

Voyagers without Abode and the Departure to a Better World.

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1. Basic Notions of an Unsettled Existence in Chinese Antiquity

Transcending all ideological differences, the *Book of Metamorphoses* (*Yijing, I-Ging*)¹ has been viewed in traditional Chinese culture as a basic work not only of the art of sooth-saying, but of an understanding of the world as a whole. Among the 64 situations described therein, the 56th deals with the constellation of 'the wanderer' (*Lü*).² It is symbolized by the 'fire' above the 'mountain', i.e., a fleeting phenomenon whose ephemeral character is highlighted by the fact that it appears above something as solid and immovable as a mountain.

The usual sequence of the 64 situations is such that those appearing next to each other frequently form a juxtaposition.³ In light of this it is remarkable that the respective 55th constellation refers to 'plenty' (*Feng*) – meaning a situation in which all is at its best. As the *Book* so aptly puts it, it is the situation in which 'the sun reaches its noon-time zenith', while already displaying the first signs of disintegration. Seen in this way, the constellation of the 'wanderer' is one that, although it emerged from that of 'plenty', it nonetheless stands in sharp contrast to it. It symbolizes destitution, the predicament of total loss; the moment when one takes flight into the unknown and is dependent on help from others. It is therefore marked by a lack of free will. Not surprisingly, the original Confucian commentary relates it to a kind of punishment or, more accurately perhaps, to a kind of trial. The relevant passage reads as follows: "Fire is on the mountain: the image of the wanderer./ The noble is thus unambiguous and cautious in inflicting the punishment and does not prolong a dispute./"⁴

This means that the state of being a 'wanderer' will be of no more than short duration and offers a chance to make a fresh beginning. Above all, like all punishment, it is not to become a permanent state of affairs. The oldest interpretation of this situation which was still unaffected by Confucianism did take a more general view which was not connected to the social context; but there was no difference in principle, as is evidenced by the following line: "The wanderer: Succeed through smallness:/ Persistence will be for the good of the wanderer." ⁵

The wanderer is therefore supposed to keep in mind the indigence of his situation and to try to regain firmer roots by showing persistence. Like all other existential constellations that are discussed in the *Book of Metamorphoses*, this one, too, is characterized furthermore by six individual situations that are conceivable within the given overall framework. The sequence in which these six situations are listed is up to a point likewise instructive. The first of the six is described as follows: "If the wanderer is preoccupied with petty matters,/ he will thereby draw misfortune onto himself." ⁶ This means that, notwithstanding his situation that directs him towards smallness, his goal should be to strive for greater things.

The second situation says that "the wanderer arrives at the lodge./ He has his possessions with him./ He acquires the persistence of a young servant." Here all circumstances for a new beginning are in place: The wanderer has an abode; he also has an assistant who supports him in his 'persistence' that is necessary in principle for survival, just as the basic line suggested. However, the situation is precarious. The next sentence which circumscribes the third situation runs as follows: "The wanderer takes a rest at a lodging./ He gains property and an axe./ But I am unhappy in my heart." In other words, external security in a foreign environment, which is reflected in property and the chance to exercise a profession, is paid for with sorrow. Interestingly enough this saying is among the few in the *Book of Metamorphoses* in which the word 'I' appears rather unexpectedly. It evokes the loneliness of the wanderer who has only himself to rely upon.

Only the fifth situation, described in the following lines, may be taken to have an unqualifiedly positive connotation: "The wanderer shoots a pheasant; it is hit by the first arrow./ It is thereby that he finally obtains praise and an office." By bringing a ritual

present in the form of a pheasant, the wanderer can formally introduce himself to a prince. He is able to gain a high position with it that fully integrates him into society and allows him to cast off his quality as a 'wanderer'. However, if he is not on his guard, he can also lose this position. For the sixth and final situation described here proclaims: "The bird's nest is destroyed by fire: the wanderer first had reason to smile./ Now he is forced to wail and cry./ He loses the cow through carelessness./ Mischief!" In other words, even under the most favorable conditions the wanderer can lose everything when he lives in a foreign environment.

There is much to be gained from a more detailed discussion of the 'wanderer' and his various situations in the *Book of Metamorphoses*, because this book has always been essential for the concepts underlying the Chinese system of values. Within this system, the wanderer, as we have seen, appears as an endangered figure who conceives of his existence as a 'punishment' and whose only hope is that this 'punishment' will be short-term. There is an immediate sense that the idea of 'banishment' creeps into this notion. In fact, from ancient times to the present exile is among the most common penalties of the Chinese judicial system – a punishment which is perceived to be particularly harsh in light of the size of the country and of the strong integration of the individual into the community. The terms used for this penalty speak for themselves. The word 'to expel' (*zhu*) is probably the most radical; the words 'to let flow' (*liu*) or 'to let run', 'to let go' (*fang*) are more neutral. Nevertheless, even if the 'wanderer' was an exiled person, his existence – as portrayed in the *Book of Metamorphoses* – was limited in time. The term 'wanderer', used in the *Book*, itself incontestably reflects this temporary sense.

However, the concept of the 'wanderer' in the Chinese tradition has a wider meaning than this. The image of the 'wanderer' as such is no less relevant, i.e., of man living fundamentally without roots. It is not really a theme underlying the *Book of Metamorphoses*, because this work – as indicated by its title – deals with situations which – however paradoxical it may sound – relate to change over time; they describe temporary changes rather than metamorphoses that are permanent. On the whole the *Book of Metamorphoses* gives a more unfavorable rating to the temporary 'wanderer'. However, the concept of the person who because of

his profession or his inner attitude becomes a perennial 'wanderer' clearly coincides with the notion of 'wanderer' in daily Chinese language; in fact, it is much more pronounced here. Thus it is symptomatic that the simple word 'to go', 'to travel', 'to wander' (*you*) appears in two characters that are constantly used interchangeably. In other words, while the phonetic element that roughly defines pronunciation is the same, the categorial sign is the same as for 'to run' in the one case and as for 'water' in the other. But if it appears in the latter style it assumes the additional meaning of 'to swim', 'to float (on water)', 'to drift' or simply 'to play'. However, the sign for 'water' inspires, metaphorically speaking, also a whole number of other concepts in all of which the relevant character again carries the categorial sign for 'water'.

Examples that come to mind are 'to drift along' (*piao*), especially if used in combination with the word 'idle' (*po*) which also carries the 'water' sign to form *piaopo* with the same meaning. There is also the word 'wave' (*lang*) which again appears in several combinations, such as 'wave-man' (*langren*) in the meaning of 'vagabond' or 'fluid-wavy' (*liulang*) in the meaning of 'to drift around'. The word *liu* that has been added to the latter term is the same that we have already encountered in connection with 'to exile'. Similarly the other word for 'to exile', i.e., 'to let go', is synonymous with 'without ties', 'roaming'. The association with 'water' is therefore highlighted in all words that are related to an unbound life-style. This is most marked in the word combination of *jianghu*. Its basic meaning is no more than 'river and lake'; but in fact it designates in the most general terms the notion of traveller and, in a metaphorical sense, adventurer.

All these words thus associate the notion of 'wandering' with a person without ties, with a social outcast. Thence it is but a small step to associations with criminality. The well-known point that in ancient China – to some extent in modern China as well – the notion of 'freedom' easily assumes the added meaning of loose living is directly relevant in this context.⁷ Peasant society always looked with suspicion upon the 'wanderer', whether he had become such because of his profession or from some inner passion. It was no accident that among the four established estates – scholar, peasant, craftsman, and merchant – the latter, who could not avoid travelling at lot, was ranked lowest, not to mention the

soldier who found himself in the same position. In fact soldiers were put outside and beneath the above professional ranking order and were psychologically lumped together with prostitutes and even with robbers. And with all of them was associated the notion of vagabonding in a pejorative sense.

'Water' symbolized all these meanings that within the Chinese conception of the five elements also represented the notion of winter and of the North. These five elements included 'water', 'soil', 'fire', 'wood', and 'metal', but not 'air'.⁸ 'Water', in the *Book of Metamorphoses* as elsewhere, was associated with the 'abysmal', the 'dangerous', the 'amorphous'; it referred not only to the ephemeral character of the waves, but, in a different state of aggregation, also that of clouds. There was something voracious, something corrosive about it. Such meanings did not contradict the fact that water was an object of special worship in Daoism, though not in Confucianism – a faith that was more oriented toward the firmer element of soil placed at the center of the five elements. As indicated by its double-meaning mentioned above, the idea of 'wandering' was all too easily identified by established society with the notion of 'swimming' and with it the danger of drowning.

2. Journeys to Heaven and to the Edges of the World

The concept of 'wanderer' thus stood for a human being who either temporarily or even permanently had lost his roots; it was seen to represent a person who was endangered and dangerous at the same time. However, this did not mean that there existed no alternative positions. These were positions that, moving against the tide, sought and willed homelessness; or there was no assumption of homelessness because 'to wander' was merely a planned journey with a clear destination which had little to do with the inner state of mind of the 'wanderer' in its deeper sense. The first great traveller from China, who thenceforth came to be seen as the traveller per se, was of precisely this type. He was the Emperor Mu of the Zhou Dynasty who ruled from 1001 to 947 B.C. (although this traditional chronology has to be shortened a little and moved a bit more into the more recent past).

The legendary description of Mu's wide-ranging travels was retrieved, as a badly damaged manuscript, in 281 A.D. from a tomb that had been sealed some 600 years earlier, i.e. in 296 B.C. This manuscript is entitled *Report on the Son of Heaven Mu* (*Mu*

tianzi zhuan). On first inspection, it reads like a sober dated travel log. In fact, however, it describes a kind of comprehensive ritual journey to the northern and western borders of the empire that were always insecure and in the course of which the ruler offers sacrifices at all crucial points, encounters mythical persons, and distributes or receives gifts from them. A meeting with the mythical 'Royal Mother of the West' (*Xi wangmu*) in the far western Kunlun Mountains represents the highpoint of the journey. According to later legends, *Xi wangmu* not only was herself immortal, but also possessed peaches of immortality that could give eternal life to others as well. Mu and the 'Royal Mother' exchange presents as well as songs in which they recognize their mutual empires of the East (i.e. China) and of the West. In the end, Mu sets out on his return journey, having listened to the expressed wish of the 'Royal Mother' that he not die and return for another visit.⁹

It is important to mention this highly placed traveller, who certainly cannot be viewed as 'homeless' because the idea of a 'journey' inevitably and immediately conjures up in the Chinese mind the figure of Mu. Moreover, the report is pervaded by many mythological elements that also appear in another text probably dating from the same period, i.e. the third century B.C. These are the *Elegies of Chu* (*Chuci*). At the center of this collection and in its first part in particular, there appears another semi-historical and semi-legendary figure, i.e., the statesman Qu Yuan (?343-277 B.C.) who was later elevated to something like a Chinese national hero.¹⁰ He was supposed to have lost his ministerial position in the Southern State of Chu on account of slanderous allegations (and it may well be that the trivial story was based on an actual historical event). Qu Yuan was so devastated by this that he drowned himself in the River Mile. But before he did so, he undertook a pathetic journey to heaven to visit a large variety of mythical figures who live there, including several female deities, in order to find a comforting new home. But, as the first part of the *Elegies of Chu*, entitled *Encounter with Sorrow*, also describes, he is without success. At one point the text reads as follows:

My glittering party raced up and down/ with wild irregularity, gathered together at one point, and fragmented at another. I begged to gate-keeper of Heaven to open the doors for us/, but he merely leaned over the heavenly gates and peeked at me with a dumb look on his face./ And slowly dark fell and the day reached its end./¹¹

Like the son of heaven Mu, Qu Yuan travels in style in a coach with several horses, capable in his case even of overcoming gravity. Yet, unlike Mu, his existence is characterized by a situation that does turn him into a 'wanderer': he is homeless due to the loss of his office that had been his world. Mu's journey is not only written in prose, but beyond its mythology also had a prosaic purpose in a literal sense. Above all, he started from a safe center and merely wanted to make certain that the periphery of his region was no less secure. By contrast, Qu Yuan's journey, which is described in powerful rhapsodic rhymes, has the opposite point of departure, i.e., the loss of Qu Yuan's personal center. The journey was an odyssey without a clear terminal point, and it ended, just as it had begun, in despair.

His journey gives the impression of a flight through heaven; it is told in the first person singular, intimating an atmosphere of loneliness. This sense connects well with the above-mentioned statement in the *Book of Metamorphoses*: "I am unhappy in my heart." It became a metaphor of the inner world of all those who saw themselves deprived of their roots, even if they did not, like Qu Yuan, 'clutching a rock', immediately throw themselves into the sea in order to drown.

Several centuries before him, innumerable members of the upper stratum of nobility, professional soldiers and scholars had lost their homeland and their communal ties. As 'wandering journeymen' they travelled from one princely court of the dilapidated empire to another. Serving as soldiers or advisors, they stayed for longer or shorter periods and were listed as 'foreign guests'.¹² Confucius, in the final analysis, belonged to the category of 'wandering journeyman' in the sixth century B.C. This was more true of Mencius, his intellectual heir writing in the late fourth century, who was thus closer to the total collapse of the ancient society. Many people could hence identify with Qu Yuan's travels, even if they had not risen to high office and had experienced the dream of a futile journey through the heavens. And the opportunity to identify with his predicament has remained to this day wherever the failure of one's personal hopes and ideals resulted in an inner alienation and isolation from the outside world.

The *Elegies of Chu* contain not only the sad story of Qu Yuan, but also a number of other elegies that are variations on the theme of

'wandering'. Among them are nine shorter shaman songs. Almost all of them describe journeys through the air that lead to a longed-for deity. But unification is followed by inevitable renewed separation ending in depression, except that the experience is less intense than Qu Yuan's.¹³ Even more interesting is an elegy entitled *The Recalling of the Soul (Zhao hun)*. It is based on the religious practice of the same name by which a man's soul is recalled during serious illness or shortly after his death. The elegy is a masterful treatment of the idea. It describes, on the one hand, the beauty of the setting from which the soul is about to depart in glowing colors, with the comforts of the upper classes providing the model; on the other hand, the story paints a picture of the horrors of an alien world in whatever direction the soul seeks to take. Thus in one place the East is depicted as follows:

Oh soul, come back! Why did not leave your old homestead to strive towards the end of the world,/ abandoning your places of joy, merely to trade in evil things?/ Oh soul, come back! You will find no peace in the East,/ where there are only giants and fierce ghosts who merely lie in wait to capture souls;/ and there are ten suns that rise at the same time; that cause metal to melt and stones to burst./ These beings may be able to endure this, but you, oh soul, would be eaten up by it.¹⁴

Once again we find that abandoning one's homeland and going away is being stigmatized as something deeply pernicious; it is identified here with nothing less than decomposition and death and it therefore also casts a dark cloud over Qu Yuan's journey.

There is a parallel piece both in title and contents, *The Recalling of the Hermit (Zhao yinshi)*, that later even created a literary genre of its own.¹⁵ Instead of the dangers looming at the four corners of the world, against which the departing soul was to be warned, it describes the discomforts of wild nature. The hermit who has escaped into this environment to enjoy its freedoms, is to be chased back into civilization and to be induced to remake his roots in society.

All these elegies – and especially those that represent a copy of Qu Yuan's *Encounter with Sorrow* – deal with a person roaming outside the societal sphere. They characterize this behavior as a fatal aberration, whether it is merely the move into actual Nature or the journey to an imaginary place. There is one elegy that, though structured similarly to Qu Yuan's, points in the opposite

direction. It is entitled *Journeys into the Distance* (*Yuan you*) It starts out with a vivid description of disappointment and failure in society. But the hero does not react by quickly escaping from the world. Rather he undergoes a kind of meditative concentration and only thereafter embarks upon a heavenly journey. What is more, the journey surprisingly turns into a great triumph that has the effect of a coded mystical experience. This piece is again set in the first person singular and all deities receive the 'wanderer' with open arms. The gate-keeper of Heaven, who also puts in an appearance, when asked, gladly opens the gates. And in the end the person does not fall down to earth again in order to disappear in the water; rather it joyously makes contact with the absolute:

I reached the four outer countries/ and journeyed through the six regions;/ ascended to those crevices in the skies that produce lightning/ and I dived down into the great abyss./ The earth disappeared in the greatest depths,/ and the sky became invisible at the greatest heights./ When I looked down, not a sound hit my astonished ears./ Having moved through idleness I arrived at purity/ and I entered the sphere of the primordial Great Beginning.¹⁶

This poem which probably dates back to the first century B.C. exudes a very different and indeed enthusiastically positive attitude towards 'wandering'. It is very different from what we had encountered so far. But it dates back farther than the first century B.C. In fact it is to be found, even if in coded metaphors, in early Daoist writings. This is true above all of the classic work *Zhuangzi*. Here we find powerful images which illustrate the independence from the banalities of life on earth of Peng, the giant bird, whose sheer size darkens the skies. Since the end of the second century A.D., the Chinese empire slipped increasingly into political chaos. In this situation it became more and more difficult to defend the ideal of an individual who stays in the place that is allocated to him geographically and socially and to describe the 'wanderer', however aimlessly he may have been stumbling about, as a person slated to die. As the Daoists had always been saying, it was often this person who was able to save his life by abandoning his social network. So, just as the image of society assumed darker shades, that of the 'wanderer' who succeeded in cutting himself off from it appeared in ever lighter colors. The collapse of the real world forced him to set out into a better world, even if that world was no more than a flight of fancy.

3. Wandering Immortals

The clearest expression of this development was the emergence of a poetry whose special themes revolved around an imaginary escape from the world as it existed and which has become known in the history of literature as a 'lyric of the wandering immortal' (*youxian shi*).¹⁷ In popular religious imagination that can be traced back almost to the beginnings of Chinese culture, but was later promoted by Daoism in particular, the 'immortals' (or 'genies'; *xian*) appear as a kind of birdmen. This is why they are regularly depicted in a feather costume, even if it is rare for them to appear with two additional limbs, like angels in the Western tradition. They were more likely to glide than to fly – an idea in which religious Daoism could be easily reconciled with its dietary rituals and fasting rules as well as with its breathing exercises. The purpose of both was, after all, to replace the heavy substances in the body with light ones until a state of levitation was reached, so to speak, on its own. The actual goal was not levitation itself; rather it was one of the corollaries of a successful attempt to liberate oneself fundamentally from the bonds of this world, among which death was the heaviest. Those who reached this state were, not inappropriately called 'immortals'.¹⁸

Between the third and the fifth century, the authors of this poetry of immortals, in their dreamlike attempt to escape the bonds of this world, spent much of their creative energy to put themselves into the position of these supermen. Unlike the above-mentioned *Journey into the Distance* in the *Elegies of Chu*, their imagination remained quite concrete and unaffected by mysticism. Thus an early example of this type of poetry by the princely poet Cao Zhi (192-232)¹⁹ and hence written only a century after the *Elegies* contains the following stanzas under the identical title of *Journey into the Distance*:

Journey into the distance – the four oceans ahead of me! / I look down and see the rising waves, / giant fish, like bent hills, / move in line against the waves. // Ghostly turtles carry Fangzhang, the island of paradise, on their heads / their peaks reach majestic heights. / Immortals glide along the edges of the island, girls in jade play on the slopes of the mountains there. // red-jaded pollen soothes their appetite, / they lift their head and drink the dew. / Clearly, the Kunlun Mountains are our home. / China, the land of the middle, is our pater-

nal house.// I shall hurry to see the divine 'Father of the East',/ with one leap I jump over drift-sand deserts²⁰./ With roaring wings I dance in the storm of the tides/ and, with a joyous voice sing my songs in the pure air.// Inscriptions on stone and metal – however permanent they may be – will fade one day./ Hence I will rather radiate together with sun and moon/ and measure my years in relation to those of Heaven and Earth./ Even a force of ten thousand chariots – how could it be greater?!²¹

The distinction between this piece and the older poem about a 'journey into the distance' that describes a mystical experience is very tangible. In the first one, earth disappears when its author looks down; the 'puzzled eyes' see nothing at all. In Cao Zhi, by contrast, we find a depiction of the landscape from a bird's eye perspective. Some of these poems that describe the free floating in the skies appear to be written under the influence of drugs. Apart from certain minerals, the literature of the period repeatedly also mentions mushrooms as stimulants that are capable of producing hallucinations of flying.²² The crucial point in the treatment of the 'journey of the immortals' is that arriving in the various paradises on mountains and islands does not form the main focus; rather it is the free wandering itself that, as a result of gliding in the skies, suddenly becomes three-dimensional. Here the means are indeed the end.

As various contemporary collections of legends confirm, one of the reasons for this was that the immortals often displayed a remarkable timidity of the Heavens. They feared to run into a hierarchy of gods that surpassed that on Earth.²³ Thenceforth a distinction was made between 'celestial immortals' (*tianxian*) and 'earthly immortals' (*dixian*). Thus, in a collection of legends dating from the fourth century A.D. the Holyman Pengzu, who because of his old age is viewed as a kind of Chinese Methusalem, has the following words put in his mouth:

Some of the immortals rise to the clouds with their bodies erect und glide without moving their wings; some ride, with dragons in harness, on the mist up to the steps of Heaven; others transform themselves into animals and birds and roam through the blue clouds; some dive deep into the rivers and oceans or fly to the peaks of famous mountains; others imbibe a primordial essence or eat the herb of immortality; some move among human beings without the latter noticing; others hide so that no-one can see them.

It is interesting that even before two forms of writing the word 'immortal' (*xian*) had emerged that neatly corresponded to a division into its celestial and earthly representatives. The older form still displays a link with the character for 'to rise into the skies'; the more recent and simpler form, which soon became accepted, instead reflected a combination of the character elements for 'human' and 'mountain'. However much people delighted in reading the experiences of flying in the poetry of the wandering immortals, subsequently the immortal who lived on Earth received greater attention than the one who disappeared into Heaven or distant paradises. The territory of the 'earthly immortals', however, were clearly the mountains, to which they retreated, which they traversed, and from which they periodically reemerged, often after an interval of hundreds of years, for instance, in order to visit a town-market and to sell strange herbs there.

Hermits were, of course, the real-life embodiments of these immortals, and there was a growing number of these since the third century. They were not, however, hermits of the strict Middle Eastern or European kind that Christianity had produced. Rather they were educated people who renounced their obligation toward the state (which, at least in Confucianism, automatically also involved education) in order to live, quite possibly with wife and child, a free and frequently non-sedentary life in unspoiled Nature.²⁴

Brief mention has already been made of a poem in the *Elegies of Chu* with which a hermit was to be 'recalled' by opening his eyes to the dangers of the wilderness. Similarly the escaping soul was to be induced to return through a description of the horrors that expected it at the edges of the world. But again the argument was turned on its head: the edges of the world now without exception were made up of paradises; free Nature (in all its manifestations, including its occasional barren-ness) became a haven of security, authenticity and above all liberty. With reference to our theme, it should be noted, however, that this development happened in two divergent phases. In the first phase, covering the second and third century A.D. and marked by the poetry of the 'wandering immortals', there occurred a general reversal in the valuation of wandering from its negative connotations to positive ones. For the moment this revaluation occurred in the realm of fantasy, but

writings on the subject nonetheless tended to give preference to the idea of an unimpeded roaming over that of an immobile rootedness.

During the second phase, which began around the second half of the third century, the emergence of the hermit's life in the above-mentioned sense meant that the revaluation now assumed practical significance. Instead of describing air-borne journeys and vistas of distant paradises, literature now depicted real Nature in its full beauty and thenceforth this theme was never again repressed. It was accompanied by a sudden enthusiasm for travelling which included an interest in mountaineering.²⁵ Not infrequently, the proclaimed purpose was to visit a hermit who was not to be persuaded to return to civilization, but who – since he had supposedly himself become a part of Nature – was regarded as a source of inspiration. The actual purpose of such journeys, though, was to experience Nature itself. As a result we see the emergence of the first literary descriptions of landscapes that are realistic and concerned with geography.

It took much longer to invent the travel diary as a literary form capable of capturing the dynamic element embodied by the 'wanderer' himself.

4. The Discovery of Nature and of Foreign Lands Beyond the Oceans and the Stars.

Even if at first glance it seems odd, contemplating the phenomenon of the travel diary²⁶ raises the question of how far this genre is at all characteristic of a 'wanderer' or at least of the wanderer from the perspective that we have chosen. After all, the 'wanderer' whose existence is determined by his homelessness and who is on the way to another world feels his whole inner self constantly propelled by this theme; it is not a partial effect that is experienced temporarily. Clearly not every person who undertakes a journey is entitled to be called a wanderer. Now, the really great travel descriptions that emerge some one hundred years later around the turn from the fourth to the fifth century start as depictions of landscapes. At the same time they do contain the ingredients of the genuine 'wanderer', even if they were official journeys in the service of the state.

We are thinking here of the voluminous travel descriptions that Buddhist pilgrims from China undertook to India in the third century following the breakthrough of Buddhism in the Far East. Particular mention must be made of the accounts by the monk Faxian between 399 and 412 A.D. and some two hundred years later, between 629 and 645 A.D. by the monk Xuanzang.²⁷ Guided by their faith, they too believed to be setting off into a better world and were motivated by the hope that they would succeed in internalizing that world. Still, their journeys were geared toward a specific goal and assumed that their return would essentially be a completion of their efforts. Ultimately what they were looking for was to gain fresh insights and information. However adventurous these journeys by land or by sea may have been and however many detours they necessitated, they surely cannot be viewed as a simple roaming.

Within the framework of Chinese Buddhism, certain mendicant friars more accurately fit the image of the 'wanderer' in the strict sense. Frequently no more than nominally associated with a particular monastery, they migrated through the country without a fixed abode. There are also some hermits whose faith was situated somewhere between Daoism and Buddhism. One of the most famous and yet, as far as his biography is concerned, also most obscure is the poet Han-shan 'Cold Mountain'. This at least is the only name of his that has survived and that he probably took from one of the peaks of the northernmost of the four holy mountains of Buddhism, the Wutai Mountain, where he presumably lived in the eighth century.

Han-shan has expressed his lost sense of life in a number of impressive poems whose translations deeply moved the beatnik and hippie generations of the 1950s who recognized in them, not without justification, some tenets of Zen Buddhism.²⁸ Perhaps these poems reflect the basic mood of the 'wanderer' particularly well, as he wavers between homelessness and the search for a homeland. The following lines offer a good illustration of this mood:

I came into this world thirty years ago,/ always on the road, a thousand, ten thousand miles/ I travelled from the grass-lined Yangzijiang to the red dusts of the northern borderlands,/ I brewed potions, searched in vain for immortality,/ studied manuscripts and recited historical works./ Having returned to the 'Cold Mountain' today,/ I

rest my head in the stream and wash my ears, (in order to cleanse myself from all that I have heard).²⁹

Buddhism has influenced the relationship of traditional Chinese culture toward the 'wanderer' in several ways: To begin with, it introduced a gigantic enlargement of being in time and space in terms of aeons. It measured time in billions of years and counted millions of worlds, against whose background even the wideranging travels of Faxian and Xuanzang became banalities. However, Buddhism also infused the here and now with a touch of the unreal, with a wisp of 'emptiness', as reflected in many of Han-shan's poems. Above all, there was the idea of a 'wandering of the souls'. Although the notion of an indestructible ego that lived through innumerable existences was not particularly Buddhist, it was nonetheless mostly taken up in its more naive version. All three elements – the incomprehensible spaces of the universe, the emptiness of being, and the wandering of the soul – impacted jointly. All contemporary being suddenly appeared to be that of a 'wanderer' who, precisely because of the gigantic size of the dimensions around him, would be unable to put down roots anywhere.

Since the ninth century, Chinese culture has managed surprisingly well to emancipate itself from this Buddhist influence, after Buddhism suffered a drastic containment at about the same time. Certainly it is difficult to make a bridge from the pilgrimages of Chinese monks to India to the travel log literature that we have mentioned above and that experienced an explosive popularity in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This literature arose independently of the Buddhist tradition. The Buddhist travel descriptions of, for example, Faxian have no more than an outward characteristic in common with this later travel literature: they, too, frequently referred to journeys that were undertaken in some official capacity, such as in order to engage in political negotiations with neighboring alien peoples. However, as a rule these journeys occurred within a narrower framework geographically speaking. Compared with earlier centuries the empire had experienced a tangible contraction. Travel therefore took place along roads and rivers, and no longer across the seas.

Diary notes relating to official journeys necessarily assumed rather more a soberly documentary character. But this is also true of records relating to travels that were privately undertaken.

Entries concerning the cultural monuments that had been visited clearly loom large in such accounts. Another element that is of a different order is richly documented in both official and private travel logs: the loving description of Nature, once rather more the preferred theme of scholars with hermitic inclinations. At the same time, with the demographic explosion and the advance of civilization, Nature no longer had the untamed power. As late as the third and fourth centuries Nature had still facilitated an alternative life-style. Now it was more like a park in which the harassed soul could find temporary relaxation.³⁰ In private travel logs Nature similarly offered ephemeral refreshment rather than the tangible opportunity of an alternative life.

If we look at the travel log literature as a whole, there is one common feature that may be outward, but nonetheless symptomatic: their consecutive dating which makes it possible to compare them with the similarly organized mythical travel logs of the Heavenly Son Mu who undertook a measured and controlled check along the borderlands. They cannot be related, however, to the passionate report of Qu Yuan, the other great primordial figure of the traveller who vainly swept through Heaven. Travel logs are therefore still touched by the idea of paradisaical freedom wherever they talk about Nature. But they lack the serious will to be completely absorbed by it, as had been so strongly the case with the poets and scholars of the third and fourth centuries. Only the latter still found themselves torn between the duties and comforts of civilization and the purity and freedom of Nature. The world as a whole had become more confined and subject to planning.

The powerful Muslim court eunuch Zheng He (ca. 1371-1434) made a single phenomenal, though brief foray into more distant lands when he sailed to Indochina, Indonesia, India, and finally to Aden and Djidda on the Red Sea.³¹ With good reason he might be called China's Columbus. These expedition regularly comprised several dozen junks with some 20,000 men. However, this gigantic enterprise, initiated by a Chinaman from a highly untypical background, surprisingly ran into the ground without leaving much of a trace. Nor did it give fresh impulses to the notion of roaming in distant lands or of a new beginning in another world. At most we may regard an 18th-century novel as a belated reflection of Zheng He's travels. This novel is set in the seventh century and describes

an extensive and fantastic sea journey through the world of islands to the east and south-east of China. The style is reminiscent of *Gulliver's Travels*. Li Ruzhen, the author (1763-?1830), depicts the existence of imaginary worlds on these islands. Indirectly his accounts contain plenty of social criticism relating to conditions in contemporary China. Still, a striving for a fundamentally different life-style is nowhere to be found even in this novel.³²

This was also true of the 16th-century book by the prominent novelist Wu Zheng (1500-1582), entitled *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*). He took as his starting-point the above-mentioned journey to India by the 7th-century monk Xuanzang as a way of depicting, in entertaining fashion, adventurous encounters with strange human and superhuman beings. However, Wu Zheng, too, did not write from a position of personal commitment, but of playful distance.³³

When this novel appeared, China's self-isolation had reached a certain climax. It was reflected in the comprehensive renovation of the 'Great Wall' which assumed its present-day shape at this time. There was also the depopulation of the eastern coastal regions for fear of foreign (mainly Japanese) pirates. There was also the ban on emigration, although this ban also demonstrates that emigration had become a problem that soon became more and more visible. The loss of the homeland in the shape of 'exile' had, as will be remembered, always been seen as a harsh punishment. But slowly perceptions began to reverse. However, this reversal should not be taken as proof of a changed basic attitude; rather it is a reflection of the increasingly desolate conditions in the empire that in earlier times, too, had led to frequent flight – whether as a flight of fancy into distant heavens and paradises or as a physical retreat to Nature. Over the centuries, the Chinese population had continuously expanded toward the west and northwest, but above all toward the south. Emigration to Indochina and partly to Indonesia could therefore be seen as a further continuation of this process, the more so since it was relatively easy to maintain family ties with the mainland, while the peoples confronted with Chinese expansion looked on with resentment.

A more far-reaching dissociation from Chinese culture, that added a few really novel aspects to the image of the 'wanderer', occurred only with the appearance of the Europeans and in particular the Americans from the middle of the 19th century. The

Americas now became a region of escape. The earliest response in this respect was the big wave of emigration by Chinese laborers to the United States during the age of railroad construction in the 1850s and 1860s. 34 Most of these innumerable emigrants had still left the homeland in the hope of being able to return one day. In the end they had to reconcile themselves to their self-chosen exile which took a different shape in the U.S. where, unlike in southeast Asia, they had, initially at least, only access to the lowliest positions in society. Not too long ago, many poems were found to have been carved into the wooden walls of the shacks put up in one of the transit camps for Chinese immigrants on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. However naive they may be, they nevertheless convey an impression of the emotional world of these immigrants. They might almost be compared with one of a miserable stages of the 'wanderer' in the *Book of Metamorphoses*. Thus, one of the poems reads as follows:

Cooped up in a wooden house, day after day,/ deprived of freedom, I
lack the words!/ I raise my head and try to see who among us is
happy, but everybody merely sits apathetically./ My heart is con-
strained, and racked with sorrow I find sleep eluding me./ ... oh, why
don't I return in all my isolation and bitterness/, in order to move
back home and to learn to plough the field?!/ ³⁵

Of course, similar thoughts may have overwhelmed immigrants from other nations who found themselves in this predicament. The decisive point is, though, that they were no doubt more intensively held by members of a culture in which wandering was seen as a misfortune or even as a punishment, notwithstanding the above-mentioned exceptions which were all too easily directed toward a transcendental paradise.

If the figure of the Chinese 'wanderer' is not merely conceived as a singular phenomenon, but as a manifestation of a life-style, it invites the following concluding considerations. Traditional Chinese culture fundamentally took a skeptical view of 'wandering'. Thus whenever a 'wanderer' appeared on the scene, the tensions to which he was exposed were tremendous. Both in his imagination as well as in his real life there was only the escape to a transcendental space that had not been occupied by Chinese culture. This escape could occur in a deep sense of despair, as reflected in Qu Yuan's life, who first raised himself to the highest

heavens before plunging to his suicide in the deepest waters. Wandering could also take place in joyous enthusiasm, as attempted by the poets in *Journeys into the Distance*. They started to their imaginary flight to paradise or mystically approached the 'Great Primordial Beginning', while in reality submerging themselves as hermits in Nature.

Daoism and later Buddhism did legitimize the life of the 'wanderer' in the real and in the metaphorical sense. But insofar as these *Weltanschauungen* became institutionalized, in the final analysis they, too, mistrusted the 'wanderer'. And in any case they were never able to compete with Confucianism which, largely unchallenged, determined the brighter side of Chinese culture. It was only in the modern period that the notion of the 'wanderer' was given in China a new, but unfortunately foreign legitimation. It was a legitimation that seemed to constitute the secret of the West's superiority, and thus made it desirable, i.e., the restlessness of the person who was constantly on the road, which included the individualist and loner. Yet the sadness that surrounds the modern Chinese vagrant explains that it was and perhaps always remains more difficult for the Chinese 'wanderer' than for the Westerner not to lose his way on his journey and thus to lose himself.

Notes

1. The different versions of the title of the *Book of Metamorphoses* have their origins in the divergent transcription systems of Western languages, some of which in turn are derived from old-fashioned pronunciations. The reading 'Yijing' corresponds to the modern *Pinyin* transcription that is widely used in China today. This transcription has also been used for other Chinese concepts occurring in this article.

2. The 64 basic situations described in the *Book of Metamorphoses* are symbolized by 64 hexagrams. They are composed either of six continuous 'male' *Yang* lines or broken 'female' *Ying* lines. The figure of 64 is thus numerologically fixed. However, according to the Chinese comments the hexagrams are in principle also combined into trigrams of two each, i.e., they are marked by three of the lines mentioned above. This combination allowed for a total of eight trigrams accounting, apart from the symbolic eight family members (father, mother, three sons, and three daughters), also for eight natural phenomena (heaven, earth, thunder, water, mountains, wind, fire, and sea). They became, so to speak, the secondary names for those trigrams.

3. The sequence of the 64 situations in the *Book of Metamorphoses* has been fixed in the received text as described here. But it has been the object of speculation even in traditional China. This means that the situations are not to be read in isolation,

but can be viewed as 'stages' in a cosmic political-historical or, equally, in a personal-biographical developmental process. In 1973 a complete copy of the *Book of Metamorphoses* was found during the sensational discovery of a tomb near Mawangdui in Hunan Province that had been sealed in 169 B.C. Apart from important variations in the use of characters that provide different meanings to the text, the manuscript also contains a different sequence of the individual situations.

4. This original commentary that accompanies each of the 64 hexagrams is identified by the technical concept of 'image' (*xiang*). The manuscript found at Mawangdui (see note 3) interestingly enough does not yet contain this commentary. Its underlying moralizing tone points to its 'Confucian' origins. It is also reflected in the key word 'the noble person', the ideal human being in Confucianism.

5. This oldest and most important interpretation which appears in all 64 hexagrams is called *tuan*, a technical concept that R. Wilhelm has translated as 'verdict'. However, the character used for *tuan* in fact signifies 'running pig' and is therefore difficult to reconcile with Wilhelm's translation. Probably it stands here for the similarly read character *duan* in the sense of 'decision'.

6. Like *tuan* that explains the hexagram as a whole, this total of 384 interpretations of the 64 six-line hexagrams is fundamental to the *Book of Metamorphoses*. They are already to be found in the Mawangdui manuscript. The technical term for them is *yao* (lines [of metamorphosis]).

7. On this point see E. Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (New Haven, 1964), esp. 247-54.

8. These five elements might be more accurately and dynamically translated as 'forces'. Starting from earlier versions in the third century B.C., a very complicated system of relationship was constructed a century later that comprised all aspects of being. All elements came to be associated with a whole range of properties, resulting in a linking of Nature and society which frequently gained a political meaning. There are many places in the system of relationships where danger is associated with the element of water.

9. For the very rich literature on *Mu tianzi zhuan*, including the various translations of the text, see W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington, 1986), 632-33. See also the detailed study by R. Mathieu, *Le Mu tianzi zhuan. Traduction annotée, étude critique* (Paris, 1978), 274-85.

10. On Qu Yuan and the rich literature relating to him in Asian and Western languages, see W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *Indiana Companion*, 352-53. See also the specialized study by L.A. Schneider, *A Madman of Ch'u. The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkeley, 1980), which also traces the history of the impact of Qu Yuan up to the present.

11. On the *Elegies of Chu*, see W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *Indiana Companion*, 347-49. A complete translation which includes also *Encounter with Sorrow* is to be found in D. Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u. The Songs of the South* (London, 1959). The lines quoted here appear on pp.29-30.

12. See more generally on this point J.J.Y. Liu, *The Chinese Knight Errant* (Chicago, 1966).

13. Translation in D. Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, 35-44. See also A. Waley, *The Nine Songs. A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China* (London, 1955).

14. See D. Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, 104.

15. For examples see G. Lang-Tan, *Der unauffindbare Einsiedler. Eine Untersuchung zu einem Topos in der Tang-Lyrik* (Frankfurt, 1985); W. Kubin, *Der durchsichtige Berg. Die Entwicklung in der Naturanschauung in der chinesischen Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1985), 160-83. For a survey of the literature on eremitism in China that has proliferated in recent years see W. Bauer, "The Hidden Hero: Creation and Disintegration of the Ideal of Eremitism," in: D. Munro, ed., *Individualism and Holism. Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* (Ann Arbor, 1985), 157-87, esp. 183f.

16. See D. Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u*, 87.
17. On this rich genre see J. Robinet, "Randonnées exstatiques des Taoistes dans les astres," in: *Monumenta Serica*, 32 (1976), 159-273; E.H. Schafer, "Mineral Imagery in the Paradise Poems of Kuan-hsiu," in: *Asia Major*, N.S., 10 (1963), 73-102, esp. 80; idem, *Pacing the Void. T'ang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley, 1977, 234-69; W. Kubin, *Der durchsichtige Berg*, 134-42, 182-83; W. Bauer, *China und die Hoffnung auf Glück. Paradiese, Utopien, Idealvorstellungen* (Munich, 1971), 260-63.
18. A number of biographical collections of 'immortals' appeared between the first and fourth century A.D. Although strictly speaking a contradiction in themselves, they were highly popular in their time and were later repeatedly carried forward or imitated.
19. On this complex poet and his oeuvre see W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *Indiana Companion*, 790-91.
20. This alludes to the two basic types of Chinese paradises. There were the mountain paradises centered on the Kunlun Mountains in the West. They were believed to be protected by drift-sand deserts that would devour the uninitiated traveller. And there were the island paradises beyond the shores of the East that were said, analogously, to be surrounded by stretches of 'light water' that would not carry ships. See W. Bauer, *China und die Hoffnung*, 248-53.
21. Quoted in D. Fubao, ed., *Quan Han Sanguo Jin Nanbeichao* (Beijing, 1959), 148.
22. See R.G. Wagner, "Lebensstil und Drogen im chinesischen Mittelalter," in: *T'oung Pao*, 59 (1973), 79-178.
23. See W. Bauer, *China und die Hoffnung*, 154.
24. For a comparison of Chinese and Christian eremitism see W. Bauer, "The Hermit's Temptation: Aspects of Eremitism and the West in the 3rd and 4th Centuries A.D.," in: Zhongyan yanjiu yuan, ed., *Guoji Hanxue huiyi lunwen ji. Sixiang yu zhexue zu* (Taipei, 1981), 73-115.
25. See L.L. Ledderose, "Religious Elements in Chinese Landscape Art," in: S. Bush and C. Murck, eds., *Theories of the Art of China* (Princeton, 1983), 118-34.
26. On the emergence of Chinese travel literature, and of the travel diary in particular, see above all, J.M. Hagggett, *On the Road in Twelfth Century China. The Travel Diaries of Fan Chengda (1126-1193)* (Stuttgart, 1989), esp. 1-69.
27. On the most famous Chinese travellers in History see the general account by J. Mirsky, *The Great Chinese Travellers* (Chicago, 1964); on the early Buddhist travel diaries see N.E. Boulton, "Early Chinese Buddhist Travel Records as a Literary Genre," unpubl. PhD. thesis, Georgetown University, 1982, which also evaluates and assesses the many older studies on this topic.
28. On Han-shan and his poetry see W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *Indiana Companion*, 394-95; Ch'i-yü Wu, "A Study of Han Shan," in: *T'oung Pao*, 45 (1957), 392-450. On his influence in the Far East and in the West see Ling Chung, "The Reception of the Cold Mountain's Poetry in the Far East and the United States," in: *China and the West. Comparative Literature Studies* (Hongkong, 1980), 85-96. A comprehensive translation in S. Schumacher, *Han Shan. 150 Gedichte vom Kalten Berg* (Düsseldorf, 1974).
29. See S. Schumacher, *Han Shan*, 66.
30. See W. Kubin, *Der durchsichtige Berg*, 204-14.
31. For the extensive literature on the life of Zheng He, his journeys and the legends surrounding him that are also of literary interest, see R. Ptak, *Cheng Hos Abenteuer im Drama und Roman der Ming-Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1986), esp. 13-14. The journeys themselves were also described in detail by the Muslim-Chinese scholar Ma Huan (ca. 1380-1460), who participated in them. See the translation by J.V.G. Mills, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (Cambridge, 1970).
32. On this novel with the title *Jing hua yuan*, see W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *Indiana Companion*, 318-19.
33. See *ibid.*, 413-418.

34. On Chinese emigration, especially to the U.S., see Ta Chen, *Immigrant Communities in South China. A Study of Overseas Migration* (New York, 1939); Lai-To Lee, ed., *Early Chinese Immigrant Societies. Case Studies from North America and British South East Asia* (Singapore, 1988); F.L.K. Hsu, *The Challenge of the American Dream. The Chinese in the United States of America* (Belmont, 1971); A.B. Chan, *Gold Mountain. The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver, 1983); and the collection of essays "Was ist chinesische Tradition? – Die Literatur der Auslands-Chinesen," in: *die horen*, 34/4 (1989), 119-70.

35. See V. Dierkes, "Eingepfercht in einem Haus aus Holz," in: *die horen*, 34/4 (1989), 139-52; the poem *ibid.*, 146.