

Calling Back the Soul

The "Lyrics of Chu" have two formal soul-callings, "Calling Back the Soul" (*Zhao hun*) and "The Great Calling" (*Da-zhao*). Both are literary versions of a religious ritual in which the shaman calls back the soul of someone dead, dying, or otherwise not in full possession of the senses (comatose, soul-wandering). The shaman first describes the terrors that lie in wait for the soul in all directions, then the pleasures that the soul can enjoy if only it comes back to the palace or great house at the center. Of the two soul-callings, "Calling Back the Soul" seems closer to the religious ceremony, making reference to particular aspects of the shamanistic rite.

As literary traditions develop, we often find a process of division into parts and elaboration of the separate parts. In the soul-calling, the major division is between the description of terrors, intended to frighten the soul into returning, and the description of delights, intended to lure the soul back. "Calling Back the Recluse" (*Zhao yin-shi*) (p. 211), a Han work included in the "Lyrics of Chu," is a transformation of the segment of soul-calling describing terrors, with the violent landscape taking the place of the demon-inhabited cosmos of "Calling Back the Soul."¹

"Calling Back the Soul" (*Zhao hun*)

[The opening is apparently the fragment of a frame story.]

The god then gave word to Yang the Shaman, saying, "There is a man down below. I want to help him. His several souls are dispersing. Go cast the lots for him."

Yang the Shaman answered, "... Holder of Dreams ... high god ... hard to follow the traces. But if I must cast the lots, I fear that it is too late, for he is decaying and it will no longer be of any use."

Then Yang the Shaman went down and called:

¹The description of delights has a far richer history. "Seven Stimuli," a work by the Western Han writer Mei Sheng, is a good example of how, very early, the ritual function of soul-calling intersected with the Northern orator's sense of mission in moral persuasion. Here an orator tries to rouse a sick and dissipated prince from his malaise by describing a series of delights. Calling the soul back to physical health merges with recalling the prince to moral and spiritual health, and thus bringing good government to the polity. The verbal display of sensual delights is set in contrast to the display of moral pleasures. This became part of the justification of the poetic exposition (*fu*), but it was a problematic justification.

Soul! Turn back!
You have left your wonted frame—
why go to the four directions?
You forsake your places of delight
and will come upon cursed things.

Soul! Turn back!
No lodging for you in the east:
Giants a thousand cubits tall
seek only souls to eat.
Ten suns emerge in sequence,
melting metals, fusing stone.
All there find this usual,
but souls that go there soon dissolve.
Turn back! Turn back!
No lodging for you there.

Soul! Turn back!
No place to rest in the south.
Tattooed brows and blackened fangs
use meat of men in offerings,
and season their stew with the bones.
Cobras form jungle-tangles,
and giant foxes range a thousand miles.

Nine-headed stag-pythons
pass back and forth in a flash,
and swallow men to feed their minds.
Soul! Turn back!
No leisurely lingering there.

Soul! Turn back!
There is harm for you in the west,
where the sand flows for a thousand miles,
You whirl into the Thunder Pit,
you are ground to powder and may not rest.

If luck lets you escape,
beyond are boundless barrens.
With red ants like elephants
and black wasps like gourds.

Not one of the five grains grows,
clumps of straw-grass is the food.
The soil there grills a man,
he seeks water with none to be found.
He roams aimlessly with no shelter
in vast spaces that have no limit.

Soul! Turn back!
I fear you will bring yourself ruin.

Soul! Turn back!
No place to rest in the north.
Piling floes of ice loom high,
and the snows fly a thousand leagues.
Soul! Turn back!
You cannot stay there long.

Soul! Turn back!
Do not climb to the heavens.
By its nine-fold gates, leopards and tigers
rend men from Earth below.
Each one has nine heads
and tears up nine thousand trees.
And wolves turn their eyes upon you,
prowling around you in packs.
They string men up for sport,
then cast them into the deepest pit.
And only when the god ordains
can he close eyes in darkness at last.
Soul! Turn back!
Should you go, I fear your peril.

Soul! Turn back!
Go not down to the Unseen City.
The Ground-Earl has nine tails,
and his horns are razor-sharp.
His back is humped, his talons bloody,
he goes bounding after men.
Three are his eyes, a tiger's head,
and his body like a bull.
All of these find men savory,
Turn back! Turn back!
I fear you bring upon yourself doom.

Soul! Turn back!
Enter in through these soul-gates.
The Spell Master summons you,
goes before you walking backwards.

A basket from Qin, thread from Qi
laced over with Zheng's satins.
All summoning implements are on hand;
and now I keen and wail:
Soul! Turn back!
Come home where you used to dwell.

In Heaven, Earth, and the four directions
many are the evils and perils.
I will set forth semblances of your chambers,
secure, peaceful, and calm.
A high hall, closets deepset within,
rimmed with high-tiered balconies.
Banked terraces dense with belvederes
look down from the high hill.
Grillwork entries, interlaced vermilion,
with continuous angular friezes carved.
For winter here are deepset salons,
in summer the chambers are chill.
Gullies with streams run straight and bend back,
their currents babbling.
Sunlit breezes bend sweet clover
and send waves through the clumps of orchid.
Through the great hall into the back rooms
go vermilion awnings and mats.

Rooms faced with stone, kingfisher wings
hung from hooks of carnelian.
Quilts of kingfisher feathers and pearls,
each glowing with equal light.
Wall covers made of rush and crêpe,
gauze canopies extended.
Red and motley plaits, silks patterned and plain,
knotted to agate half-rings.

To be seen within the chambers
are many cherished marvels.
Bright candles, tallow scented with orchid,
of sparkling faces a full array.
In two rows of eight they wait at your bed,
taking turns for your evenings.

Chaste daughters of the nobility
much surpassing the commoners.
Piled hair and hanging tresses, styles not alike
fill full your grounds.

Well matched in figure and features,
they are truly the best of this age.
Gentle of face, firm of intent,
and, ah, they possess desire.

Comely features and tall statures
are found all through the harem.

Mothlike brows and liquid eyes
from which dark pupils flash.

Smooth faces, skin's glossy tracery,
from which glances of love are given.
Behind tall drapes in pavilions apart
they await upon my lord's leisure.

Kingfisher curtains and draperies
adorn the high halls.

Red walls and ochre boards
and beams faced with black jade.

Above you see the graven timbers,
with paintings of dragons and serpents.
Sitting in hall or leaning on rail
you look over curving basins.

There the lotuses begin to come out
mingled with waterlilies.

Watermallows with purple stalks
make patterns along with the waves.

Guards dressed in rare-patterned leopard skins
attend on the sloping shore.

When the great coach at last arrives,
both foot and horse stand in their ranks.

At the entry are planted orchid clumps,
trees like jewels form your hedge.

Soul! Turn back!

Why do you keep so far?

The household comes to show you reverence
with foods of many kinds.

Rice, millet, wheat, barley
combined with yellow millet.

The very bitter, the salty, the sour,
the hot and the sweet are used,

The leg tendons of the fat ox
cooked tender and smelling sweet.

Mixing the bitter and the sour,
they serve the broth of Wu.

Braised terrapin, lambs roasted whole,
there is sauce of sweet potato.

Sour-boiled goose, braised duck,
simmered swan and fishhawk.

Seared fowl, chowdered turtle
fiery, but not mouth-burning.

Doughballs and honey buns,
sweetcakes as well.

Precious brews, quaffed like mead,
brim feather-patterned flagons,
the pressed mash drunk chilled as ice,
and the clarified wine, cool.
Well-wrought ladles have been set
and there is the precious brew.
Turn back to your old chambers
where you are honored and free from offense.

Before those morsels make the rounds,
girl musicians move to their lines.
They ring the bells and roll the drums,
performing the recent songs:
“Wading the River,” “Pick Caltrops,”
then breaking into “O Brightness.”
And as the beauties grow more drunk,
their rosy faces flush.
Eye’s teasing gleam, the half-lidded gaze,
glances come wave upon wave.
Patterned cloaks, fine-woven gowns,
flashy but yet not garish.
Long tresses and trailing locks,
sensual, bright, and alluring.

In two rows of eight, in unison,
they begin the dances of Zheng.
Then, sleeves crossed like staves before them,
slowing the beat they withdraw.
With pipes’ and psalteries’ wild concert,
they hammer booming drums
Till the whole court of the great house shakes
and the “Frenzied Chu” begins.²
The lays of Wu, lyrics of Cai,
and they play the Great Lü.

Men and women are sitting together,
mixed and not kept apart.
Sashes and ribbons are cast down,
the places all in confusion.
Seductive diversions of Zheng and Wei
are performed mixed in among them.
But the coda of the “Frenzied Chu”
is the finest of them all.

Smoky-jade markers and ivory pieces
they play the game of Six Whites.

²The “Frenzied Chu” is a dance.

Dividing in teams, they attack together,
and press one another hard.
The throw succeeds, the score is doubled,
one shouts: "Five white!"

Horn buckles of Jin-craft,
aglow like bright suns.
Bells are rung, chime frames shake,
they sweep the catalpa-wood harps.

Joys of the wine are not set aside
as they pass through days and nights.
When bright lamps burning orchid oil
are set in their splendid frames.
Verses are made to speak longing,
with phrases finely wrought.
And in the heights of their passion,
joined hearts recite.
Drinking we reach the crest of pleasure
to give the ancestors joy.
Soul, turn back!
Return here where you once dwelled.

The Ending Song

The entering year, the onset of spring,
it was then that we made our way south.
The green leaves of duckweed lay even,
and the white iris grew.

Our course cut across the Lu River,
tall jungles lay to the left.
By the pools edging the floodplain,
our gaze swept wide and far.

Jet black steeds were yoked in teams,
a thousand chariots held the line.
The hunters' torches stretched off,
and the black smoke rose.

Those on foot reached to where we charged,
and the hunt leader galloped ahead.
We curbed their stampede to an easy gait,
then bent the chariots round to the right.
With the king I dashed through the fens,
we raced to see who would be the first.
The king himself made the shot,
the black buffalo was slain.

Red dawnlight follows the night,
the time does not let us linger.

Marsh orchids blanket the trail,
the path here fades away.

The river rolls in swollen floods,
above there are maples.
The eyes reach a full thousand leagues
wounding the heart in spring.
O soul! Turn back!
Have pity on the Southland.

"Calling Back the Recluse" (*Zhao yin-shi*) is attributed to a courtier of the Han prince of Huai-nan. Huai-nan was well to the east of the original Chu homeland, but it was the site of the last Chu capital at Shou-chun. The Han principality of Huai-nan included much of the region of Wu as well. It was in this large region that the "Lyrics of Chu" seem to have been preserved, and other works of the area show strong traces of old Chu learning, such as the essay collection compiled in the Huai-nan court, the *Huai-nan-zi*.

"Calling Back the Recluse" (*Zhao yin-shi*)

Dense groves of cassia in hills' hidden places,
writhing shapes rising, boughs locked together,
where hill vapors loom with rocks jutting high,
where chasms drop deep and waters raise waves.
Packs of apes shriek, leopards and tigers roar,
there he snapped cassia branches and lingered a while.

A royal prince wandered, he did not come home:
in spring the plants grew, thick and so green;
and then with year's ending, he grew dejected,
the cicadas were singing their mournful cries.

Jagged and craggy, clefts of the hills,
there the heart lingered, dazed with dread,
its murky recesses sent shivers of fright,
caves of leopards and tigers,
in deep forest thickets a man climbs from fear.

Steep is its sheerness, rocky and rugged,
looming and lofty, strewn with great stones,
tree limbs locked together,
woods dense with leaves and twigs;
green sedge grows between the trees,
and high grass rattles, whipped by winds.
The white deer and the hart,
sometimes bounding, sometimes still,
there poised on the heights, on the towering cliff,
in the gloomy chill and the soggy air.