into a poem about the subtleties of dress that beguile outsiders, who have trouble distinguishing men from women:

Green stockings rise wavelike above her crimson brocaded slippers
Blue thread ties in her hair match her body

In such a blur, it is hard to tell her apart [from a man]

Her hem flutters, reaching all the way down to the ground

Author’s note: Women’s clothing is similar to men’s, but women do not use belts, and their dresses are longer. Moreover, the collar and lapel of the outer garment is more colorful, with multicolored cloth making up the two sides of the hem on the breast, which are cut into a shape resembling a trigram that forms a decorative pattern. The garment may also be embroidered throughout with floral patterns. The name of this garment is *Xiaban*, and the local people value it the most. They also leave their long tresses uncut, and instead of putting them up in buns, they braid them. They divide them into two or three braids at first, but then combine the braids into one at their ends, which are tied together with blue silk threads. Their hair when plentiful can weigh many ounces and reach down over a foot. When they undo it, it reaches down to the ground. By nature, they love a smooth, lustrous complexion, and apply powder and rouge. They also wear earrings and bracelets and are especially fond of pearls and jade. They do not don flowers, though, but instead cover their heads with large flat, rounded hats embroidered with gold, in the same style as men. They do not have the custom of binding their feet, and delight in green socks. They wear thin-soled shoes with purple and red inlays, embroidered on the inside with flowers and plants. Older women typically wear leather boots, or even go barefoot, depending on their need. Women’s gait is elegant and chaste, and their light,

floating steps stir up a slight trail of dust.

Xiao Xiong, ca. 1890

翠襪凌波紅繡鞋 青絲編髮稱身材
迷離撲朔渾難辨 襟影雙飄拖地來

自註：婦人衣飾略與男同，惟裡衣腰不束帶，下垂更長，外之圓領對襟長衣顏色尤加豔麗，胸前兩襟多用雜色布帛，剪成二卦象，分嵌於邊以為飾，或再通身刺繡為團花、散花之類，此衣名曰霞袿。俗所最重者。滿頭留髮皆不梳髻而編辮。其初分作三兩條、尺餘後始總編為一，交以青絲纜線，多者重數兩，下留尺餘，散垂至地。性好光澤，施脂粉，飾耳環、手鐲之屬，珠玉尤所酷愛；惟不插花朵，但戴繡金平頂大圓帽，與男子同式。俗不裹腳，喜歡綠襪，著雙梁薄底鞋，紅紫鑲嵌，中繡花草；年老則以香皮所製靴鞋為常服，甚或赤腳，相從其便。女子行路嫻雅端正，飄飄然微步生塵也。

蕭雄〈婦女〉

(Qiu et al, 2007, 7:332)

From the hat-topped crowns of their braided heads to the soles of their unbound, sometimes uncovered feet, Xiao's painstaking elaboration of such feminine attire is intended to enlighten the observer who, unschooled in local customs, at least momentarily confuses women with men. While the women's dainty gait accords with Han preferences for feminine modesty—traits that Huang Xieqing found lacking in the Western women of Shanghai—the sheer variety of footwear, ranging from leather boots to exquisitely embroidered cloth shoes, to the absence of any covering, diverges starkly from Han conventions. His subjects' relatively relaxed attitude, along with the minimal differences between the clothing of men and women, echo other poets' descriptions of the local women that emphasize their mobility, competitiveness, and general visibility in the public domain.

Writing in the wake of the bloody conflicts that had only recently disrupted the lives of the residents throughout Xinjiang and the wider Northwest, Xiao turns again and again to the shared bonds of humanity that may lie hidden beneath their exotic clothing or seemingly inscrutable cultural peculiarities. The variations among ethnicities so evident on the surface pale in significance compared to these ties that bind, and by extension to the comity that normally prevails in this region:

Cardinal ethical relations are basic to human nature
 Besides lords and commanders, [these people] also love their parents
 Just like [us], their ethical obligations vary by degree of kinship
 Their interconnected branches are separated only by origin
 Xiao Xiong, ca. 1890

| | |
|---------|---------|
| 本來天性即彝倫 | 除卻君師尚愛親 |
| 一樣綱常分厚薄 | 連枝惟隔異苔人 |

(Qiu et al, 2007, 7:334)

This poem emphasizes that a familiar ethical order prevails over these vast distances and among diverse ethnic groups, because our *tianxing* or heaven-bestowed human endowment crosses all artificial boundaries. The term “*yitai ren*” or literally “people of different mosses” normally refers to ethnic differences, but Xiao appears to be using it as a homophone for “people of different wombs.” In the appended gloss he describes the local practice of marriage among paternal cousins, and perhaps even more surprising to his Han readers, of half-siblings by different mothers. In spite of these radical anomalies, concludes Xiao, “the Muslims are courteous in treating and entertaining others, which can be attributed to their sincerity and simplicity.” However contentious their world may have become in times of warfare or revolt, and however foreign their customs might seem to outsiders, the de-

fault mode of relations among the interconnected branches of the human family remained kindness and civility.

Music, Wining, and Dining

In an area near the south side of the mountains, merchants are many
A prostitute sings a barbarian song, lifted from somewhere
Who has transposed “Retty” to a new mode
And set it to an exotic western tune?

Author’s Note: In Turfan, a prostitute is called a *yangge* [“woman”].
On the festival day of early spring, barbarian women dress up and
sing barbarian tunes. Their lyrics are unintelligible, but the music is
entrancing.

Ji Yun, 1771

地近山南估客多 偷來番曲演鶯哥

誰將紅豆傳新拍 記取摩訶兜勒歌

自註：吐魯番呼妓為鶯哥。春社扮番女唱番曲，侏離不
解，然亦靡靡可聽。紀昀〈烏魯木齊雜詩〉

(Qiu et al. 2007, 7:292)

With this poem, from Ji Yun’s sequence “Poems of Urumqi,” we come back again to the refrain about the unintelligibility of customs or languages of the region, already encountered in the examples of Xinjiang *zhuzhici* quoted above. Ji rejoices that in spite of its incomprehensible lyrics, the music can still please his ears. It is unclear whether he is referring to the *locus classicus* of “retty” (*hongdou*)—Wang Wei’s venerable quatrain, “Thinking of You” (“*Xiangsi*”)—but the poet is clearly intrigued that these women’s singing styles just might have been “lifted” from Chinese sources. His emotional engagement once again emphasizes the interweaving of difference with similarity, in both music and poetry. The following poem about the

produce sold in Urumqi, however, is more equivocal on this theme:

Half have turned deep green and half have yellowed,
 Only rotting garden produce reaches the man at the vegetable stand
 Lamentably, other than invitees at official banquets
 Who can savor a plate of tender, fragrant greens?

[Note:] Vegetable peddlers are called vegetable stand [men]. They only pick melons and vegetables to sell after they've become extremely old. Otherwise, people won't eat them, disliking their tenderness. Only thanks to the gardens planted by government officials can people eat fresh produce. This is yet another inexplicable local custom.

半帶深青半帶黃 園蔬已老始登床
 可憐除卻官廚宴 誰識春盤嫩甲香

鬻菜者謂之菜床，瓜菜必極老之後乃采以鬻，否則人嫌其嫩而不食。惟官種之園，乃有嘗新之事。此亦土俗不可解者。

(Qiu et al. 2007, 7:286)

Among all of the *zhuzhici* sequences set in Xinjiang, Ji Yun's "Poems of Urumqi" are by far the most celebrated. Intriguingly, they are directly linked to those of Lu Jianzeng, and may even have been inspired by them. Ji was banished to Urumqi in 1769–71 for having shielded Lu Jianzeng, to whom he was related by marriage, from prosecution in yet another case of alleged corruption. Ji's attempts to rescue him proved naught, and the aging Lu died in prison. We can thus imagine Ji's conflicted emotional state as he followed in his kinsman's earlier footsteps to the Far West. But not only did Ji's poems both outnumber and outshine Lu's; even within the much larger corpus of *zhuzhici* from across the entire empire (at least 40,000 survive from the Qing period), Ji's poems are far better known than almost any

others. While this may have much to do with Ji's position as a leading light in the scholarly and literary world of his time, the sequence possesses the requisite features valued by the lyrical tradition: a personal voice, affective engagement with its subjects, and a compelling thematic and structural cohesion that ties its 160 poems together. In addition, the richness and variety of its topics, the sophistication of its historical allusiveness, and yet other features all contribute to this exemplarity. We might add to these the touch of bemusement toward his subjects (he was famed as a wit), a response that further humanizes the people and phenomena he describes. Many of their ways of life baffle him, and though he prefers the fresher, more tender vegetables served at official banquets, he leaves such differences between local and official culinary tastes "undecipherable" (*bukejie*). Far from diluting his fondness for the region, however, which he lauds as "every bit as lovely as Jiangnan," these peculiarities heighten a sense of heartfelt nostalgia as he reminisces about his experiences (all 160 poems were composed en route home from Urumqi). To the contrary, his emotional and aesthetic identification with his informants in this remote corner of the expansive domain "under heaven" (*tianxia*) only grows stronger as it recedes into his memory.

HARDLY A JADED EMPIRE

As noted above, many of these Xinjiang visitors, particularly during the heyday of Qing power in the Qianlong and early-Jiaqing eras, express appreciation for the peace and prosperity celebrated in Qishiyi's prose account. As Ji Yun puts it, "Now that I have been to the frontier myself and recorded my observations, I wish to apprise the entire world of the power and virtue of our current Son of Heaven. Thanks to his edict to open up and reclaim new lands, the deserts and snowbound mountains, where sage teachings never before reached, have now been transformed into farmlands and villages where singing, dancing, and recitation of the classics can be heard. If my poems spread the word about these events, I will be truly satisfied." (Qiu et al. 2007, 7:282)

In 1789, an official who had recently returned from a stint in Xinjiang presented 31 *zhuzhici* to the Qianlong Emperor during an imperial audience in Tianjin. Most, such as the following example, are encomia to the monarch's subjugation of the region:

The pearly spring and jade slope both trace their sources to towering
peaks and precipices
Kama is said to be carving beautiful pieces still
Gold-brocaded reins and heavenly seals record peacemaking
And a “cloud dragon” precious urn ascends the jasper steps
Wang Qisun, “Shepherd’s Songs from the Western Corner”

| | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| 璇源玉隴溯巔涯 | 喀瑪還聞追琢佳 |
| 金勒天章記綏靖 | 雲龍寶瓮上瑤階 |
| 王芑孫〈西陲牧唱詞〉 | |
| (Qiu et al. 2007, 7:305) | |

As its lengthy appended note explains, this ode describes the southwestern oasis of Khotan, where riverine nephritic pebbles are carried down the Yurungkash (“White Jade River” in Uighur) and Karakash (“Black Jade River”) from outcrops high in the Kunlun Mountains to their south. Since the Han Dynasty, these river beds had served as the single largest source of nephrite to China, but in the Qianlong period, increasingly larger fragments, including boulders weighing well over a ton each, were hewed out of the mountains and transported to the imperial workshops in the capital (Kim 2016, 242). Some of the gargantuan pieces ornately carved from these boulders during and after the Qianlong era still adorn the Forbidden City’s apartments to this day. In this poem and its gloss, the spiritual heirs to the master carver Kama (A Muslim of the Yuan Dynasty famed for his craftsmanship) have delivered an intricately decorated vessel (alluding to a fabled urn presented to the mythical sage emperor Ku by the western

kingdom of Danqiu) to the jasper steps of the imperial throne. And on this gift is engraved the brocade-framed “heavenly seal” that records the pacification of the region, the event that occasioned this gift.

Not only had its prolific jade production lent Khotan an aura of singular significance for the Chinese state practically since time immemorial; its strategic location also made it a pivotal node of interconnection in the region. In Wang’s words, “The area south of these mountains leads into Tibet, bringing north and south together into a single family. From there, we have found the ancient source [of jade] in the Kunlun and sought the old veins of its branches [of mineral deposits]. Vehicular traffic passes through there without interruption, and jade stones are distributed in all directions. It is nothing like when Zhang Qian had to rush westward on horseback [to evade the blockades put up by the Xiongnu]” (Qiu et al. 2007, 7:306). In other words, conditions of regional peace under *Pax Manjurica* had led to the flourishing of the jade trade not only along its traditional east-west routes, but southward to Tibet and north into Mongolia, both of which had been joined together in the “single family” of the Qing Great Unity. The Kunlun Mountains, now firmly under imperial rule, could thenceforth be fully exploited for the rich veins that lay in the subterranean branches of its ore-laden “jade tree.” Needless to say, this is also the mythical site of the jasper pool from which the Western Queen Mother (Xiwangmu) ruled in partnership with the Jade Emperor (regarded as her spouse in some Taoist folk traditions) over the earth, and where her famed peach tree of immortality stood. The symbolic significance of the region’s accession to rule by Beijing cannot be overstated.⁸

The halcyon era memorialized by Wang Qisun may have been rel-

8 The symbolic place of the Kunlun as the “origin of the earth’s veins” (mentioned in ancient texts such as *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers*) is also noted in Qi Yunshi’s 祁韻士 (1751–1815) *zhuzhici* entitled “Origin of the Yellow River,” (河源) and “Khotan” (和闐), in his *Xichui zhuzhici* 西陲竹枝詞. See Wang Liqi et al. 2003, 7:310-18.

atively short-lived, and even then, a perfect union far from realized, but the ideals of interethnic peace and tolerance remained a constant theme of many of these sojourning poets (Mi 2016, 135–44). The unimpeded circulation of jade, which stood for beauty, health, longevity, and prosperity, through the expanded body politic, boded well for all members of this extended imperial family, whether Muslim, Mongol, Tibetan, Han, or others among these residents of the Far West. In much of Xinjiang *zhuzhici* poetry, we find interconnectedness and the search for understanding, respect, and tolerance to be touchstones for their authors. As conflicts grew more frequent, and enmity within and among these groups waxed and waned, later poets like Lin Zexu and Xiao Xiong sought to articulate such ideals with even greater fervor (Qin, 2017, 106). And their affirmations of the prosperity and stability that had been enabled by Qing suzerainty was not without a local echo. The retired governor of Yaksu and Yarkand, Ahmad (?–1864), who was murdered by rebels for refusing to join the rebel forces under Yaqub Beg, defended his choice (according to a late-Qing history by Musa Sayrāmī) as follows:

“As for me, my grandfather and father continuously worked for the Great Khan [Qing emperor], and received high offices. I also personally received land, water, and servants through the emperor’s grace [...] Surely, he is a non-believer, who does not have faith. However, continuing from my grandfather and father, I am bathed in his glory and continued to eat his salt. Under any circumstances, I will not betray my lord who has given me salt.” (Kim 2016, 257; Millward and Newby 2006, 121)

In the light of such unalloyed loyalty, Wang Qisun’s profuse praise for Qianlong for having ushered in an age of resplendent peace and prosperity seems less sycophantic than it otherwise might (Newby 2005, 165). Still, we may hesitate to consider literary works like Wang Qisun’s to be either

good poetry or critically informed ethnography. Yet whatever its literary deficiencies, a poem like Wang's exhibits something of what Abbott describes as the lyrical approach to ethnographic writing. Referring to Harvey Warren Zorbaugh's classic work about Chicago, *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929), he writes that such an ethnographer "looks at a social situation, feels its overpowering excitement and its deeply affecting human complexity, and then writes [...] to awaken those feelings in the minds—and even more the hearts—of his readers. This recreation of an experience of social discovery is what I shall here call *lyrical sociology*" (Abbott 2007, 72). In conveying the significance of Xinjiang's recent transformations, these poems brim with the affective responses to their authors' discovery of this previously unfamiliar, newly incorporated terrain. As Abbott puts it, the promise of lyrical ethnography is its potential for the transcendence of parochial or ethnocentric biases, through a process of deeply introspective observation:

[W]hat these works have in common is the intense engagement of their authors, and by extension their readers, in precisely their indexical, located quality, the transitory and particular nature of their present here(s) and now(s). At its best, this feeling is curious without exoticism, sympathetic without presumption, and thoughtful without judgment.... [W]hile we commonly read texts in the nonindexical mode, looking for narratives or structural accounts that explain other people's lives by contextualizing them in various ways, we tend quietly to reserve to ourselves the privilege of living in the (only) "real" here and now, in the inexplicable, indexical present [...]. The lyrical text directly confronts us with the radical chasm between our own here and now and that of its subjects. Yet while the lyrical text shows us this chasm clearly, the chasm itself is crossed by our moral recognition of the common humanity we share with those we read about. The central emotion aroused by lyrical sociology is precisely

this tense yoking of the vertigo of indexical difference with the comfort of human sympathy (Abbott 2007, 94–95).

Arguably, at least some of the *zhuzhici* of Xinjiang I have discussed above reflect similar sentiments: curiosity without exoticism, sympathy without presumption, thoughtfulness without judgment. And if they are able to do so, it may be because, as non-narrative texts, they avoid the “trap” of privileging the writer’s own nonindexical “here and now” over that of the informant. Instead, their authors are intensely engaged in the transitory, particular nature of the present, speaking in the voices of their informants, even employing their language. As Lu Jianzeng intones in his concluding poem, he has imitated Liu Yuxi’s ninth-century appropriation of the tunes sung in unison by indigenes and poets alike amidst the bamboo forests of Sichuan. In fusing their own voices with those of their subjects, these poets appear to strive to achieve, even if only imperfectly and with obvious gaps in their understanding of local cultures and sensitivities, a “moral recognition of the common humanity” shared by the crisscrossed branches of the human family they document.

That *zhuzhici* was perceived as an appropriate vehicle for writing about the “branching out” of Chinese officials and visitors into far-flung, unfamiliar regions dates from its origins in Liu Yuxi’s poems, but it was only in the mid- to late-Qing that something like an ethnographic mode of description first appeared. Concurrent with its use by Xinjiang exiles, travelers to Mongolia, Tibetan-speaking regions, and both visitors and residents of Taiwan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Manchuria, and other peripheral areas produced poems with similarly lengthy glosses to explain the unfamiliar cultural and social practices of these areas. After 1842, the foreign concessions of Shanghai and eventually foreign countries like Japan, Europe, and North America also inspired poems; the diplomat Huang Zunxian’s series on Japan is a notable example of these so-called “*haiwai zhuzhici*” 海外竹枝詞. In such regions, the crisscrossed veins of the “jade tree” exemplifying

the Great Unity did not prevail, and to the contrary, gunboats and imperial arrogance negatively impressed many Qing travelers abroad. But even in such “here(s) and now(s),” these poets sought to uncover and celebrate the strands of common humanity that such poems affirmed in other places and times. The examples of Ji Yun, Lin Zexu, and other sojourners in Xinjiang inspired them to do nothing less.

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