

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME: XIE LINGYUN'S REPRESENTATION OF HIS ESTATE IN "RHAPSODY ON DWELLING IN THE MOUNTAINS"

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In his monumental work, "Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains" ("Shanju fu"), Xie Lingyun describes in detail the construction of his home in a setting that would constitute his style of reclusion and poetry, "mountains and rivers" (shanshui). This article examines how Xie Lingyun built his home through architecture and discourse, and how shaping a home may bear upon the characterization of a particular brand of reclusion in early medieval China. Contrary to the prevailing early medieval view that regards reclusion as being in its loftier form when state of mind is prioritized over physical position, this rhapsody shows that for this scholar in retreat place actually matters. His rhapsody catalogues all varieties of animals and plants, related sceneries and industries, on his mountain estate. This encyclopedic enumeration of things and activities on his estate advances the claim of material self-sufficiency or completeness that he enjoys in his withdrawal, but creates a paradox with the spiritual emptiness that he sought through quietist values and Buddhist faith.

KEYWORDS: Xie Lingyun, "Shanju fu," home space, mountains and rivers, reclusion

"For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word."¹ (Gaston Bachelard)

Few medieval writers wrote as extensively or profoundly about his home as Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433).² His "Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains" 山居賦, a monumental work of nearly ten thousand characters, is devoted to describing his estate in the Zhejiang mountains, to which he retreated after a period in exile as the Governor of Yongjia 永嘉 between 422–423. Xie Lingyun locates his home space not only apart from the official realm but within nature, more specifically, in the "mountains and rivers" (*shanshui* 山水) that would constitute his brand of

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 4.

² The other prominent example is Tao Yuanming, who wrote substantially and lovingly about his small cottage. See my *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception* (427–1900) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008) and my forthcoming book, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry in Early Medieval China*.

reclusion and poetry. As his domestic place is distinctly marked off from the official sphere, an arena of politics and bureaucracy, it thus shares some common ground with the private sphere. Stephen Owen has aptly defined “private sphere” in medieval China as “a cluster of objects, experiences, and activities that belong to a subject apart from the social whole, whether state or family.”³ Like the private sphere, domestic place functions as a non-official or non-state space; however, it is at once more particular and more inclusive. It can be utterly intimate since home is most basically a cloistered inside space (what one trusts to shield oneself from the outside world), but it can also be occupied by and shared with others (family, friends, and servants). Home space thus assumes the paradox of being both intimate and open.

Xie Lingyun’s mountain dwelling served as a retreat in both the sense of a hermitage and a sanctuary. Situating one’s home within nature underscored the radical changes that had taken place in the conception of nature in early and medieval China: from the world of the *Lyrics of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭), where nature was portrayed as inhospitable and dangerous for the prince in “Summoning the Recluse” (“Zhao yinshi” 招隱士), to the early medieval period, when it was embraced as a safe haven from the world of affairs in a poem of the same title by Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305).⁴ Moreover, Xie Lingyun could assert an independence from state and office by making his home a site of material self-sufficiency: the land provides him with just what he needs, as he proudly tells his readers. In this way, his work on his estate is as much about security as production, both economic and cultural.

Xie Lingyun constructs his domestic place through a delineation of space that contains his belongings and activities, as well as through discourse that fills that space with meaning: a place is meaningless without either things or activity to populate it and particularize that space. Working from Leibniz’s view of space as being relative in nature, Mark Lewis has argued that “it is the relations between things, relations expressed by such oppositions as inside/outside, center/periphery, or superior/inferior;” that defines space.⁵ This idea of space is germane to Xie Lingyun’s discourse on home. His domestic place is constituted through an opposition to the outside world (e.g. that of government, politics) and is located at the center around which he organizes and identifies the space surrounding his estate, as we will soon see. The things that fill his estate, from mountains and lakes to fish and fowl, are brought into relation with one another in a comprehensive ecological map that his rhapsody seeks to chart. His exhaustive enumeration of things and activities on his estate bolsters the claim of material completeness he enjoys in his withdrawal, but creates an interesting paradox with the spiritual emptiness that he sought through quietist values and Buddhist faith.

³ Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese ‘Middle Ages’: Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 88. In his book, Owen explains his use of the term “private sphere” (in contradistinction to that of Jürgen Habermas and contemporary debates of a “public sphere” in China) and argues that the Chinese medieval private sphere was a space “that was at once within the public world while at the same time enclosed and protected within it” (87).

⁴ Zuo Si’s poem is included in Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 22.1027–29.

⁵ Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 1.

In writing about his home, Xie constructs an identity apart from officialdom and, consequently, something much more localized. One's home is a place that both reflects and reinforces one's identity. His account of his home tells the reader "this is where I find rest, this is my brand of a reclusive lifestyle, this is what I value (and what my value is), and this is what defines me." Contrary to the prevailing early medieval notion regarding superior forms of reclusion whereby mind trumps matter, his discourse on home reveals that for this scholar-official in retreat place does matter. This essay explores how Xie Lingyun built his home through architecture and discourse, and how shaping a home may bear upon the characterization of a particular brand of reclusion in early medieval China.

In the autumn of 423, Xie Lingyun returned home to his ancestral Shining 始寧 Residence (located in southern Shangyu 上虞 and northwestern Sheng 嵊 counties in present-day Zhejiang), where until the spring of 426 he undertook a massive project of expansion and renovation on the estate first developed by his grandfather, Xie Xuan 謝玄 (343–388). "Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains," written during this period, offers a rare window into not only estate management and culture, but also provides a fascinating account of the selection, construction, and use of the writer's home space. In the preface to the rhapsody, Xie identifies four types of abodes available to recluses of his time: cliffs and caves, mountain homes, hills and gardens, and the suburbs; the rest of the rhapsody presents an extended argument for the mountain home. For Xie, what really defines reclusive life and what truly differentiates dwelling in the mountains from anywhere else are the phenomena—specifically, all the phenomena contained in *his* place, and not just any place. Hence the rhapsody begins with a topography of his estate and its surroundings through lists and descriptions of the mountains, hills, woods, rivers, streams, and lakes to be found extending into the four directions. In a manner similar to early discourses that place one's body at the center around which one structures space, such as the "Inner Cultivation" ("Nei ye" 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi* 管子, Xie's discourse situates his estate at the center of the world.⁶ His descriptions move outward (e.g. near east, far east, near west, far west) and ultimately attempt to cover everything in between. Much of the remainder of the rhapsody is dedicated to providing thorough catalogues of the various plants and animals found in his estate. Yet the particularity of his home is the result of more than an inventory of the things in it: it is substantiated by his experience of moving through the grounds of his estate, at different times of day, and the various observations and meditations he gathers during his tours.

My examination of Xie Lingyun's discourse on home begins with a detailed description of his living space, which sketches a layout of his fields, parks, groves, streams, isles, valleys, peaks, irrigation canals, and dikes. His own Commentary elaborates with more rich details:

Southern Mountain is where I established my dwelling by divination. I walk along the road from the river pavilion, crossing over mountain peaks, and over continuous patches of fields and meadows, at times ascending then

⁶ For a discussion of this aspect in "Nei ye," see Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China*, 22–23.

descending over a stretch of about three *li*. Along the way, what one sees are: tall trees and flourishing bamboos, footpaths in the fields traced to faraway hills, straddling billows over spaced out rocks, side paths and flying currents—all making a beautiful view upon which to rest one's gaze.

Now coming to where I reside: from Western Mountain a path has been opened all the way to Eastern Mountain, a distance of over two *li*. To the south, there were but linked peaks and continuous summits, their dark green connecting together: a road to the sky through clouds and mists, almost without bounds and limits.

I follow along the path to enter the valley, which has altogether three mouths. Surrounded by cliffs, Stone Gate to the southwest [lacuna], all of these things are recorded elsewhere.

As one first enters, following along the road one proceeds down bamboo paths. Halfway down the road, it opens up to bamboo-lined irrigation channels and streams. As one moves southeast along the channel running beside the mountain, the path twists and turns in secluded and wonderful spots—they lie in different places, but are equally beautiful.

North of this road is the east–west road, which has the mountain as its barrier. Due north is a narrow gorge; I tread along the lake where it has formed shallow pools. My home faces the Southern Mountain, where throughout there are cliffs and crags. On the northeast, it rests over a ravine; below, there is a river as clear as a mirror, leaning evergreens and hanging boulders, shaded coves and shiny isles.

The Western Crags are encircled by forests, about 20 *zhang* from the deep pool. I laid the foundation and built a roof in the middle of crags and forests. Water surrounds the stone steps. I open the window to face the mountains, look up to see the layered crests, and down to espy the deep ravine.

From these crags, halfway up the mountain, there is another tower. There one may gaze afar and see in all directions, giving one expansive pleasure. Turning around to look at the western lodge, one directly faces its windows and doors.

Going down from the cliffs, dense bamboos conceal a pathway. From north to south, there are only bamboo groves: one hundred *zhang* from east to west, one hundred fifty-five *zhang* from north to south.⁷ To the north, it cleaves against the nearby peaks; to the south, one sees the distant ranges. Mountains surround all four sides; creeks and streams crisscross one another. The beauty of waters, rocks, forests and bamboos, and the good of mountain crags and peaks, river bends and curves, are complete here.

⁷ This measures 242 meters from east to west and 375 meters from north to south.

I cleared the ground and constructed my home; this is where I live. It is impossible to make a complete record of each minute pleasure and intimate diversion; thus I have merely provided a general account of it ...

南山是開創卜居之處也。從江樓步路，跨越山嶺，綿亘田野，或升或降，當三里許。塗路所經見也，則喬木茂竹，緣畛彌阜，橫波盤石，側道飛流，以為寓目之美觀。及至所居之處，自西山開道，迄于東山，二里有餘。南悉連嶺疊郭，青翠相接，雲煙霄路，殆無倪際。從逕入谷，凡有三口。方壁西南石門世□南□池東南，皆別載其事。緣路初入，行於竹逕，半路闢，以竹渠澗。既入東南傍山渠，展轉幽奇，異處同美。路北東西路，因山為郭。正北狹處，踐湖為池。南山相對，皆有崖巖。東北枕壑，下則清川如鏡，傾柯盤石，被隩映渚。西巖帶林，去潭可二十丈許，葺基構宇，在巖林之中，水衛石階，開窗對山，仰眺曾峰，俯鏡潄壑。去巖半嶺，復有一樓。迴望周眺，既得遠趣，還顧西館，望對窗戶。緣崖下者，密竹蒙逕，從北直南，悉是竹園。東西百丈，南北百五十五丈。北倚近峰，南眺遠嶺，四山周回，溪澗交過，水石林竹之美，巖岫隈曲之好，備盡之矣。刊翦開築，此焉居處，細趣密翫，非可具記，故較言大勢耳。⁸

Like any proud homeowner, Xie Lingyun walks the reader through a tour of his new residence at Southern Mountain, which lies south of the old residence built by his grandfather at Northern (or Eastern) Mountain: a veritable showcase of both steep cliffs and clear streams, hanging boulders and cascading torrents, as well as distant vistas and intimate nooks. The home he built, as Xie notes at the end of his descriptive tour, has it all: it is “completely supplied” (備盡 *bei jin*).

Completeness functions as a crucial, underlying thread in his work: his descriptions cover both mountains and waters, as well as things near and far; his estate is home to animal, vegetal, and herbal varieties of all kinds. The conventional *fu* apologia he occasionally makes for being unable to give a complete account of his dwelling and the frequent disclaimers that accompany his seemingly interminable list of things that they are far from being comprehensive only serve to foreground the idea of completeness. Although Xie Lingyun claims here that his estate is “completely supplied,” in an earlier passage, he identifies the opposite as characteristic of mountains and rivers and champions that type of landscape over others for precisely this reason. He contrasts mountains and rivers to parks and gardens and rules in favor of the former: “Although these [imperial parks in earlier *fu*, such as Yunmeng 雲夢 (a hunting preserve in Chu) and Qingqiu 青丘 (a hunting preserve in Qi)] were the prized parks of princes, how are they places to which one can go for timely withdrawal? Moreover, since mountains and rivers are not completely supplied, how could one discuss seeking everything

⁸ All citations from “Shanju fu” are from Gu Shaobo 顧紹柏, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu* 謝靈運集校注 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1987), 318–34; hereafter, XLYJJZ. For a complete and annotated English translation of “Shanju fu,” see Francis Westbrook, “Landscape Description in the Lyric Poetry and ‘Fuh on Dwelling in the Mountains’ of Shieh Ling-yunn” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973), 177–337.

together” 雖千乘之珍苑，孰嘉遯之所遊。且山川之未備，亦何議於兼求？ Xie explains in his commentary: “Mountains and rivers cannot claim complete splendor; it all depends on what one encounters in the natural topography” 且山川亦不能兼茂，隨地勢所遇耳。For Xie, parks and gardens are engineered, cultivated, and perfected—something made beautiful by man but of little use for the recluse. In contrast, mountains and rivers impress him as natural, unadorned, and imperfect—a place that offers rest to the recluse and surprises to the wanderer. Completeness is a relative term here: mountains and rivers are incomplete when compared to man-made parks and gardens. In describing the mountains and rivers on his own estate, in specific rather than in general terms, he demands the ideal of completion. It seems that completeness is desirable when the issue at stake is self-sufficiency and possible when the vantage point is properly positioned or framed. Xie’s description of his recent renovations on the old residence underscores the reward of having a complete view: “I opened a door to the south to face the distant peaks, / I installed a window on the east to look out onto the nearby fields.” Xie explains in his commentary that through his window he could “behold the beauty of *both* rivers and mountains” 兼見江山之美。

In addition to generic and aesthetic considerations, the notion of completeness reflected economic ones as well. A well-stocked supply underscores the basic operational habit of large estates in early medieval China: economic self-sufficiency. Xie Lingyun details the various enterprises on his estate, which include farming with the aids of irrigation channels and drainage ditches, producing lumber, harvesting grains and fruits, brewing wine, cutting thatch and reeds, producing dyes, making clothing, and manufacturing paper. This array of industry signals wealth, yet throughout the rhapsody Xie spurns the possibility of surplus and profit, and insists merely on the goal of material sufficiency.

Paddy-trails run the length and width of fields,
Dikes and embankments crisscross.
We channel ditches to direct the water flow,
Arteries disperse and moats conjoin.
Lush and luxuriant the thick millet,
Sweet-scented the fragrant rice.
As summer departs, early crop comes into ear,
As fall arrives, late crop becomes ripe.
There are plots on both hills and flatlands,
For growing hemp, wheat, millet, and soybeans.
We wait for the time, and observe the season,
Now we sow, then we reap.
Being provided with grains to eat and fluids to drink,
I decline to be an artisan, merchant, forester or pastor.⁹
Why should life depend on great many supplies?
The principle is to find sufficiency in a fully belly.

阡陌縱橫
塍埒交經
導渠引流
脉散溝并
蔚蔚豐稔
苾苾香
送夏蚤秀
迎秋晚成
兼有陵陸
麻麥粟菽
候時規節
遞藝遞熟
供粒食與漿飲
謝工商與衡牧
生何待於多資
理取足於滿腹

⁹ This line may also be taken to mean “I have no need for artisans, merchants, foresters or pastors.” The point would nonetheless be that he possesses a comprehensive supply of what he needs.

Like the mole from the *Zhuangzi* that drinks just enough from the river to fill his belly, Xie Lingyun maintains that his estate produces just enough for his own consumption.¹⁰ Unlike artisans, merchants, foresters, and pastors, who desire a surfeit of goods and aim for profit, Xie Lingyun claims only a desire for sufficiency (*zu* 足). For the rich landowner and *fu*-writer who devotes most of his work to enumerating just how many things there are in his estate, he must switch the argument from a quantitative to a qualitative one in his persuasion: the point is not to count the amount, as is the wont of those profiteers, but rather to subsist in the principle of sufficiency, here measured by comprehensive supply. Indeed, the rest of his rhapsody attempts to demonstrate the independent economy of his estate, which produces all that he claims to need.

While Xie attempts to demonstrate the complete material self-reliance of his estate by representing it as being fully furnished with fields, gardens, plantations, groves, mountains and waters, he is careful to avoid any implication of commerce.¹¹ By raising the issue of profit in the context of production on his estate and immediately rejecting it, Xie Lingyun may well be distinguishing himself from landowners who engaged in mercantile activities by selling their yields or goods. For instance, Wang Rong 王戎 (234–305), one of the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, was infamous as a miser who amassed a great deal of wealth. According to his biography in the *Jin shu* 晉書, “his estate had excellent plums, which he often sold. Afraid that others might be able to plant such plum trees, he had the pits removed. It was because of this that he was mocked by his contemporaries.”¹² By contrast, sufficiency rather than profit is the principle by which Xie Lingyun claims to manage his estate: he thus emphasizes in his own commentary to the passage that “if by reducing self-interest and having few desires, one fulfills his life, then that is sufficient” 若少私寡欲，充命則足。

In his discussion of sufficiency, the most arresting statement is the imperative of land ownership that follows the above passage in the Commentary: “But without farmland, there is no means by which to establish oneself” 但非田無以立耳。Xie here borrows the language of the *Analects* to stress the fundamental priority of his enterprise: Confucius had instructed his disciples to “establish oneself through rites” 立於禮。¹³ For readers familiar with Xie Lingyun’s many efforts to claim, appropriate, or annex more land for his estate, the contrariety, even irony, of contextualizing land ownership thus in a discussion of sufficiency would be difficult to miss. Although the notion of establishing oneself through possession of land may well have had timely application for the failed official, as it provided Xie with a vocation after his recent political setback, it seemed to reflect within the larger socio-cultural context the widespread lust for land among the gentry in the Six Dynasties.¹⁴ Xie’s biography in the *Song shu* gives this picture:

¹⁰ The lesson appears in “Free and Easy Wandering.” Guo Qingfan, 郭慶藩, ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 1:24.

¹¹ Jiang Fuya 蔣福亞 has reasonably cast some doubt on Xie Lingyun’s claim that his estate was completely self-sufficient. See his *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shehui jingjishi* 魏晉南北朝社會經濟史 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2005), 21–22.

¹² *Jin shu*, 43.1234.

¹³ *Analects*, 8/8.

¹⁴ Xie Lingyun’s exile to Yongjia in 422 resulted from his alliance with the Prince of Luling, Liu Yizhen 劉義真 (407–424), who made an unsuccessful bid for the throne.

On account of the resources of his grandfather, Lingyun's assets were quite immense. His servants were legion, and his retainers and attendants numbered in the hundreds. Boring through mountains and dredging lakes, their labor was without end. Whenever he sought out mountains and ascended their ridges, he would be sure to reach secluded peaks where crags and cliffs formed manifold layers—there was none that he did not thoroughly investigate.¹⁵

Several modern scholars have duly foregrounded the economic and material considerations likely behind the tours of mountains and lakes by even the most enthusiastic of pleasure-seeking sightseers such as Wang Xizhi, Xie An, and Xie Lingyun: to scout out good land for potential development.¹⁶ Large-scale reclamation of land involving boring through mountains and draining out lakes was an enterprise that none but the government, monasteries, and rich estate owners could undertake. Xie Lingyun's biography also tells us that he once led hundreds of servants from his Shining Estate all the way to Linhai 臨海 (southeast of present-day Linhai, Zhejiang) some one hundred kilometers away, felling trees and opening paths. The Governor of Linghai Wang Xiu 王琇 mistook Xie and his legion of men for mountain bandits. In yet another scheme for expansion, Xie twice petitioned to drain public lakes (Huizhong in Guiji and Pihuang in Shining) to make tillable land. Both efforts were thwarted by Meng Yi 孟顛, the Governor of Guiji, on the grounds that the local populace used produce (plants, fish) from public lakes such as Huizhong to supplement their diet.¹⁷

Although Meng Yi was said to have harbored a personal grudge against Xie Lingyun, who had predicted in mockery that Meng will surely be reborn in heaven before Xie, but will attain Buddhahood after him, his objection to Xie's bids to privatize more land nevertheless reveals a major conflict between the government and large estate owners during the Southern Dynasties over the issues of land ownership and reclamation.¹⁸ Since much of the tillable land in the South, especially the fertile fields in the Tri-Wu 三吳 Region (Wuxing 吳興, Wujun 吳郡 and Guiji 會稽), was already occupied by native gentry clans or local peasants, the northern émigré families faced a shortage of land upon arrival.¹⁹ This region was attractive for other reasons as well: it was more economically developed than most other areas in the south and it was proximate to the seat of political power, Jiankang.²⁰ As gentry clans then sought voraciously to reclaim land in mountains and marshes,

¹⁵ *Song shu*, 67.1775.

¹⁶ See Tang Zhangru 唐長孺, *San zhi liu shiji Jiangnan datudi suoyouzhi de fazhan* and "Nanchao de tun di bieshu ji shanze zhanling" 南朝的屯、邸、別墅及山澤占領, in *Shanju cunqao* 山居存稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 1–26; and Cheng Yu-yu, "Bodily Movement and Geographic Categories: Xie Lingyun's 'Rhapsody on Mountain Dwelling' and the Jin-Song Discourse on Mountains and Rivers," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 23 (2007): 193–219.

¹⁷ *Song shu*, 67.1775–76.

¹⁸ *Song shu*, 67.1775–76.

¹⁹ See, for example, Kong Lingfu's 孔靈符 biography in the *Song shu* (54.1533), which mentions that "the area of [tillable] land in Shanyin 山陰 (north of Mount Guiji) district was small, people were numerous though fields were scarce."

²⁰ For a fuller discussion of why émigré clans chose this region for settlement, see Jiang Fuya, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shehui jingjishi*, 311–18.

their efforts brought on a two-fold problem for the government. First, this encroachment contradicted the law of the land, which traditionally stipulated that mountains and wetlands belonged to the emperor, and thus threatened the sovereign's power and economic base.²¹ Second, when large estate owners reclaimed and privatized land that was used by the public, this imposed material hardships on the local populace which depended on mountains for firewood, herbs, or fruits, and wetlands for fish or water plants.²² The string of edicts issued during the Liu-Song dynasty to prohibit the closing of mountains and wetlands by private individuals illustrated at once the rampant encroachment on government land as well as the futility of such edicts to hold back these large estate owners, as Tang Zhangru has argued.²³

Possession of land often fell in murky territory during the Southern Dynasties. While Xie Lingyun was denied permission to drain two public lakes, he could clear mountains between his estate and Linhai. It was surely easier to appropriate government land that was not actively managed than lakes that were constantly used by the populace.²⁴ Possession may be asserted in physical as well as discursive ways.²⁵ "Rhapsody on Dwelling in the Mountains," with its verbal maps and itemized lists, enables the estate owner Xie Lingyun to reinforce in a lasting way his possession of all the local land and things he wrote about (and even that which he pointed to but could not fully cover in his work). The borders of his estate were as fluid as his maps and catalogues were open-ended. The map he charts in the rhapsody begins with the topography of the immediate area of his property (near east, south, west, and north) and extends to more distant geographical locations in all four directions (e.g. Mount Tiantai to the east, Qiantang River to the north), thereby situating his home at the center of the cosmos, as it were.²⁶ This discursive display of an intimate knowledge of his space and all that inhabits it highlights his ownership. His lists of things, usually accompanied by annotations and pronunciations, allow him to demonstrate his unique ability to identify and name things on his property.

²¹ *Shiji* (30.1429) states that: "Chamberlain for the National Treasury (literally, 'great supervisor of agriculture') sent the following petition to Aides Kong Jin and [Dongguo] Xianyang of the Salt and Iron Monopoly Bureau stating that: 'The treasure troves of mountains and seas, heaven and earth, all should be under the supervision of the Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues. That which the emperor does not keep for himself should come under the supervision of the Chamberlain for the National Treasury to supplement tax revenues.'" Also, *Han shu* (19A.731) states that: "Chamberlain for the Palace Revenues, an official post established in the Qin, is in charge of revenues generated from the mountains, seas, lakes and wetlands, which he used to supply provisions for the emperor."

²² See Tang Zhangru, "Nanchao de tun di bieshu ji shanze zhanling."

²³ Tang Zhangru, *San zhi liu shiji Jiangnan datudi suoyouzhi de fazhan*, 67. The law proposed by Yang Xi 羊希 (d. 468), who became Left Aide to the Imperial Secretary at the beginning of the Daming reign period (457–64), to legalize the appropriation of mountains and wetlands by private citizens and stipulate the amount based on rank was as much an admission of the government's inability to enforce its prohibitions against "privatizing" public land as a last resort attempt to curb the encroachment. See his biography in the *Song shu*, 54.1537. Cf. Jiang Fuya's more positive interpretation of this edict, which emphasizes the government's legitimation and recognition of private land ownership. Jiang, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shehui jingjishi*, 314–15.

²⁴ Tang Zhangru makes a similar point in *San zhi liu shiji Jiangnan datudi suoyouzhi de fazhan*, 68.

²⁵ For a good discussion of discursive and cultural forms of ownership in the mid-Tang, see Stephen Owen's "Singularity and Possession," in *The End of the Chinese 'Middle Ages'*, 12–33.

²⁶ The text and commentary on the section describing the "far west" have been lost.

Xie Lingyun's rhetorical strategy harkens back to the tradition of the Han epideictic rhapsody in which the rhapsodist, on behalf of the emperor, names and takes stock of all that inhabited the imperial park, meant to signify a miniature version of the empire. The Han epideictic rhapsody served as a powerful rhetorical tool for proclaiming imperial ownership and sovereignty. Commanding this type of rhapsody was traditionally the prerogative of the emperor alone. Xie Lingyun's appropriation of the imperial trope raises the question of possible subversion. If any were intended, then Emperor Wen 文帝 (r. 424–453) either did not perceive it or did not care. The Emperor was said to be a great fan of Xie Lingyun's writings: "Lingyun's poetry and calligraphy were both of unparalleled excellence. Each time he completed a piece of work, he would write it out himself. Emperor Wen called them his twin treasures" (*er bao* 二寶).²⁷ The Emperor so valued Xie Lingyun's writings that he dismissed several charges of sedition against Xie and refused several earlier petitions to put the aristocrat to death before finally (and perhaps reluctantly) agreeing to sign his death warrant in 433.²⁸

We have seen how Xie Lingyun's major work—the expansion of his family estate and the commemoration of it in rhapsody—represents capital building in a dual sense: economic and cultural. Building appropriately constitutes a major theme in the rhapsody and is explicitly thematized at the beginning of the work through several allusions to the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). Xie advances his argument for rejecting the ancient abode for recluses and for constructing a contemporary dwelling by invoking classical authority. Referencing hexagram 34 "Da zhuang" 大壯 (Great strength), Xie writes that "if wind and dew bring distress to nests and caves, then Great Strength expels harm with the ridgepole and roof" 若夫巢穴以風露貽患，則大壯以棟宇祛弊.²⁹ Several sections of the rhapsody provide details of the design and construction of the expansion projects on his estate. In an especially illustrative passage, Xie Lingyun describes the process by which he selected a site to construct new buildings.

When I first planned to work [on my estate],	爰初經略
I set out alone with a walking staff in hand.	杖策孤征
I entered brooks and waded through waters,	入澗水涉
I ascended peaks and traversed mountains.	登嶺山行
I scaled summits and did not rest,	陵頂不息
Reached the source of springs and did not stop.	窮泉不停
Combed by winds and bathed by rain,	櫛風沐雨
I intruded upon the dews and was guided by the stars.	犯露乘星
I examined my shallow ideas,	研其淺思

²⁷ *Song shu*, 67.1772.

²⁸ On Xie Lingyun's last years, see *Song shu*, 67.1775–77; for an account in English, see J.D. Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream: The Life and Works of the Chinese Nature Poet Hsieh Ling-yün [Xie Lingyun] (385–433)*, Duke of K'ang-Lo (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 1:65–79.

²⁹ On the hexagram "Da zhuang," the *Xi ci zhuàn* states the following: "In remote antiquity, people lived in caves and resided in open country. The sages of later ages had these exchanged for proper houses, putting a ridgepole at the top and rafters below for protection against the wind and the rain. They probably got the idea for this from the hexagram 'Da zhuang' "上古穴居而野處，後世聖人易之以宮室，上棟下宇，以待風雨，蓋取諸大壯。

And scrutinized my imperfect visions.	罄其短規
Without tortoise shell, without divination stalk,	非龜非筮
I chose the excellent and selected the exceptional.	擇良選奇
I cut through hazel trees and opened up a path,	翦榛開逕
I sought out boulders and searched for crags.	尋石覓崖
With mountains surrounding on all four sides,	四山周回
And a pair of streams winding around,	雙流逶迤
Facing the southern peaks, I built a scripture terrace.	面南嶺建經臺
Against the northern hills, I constructed a lecture hall.	倚北阜築講堂
Beside the towering peaks, I erected a meditation room.	傍危峰立禪室
Overlooking the deep river, I arranged houses for monks.	臨浚流列僧房
Facing lofty trees of hundreds of years old,	對百年之高木
I take in the fragrance of myriad generations.	納萬代之芬芳
I hold dear the springs of antiquity,	抱終古之泉源
I admire the pure continuity of their rich fluid.	美膏液之清長
I quit the beautiful pagodas in the suburbs,	謝麗塔於郊郭
And removed myself from the world beside the city walls.	殊世間於城傍
With joy, I see simplicity and embrace the uncarved block,	欣見素以抱樸
Truly there is sweet dew in the place of the Way.	果甘露於道場

Building the perfect residence for his reclusion was clearly not an easy task. Xie Lingyun *personally* scaled mountains to their peaks and traced springs to their sources; through wind and rain, by early morning dew and late night stars, he sought out the ideal place to construct new buildings whose functions were designed to enhance the sanctity of his home. In case the toil involved with designing and developing his estate escaped the reader's notice, Xie stresses in his Commentary that "When I first planned to work [on my estate], I personally made a tour of it on foot, and sustained all sorts of hardship" 云初經略，躬自履行，備諸苦辛也。The new space he developed was a product of much careful deliberation and extensive fieldwork. Nothing was left up to chance or fate. Without divining by tortoise shells or yarrow stalks, he searched high and low and selected the best spot. This home improvement project rewards the owner-architect with consummate satisfaction. In his Commentary, Xie affirms that "pure emptiness and quiet solitude are truly where the Way may be attained" 然清虛寂漠，實是得道之所也。

The extent of Xie's interest in Buddhism can be seen in the landscape architecture of his estate, where his piety played an integral factor. In addition to the various monastic spaces mentioned in the above passage, a monastery was built on a cloistered peak and several parks were designed to accommodate his Buddhist devotion. He writes that:

I admire the flower gardens of Deer Park,	欽鹿野之華苑
And esteem the famous mountain of the Numinous Vulture.	羨靈鷲之名山
I hope for the pure forest of sala trees,	企堅固之貞林

And yearn for the fragrant garden of Amrapāli.	希菴羅之芳園
Although His bright visage is remote,	雖絳容之緬邈
It is said that his sorrowful sound is always present.	謂哀音之恆存
I have erected a monastery on a secluded peak,	建招提於幽峰
In hopes that staff-holding monks will rest their shoulders there.	冀振錫之息肩

Xie Lingyun repeatedly states his longing for certain important sites in Buddhist lore: the place of Gautama Buddha's first sermon on the Four Noble Truths (Deer Park, Mrgadāva), a retreat where he preached the *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Lotus Sūtras* (Vulture Hill, Griddhraj Parvat), the place where he delivered his last sermon, *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (a sala grove), and the garden in which he taught the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (the mango grove of Amrapāli).

Xie's aspirations for another time and place, which transcend his immediate material boundaries while somehow still resonating within them, do not remain mere fantasy since he was able to recreate the settings of Buddha's sermons right here at home. His Commentary tells us th at:

Singing, crying, disputing, litigating—I say towns have all sorts of clamor and noise and cannot match the mountain wilds as a place for monks to dwell. The teachings of scriptures should be done in the mountains ... The gardens I plant and parks I build now next to the forests are like those of the past. Longingly, I entrust my thoughts to them. Although His bright visage is remote, his sorrowful sound remains.

聚落是墟邑，謂歌哭爭訟，有諸諠譁，不及山野為僧居止也。經教欲令在山中 ... 今旁林菴園制苑，彷彿在昔，依然託想，雖絳容緬邈，哀音若存也。

To make the past appear present, the dead seem alive, and China like India were wholly within the realm of possibility for a man of Xie Lingyun's means. While most might transport themselves to the time of lore through their imagination, Xie could transplant lore right into his own estate. His replica gardens and parks were designed to create the right environment for the voice of Buddha to be carried on by monks in their sermons, all of which help channel, presumably, a complete, organic experience of Buddhist learning, even a facsimile of the original lessons. Religious pilgrimages to the west even among monks were extremely rare during early medieval China. Since Xie Lingyun could not travel to the groves in India, he then made the groves come to him in Shining.

Religious motivations notwithstanding, building a monastery on one's estate may well have yielded economic benefits as well for the landowner. Monasteries attracted not only monks but also dependants that provided services of various kinds (e.g. menial, agricultural). Monastic dependants generally consisted of peasants who escaped from secular authority and sought the patronage of monasteries, as well as retainers and slaves.³⁰ In addition, monasteries were tax-exempt. Although

³⁰ For a good general discussion of monastic dependants, see Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 112–41.

Xie's noble ranking exempted him from tax liability, his demotion from duke to marquis at the beginning of the Liu-Song dynasty would have taught him about the precarious nature of fortunes. In the case that his title and privileges be stripped from him, the monastery might still allow his descendants to claim tax-exemption status for their land.

Xie Lingyun's emphasis on having a proper place for his withdrawal and meditation challenges the prevalent Jin dynasty attitude that blurs the distinction between reclusion and service, which consequently deemphasizes place. Wang Kangju 王康琚 (fourth century) concisely articulated this attitude: "Minor recluses seclude themselves in the hills and groves, / Great recluses seclude themselves in the court and marketplace" 小隱隱陵藪, 大隱隱朝市.³¹ Wang's declaration is, of course, an echo of Dongfang Shuo's 東方朔 famous defense of his own "court reclusion" (*chao yin* 朝隱) in the time of the Han Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE): "Within the palace, one can avoid the world and preserve oneself. Why must one reside in the deep mountains and thatched huts?"³² Xie Lingyun would not have denied the importance of one's state of mind, but he insists that there remains an absolute, categorical difference between notion and practice. He writes at the beginning of his preface to the rhapsody:

In antiquity, dwelling in nests and staying in caves is called resting on a cliff. Living in the mountains under ridgepole and roof is called dwelling in the mountains. Residing in the wooded wilds is called [living in] the hills and gardens, and in the suburbs is called [living] beside the city wall. The differences among the four may be deduced by reason. In one's mind, the yellow canopy may not be different from the north bank of Fen River. In actual practice, however, dwelling in the mountains is certainly distinct from [living in] the city marketplace.

古巢居穴處曰巖棲。棟宇居山曰山居。在林野曰丘園。在郊郭曰城傍。四者不同，可以理推。言心也，黃屋實不殊於汾陽。即事也，山居良有異乎市塵。

A mind detached from all spatial context would enable one to perceive no substantive difference between active governance in the palace, implied by the yellow canopy of the imperial carriage, and non-action as practiced by the sage-king Yao, who visited the Four Masters of Mount Guye to the north of the Fen River, where he is said to have forgotten about his kingdom.³³ In practice, however, Xie Lingyun would argue, spatial context really matters. His entire rhapsody is an elaborate argument for that. His reclusion is made possible by one place in particular: his mountain home, as well as all of the things in it and the activities it supports.

Throughout his discourse on place, Xie Lingyun maintains the priority of actual experience as the basis of real knowledge. In one passage, he tells us that:

³¹ Lu Qinli 逯欽立, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 2:953.

³² Lu Qinli, ed., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi*, 1:101. The original reads: 殿中可以避世全身, 何必深山之中蒿廬之下。

³³ See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1:28.

As for my two dwellings, south and north,	若迺南北兩居
They are accessible by water, blocked by land.	水通陸阻
Observe the winds, gaze at the clouds,	觀風瞻雲
Only then could one know this place.	方知厥所

And again, he acknowledges in another section that prefaces several lists of animals and plants on his estate the following: “I say that since the varieties are numerous, it is impossible to classify them according to their source. But one only needs to observe their appearances and listen to their sounds in order to know the fineness of mountains and rivers” 謂種類既繁，不可根源，但觀其貌狀，相其音聲，則知山川之好。For Xie Lingyun, knowledge of place only comes from physical experience of it. As Cheng Yu-yu has argued, Xie’s rhapsody represents “a new categorization of space that is based on embodied and personally-witnessed experience.”³⁴ This argument points to Merleau-Ponty’s influential view concerning the process of experience as a bodily matter, one that is not reducible to discourse or language: perception is a bodily experience and perspectives are basically embodied.³⁵ According to Cheng, this rhapsody marks a shift from pre-Qin *shanchuan* 山川 discourse, in which the accounting of items had mainly to do with regional administration and government control, to Six Dynasties *shanshui* 山水 literature, in which descriptions of things concerned more an appreciation of the landscape based on physically-engaged experience.³⁶

However, this argument concerning Xie Lingyun and personal experience needs to be qualified. Given Xie’s emphasis on direct experience in the rhapsody, he exhibits a curious tendency to textualize his experience of the things on his estate. In the section on water plants, he comments on the varieties growing on his estate and names famous tunes on certain of these water plants, such as *Shijing* 129 “Rush Leaves” 蒹葭 and the anonymous *yuefu* “South of the River” 江南, and concludes that “mare’s tail, clover, sagebrush, floating-heart have all been sung by poets, so I will not give more examples” 魚藻蘋蘩荇亦有詩人之詠，不復具敘。Or, in his catalogue of land and waterfowl, he appends quotations from classical texts about the species found on his estate: for example, “the *Zuo Commentary* states, ‘Six fish-hawks flew backwards’” 六鷗退飛, and “the *Analects* says, ‘The hen-pheasant on the mountain bridge knows how to bide its time, bide its time’” 山梁雌雉，時哉時哉。³⁷ I have elsewhere discussed at length Xie’s citation of classical texts and the ways in which prior texts mediate at the very least the narrative of his experience.³⁸ In Mark Elvin’s reading of Xie’s rhapsody, he aptly puts it thus: “Xie was sensitive

³⁴ Cheng, “Bodily Movement and Geographic Categories: Xie Lingyun’s ‘Rhapsody on Mountain Dwelling’ and the Jin-Song Discourse on Mountains and Rivers,” 213.

³⁵ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge Classics, 1958).

³⁶ Cheng, “Bodily Movement,” 193–219.

³⁷ *Analects*, 10/27. *Zuo zhuan*, Duke Xi 16, has 鷗 instead of 鷗, though the *Guliang Commentary* 穀梁傳 has the latter. When six fish-hawks were seen flying backwards over the Song capital, it was treated as an ill omen.

³⁸ See Swartz, “Naturalness in Xie Lingyun’s Poetic Works,” *HJAS* 70.2 (December, 2010). See also Francis Westbrook’s seminal article, “Landscape Transformation in the Poetry of Hsieh Ling-yün,” *JAOS* 100.3 (July–October, 1980): 237–54, which discusses how allusions to the *Yijing*, *Shijing*, and *Chuci* radically transform the landscape in Xie’s poems. In an essay on the

to the dual origin of a poem: both personal experience mediated through previous literature, *and* previous literature developed further on the basis of personal experience.”³⁹ This balanced view is persuasive in light of both tendencies exhibited in Xie’s work.

The implications of this textualization of his possessions and experiences are far-reaching. In linking the various things on his estate to prior texts, it seems that Xie’s persuasion makes this bold and ambitious claim: he gives the suggestion that all of the things described in books exist right here in *my* home. The transplantation of the sacred groves from India and the sermons that Xie had read about but could now hear at home certainly reinforces this idea. It is as if all of history, documented in texts, has culminated in Xie Lingyun’s estate.

The living space that Xie Lingyun painstakingly designed and built for his retreat moreover makes the most universal of all statements. Put simply, it contains the cosmos: animal, vegetable, and mineral diversity growing within a comprehensive range of terrains ordered through all modes of industry. There is nothing wanting in Xie’s residence, which paradoxically becomes an ecology of “pure emptiness” and “quiet solitude” necessary for attaining the Way. Completeness and emptiness together form the foundation of his reclusive habitat. In yet another paradoxical turn, the understanding Xie reaches at the end of the rhapsody hinges upon a radical inward turn, a closing off all outside stimuli. It seems that the environment he created has not only enabled him to experience the requisite “quiet solitude” and “empty remoteness,” but it also has made him see the limitations of the physical progress toward Buddhist truth.

Here is tranquil seclusion in deep obscurity,	暨其窈窕幽深
Quiet solitude in empty remoteness.	寂漠虛遠
Phenomena and feelings are at variance;	事與情乖
Principle and form are at odds.	理與形反
Since ears and eyes offer no clues,	既耳目之靡端
Then how could the tracks made by one’s footsteps?	豈足跡之所踐
All of time is gathered in the Three Seasons, ⁴⁰	蓋終古於三季
I await penetrating insight through the Five Eyes. ⁴¹	俟通明於五眼
I assess my limited thoughts and halt my brush;	權近慮以停筆
I suppress my shallow understanding and stop writing.	抑淺知而絕簡

Place, including all of the phenomena (*shi*) contained in his mountain abode, may be conducive to the quest for enlightenment, though it does not guarantee it. Hence

role played by prior texts in Xie’s poetry, Stephen Owen characterizes Xie as a “committed textualist” who reads nature “in terms of textual knowledge”; see his “The Librarian in Exile: Xie Lingyun’s Bookish Landscapes,” *Early Medieval China* 10–11.1 (2004): 205, 210, 225.

³⁹ Mark Elvin, *The Retreat of the Elephants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 353.

⁴⁰ This refers to the three seasons of the Indian year: spring, summer, and winter. Xie Lingyun seems to be saying that all of time is gathered in one year, and one year includes all time. This view of time would enable one to transcend all temporal distinctions.

⁴¹ The five eyes or kinds of vision refer to human, *deva*, Hīnayāna wisdom, bodhisattva truth, and Buddha-vision or omniscience. For more on the gloss of this term and the following two, see William E. Soothill and Lewis Hodous’ *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms: With Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937).

feelings do not necessarily follow phenomena. Xie Lingyun explains in his commentary that it is “not by human footsteps that he seeks,” rather he must “await the Three Insights and Five Illuminations (*sanming wutong* 三明五通), only after which one may tread onwards.”⁴² Xie thus concludes that the progress toward Buddhist enlightenment must be completed on a spiritual plane, where normal visual and auditory perceptions are of no use. As another great traveler wrote in a different time and place, “what is essential is invisible to the eye.”⁴³

When Judy Garland, playing Dorothy in the MGM film adaptation of L. Frank Baum’s 1900 classic, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, longed to return home after an arduous ordeal in foreign places, she knocked together her heels three times and repeated again and again “there’s no place like home.” This proverbial line expresses an all too familiar sentiment. Home symbolized safety and comfort, too, for Xie Lingyun, who, upon leaving for exile to Yongjia, promised the villagers in Shining that he would return as soon as his term was over.⁴⁴ Moreover, mountain dwelling offered him the right environment for his reclusion and quest for Buddhist enlightenment. He writes in the Commentary toward the end of his rhapsody: “The mountains in their tranquility truly are a place for sermons and discourses . . . One can have quiet and peace, and be perfectly comfortable.” The spiritual solitude and emptiness that he sought through the cultivation of his Buddhist learning contrasts sharply with the material and rhetorical completeness that marks his representation of his home. In a similarly paradoxical fashion, the focus on outer things (all the phenomena on his estate) for most of the rhapsody reverses to an inward turn at the end of the rhapsody, as he recognizes that his quest can only be completed on an immaterial level. Nevertheless the setting of his devotional progress was for him determinative: he would be led beyond the mountains by means of the mountains. He therefore maintains that place matters in practicing reclusion, which is a lived experience. Through building, identifying, naming, and cataloguing the various objects in his estate, Xie emphasizes ownership and singularity. Only Xie Lingyun

⁴² The three insights (*sanming*) may refer to either the clairvoyance of the Buddhas into past and future lives, and the nirvana insight seeing through conditions; or the three basic insights about existence (impermanent, characterized by suffering, and without self). Since the term with which it is paired, five illuminations (*wutong*) refer to supranormal powers, Xie is probably referring to the three clairvoyances of a Buddha, or more specifically here, an arhat. When applied to Buddhas, the three insights are called *sanda* 三達, to arhats they are called *sanming* 三明. They are: 1) insight into past mortal conditions of self and others (*sumin ming* 宿命明); 2) supernatural insight into future mortal conditions (*tianyan ming* 天眼明); 3) nirvāṇa insight into present mortal conditions (i.e. sufferings) which enable the self to overcome passions or temptations (*loujin ming* 漏盡明).

The five illuminations (*wutong*) refer to the five supranormal powers. They are, as defined by Soothill and Hodous (123): 1) *divyacakṣus*, or deva-vision, “the instantaneous view of anything anywhere in the form-realm” (*tianyan tong* 天眼通); 2) *divyaśrotra*, the “ability to hear any sound anywhere” (*tianer tong* 天耳通); 3) *paracitta-jñāna*, the “ability to know the thoughts of all other minds” (他心通); 4) *pūrvanivāsānasmṛti-jñāna*, the “knowledge of all formed existences of self and others” (*sumin tong* 宿命通); 5) *ṛddhi-sākṣātkriyā*, the “power to be anywhere or do anything at will” (*shentong tong* 神通通).

⁴³ In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s 1943 novel *Le Petit Prince* (The little prince), the fox gives the prince this advice: “L’essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.”

⁴⁴ See his poem, “On Passing Through My Shining Estate” 過始寧墅, in *XLYJJZ*, 41. In this poem, Xie pledged that he would return in three years, though in fact he pleaded illness after about a year in office and returned home early.

can truly experience this unique place, with all of its various phenomena, which he calls home; others can merely read about it. And though readers are given detailed verbal maps of his home and its environs, they could never use it. This place belongs to Xie Lingyun alone, and there is no place like his home.

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