

南柯太守传

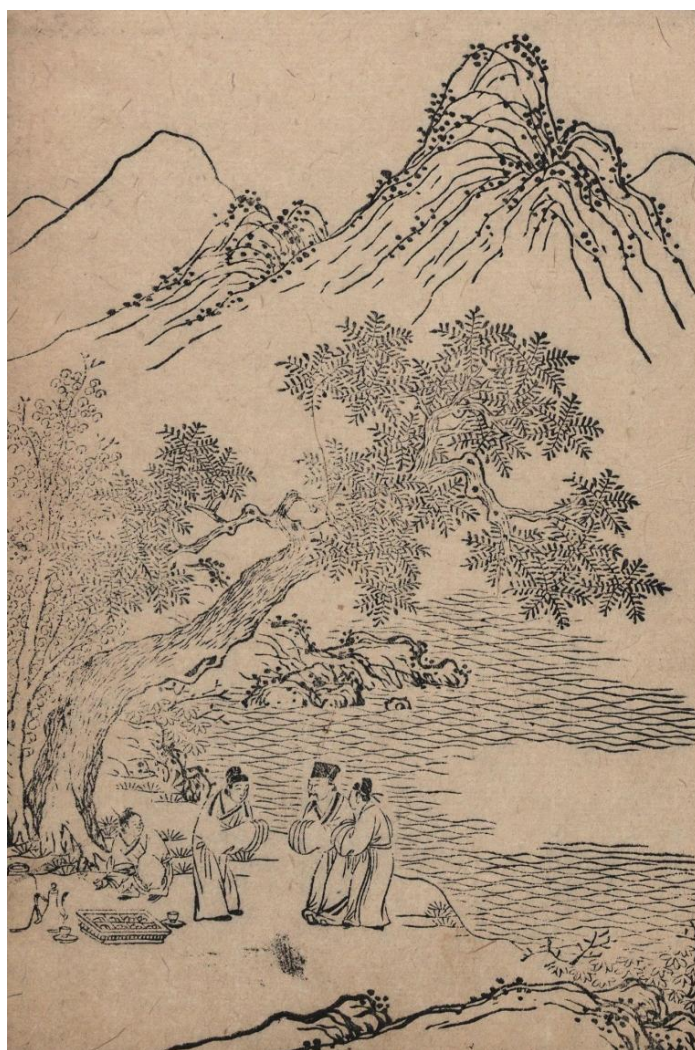
The Legend of the Governor of the Southern Branch

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The legend narrated below is reproduced from the version that appears in the Classified Tales¹ of Zeng Zao² (1091-1155), a collection of 252 ancient semi-historiographical stories from the Han to the Song Dynasty which was completed in 1136. The story serves to exemplify the type of dream that signifies a passage from one world to another. Furthermore, it imparts a strong moral that is directly related to Daoism.

It also encompasses Confucianist norms and standards which in the eyes of the modern reader may seem outdated and patriarchal. One should be bear in mind that these Confucian ideals reflect the social customs and values of the time and are by no means intrinsic to the relevance of this story.



Chun Yu Fen drinking under the locust tree.³

东平淳于棼，吴楚游侠之士。嗜酒使气，不守细行。累巨产，养豪客。曾以武艺补淮南军裨将，因使酒忤帅，斥逐落魄，纵诞饮酒为事。家住广陵郡东十里，所居宅南有大古槐一株，枝干修密，清阴数亩。棼于生日与群豪，大饮其下。

Chu Yu Fen from Dong Ping⁴ was a chivalrous wanderer⁵ who roamed in [the southern states of] Wu and Chu. He was fond of alcohol, easily swayed by emotions,⁶ and he did not observe the triviality [of social norms] in his behaviour. He had accumulated a large estate and supported a retinue of gallant people. At one time, on account of his military skill, he was appointed Deputy General of the Huai Nan⁷ armies. Under the influence of drunkenness in his behaviour, however, he disobeyed the [orders of the] Commander-In-Chief. Consequently, he was reprimanded and dismissed [from his position]. Having lost his ambitions [in this way],⁸ he increasingly indulged in the drinking of alcohol, which became his main occupation.⁹ His family lived ten Chinese miles east of Guang Ling¹⁰ county. In the southern part of the [family] mansion where he resided, there was a great and ancient locust tree,¹¹ with dense branches and a tall trunk, [that provided] cool shade over several *Mu*.¹² Each day, Chun Yu¹³ drank excessively beneath [the tree], surrounded by crowds of gallant people.

贞元七年九月，因沉醉致疾。时二友人于座扶生归家，卧于堂东庑之下。二友谓生曰：“子其寢矣！余将秣马濯足，俟子小愈而去。”生解巾就枕，昏然忽忽，仿佛若梦。见二紫衣使者，跪拜生曰：“槐安国王遣小臣致命奉邀。”生不觉下榻整衣，随二使至门。见青油小车，驾以四牡，左右从者七八，扶生上车，出大户，指古槐穴而去。使者即驱入穴中。生意颇甚异之，不敢致问。

[On one occasion,] in the ninth [lunar] month of the seventh year of the Zhen Yuan era (794),¹⁴ having become highly intoxicated, he fell ill. Two friends who were present then assisted him and took him home. They laid him down in the corridor to the east of the main room. The two friends said to him: ‘Master, you should take a rest! We will feed the horses and wash our feet. We will wait for the master to recover a little before we depart’. Chun Yu untied his headband and rested his head on a pillow. He was muddle-headed and in a daze, as though dreaming, when he saw two envoys clad in purple, who knelt down and prostrated to him, saying: ‘The Ruler of the Huai An¹⁵ Kingdom has sent us, petty officials, by command to present to you respectfully his invitation’. Chun Yu automatically reclined on his daybed to adjust his clothes and followed the two envoys to the gate, where he saw a small carriage¹⁶ in azure lacquer, drawn by four horses and with around eight¹⁷ attendants to its left and right. They lifted Chun Yu into the carriage, and then, having departed through the main gate, they travelled to a hole in the locust tree. Then the envoys immediately drove [the carriage] into the hole. Although Chun Yu found this rather strange, he did not dare to ask why.

忽见山川风候草木道路，与人世甚殊。前行数十里，有郭郭城堞。车舆人物，不绝于路。生左右传车者传呼甚严，行者亦争辟于左右。又入大城，朱门重楼，楼上有金书，题曰“大槐安国”。执门者趋拜奔走。旋有一骑传呼曰：“王以驸马远降，令且息东华馆。”因前导而去。

Suddenly, he saw mountains and rivers, grassland and wooded scenery, and also paths and roads, all of which were quite different to [those of] the world of humans.¹⁸ After travelling for several dozen Chinese miles,¹⁹ they reached the outskirts of the outer city wall and its battlements. Carts, carriages, and people [stood] in a never-ending [line] along the road. To Chun Yu’s left and right, the carriage attendants shouted [at people to clear the road] with great sternness, and the travellers rushed to the left and right [of the road] to avoid [the carriage]. Subsequently, they entered through the great city wall, with its vermilion gates and multi-storied tower. On the gate tower was inscribed in gold: ‘The Great Kingdom of Huai An’. The guards at the gate hastened to pay their respects and then rushed back [to their posts]. At once, a mounted envoy [approached and] shouted: ‘The King believes that his [future] son-in-law has visited²⁰ from afar. For the time being, he commands him to rest at the Eastern Florescence Lodge’. The envoy then led them towards [the lodge].

俄见一门洞开，生降车而入。彩槛雕楹；华木珍果，列植于庭下；几案茵褥，帘帟肴膳，陈设于庭上。生心甚自悦。复有呼曰：“右相且至。”生降阶祇奉。有一人紫衣象简前趋，宾主之仪

敬尽焉。右相曰：“寡君不以弊国远僻，奉迎君子，托以姻亲。”生曰：“某以贱劣之躯，岂敢是望。”右相因请生同诣其所。

Suddenly, Chun Yu saw a passageway open. He descended from the carriage and entered. The [passage led to a] courtyard, where there were colourful balustrades and engraved pillars, splendid trees and rare fruits, all of which were planted in rows. In the main hall, a long table with sitting mats, hanging curtains, and a meal with meat dishes,²¹ was set out decorously. [On seeing this,] Chun Yu felt exceedingly happy in his heart. Then, someone shouted: ‘The Chief Minister of the Right²² is about to arrive’. Chun Yu descended the front steps²³ to present himself respectfully. There, a purple-clad man holding an ivory court tablet²⁴ hastened towards [Chun Yu’s lodge]. After the guest and host had finished respectfully exchanging greetings, the Chief Minister of the Right said: ‘Our humble²⁵ sovereign [hopes that] you do not mind how far away and secluded our modest kingdom is. He would now like to receive and welcome you, the noble one, and to entrust you with [the hand of his daughter] in marriage’. Chun Yu replied: ‘How might someone like me, of lowly and inferior status, dare to hope for such?’ In response, the Chief Minister of the Right then invited Chun Yu to walk with him to pay a visit to [the King].

行可百步，入朱门。矛戟斧钺，布列左右，军吏数百，辟易道侧。生有平生酒徒周弁者，亦趋其中。生私心悦之，不敢前问。右相引生升广殿，御卫严肃，若至尊之所。见一人长大端严，居王位，衣素练服，簪朱华冠。

After walking about a hundred paces, they entered through a vermilion gate. With their spears, halberds, hatchets, and battle-axes spread out in rows on the left and right, there were soldiers and officers, numbering in the hundreds, who withdrew and shifted their posts to the sides of the road.²⁶ Zhou Bian, a regular drinking companion of Chun Yu, was also hastening amongst [the people there]. Chun Yu was pleased in his heart [to see him], though he did not dare to approach him and ask [what was happening]. The Chief Minister of the Right led Chun Yu as they went up to the vast hall. The imperial guards were solemn and stern, as though this were a place only for [those worthy of] the utmost reverence. He saw a person occupying the throne of the King who was tall and great, stern and correct [in bearing], clad in a white silk garment, and fitted with a vermilion hairpin and a florid crown.

生战栗，不敢仰视。左右侍者令生拜。王曰：“前奉贤尊命，不弃小国。许令次女瑶芳奉事君子。”生但俯伏而已，不敢致词。王曰：“且就宾宇，续造仪式。”有旨，右相亦与生偕还馆舍。生思念之，意以为父在边将，因歿虏中，不知存亡。将谓父北蕃交逊，而致兹事。心甚迷惑，不知其由。

Chun Yu trembled and did not dare to look up. The attendants to the left and right [of him] commanded Chun Yu to pay his respects. The King declared: ‘Sometime prior [to your arrival], I had received word [of this] from your venerable father, who did not despise our small kingdom. He agreed to allow my second daughter, Yao Fang,²⁷ to serve you, the noble one, as your wife’. Chun Yu simply prostrated and did nothing more, since he did not dare say anything. The King said: ‘For the time being, please make yourself at home in the guest house; we will begin the ceremony later’. An edict was then issued, and the Chief Minister of the Right accompanied Chun Yu to his residence at the guest house.

As he reflected [on the day’s events], Chun Yu thought about his father, who had served as a frontier commander and had gone missing after being captured as a prisoner of war; it was unknown if he was still alive or had perished. He conjectured that his father had reached a truce with, or run away from, the northern barbarians, and that this had led to all the [day’s] events. Yet he was very bewildered in his heart, for he did not know the reason [why the events had taken place].

是夕，羔雁币帛，威容仪度，妓乐丝竹，肴膳灯烛，车骑礼物之用，无不咸备。有群女，或称华阳姑，或称青溪姑，或称上仙子，或称下仙子，若是者数辈。皆侍从数千，冠翠凤冠，衣金

霞帔，彩碧金钿，目不可视。邀游戏乐，往来其门，争以淳于郎为戏弄。风态妖丽，言词巧艳，生莫能对。

That evening, all was provided for, without exception: [gifts of] lambs, geese, money, silk, [guests] of awe-inspiring appearance and dignified manner, female performers playing upon silken strings and bamboo instruments, a banquet with meat dishes, lanterns and candles, carts and horses, and other gifts. A group of women was also there. One was called the Floral Yang Maiden,²⁸ and another was called the Azure Creek Maiden; one was called the Superior Female Immortal, and another was called the Inferior Female Immortal; and there were many others. Each of them [brought] several thousand attendants, who were crowned with phoenix tiaras in green jade, wearing capes decorated with golden and rosy clouds, and [dressed in garments] inlaid with multi-coloured jade and gold, [which shone so brightly] that his eyes could not see. They strolled about playfully and joyously, passing back and forth at his gate, vying [with each other] in teasing the young man, Chun Yu. They were charming and seductive in manner, and their words were quick-witted and amorous, but Chun Yu was [hopelessly] unable to respond.

复有一女谓生曰：“昨上巳日，吾从灵芝夫人过禅智寺，于天竺院观右延舞《婆罗门》。吾与诸女坐北牖石榻上，时君少年，亦解骑来看。君独强来亲洽，言调笑谑。吾与琼英妹结绶巾，挂于竹枝上，君独不忆念之乎？又七月十六日，吾于孝感寺侍上真子，听契玄法师讲《观音经》。吾于讲下舍金凤钗两只，上真子舍水犀合子一枚。时君亦讲筵中于师处请钗合视之，赏叹再三，嗟异良久。顾余辈曰：“人之与物，皆非世间所有。”或问吾氏，或访吾里。吾亦不答。情意恋恋，瞩目不舍。君岂不思念之乎？”生曰：“中心藏之，何日忘之。”群女曰：“不意今日与君为眷属。”

One of these women then said to Chun Yu: ‘In the past, during the First Si Day Festival,²⁹ I followed Lady Ling Zhi³⁰ as she walked past Chan Zhi Temple;³¹ there, at the Tian Zhu court,³² we observed Shi Yan³³ perform the ‘Brahmin’ [dance]. I sat with all the young women upon the stone bench under the northern lattice window. At this time, you, the noble one, were still in your youth; yet you also dismounted to watch [the dance]. You, the noble one, then approached us brazenly, with joking and teasing words. Together with my younger sister, Qiong Ying,³⁴ I tied a maroon headcloth and hung it on a bamboo branch.³⁵ Noble one, could it be that you do not remember this? Furthermore, on the sixteenth day of the seventh lunar month, I served Shang Zhen Zi³⁶ in Xiao Gan Temple,³⁷ listening to the Dharma master, Qi Xuan,³⁸ as he explicated *The Scripture of Guan Yin*.³⁹ I donated two golden phoenix hairpins, while Shang Zhen Zi donated a casket [made of] water rhinoceros [horn]. At this time, you, the noble one, were also there by the teacher’s seat. You then asked the teacher for permission to inspect the hairpins and casket, which you viewed with admiration over and over again, praising how extraordinary they were for some time. You then turned around to look at us and said: “all of you people and these objects are not of this world”. Maybe you were inquiring about my clan, or maybe about my hometown, but I did not respond. We passionately yearned for each other’s affection, staring longingly, and were reluctant to leave each other. How could you, the noble one, not remember this?’

Chun Yu replied: ‘I have stored [this memory] deeply within my heart. When did I forget it?’⁴⁰ The group of women said: ‘We did not expect that we would become family with you, the noble one, today’.⁴¹

复有三人，冠带甚伟，前拜生曰：“奉命为驸马相者。”中一人与生且故。生指曰：“子非冯翊田子华乎？”田曰：“然。”生前，执手叙旧久之。生谓曰：“子何以居此？”子华曰：“吾放游，获受知于右相武成侯段公，因以栖托。”生复问曰：“周弁在此，知之乎？”子华曰：“周生，贵人也。职力司隶，权势甚盛。吾数蒙庇护。”言笑甚欢。

Furthermore, there were three people there, wearing magnificent caps and girdles, who then advanced and paid their respects to Chun Yu. They said: ‘We have received orders to serve you, the emperor’s son-in-law, as your ministers’. One of them was an old friend of Chun Yu. Chun Yu pointed to him and said: ‘Sir, are

you not Tian Zi Hua⁴² of Ping Yi? Tian [Zi Hua] replied: ‘Yes, that is so’. Chun Yu advanced, grasped his hand, and they reminisced for a long time.

Chun Yu said: ‘Sir, why are you living here?’ [Tian] Zi Hua said: ‘I travelled around and gained recognition [for my talents] from the Chief Minister of the Right, Elder Duan, the Marquis of Wu Cheng. Hence, I have been living here and have entrusted [all I have to this place]. Chun Yu once again asked: ‘Zhou Bian is here. Did you know that?’ [Tian] Zi Hua replied: ‘Our Zhou [Bian] is an important patron [of mine]. He [wields] immense power and influence in his post as Metropolitan Commandant. I have been protected by him on several occasions’. They laughed and talked, and were extremely joyous.

俄传声曰：“駙马可进矣。”三子取剑佩冕服，更衣之。子华曰：“不意今日获睹盛礼。无以相忘也。”有仙姬数十，奏诸异乐，婉转清亮，曲调凄悲，非人间之所闻听。有执烛引导者，亦数十。左右见金翠步障，彩碧玲珑，不断数里。生端坐车中，心意恍惚，甚不自安。田子华数言笑以解之。向者群女姑姊，各乘风翼辇，亦往来其间。至一门，号“修仪宫”。群仙姑姊亦纷然在侧，令生降车辇拜，揖让升降，一如人间。撤障去扇，见一女子，云号“金枝公主”。年可十四五，严若神仙。交欢之礼，颇亦明显。生自尔情义日洽，荣耀日盛，出入车服，游宴宾御，次于王者。

Suddenly, a voice reverberated, which declared: ‘The emperor’s son-in-law may now enter’. The three men removed [Chun Yu’s] sword, pendant, and ceremonial robe, and [helped him] change into new clothes. [Tian] Zi Hua said: ‘I never expected to see such a magnificent ceremony today. Let us not forget about each other’. Scores⁴³ of transcendent beauties⁴⁴ played various forms of foreign music, which were suave and mellow, clear and resonant, with sad and sorrowful melodies, none of which he had heard before in the human world. Scores of them held candles to lead [the way]. To the left and right, he saw golden and emerald screens,⁴⁵ multi-coloured and delicately wrought, [which stretched on] continuously for several Chinese miles. Chun Yu sat upright in the carriage and was absent-minded and rather restless. Tian Zi Hua repeatedly spoke to him and joked in order to relieve [his restlessness]. Each of the older and younger women that he had just met was mounted in a phoenix-winged imperial carriage, and [people] went back and forth amidst [the screens]. [Chun Yu and his entourage] then arrived at a gate which bore the name ‘Xiu Yi Palace’.⁴⁶ A group of younger and older divine women hurried to the sides [of the gate]; as Chun Yu alighted from the imperial carriage, each of them paid their respects, bowed with their hands clasped, and then yielded to others as they stepped forwards [to greet him], withdrawing to the sides as in [the etiquette] of the human world.⁴⁷

[After he had entered the bridal chamber], when the bed curtains were drawn aside and the bridal veil was removed, he saw a girl who told him that her name was Princess Jin Zhi.⁴⁸ She was about fourteen or fifteen years old. She was as solemn as a spirit immortal. When they consummated [their marriage], she followed clearly the proper etiquette.⁴⁹ From this time, Chun Yu’s affection for his wife grew deeper daily, and his glory and honour flourished daily. When he came and went with his carriage and in his robes, when he travelled and attended feasts with guests and guards, he seemed second only to the King.

王命生与群僚备武卫，大猎于国西灵龟山，山阜峻秀，川泽广远，林树丰茂，飞禽走兽，无不蓄之。师徒大获，竟夕而还。生因他日启王曰：“臣顷结好之日，大王云奉臣父之命。臣父顷佐边将，用兵失利，陷没胡中；尔来绝书信十七八岁矣。王既知所在，臣请一往拜觐。”王遽谓曰：“亲家翁职守北上，信问不绝。卿但具书状知闻，未用便去。”遂命妻致馈贺之礼，一以遣之。数夕还答。生验书本意，皆父平生之迹，书中忆念教诲，情意委曲，皆如昔年。复问生亲戚存亡，闾里兴废。复言路道乖远，风烟阻绝。词意悲苦，言语哀伤。又不令生来觐，云：“岁在丁丑，当与汝相见。”生捧书悲咽，情不自堪。

The King commanded Chun Yu to get the royal guards and officials ready to go on a great hunt on Mount Ling Gui,⁵⁰ in the west of the kingdom. The hills and mounds were high and spectacular, the streams and marshes were wide and far-reaching, the forests and trees abundant and luxuriant, and all flying birds and

walking beasts were gathered [at the mountain] without exception. The army returned at dusk with a great bounty.

[Sometime later], Chun Yu said to the King: ‘A little while ago, on the day of my, your humble servant’s tying of the good bonds [of marriage], the great King spoke of receiving word from your humble servant’s father. A little while ago, your humble servant’s father served as an assistant commander at the frontier. He suffered defeat while engaging his troops and fell into [the hands of] of the barbarians. I have not received a letter [from him] for seventeen years or so.⁵¹ Since the King already knows his whereabouts, I, your humble servant, beg leave to go to pay my respects and have an audience with him’. The King immediately replied: ‘The elder, my daughter’s father-in-law, is [currently] responsible for safeguarding the north. Letters and inquiries [to him] have not been cut off. You, my noble minister, simply need to provide a letter informing him of your situation; there is no need for you to travel there just now’. Thereupon, [Chun Yu] instructed his wife to prepare gifts to congratulate [the father on his son’s marriage], so they might be dispatched [along with the letter]. Several evenings later, a reply came back. Chun Yu inspected the letter’s handwriting and meaning; it was all in his father’s lifelong script, and the letter reminded him of [his father’s past] instructions, being full of tender regards, just as in bygone years. Furthermore, [the father] asked Chun Yu whether their relatives were still alive or if they had perished, and whether their hometown were flourishing or had been abandoned. He further talked about the road between them being uncommonly far [to travel], and obstructed by wind and smoke.⁵² The lines were [full of] sentiments of sorrow and misery, and the words and phrases were of grief and distress. Furthermore, he commanded Chun Yu not to visit and have audience with him, saying: ‘It is in the year of *Ding Chou*⁵³ that we should meet with each other’. Chun Yu held the letter in both hands, wept and sobbed, unable to contain his feelings.

他日，妻谓生曰：“子岂不思为政乎？”生曰：“我放荡不习政事。”妻曰：“卿但为之，余当奉赞。”妻遂白于王。累日，谓生曰：“吾南柯政事不理，太守黜废，欲籍卿才，可曲屈之。便与小女同行。”生敦受教命。王遂敕有司备太守行李。因出金玉、锦绣、箱奩、仆妾、车马，列于广衢，以饯公主之行。

One day, his wife said to him: ‘Sir, have you not considered serving in the administration?’ Chun Yu replied: ‘I am an unrestrained person and am not familiar with administrative affairs’. His wife said: ‘My dear, you only have to act as such, and I shall assist you’. His wife then informed the King. A few days later, [the King] said to Chun Yu: ‘The administrative affairs of our Southern Branch are being mismanaged. The governor of the province has been dismissed. I hope to lend your talents [to the situation], my noble minister. Should you find it acceptable to be placed with such an inconvenience,⁵⁴ you will then travel there with my daughter’. Chun Yu sincerely accepted the order and instructions. The King thereupon decreed that the appropriate officials should ready the luggage for the [new] governor of the province. Thus, gold and jade, brocades and embroidery, trunks and vanity cases, servants and concubines, carriages and horses, were brought out and arranged in [rows] on a broad avenue, in order to see off the princess on her journey.

生少游侠，曾不敢有望，至是甚悦。因上表曰：“臣将门余子，素无艺术，猥当大任，必败朝章。自悲负乘，坐致覆餗！今欲广求贤哲，以赞不逮。伏见司隶颍川周弁，忠亮刚直，守法不回，有毗佐之器。处士冯翊田子华清慎通变，达政化之源。二人与臣有十年之旧，备知才用，可托政事。周请署南柯司宪，田请署司农。庶使臣政绩有闻，宪章不紊也。”王并依表以遣之。

From his youth, Chun Yu had always been a roaming and chivalrous wanderer who never dared to hold any high hopes, so he was now very pleased. For this reason, he presented a proposal to the King, stating: ‘I, your humble servant, am the worthless son of a line of generals. I have always been without art or skill. If a base man like me were to be entrusted with such a great assignment, this would certainly ruin the order of the court. I feel utterly inferior, [and worry] that if I were to carry this burden [of governance],⁵⁵ then on my watch the cauldron would overturn.⁵⁶ So I now wish to seek widely for wise and worthy ones, who might assist me in what I would otherwise fail to achieve [alone].⁵⁷ In my humble opinion, the Metropolitan Commandant, Zhou Bian, from Ying Chuan,⁵⁸ is loyal, brilliant, upright, and outspoken. He abides by the

law, without trying to skirt around it. He has the capacity to be a great assistant. The reclusive scholar, Tian Zi Hua, from Ping Yi,⁵⁹ is pure, cautious, knowledgeable, and adaptable when there are changes;⁶⁰ he has a thorough understanding how to transform [the people] fundamentally by governance. These two people and I, your subject, have [associated with] each other for the past ten years. I am fully aware of their competence and capability, and [I know that] they can be entrusted with administrative affairs. I request that Zhou [Bian] be assigned the post of Minister of Law for the Southern Branch and I request that Tian [Zi Hua] be assigned the post of Minister of Agriculture. This will enable your humble servant to produce sound administrative achievements and will prevent the laws and regulations from falling into disorder'. The King then dispatched [orders] in agreement with the proposal.

其夕，王与夫人饯于国南。王谓生曰：“南柯国之大郡，土地丰壤，人物豪盛，非惠政不足以治之。况有周田共赞。卿其勉之，以副国念。”夫人戒公主曰：“淳于郎性刚好酒，加之少年；为妇之道，贵乎柔顺。尔善事之，吾无忧矣。南柯虽封境不遥，晨昏有间，今日睽别，宁不沾巾。”生与妻拜首南去，登车拥骑，言笑甚欢，累夕达郡。郡有官吏、僧道、耆老、音乐、车舆、武卫、銮铃，争来迎奉。人物阗咽，钟鼓喧哗，不绝十数里。见雉堞台观，佳气郁郁。入大城门，门亦有大榜，题以金字，曰“南柯郡城”。见朱轩柴户，森然深邃。生下车，省风俗，疗病苦，政事委以周、田，郡中大理。

That evening, the King and his wife bid [Chun Yu and his wife] farewell in the southern outskirts of the kingdom's [capital]. The King said to Chun Yu: 'The Southern Branch is a great region of the kingdom; the territory has fertile soil, and gallant and vigorous local inhabitants; without benevolent governance, one will not be able to rule over them. Now that you are assisted by both Zhou [Bian] and Tian [Zi Hua], my noble minister, please make such efforts, so you will fulfil the intentions of the kingdom'. [The King's] wife warned the princess: 'Your husband, Chun Yu, possesses an unyielding inner nature and has a fondness for drinking; in addition, he is young in years. To follow the ways of women, it is invaluable to be gentle and conformable.⁶¹ If you are good in serving him, I will be free from worries. Although the conferred territory of the Southern Branch is not far away, it will [feel] as far apart [from here] as the morning from the twilight. Today, as we part ways with each other, how could I not moisten the cloth?'⁶² Chun Yu and his wife prostrated together to pay respect, and then left for the South. They ascended into their carriage, which was surrounded by mounted soldiers. They talked and laughed very joyously [as they travelled], and they reached the region a few days later at evening time. They were met by officials, envoys, monks, Daoists, elders,⁶³ musicians, carts, carriages, warriors, guards, and carriage horses with tinkling bells – all vied to pay their respects and welcome them. [The air] was filled with the clamour of these people, and a hubbub of bells and drums. This continued over a distance of around a dozen Chinese miles. Then, [Chun Yu] saw the battlements, the platforms, and the watchtowers, which were suffused with auspicious Qi. When they entered the great gate of the city, there was a large placard inside it, inscribed in golden characters, which read: 'City of the Southern Branch Region'. They saw lofty, vermilion houses and doors lined with ceremonial halberds,⁶⁴ which were solemn and serene. Chun Yu alighted from the carriage, [and from that moment worked to] familiarize himself with the local customs and to alleviate [the troubles of] those who were sick and suffering. Furthermore, he entrusted the administrative affairs to Zhou [Bian] and Tian [Zi Hua]. The region was restored to [a state of] great order.

自守郡二十载，风化广被，百姓歌谣，建功德碑。立生祠宇。王甚重之，赐食邑，锡爵位，居台辅。周、田皆以政治著闻，递迁大位。生有五男二女。男以门荫授官，女亦聘于王族；荣耀显赫，一时之盛，代莫比之。是岁，有檀萝国者，来伐是郡。王命生练将训师以征之。乃表周弁将兵三万，以拒贼之众于瑶台城。弁刚勇轻敌，师徒败绩，弁单骑裸身潜遁，夜归城。贼亦收辎重铠甲而还。生因囚弁以请罪。王并舍之。

From that time, [Chun Yu] protected the region for twenty years and widely civilized the local customs; the populace⁶⁵ sang his praises in ballads and produced a stone tablet⁶⁶ [as a testament] to his achievements and virtues. They also erected a temple [in honour of Chun Yu]. The King valued him greatly, granting him

lands in estate⁶⁷ and bestowing him with a title of nobility. He was also [promoted to] the position of Chief Minister. Zhou [Bian] and Tian [Hua Zi] became renowned through their governance and were promoted to increasingly greater positions. [Chun Yu] had five sons and two daughters. In recognition of his service,⁶⁸ the sons were granted officialdom and the daughters were betrothed into the royal clan. [Chun Yu's] honour and glory were illustrious, and his magnificence at this time was unmatched [by anyone in] other eras.

In that very same year, the Tan Luo⁶⁹ kingdom launched a military expedition against the [Southern Branch] region. The King commanded Chun Yu to train generals [in military exercises] and drill troops in order to send them on a [counter] expedition [against the Tan Luo army]. [Chun Yu] then recommended [to the King] that Zhou Bian be made commander of an army of thirty thousand soldiers to expel the multitude of enemies⁷⁰ at Yao Tai City.⁷¹ [Zhou] Bian was strong-willed and brave, but he treated lightly the [danger posed by] the enemy and his army was utterly defeated. [Zhou] Bian himself escaped [the battle], riding alone naked, and returned to the [Southern Branch] city in the evening. The enemy collected the supply wagons and armour and returned [to its homeland]. On account [of this defeat], Chun Yu imprisoned [Zhou] Bian and requested [that the King impose] punishments. But the King forgave both of them.

是月，司宪周弁疽发背，卒。生妻公主遘疾，旬日又薨。生因请罢郡，护丧赴国。王许之。便以司农田子华行南柯太守事。生哀恻发引，威仪在途，男女叫号，人吏奠饌，攀辕遮道者不可胜数。遂达于国。王与夫人素衣哭于郊，候灵輿之至。谥公主曰“顺仪公主”。备仪仗，羽葆鼓吹，葬于国东十里盘龙冈，是月，故司宪子荣信，亦护丧赴国。

That month, carbuncles erupted on the back of the Minister of Law, Zhou Bian, and he died. Chun Yu's wife, the princess, also became ill. After ten days, she too died. Following this [its more Due to these events, its causal not temporal], Chun Yu requested that he be relieved from [his duty as governor of] the region, so he might escort the funeral procession back to the capital.⁷² The King granted [his request]. Then [Chun Yu] assigned the Minister of Agriculture, Tian Zi Hua, to handle the affairs of the Governor of the Southern Branch on his behalf. In [a state of] inconsolable grief, Chun Yu began the funeral procession. It was dignified and solemn; along the way, men and women wailed and cried, petty officials and other people offered libations to the spirit [of the princess], and people held onto the procession carriages and obstructed the road, in a multitude that was beyond counting. Eventually, he reached the capital. On the outskirts, the King and his wife wept, in white clothes, waiting for the funeral carriage to arrive. The princess was conferred the posthumous title, 'Princess of Conformable Etiquette'. Then they readied the ceremonial apparatus, with a feathered canopy, drums, and windpipes,⁷³ and buried her on the Pan Long Ridge,⁷⁴ ten Chinese miles east of the capital. In the same month, [Zhou] Rong Xin,⁷⁵ the son of the late Minister of Law, also escorted the funeral procession [of his own father] to the capital.

生久镇外藩，结好中国，贵门豪族，靡不是洽。自罢郡还国，出入无恒，交游宾从，威福日盛。王意疑惮之。时有国人上表云：“玄象谪见，国有大恐。都邑迁徙，宗庙崩坏。衅起他族，事在萧墙。”时议以生侈僭之应也。遂夺生侍卫，禁生游从，处之私第。生自恃守郡多年，曾无败政，流言怨悖，郁郁不乐。

Chun Yu had long been safeguarding⁷⁶ [the kingdom's] outlying vassal states. Thus, he had maintained strong relations with figures within the capital. All the noble families and powerful clans without exception had thereby associated with him on friendly terms. So, from the time when he was relieved as governor of the region and returned to the capital, he came and went [from house to house in the city], without staying in one place for long. He made friends and travelled around with followers, [exploiting] his prestige and good fortune more and more with each passing day.⁷⁷ Fear and distrust [began to] emerge in the King's mind. At that time, a person in the capital presented a report [to the King], which proclaimed: 'Banishment has been seen in the mysterious sign;⁷⁸ the kingdom will soon be in great terror. The capital city will be moved, while the ancestral temples will collapse into ruins. Disputes will erupt in other clans, yet the events will begin from within the screen walls'.⁷⁹ At that time, it was suggested that this was a response⁸⁰ to Chun Yu's extravagances [in behaviour] and his overstepping [of the bounds of his authority]. Thereupon, Chun

Yu was stripped of his attendants and guards, and was prohibited from travelling and having any dealings with others. He was then placed in a private mansion. Chun Yu was vain [about his record] during his years of governing the [Southern Branch] region, when he had never once failed in his administration; thus, he was severely despondent and melancholy about the resentment and estrangement [of the King] that the widespread rumours [had caused].

王亦知之，因命生曰：“姻亲二十余年，不幸小女夭枉，不得与君子偕老，良有痛伤。”夫人因留孙自鞠育之，又谓生曰：“卿离家多时，可暂归本里，一见亲族。诸孙留此，无以为念。后三年，当令迎卿。”生曰：“此乃家矣，何更归焉？”王笑曰：“卿本人间，家非在此。”生忽若昏睡，瞢然久之，方乃发悟前事，遂流涕请还。王顾左右以送生。生再拜而去，复见前二紫衣使者从焉。至大户外，见所乘车甚劣，左右亲使御仆，遂无一人，心甚叹异。生上车，行可数里，复出大城。

Eventually the King became aware of [Chun Yu's unhappiness]. So he said to Chun Yu: 'You have been [a member of] my family by marriage for more than twenty years; unfortunately, as my daughter died young, she could not grow old with you, the noble one. This is truly painful'. On account of this, [the King's] wife took custody of the grandchildren and raised and educated them herself. [The King] then said to Chun Yu: 'My noble minister, you have long been separated from your home; you should return to your hometown temporarily, to see your relatives and clan members. All the grandchildren will remain here, so you do not need to worry about them. After three years have passed, I will command [men] to [return you here] to welcome you [back], my noble minister'. Chun Yu replied: 'This is my home. Where else could I return to?' The King laughed: 'You, my noble minister, were originally from the human world, your home is not here'.

[On hearing these words], it was as though Chun Yu had suddenly awoken from a hazy [trance] that had obscured his sight for a long time. Only then did he realize what had happened. Thereupon, tears flowed and he begged to return. The King turned to the attendants on his left and right with a glance [that beckoned them] to see off Chun Yu. Chun Yu prostrated himself repeatedly [in front of the king] before he left. Once more, he saw the two purple-clad envoys from the previous [encounter], who were following him now. When he arrived outside the main entrance, he saw that the carriage he was about to ride was of a very low quality. He was thus left without a single person [to help him] – with no attendants, or personal envoys, or imperial guards, so he sighed [deeply] in his heart-mind [to reflect] on how different things were now. Chun Yu mounted the carriage, and after travelling several Chinese miles, once more he left the great city.

宛是昔年东来之途，山川原野，依然如旧。所送二使者，甚无威势，生逾怏怏。生问使者曰：“广陵郡何时可到？”二使讴歌自若，久乃答曰：“少顷即至。”俄出一穴，见本里闾巷，不改往日，潜然自悲，不觉流涕。二使者引生下车，入其门，升其阶，已身卧于堂东庑之下。生甚惊畏，不敢前近。二使因大呼生之姓名数声，生遂发寤如初。见家之僮仆拥篲于庭，二客濯足于榻，斜日未隐于西垣，余樽尚湛于东牖。梦中倏忽，若度一世矣。

It seemed to be the same path on which he had travelled there from the east all those years ago: the mountains, the streams, the plains, all were the same as before. The two envoys who saw him off were quite without prestige or grandeur, so Chun Yu became ever more sullen and dispirited. He asked the envoys: 'When will we arrive at Guang Ling Region?'⁸¹ The two envoys were preoccupied with singing songs, and only after a long time did they reply: 'We will arrive in a short while'. Suddenly, they emerged from a hole and he saw his hometown and its alleys, which had not changed from its former days. His eyes welled up with grief and tears began to flow unawares. The two envoys led Chun Yu as he descended from the carriage, entered through the gate [to his residence], and mounted its steps. Yet his body was already there [before him], lying in the corridor to the east of the main room. Chun Yu felt very frightened and full of dread, not daring to approach [his own body]. So the two envoys loudly shouted Chun Yu's full name⁸² several times. Thereupon, Chun Yu awakened from sleep as before. He saw his boy servant holding the broom in the courtyard and the two guests washing their feet on a daybed. The declining sun had not yet

concealed himself behind the western wall and his goblet was still half-full⁸³ under the eastern lattice window. It was as though he had swiftly lived through an entire lifetime, all at once, in his dream.

生感念嗟叹，遂呼二客而语之。惊骇。因与生出外，寻槐下穴。生指曰：“此即梦中所惊入处。”客将谓狐狸木媚之所为祟。遂命仆夫荷斤斧，断拥肿，折查栝，寻穴究源。旁可袤丈，有大穴，根洞然明朗。可容一榻。上有积土壤，以为城郭台殿之状。有蚁数斛。隐聚其中。中有小台，其色若丹。二大蚁处之，素翼朱首，长可三寸。左右大蚁数十辅之，诸蚁不敢近。此其王矣。即槐安国都也。又穷一穴：直上南枝，可四丈，宛转方中，亦有土城小楼，群蚁亦处其中，即生所领南柯郡也。又一穴：西去二丈，磅礴空圻，嵌窞异状。中有一腐龟，壳大如斗。积雨浸润，小草丛生，繁茂翳荟，掩映振壳，即生所猎灵龟山也。

Chun Yu remembered [the dream] and sighed with much feeling; then, he called for the two guests and told them about it. They were terrified. Consequently, [the two guests] and Chun Yu went outside to search for the hole below the locust tree. Chun Yu pointed towards [the tree] and said: ‘This is the very place that I was astonished to enter in my dream’. The guests thought that it might be the work of a tree demon or fox spirit.⁸⁴ Thereupon, he commanded his servants to carry axes and hatchets there. They cut through the intertwined and bulging [roots], and broke away the stumps and stubs, so they might look for the hole and investigate its source. To the side [of the tree], about the length of one *Zhang*,⁸⁵ there was a great hole. [They saw that] it was completely hollow among the roots.⁸⁶ It was [large enough] to hold a daybed.⁸⁷

On [the floor] was a pile of soil, which which seemed to them to have the appearance of city walls, towers,⁸⁸ and palace halls. Scores⁸⁹ of ants were gathered and concealed themselves within it. In the centre [of the pile of soil], there was a small platform, which resembled cinnabar-red in colour. Two large ants were there, which had white wings, vermilion heads, and were about three Chinese inches in length. At their left and right, they were assisted by several dozen large ants. All the other ants did not dare to come near them. This was the King [and his Queen]. This [pile of soil] was the capital city of Huai An. They investigated further [and found] another hole: a southern branch that ascended vertically and was about four *Zhang* [in length]. Within this winding [branch] there was a square at its centre, where there was a city made of soil with smaller towers [than Huai An]. Another multitude of ants resided within it. This was the very Southern Branch Region that Chun Yu had once ruled over. And there was yet another hole: two *Zhang* to the west [of the tree], in the vast and empty mud field, among the rugged and sunken landforms, there was a strange shape. At its centre were the remains of a turtle whose shell was the size of one *Dou*.⁹⁰ Having been soaked and wetted by a spell of rainy days, bundles of short grass had grown from it, which were lush and luxuriant. [Under the sun], swaying shadows and light were cast on the shell. This was Mount Ling Gui, on which Chun Yu had once hunted.

又穷一穴：东去丈余，古根盘屈，若龙虺之状。中有小土壤，高尺余，即生所葬妻盘龙冈之墓也。追想前事，感叹于怀，披阅穷迹，皆符所梦。不欲二客坏之，遽令掩塞如旧。是夕，风雨暴发。旦视其穴，遂失群蚁，莫知所去。故先言“国有大恐，都邑迁徙”，此其验矣。复念檀萝征代之事，又请二客访迹于外。宅东一里有古涸涧，侧有大檀树一株，藤萝拥织，上不见日。旁有小穴，亦有群蚁隐聚其间。檀萝之国，岂非此耶？嗟呼！蚁之灵异，犹不可穷，况山藏木伏之大者所变化乎？

Upon further investigation, there was yet another hole: about one *Zhang* to the east [of the tree], with ancient root coiling and winding, as though in the shape of a dragon or a mythical venomous snake. At its centre was a small earth [mound], which was about one Chinese foot high. This was the tomb mound on Pan Long⁹¹ Ridge, in which Chun Yu had buried his wife. As he recalled these past events, he sighed with a heavy feeling in his breast. As they split open [places] to examine thoroughly the traces, every sign corresponded to what he had dreamed. As he did not want the two guests to ruin [the ant nests], in a hurry he ordered [his servants] to cover and seal them up as they had been before. That evening, a violent wind and rainstorm broke out. At dawn, when he went to inspect the holes, the multitudes of ants had all disappeared. No one knew where they had gone. That was why [the prophecy] had declared that ‘the

kingdom will soon be in a great terror, and the capital city will be moved.⁹² The [prediction] had now been confirmed. Further, [Chun Yu] remembered the expedition against the Tan Luo [Kingdom]. He once again asked the two guests to seek for traces outside. One Chinese mile to the east of his residence was a dried-up ancient stream; on its bank was a great sandalwood tree, which was so enwrapped and interwoven by vines that the sun above could not be seen. At its side was a small hole, where multitudes of ants had gathered and concealed themselves. How could this be anything other than the Kingdom of Tan Luo? Alas! So divine and extraordinary were the ants that it would be impossible to give a proper account of them, let alone the great [beings] harboured in the mountains and hidden in the trees. What great transformations [and illusions] might they bring?⁹³

时生酒徒周弁、田子华并居六合县，不与生过从旬日矣。生遽遣家僮疾往候之。周生暴疾已逝，田子华亦寝疾于床。生感南柯之浮虚，悟人世之倏忽，遂栖心道门，绝弃酒色。后三年，岁在丁丑，亦终于家。时年四十七，将符宿契之限矣。公佐贞元十八年秋八月，自吴之洛，暂泊淮浦，偶觐淳于生梦，询访遗迹，翻覆再三，事皆摭实，辄编录成传，以资好事。虽稽神语怪，事涉非经，而窃位著生，冀将为戒。后之君子，幸以南柯为偶然，无以名位骄于天壤间云。

At that time, both of Chen Yu's drinking companions, Zhou Bian and Tian Zi Hua, lived in Liu He County,⁹⁴ and they had not had any interactions with Chun Yu for ten days. So Chun Yu hurriedly dispatched his boy servant to speed towards them and inquire. Zhou [Bian] had suddenly developed a fulminant illness⁹⁵ and had already passed away, Tian Zi Hua was also lying sick in his bed. [On receiving this news,] Chun Yu felt [acutely] the vanity and meaninglessness [of his life] at the Southern Branch; he was awakening to the fleetingness of a person's life in this world. Thereafter, he settled his heart-mind within the gate of the Dao,⁹⁶ giving up and renouncing alcohol and sexual indulgences. Three years later, in the year *Ding Chou*,⁹⁷ he passed away at his home, at the age of forty-seven years. This corresponded exactly to the term [of time] that [his father and the King] had promised to him.⁹⁸

I, [Li] Gong Zuo, in the autumn of the eighth lunar month of the eighteenth year of the Zhen Yuan era,⁹⁹ was [on my way] from Wu to Luo [Yang], [my boat] temporarily anchored on the river bank of River Huai, when by chance I heard of Chun Yu's dream. So I inquired into and looked for the traces of his deeds. I examined them again and again; the events [in the story] were all real. [Having done so], I noted them down at once and arranged them into a legend, so that it might provide people [with the impetus to perform] good deeds. Although [the story] examines [incidents that involve] spirits, in a language that is [sometimes] peculiar, and the events recounted are unusual, I hope it will serve as a warning to those who gain their livelihood by occupying an undeserved position. For the noble ones yet to come, I hope that you will consider [how Chun Yu's rule of] the Southern Branch occurred only by chance, so you will not become arrogant about your reputation or position between heaven and earth.¹⁰⁰

前华州参军李肇赞曰：贵极禄位，权倾国都，达人视此，蚁聚何殊。

The former Military Adviser to the Hua prefecture, Li Zhao,¹⁰¹ said in praise [of this story]: '[To reach] the highest prominence in official rank and emolument, [to have] powers that can sway the capital and the kingdom – when wise people observe this, how can it seem any different to a gathering of ants?'

¹ In Chinese, 类说 [lei shuo]. Another very early extant version is found in the *Extensive Records of the [Reign of the] Great Peace* [tai ping guang ji 太平广记], which is a large compilation of supernatural events throughout Chinese ancient history, completed in 978, which shows some minor variations in the plot. The story is also titled 'Chun Yu Fen' [淳于棼], after the protagonist.

² In Chinese, 曾慥. He also compiled an anthology of Daoist texts called *The Pivot of the Dao* [dao shu 道枢].

³ This illustration originates from *Records of the Southern Branch* [nan ke ji 南柯记] by Tang Xian Zu [汤显祖] (1550-1616).

⁴ Dong Ping [东平] is a small state north of modern Ji Ning City [济宁市].

⁵ Xia Shi [侠士] means a person well-trained in martial arts and who observes the chivalric code. Strictly speaking, Shi [士] originally means the literati class of non-aristocratic civilians, Shi Zu [士族]. However, it later became a common term for a person who has been trained in a specific skill. It has, thus, been borrowed as an honorific title for someone with such a skill, almost like 'Master' [shi fu 傅师] today.

⁶ This further indicates that Chun Yu's actions and conduct were dictated by his emotions and passions rather than rationality.

⁷ Huai Nan [淮南] was the area south of the Huai River, centred on An Hui Province [安徽]

⁸ Literally, ‘to drop one’s corporeal soul’. Another reliable textual source, Kanripo, had 魂, which would render the term as ‘to drop one’s ethereal soul’. The expression *Luo Po* [落魄] refers to losing one’s dreams, ambitions, will, and drive, usually depicted by the haggard appearance of someone who has lost the motivation to go on.

⁹ Alternatively, this sentence reads ‘he kept himself busy drinking’.

¹⁰ Guang Ling district is located in today’s An Hui Province.

¹¹ *Sophora Japonica*, also called Chinese Scholar Tree or Japanese Pagoda Tree. If we break down the character for locust [huai 槐], it reads wood [mu 木] and ghost [gui 鬼]. The varietal with spikes is also employed as remedy in Chinese medicine and its flowers serve as meal, usually prepared by frying.

¹² *Mu* [亩] is a unit of area equal to one fifteenth of a hectare.

¹³ *Sheng* [生] in the Chinese text means ‘man’ and has been replaced by [Chun Yu] for ease of reading. It might be speculated that this term comes from the term in Chinese opera for the male role [sheng 生], which together with the female role [dan 旦], the painted face [jing 净], and the comedic role [chou 丑], make up the four main roles within an opera. The legend in this story was extremely famous and often re-enacted in opera; thus, it is possible that Chun Yu was simply referred to as the ‘main actor’ throughout this work.

¹⁴ The chronology of Chun Yu does not quite correspond to the given year. Since he died in the year Ding Chou (797), and the story takes place three years prior to that, seven [qi 七] here is believed to be a scribal error for ten [shi 十]. As the *Zhen Yuan* era lasted from 785-805, this makes it the year 794.

¹⁵ Huai An [槐安] literally is ‘Kingdom of Locust Peace’.

¹⁶ This cart is small in comparison, for example, with the carriage of a king.

¹⁷ Literally, seven or eight.

¹⁸ It is conjectured that *Shen* [甚] – ‘quite’ – is a scribal error and should be *Wu* [无] – ‘without’ – as contextually this would make more sense. Chun Yu is in a daze and everything appears to be so similar, adding to the confusion, so he is unsure if he is awake or asleep, whether this is reality or a dream. This assumption would make the sentence read: ‘Suddenly, he saw mountains and rivers, scenery, grasses and woods, paths and roads, all of which were no different to [those of] the world of humans’.

¹⁹ In Chinese, ‘several tens of Chinese miles’.

²⁰ Visited [jiang 降] is a humble expression of ‘to descend from one’s mount’ [jiang jia 降驾], which literally means that the lofty guest has lowered himself to arrive at one’s own humble place.

²¹ ‘Meat dishes’ can also be read as ‘delicious dishes’ or ‘gourmet dishes’, as meat was not widely available at this time. In other words, the scene described here is an extravagant feast of rare delicacies.

²² It appears that left and right means according to where they stood in the court; one stands to the left of the emperor, the other to the right. Therefore, the two positions could also be rendered as the Right Hand Chancellor and the Left Hand Chancellor.

²³ Chun Yu rushed out of the main hall, which is an elevated platform, to the levelled ground in the front yard to greet the chancellor.

²⁴ An ivory court tablet is long, curved and rectangular in form. The use of such tablets can be dated back as far as the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) and possibly even earlier. They were originally made of wood or bamboo, to be used as a recording device for an official's report to the king, or to mark down the king's commands. As a form of court etiquette, the official would hold the court tablet in front of their face, stare at it, and never look directly at the king. Later on, as paper became prevalent, these tables lost their functional use and became mostly symbolic of one's position in the court, as higher rank officials would hold a court tablet made of jade or ivory; while lower rank officials would use ones made of wood or bamboo.

²⁵ Humble [gua 寡] is similar to the self-referential expression *Gua De* [寡德] by the emperor, literally translating as ‘unworthy sovereign’.

²⁶ Weaponry of this kind was commonly arranged neatly in front of the gates of the mansions of the rich and high-ranking nobility.

²⁷ Literally, Jasper Fragrance.

²⁸ This slightly unidiomatic name, *Hua Yang* [华阳], may refer to a location, possibly the group’s home, i.e. the south side or sunny side of Mount Hua.

²⁹ The third day of the third lunar month [san yue san 三月三] was a major Tang festival in which one cleansed oneself by bathing. It was also a time when men and women could mix in public. It was called *Shang Si* [上巳] because the date was originally set on the first *Si* [巳] during the first ten-day period of the third lunar month [san yue shang xun si ri 三月上旬巳日] during the Han Dyanasty (206 BC- 220 AD) and prior to it. It would be logical to assume that if no Si day were to appear in the first ten days, since there are twelve Earthly Branches, that the festival would fall on a Si day in the middle ten-day period of the third month [zhong xun 中旬]. From the Wei Dynasty (220-266 CE) onwards, the festival was fixed to be on the third day of the third month according to the *Book of Jin*, eleventh chapter [jin shu 晋书]..

³⁰ Reishi mushroom (*Ganoderma lucidum*).

³¹ Chan Wisdom Temple.

³² Literally, India (Heavenly Bamboo) Court.

³³ Literally, Shi, the Prolonged One, a famous dancer from what is now Uzbekistan.

³⁴ Literally, Jasper-Brilliance.

³⁵ This gesture was equivalent to dropping a handkerchief in the West.

³⁶ Literally, Master Superior Truth.

³⁷ Literally, Filial Feelings Temple.

³⁸ Literally, Agreement with the Mysterious.

³⁹ Literally, Observer of Sounds. See also chapter 38, ‘Bodhisattva Guan Shi Yin’, in *The 49 Barriers of Cultivating the Dao*.

⁴⁰ Alternatively, ‘I have not forgotten it for a single day’.

⁴¹ There are two possible explanations for the word ‘family’ here. Firstly, that all of them were royalty – which was highly likely given the fact that they are invited to the celebrations, as they appear to be highly affluent with their entourages. Secondly, family in the Chinese sense can depict the entire tribe, clan, and even a nation.

⁴² Literally, Tian, the Man of Brilliance.

⁴³ Literally, multitudes of tens [shu shi 数十].

⁴⁴ Literally, Immortal Beauties [仙姬], indicating their outstanding looks as though they were immortal or divine beings.

⁴⁵ Screens were employed to shelter travelling dignitaries from the chilly wind and dust.

⁴⁶ Literally, Palace of Cultivating the Etiquette.

⁴⁷ People were standing in a line to greet him, they went forward to pay respect, and then withdrew themselves to the sides.

⁴⁸ Literally, Princess Golden Branch.

⁴⁹ In the Tang Dynasty it was customary to marry off one’s daughters at what we consider nowadays a very young age.

⁵⁰ Literally, Mount Divine Turtle.

⁵¹ Literally, seventeen or eighteen.

⁵² Smoke [yan 烟] implies uprisings, revolt and turbulent times.

⁵³ The fourth Heavenly Stem and the second Earthly Branch, or the fourteenth year in a sixty-year cycle. This year would later turn out to be 797 CE at the end of the work.

⁵⁴ Alternatively, ‘...to condescend to such an inconvenient position’.

⁵⁵ Nienhauser links this expression to the *Book of Changes* [yi jing 易经], in the commentary on the hexagram Dissolution [jie 解]:

负且乘，致寇至。

When one carries [burden] on one’s back and mounts [the carriage], it will cause bandits to arrive.

This implies that when a lowly person – the one who carries a burden – deals with the affairs of a noble – mounting the carriage – this is bound to be disastrous.

⁵⁶ To overturn the cauldron [fu su 覆餗] is literally ‘capsizing the food [in the cauldron],’ which employs a common analogy of the minister as a chef and the cauldron as the governance of the kingdom. The minister, like a chef, is in charge of handling the cauldron of the kingdom, where he needs to be aware of the temperature (i.e. laws, taxation, and levy) and the different ingredients (i.e. different groups of subjects and powers at play) in order properly to handle the affairs of the state, all of which are simmering within the cauldron. When the cauldron has capsized, this symbolizes the failure of governance.

The hexagram Cauldron [ding 鼎] in *The Book of Changes* reads:

鼎折足，覆餗其形渥，凶。

When a leg of the cauldron is broken, the food within [the cauldron] will be capsized and its form will become drenched. It is inauspicious.

⁵⁷ I.e. shortcomings.

⁵⁸ Literally, Ying Stream.

⁵⁹ Literally, galloping and wing-bearing.

⁶⁰ Adaptable [tong bian 通变] is explained in the following way in *The Book of Changes*, ‘Appended Explanations Part 1’ [xi ci shang 系辞上]:

极数知来之谓占，通变之谓事。

[To reach] the utmost [understanding of] numerology and to know what is to come, this is called divination. To be adaptable to changes, this is called handling one’s affairs.

⁶¹ *The Book of Changes*, hexagram Kun, states:

柔顺利贞，君子攸行，先迷失道，后顺得常。

Gentle, conformable, advantageous and persevering, a noble person undertakes a journey; if one leads, such a person will be led astray from the Dao; however, if one follows, that person will obtain the constancy [of the Dao].

⁶² I.e. how could I not cry?

⁶³ An elder here denotes a man of sixty or seventy years.

⁶⁴ ‘Lofty vermilion houses’ were grand residences occupied by powerful figures, while ‘doors lined with ceremonial halberds’ were government agencies and offices. When the officials travelled or patrolled the city, the ceremonial halberds would be held in front of the travelling party to clear the road.

⁶⁵ The populace [bai xing 百姓] are literally the hundred most common family names in China.

⁶⁶ Chinese stone tablets, sometimes called Chinese steles, are generally of rectangular form, inscribed with Chinese characters and of funerary, commemorative, or edifying nature. The custom of stone tablets seems to have its roots in the Tang Dynasty.

⁶⁷ Estate [shi yi 食邑] here means imperial land conferred to a person, in which the produce and taxes were collected by that person rather than by the court.

⁶⁸ Literally and poetically in Chinese, ‘sheltered under his shade [of merits]’.

⁶⁹ Literally, sandalwood creeper.

⁷⁰ The enemies [ze 贼] are literally called ‘bandits’ in order to dehumanize them and to place the speaker on the moral high ground.

⁷¹ Literally, Jade Platform City.

⁷² The verb ‘escort’ deserves further attention. As Chun Yu is walking besides her funeral procession all the way to the capital, whenever the procession comes to a turn or a stream or a bridge, or whatever obstacle, the ‘escort’ (Chun Yu in this instance) will need to speak to the deceased person and inform of them of the obstacle to be overcome or passed over.

⁷³ Windpipes [chui 吹] include all wind instruments.

⁷⁴ Literally, Coiling Dragon Mound.

⁷⁵ Zhou Bian’s son.

⁷⁶ Safeguarding [zhen 镇] also means a pillar and stabilizing the kingdom.

⁷⁷ The equivalent idiom in English would be ‘to throw one’s weight around’. Good fortune [fu 福] or blessings might also be interpreted as indulgent or extravagant behaviour, usually referring to the abuse of one’s power and position.

⁷⁸ These signs are, for instance, the positions and movements of the sun, the moon and the stars.

⁷⁹ ‘Within the screen walls’ [zai xiao qiang 在萧墙] typically means internal strife between members of the royal family.

⁸⁰ Response [ying 应] points to a philosophical concept expounded by Dong Zhong Shu [董仲舒] that gained wide acceptance:

天人相應。

The heavens and humans mutually respond to each other.

Whatever happens on earth is reflected in the heavens. Under such a framework, when a ruler misbehaves, or when the royal court is in disarray, it is believed that there will be a sign in the heavens. Thus, it was common for the monarch to issue an edict of repentance to take blame whenever an omen was observed or a natural disaster occurred. At the same time, omens and natural disasters were often utilized as convenient political tools by emperors and officials alike to attack political enemies or press for certain political agendas in court.

⁸¹ Literally, Vast Mound Region.

⁸² Literally, family and first name.

⁸³ Zhan [湛] is literally ‘deep with water’, implying that the light glistens from the liquid.

⁸⁴ Literally, charm or bewitchment of trees and foxes.

⁸⁵ One Zhang [丈] is equal to ten cubits [chi 尺], or 3.3 metres.

⁸⁶ As the description of the location of the hole is not entirely tangible, the translators have deduced that this underground hole lies to the side of the tree, yet is obscured by its root network, forming a hollow beneath the overground roots.

⁸⁷ A daybed [ta 榻] was equivalent to a couch in modern times.

⁸⁸ Towers [tai 台] can also be read as platforms.

⁸⁹ Hu [斛] is an ancient measuring vessel for dry grain, equalling to five pecks [dou 斗].

⁹⁰ One peck [dou 斗] is a measurement for grain, equal to a decalitre.

⁹¹ Literally, ‘coiling dragon’, which is explained by the shape of the root that resembles a dragon.

⁹² The expression ‘to move the capital’ also appears in the *Book of Changes*, with slightly different wording, in the context of the hexagram ‘Increase’ [yi 益], line 4:

中行，告公從，利用為依遷國。

To walk in the middle path and report to one's duke, who shall follow [one's advice], it is favourable to be entrusted with [the task of] moving the capital.

⁹³ Since a minute animal such as an ant was able to conjure up the illusions in Chun Yu’s dream world, what kind of transformations could the greater beings in the mountains and woods generate?

⁹⁴ Literally, Six Harmonies [liu he 六合].

⁹⁵ A fulminant disease [bao ji 暴疾] is a serious or severe illness that flares up suddenly.

⁹⁶ I.e. he became a follower of Daoism. ‘To enter the gate’ is derived from the crossing of a threshold into a temple complex and thus leaving the secular world.

⁹⁷ See also endnote 223.

⁹⁸ I.e. his father would meet him in *Ding Chou* year and the ants would welcome him back in three years’ time.

⁹⁹ The eighteenth year of *Zhen Yuan* [贞元] era, which began in 785; thus, it is the year 802.

¹⁰⁰ There are allegedly two major lessons to be extracted and distilled from this legend; primarily, power, influence and wealth will manifest and vanish again. What one is bestowed with can be removed in an instant, by simply rumour, bad timing, or distrust. Even if you are a royalty who has served honourably and loyally for decades and is loved by people with a wise sovereign -all the best possible conditions- yet, you can lose it all in a moment’s time, let alone with ruthless and tyrannical monarchs. Secondary, the legend can be viewed from a more spiritual and cultivation level of Daoism; that is that these pursuits of fame and gain are not worth one’s lifetime, as they ultimately will lead to one’s demise.

¹⁰¹ Li Zhao [李肇] (c. 800) was a Tang dynasty scholar and official.