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# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

### **Representing and Coping with Early Twentieth-Century Chongqing: “Guide Songs” as Maps, Memory Cells, and Means of Creating Cultural Imagery**

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#### **Abstract**

Chongqing’s “guide songs” form an interesting subgenre among the broad category of *haozi* 號子 (workers’ songs). These early twentieth-century songs were a form of rhythm-based oral narrative describing Chongqing’s urban spaces, river docks, and harbors. Each toponym mentioned in the lyrics was followed by a depiction of the characteristic associations, whether visible or symbolic, of the place. This article aims to analyze the verbal images of Chongqing presented in these songs in order to understand how the city was remembered, reproduced, and represented. The article deconstructs representations of the city produced by the lower classes, mainly by Sichuan boatmen, and links culturally meaningful images of urban spaces with the historical experiences of work, religion, and historical-mythical memory. It also points to the functions that oral narratives had in the urban environment of early twentieth-century Chongqing. Rhythmic and easy to remember, the songs provided ready-to-use guides and repositories of knowledge useful to anyone living or working there. A cross between utilitarian resource books and cultural representations, they shaped modes of thinking and visualizations of urban spaces and Chongqing. Finally, this article responds to the need to employ popular culture in our thinking about Chinese cities and the multiplicity of meanings they were given in pre-Communist times.

#### **Introduction**

Apart from occasional appearances in monuments and tourist-oriented shows, Sichuan boatmen are a thing of the past. Their environment, especially along the Yangtze River and in small vibrant cities along its shores, has been permanently altered due to construction of the Three Gorges Dam. Furthermore, Japanese bombing during the Second World War, Maoist industrialization, reform and opening (*gaige kaifang*), and wholesale reconstruction also contributed to the obliteration of the urban structure of old Chongqing (Sichuan’s main river

port).<sup>1</sup> All of these changes encouraged a somewhat nihilistic approach to the historical past, whose material remnants are now rarely found. On the other hand, both large-scale rural-urban migration and the modernization of modes of production and transportation render past cultures of work irrelevant to most people.

In this context of change, scholars have vigorously engaged with local history, trying to understand, rescue, and popularize the past of eastern Sichuan and Chongqing. A number of comprehensive history projects produced since the 1980s rendered a vision of urban life and urban change that emphasized the inclusiveness of the region within the broader Chinese polity; these studies also underlined the historical-dialectic evolution of the city and its advancement toward modernity.<sup>2</sup> Concurrently, much Western scholarship on Chinese cities has also emphasized the importance of modernity in the process of urban change.<sup>3</sup> It is not my intent here to criticize such approaches, but rather to point out the necessity of bringing popular (predominantly oral) sources into our thinking about the social and cultural history of Chinese urbanization. Focusing on noninstitutional and nonurban intelligentsia sources, such as popular working-class traditions, allows diversification of our views on the urbanization processes in post-Qing China.

In this article, I concentrate on the work-song tradition of eastern Sichuan boatmen. From the early Qing until the 1960s, boatmen constituted the majority of transportation workers in the province. They hauled, rowed, and sailed on wooden boats on the multiple waterways that spanned the province. My focus here is on one aspect of boatmen's social and cultural lives: the way they constructed and utilized images of the city. My main claim is that boatmen, through their sung oral traditions, conveyed a broad range of meanings and representations that both reflected and guided their understanding and imagining of the city (see figure 1).

Focusing on the case study of Chongqing work songs, I show that boatmen, having extensive contacts with the urban world, were deeply embedded within the city's culture—including its folk stories, regional religious cults, local rituals, and modes of work and production. These contacts allowed boatmen to fill provincial and urban spaces with names and images corresponding to regional culture. Nevertheless, boatmen songs were not simply mirrors of the city or guides to its current situation. Rather, they were reflections of what workers from late-Qing and Republican times saw from their social vantage point, within the scope of their knowledge and understanding of the moral order. Regardless of historical changes to urban

space, boatmen mapped their reality using geomantic symbolism, local myths, and images of goods that were often more symbolic than real.

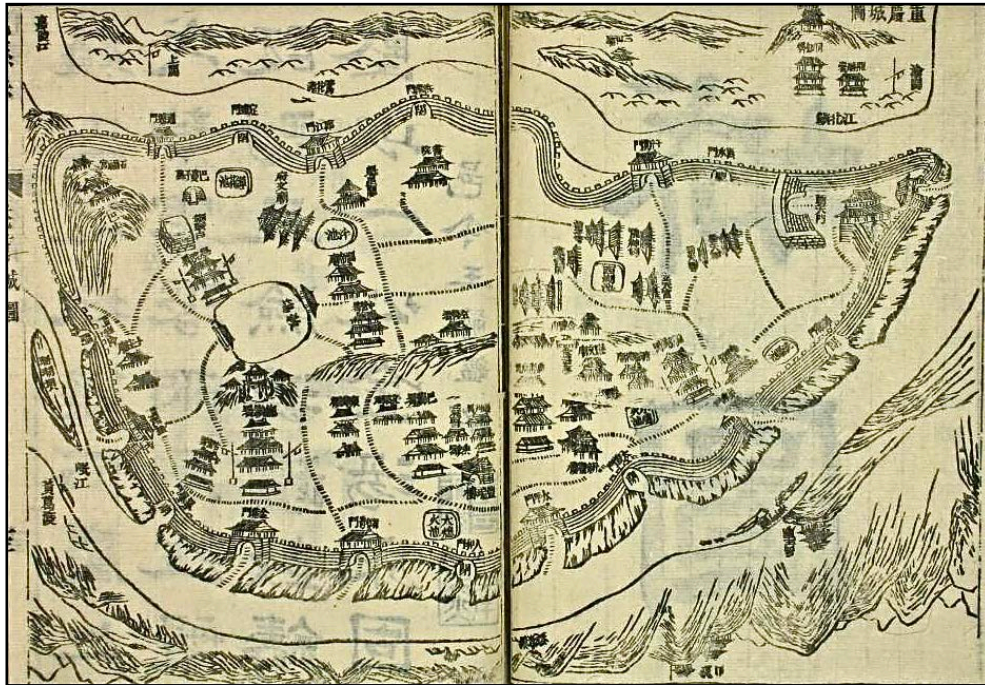


Figure 1. Map of the city of Chongqing, *Ba County Gazetteer*, 1761. Gates, both opened and closed, three *yamen* (county, circuit and subprovincial), main temples, wells, and a parade ground are all visible. *Source*: Wang Erjian (1761, n.p.).

## Methodology

### *Sichuan Boatmen*

Various forms of river transportation work have existed since the establishment of settled communities in the eastern Sichuan. The recent excavation of a funerary boat from the Ba Kingdom (n.d.–316 B.C.E.), which can be seen in Chongqing's Chinese Three Gorges Museum, provides material proof of early skill in river faring. Although many Chinese specialists viewed excavated artifacts as the ancient roots of local traditions, their claim does not stand up to historical evidence.<sup>4</sup> Paul Smith (1988) showed, for example that there was no demographic continuity in Sichuan due to the almost total annihilation of the region's population during the Yuan conquest and Ming-Qing transition period.

Moreover, the mid-Qing repopulation of Sichuan by people of central China (mostly from Hubei and Hunan), especially evident in the linguistic and institutional transformation of the eighteenth century, proves that local traditions had only ephemeral continuity (Lan and Huang 2009, 203–212). Additionally, in pre-Qing times, the rivers of eastern Sichuan and especially Upper Yangtze were not viable routes of trade but were, rather, exploited for military and official communication purposes. Only the development of cross-provincial trade in the eighteenth century and the regional boom and urbanization in the nineteenth century created the need for sharp expansion in river transportation (Wang Di 1989, 2002). Boatmen as a social and economic group grew out of this trade revolution. Multiple accounts claimed that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries more than ten thousand boats of various sizes were moored in Sichuan's main port at any time of the year (figure 2).<sup>5</sup> From trade surveys conducted and published in 1946, we know that most local river routes were covered by the services of traditional boatmen (Zhou, Hou, and Chen, 118–124). In fact, on the majority of routes, wooden boats successfully resisted competition from steamer companies until at least the 1960s.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2. Various types of boats moored in Chongqing river port. This picture vividly depicts the vicinity and interconnection between the social and physical spaces of the boatmen and dock-land populations. Photo by Fritz Weiss; used with the permission of Tamara Wyss.

The profession of Sichuan boatmen was characterized by its minute division of labor, which included the jobs of rower, boat puller (“tracker”), swimmer (the person who untied the ropes when blocked between the rocks), headman (the person who led the way and intoned songs), boat worker (the person who used long poles to push the boat away from the rocks or the shore), cook, helmsman, pilot, and captain. Some of these divisions also reflected social inequalities, roughly splitting the boat between entrepreneurs, who had a financial stake in each trip or co-owned the boat (mostly pilots, captains, and helmsmen) and wageworkers. Workers themselves were divided into roughly two groups: those who were permanently employed and seasonal workers. The former seem to have obtained their jobs through personal or secret-society associations; seasonal work was procured only for a short time to deal with daunting rapids. Despite these status divisions, boatmen seem to have shared the same culture, based largely on the oral transition of ideas and stories within largely masculine, river-based communities occupying the fringes of the settled world of cities and villages (figure 3).

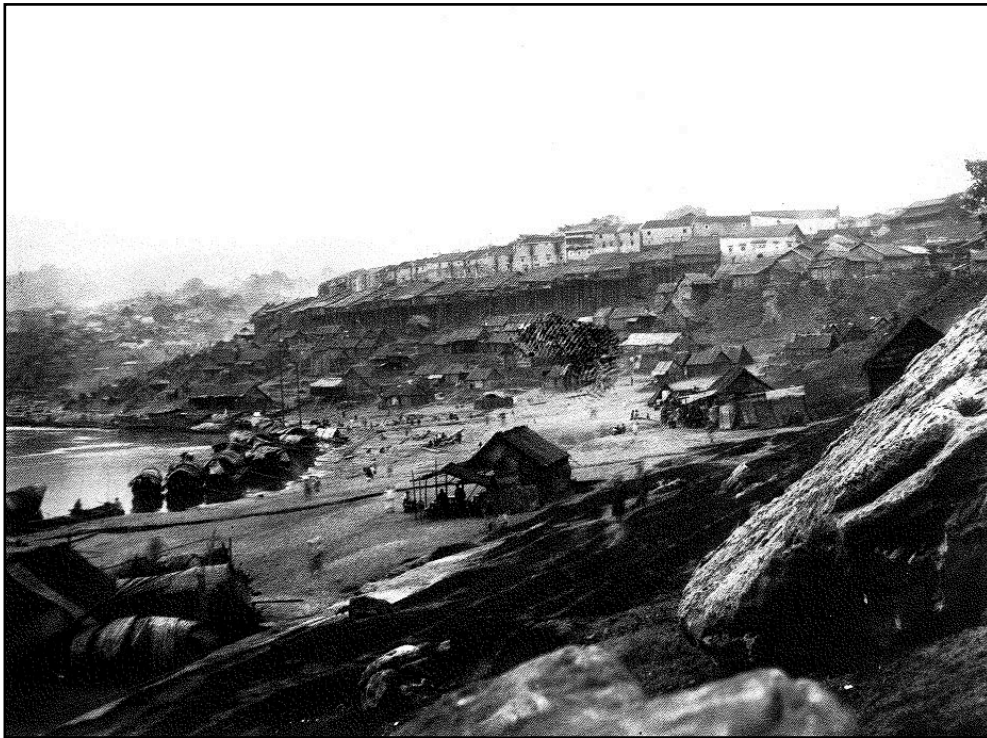


Figure 3. Tracking up the Yangtze Gorges. Photo by Fritz Weiss; used with the permission of Tamara Wyss.



*Popular Culture and Boatmen Songs*

Eastern Sichuan work songs are broadly classified as an example of popular culture (*minjian wenhua* 民間文化). This classification, in the context of late-imperial and Republican China, implies the nonliterary origin of the tradition and its mostly oral dissemination. The line between the popular and the elite in China was, as David Johnson's work makes clear, often blurry; the two realms did not exist separately, but mingled at numerous points in time (Johnson 1985, 67–68). I adopt a definition of culture and of “popular” proposed by Peter Burke:

“Culture” is an imprecise term, with many rival definitions; mine is “a system of shared meanings, attitudes, and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artifacts) in which they are expressed or embodied.” Culture in this sense is a part of a total way of life but not identical with it. As for popular culture, it is perhaps best defined initially in a negative way as unofficial culture, the culture of the non-elite, the “subordinate classes” as Gramsci called them. ([1978] 1983, xi)

The notion of unofficial culture better suits the case of boatmen traditions, as these were not an assertion of separate identity, but instead functioned within the overlaying cultural milieu and utilized it for the particular social, economic, and cultural needs of the group.

Work songs, in Chinese folklore studies and ethnographic and ethnomusicological scholarship, appear under the name *haozi* 號子, which is an all-encompassing category of songs chanted during work. The genre of *haozi* appeared in the earliest attempts at creating a corpus of Chinese popular songs/ballads (*min'ge/geyao*, 民歌/歌謠), yet its definition achieved maturity only during the period of intensive discussions taking place from the 1980s on.<sup>7</sup> Work songs were seen as one of the three big traditions of Chinese singing, which included also *shan'ge* (mountain songs) and *xiaodiao* (a genre of singing with instrumental accompaniment). In a 1989 article, Han Kuo-Huang used three underlying criteria—scales and modes, melodic progression, and musical form—to divide work songs into several categories: “transporting,” “construction,” “farming,” “sailing and fishing,” and “miscellaneous” (other professions) songs (1989, 113–116).<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the subclasses proposed, the definition of the work song was and has remained consistent. It is worth quoting here the definition provided by Han:

The Chinese name for this category, *haozi*, means “crying” or “shouting,” an indication of its origins in labor. The function of this type of song is to accompany work or to relieve hardship during work. Most work songs feature strong rhythms, and for each a basic rhythmic pattern underlies the entire piece. This is true of the work songs of any people in the world. Melodic material is rather limited and ostinato used frequently. Work songs are exclusively vocal and the range is normally wide. Texts are not organized in any established poetic form and there are numerous vocables used. Solo, unison, duet and call-and-response are typical manners of performance according to specific work conditions. There are five subtypes of work songs: 1. Transporting Songs. This subtype refers to songs sung by laborers who carry, drag, or push a heavy load. Due to the extreme physical requirements associated with these activities, most of the songs are short and sung in loud voices. [ . . . ] (1989, 113)

By the early 1980s, the definitions of work songs started to take on more regionalized meanings. In 1984, Kuang Tianqi made a distinction between the transportation songs confined to workers busy with moving objects on land, such as carrying sedan chairs, and unique river workers’ songs (or “trackers’ songs,” *chuangong haozi*). Within other categories he listed only production, construction, and rural songs (1984, 48–49). Such recognition of local particularity, thoroughly accepted by scholars, became a cornerstone of folklore studies on Sichuan, and especially Chongqing, worker culture. The 2000 *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* stated:

Among the Sichuan workers’ songs, the ones of river trackers are the most particular. . . . [They] have an individual cultural flavor. On every river of Sichuan where there were boats, workers sung; whatever was the river flow, *haozi* was adjusted to it; it directed the step, helped overcome rapids and waves. The voice and tune of *haozi* were set according to natural conditions, human nature, river slow or rapid flow, and boat’s load—all of them evoked and directed workers’ shouts [voices, or *huan* 呼喊]. (Sichuansheng difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, 621)

The definitions provided by Han and the *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* are complimentary and basically satisfactory. The former gives us a general understanding of the category, whereas the latter specifies its regional meaning. However, its assertion that these songs possess “individual cultural flavor” is acceptable only if we interpret “culture” as springing out of the boatmen’s historical socioeconomic conditions. Here, I would also enrich the definition of work songs by taking into account the ideas of Ted Gioia, who claimed that such traditions were indivisible elements of the work and life of the professions and should not



be considered as a separate or abstracted “art” (2006, 8–12). Gioia thus underlines the integral character of work songs, in which multiple functions (helping in work, communication, and expression of ideas) exist together.

Finally, the notion of Sichuan *haozi* has recently become more sophisticated as a result of musicological research and analysis. New divisions now manage to knit together particular tunes and voices present in the songs to the direction of movement (up- or down-river), the workers’ pace, conditions on the river, type of track followed, etc. Such factors influenced the rhythm and melody of songs, while the texts were injected freely according to the singer’s will.<sup>9</sup>

### *Collections*

In analyzing eastern Sichuan work songs we are necessarily constrained to work with the available edited collections of folklore. A unique set of recordings made by the Imperial German Consul General in Chengdu, Fritz Weiss (Max Friedrich Weiss, 1877–1955), in 1911 is, unfortunately, more useful for musicological purposes than for textual analysis.<sup>10</sup> The other existing collections—the outcome of the thorough, large-scale research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s—provide us with a fair number of song texts but are not free of problems connected to selection and editing.

Two editions of Sichuan work songs are particularly important. One was conceived as part of an investigation into provincial folklore and was published in 1989 under the title *Grand Compendium of Chinese Folksongs, Volume on Chongqing Municipality* (hereafter, *Grand Compendium*) (Nie, Peng, and He 1989). The other, titled *Work Songs of Sichuan Rivers*, consists of original research and reprints from previous publications. It was edited by two prominent local ethnographers, Duan Ming and Hu Tianchang, and came out in print in 2007.

The *Grand Compendium*, the main source for this article, was unprecedented in its scale and in the number of people involved in its production. Its aim was to gather and codify the most valuable elements of the local traditions—that is, works whose textual, musical, and moral values were outstanding. Such an approach, the editors claimed, led to “sifting through mud to find gold sand” and produced “small results for great efforts [invested]” (Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 3). What was considered “mud” were the traditions that offended contemporary senses of morality and appropriateness, typically related to what was seen to be vulgar, offensive, pornographic, or superstitious content. Nevertheless, the *Grand Compendium*—or at least its

Chongqing volume—cannot be viewed as a purified and politically correct edition, artificially divided from the milieu of the local culture. It contains a substantial number of informative songs about religious rituals, local beliefs, and, occasionally, ghosts and demons. Nor are the collected songs particularly restrictive in talking about desire, but one would not succeed in finding much about sex (except in the form of the frequently mentioned and named prostitutes). The vocabulary of the songs must sometimes have been edited; localisms are frequent, whereas swear words are rare. Still, what the authors presented was only 10 percent of all material gathered; the remainder was considered either repetitive or of little value. The *Grand Compendium* was not focused solely on work songs (*laodongge* 勞動歌), though it gives them prominent first place among other traditions. Other genres included in the volume are love songs (*qing'ge* 情歌), ritual songs (*yishige* 儀式歌), political songs (*shizhengge* 時政歌), life-condition songs (*shenghuoge* 生活歌), historical-narrative songs (*lishi chuanshuoge* 歷史傳說歌), and children's songs (*erge* 兒歌).<sup>11</sup> In choosing such an approach, the authors claimed that they not only restrictively followed the “Project regulations for publishing the compendium of Chinese folksongs” (*Zhongguo geyao jicheng bianji fang an*), but also that they adjusted them to the regional characteristics and historical conditions of the old-class society these songs represented (Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 2–7).

The tendency to overemphasize the revolutionary tradition in gathering popular songs, criticized by Yang Mu, is conspicuously absent in the Chongqing volume. Yang Mu (1994) claimed that revolutionary songs were not in fact popular but just sung by people on official, government-organized occasions. I find the almost total absence of this tradition quite problematic, however, both because these tunes are still in vogue among broad groups of urban Chinese and because it reveals another type of bias on the side of the editors. Early on, Stephen Jones pointed out that Chinese ethnographers were driven by a sentimental notion of restoring the traditional past, a past untouched by modernity or revolutions. Such an attitude among scholars led to the elimination of revolutionary songs and encouraged people to sing “real” songs, thus ignoring the much more flexible and adjustable character of popular traditions. In spite of these alterations, however, we can see that recorded song texts ultimately do represent the adjustable and amorphous nature of the genre. To some degree they resemble archeological excavations combining extremely disparate elements from various historical epochs.

The later collection, *Work Songs of Sichuan Rivers* (hereafter *Work Songs*), edited by Duan Ming and Hu Tianchang, is devoted only to boatmen songs and especially to their work songs. It is richer in form and content than the *Grand Compendium*, providing a thorough discussion of both music and texts. The authors also provide historical background (encompassing local history, society, and economy), musical notation of the melodies, musicological discussion of the genre, and biographies of the singers. Although much more sophisticated than *Grand Compendium*, *Work Songs* is not free of ideological choices and some historiographic mistakes. The authors chose what was considered the most valuable, and as with much current local scholarship, they overemphasized the antiquity of the tradition, following the curious trend of local particularism compounded with Chinese nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Third, though this is more a strength than a weakness of *Work Songs*, the book is directed more to ethnomusicologists than to historians. This is evident in the quality of the chapters devoted to the sonic characteristics of *haozi* compared to the discussion of this tradition's historical development.

### *Guide Songs*

Scholars of Sichuan *haozi* originally distinguished the songs not on the basis of lyrical content but on the basis of their musical characteristics. This approach had certain shortcomings from the perspective of textual research, yet it was fully justified on the basis of musicological interpretation. Focusing on musical characteristics meant taking into consideration situations in which the songs were chanted and trying to grapple with the changeable pace and melody so characteristic of this genre. The weakness of such an approach, however, was that it did not address the diverse topics—such as descriptions of rivers and cities, social criticism, work conditions, prayers, love songs, and folk stories—contained in Sichuan *haozi*.

In *Work Songs*, Duan and Hu attempted to distinguish the traditions on the basis of their texts. They created a set of categories such as: expressing love for one's native land (*xiangtu fangqing lei* 鄉土風情類), boatmen's lives (*chuangong shenghuo lei* 船工生活類), love songs between men and women (*nannü lianqing lei* 男女戀情類), waking calls (*xingshi jingyan lei* 醒世警言類), speaking ill of the government (*baobian shizheng lei* 褒貶時政類), legends and stories (*chuanshuo gush lei* 傳說故事類), and others (*qita lei* 其他類). The twenty-nine songs

gathered under the heading of “expressing love for one’s native land” are all descriptions of places in Sichuan, such as its river valleys or particular cities (most prominently Chongqing and Hechuan).<sup>13</sup> Such a category is, however, problematic, since it implies or even imposes local patriotism on the songs rather than focusing on their functions and meanings. These songs were less expressions of warm feelings than expressions of one’s social class, its worldview, trove of knowledge, and interpretations. Above all, these songs functioned as guides; they contained a large amount of accurate geographic information, consisting of place names sequenced according to the way boatmen traveled on the rivers and within the cities.<sup>14</sup> This characteristic is clearly visible in a typical song called “Counting Rapids” (Shu tan) (Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 13), which describes a river trawl from Chongqing down the Yangtze:

朝天門開船兩條河， *Starting from Facing Heaven Gate, you face two rivers,*  
 大佛寺落眼打一方； *From Great Buddha Temple look down the current;*  
 茅溪橋落眼楊八灘， *From Straw Brook Bridge look to Eight Rapids of Poplar Trees,*<sup>15</sup>  
 黑石子落眼下寸灘； *From Black Stone look down to Inch Rapid;*  
 張幺河下朱老灘， *From Zhang’s First River to Old Zhu’s Rapid,*  
 到了唐家沱要點關； *When you come to the Tang’s Mansion Bay, stop for a while;*<sup>16</sup>  
 大興場落眼黃臘灘， *From Great Prosperity Field look down to the Beach of Yellow Cured Meat,*  
 豬鴨子下碓巴灘； *From Pig and Duck down to Pounding Stick Rapid;*  
 [ . . . ]

Because of the geographic focus of these songs, I refer to them as “guide songs.” My concern here is what filled this functional frame. What did the images put in the songs mean and why were they there?

### Imagining the City

In the following pages, I consider how boatmen saw, represented, and understood two important aspects of Chongqing urban life: its markets and its places of religious-mythical significance. I will treat each of them briefly on the basis of the two songs that focus most on this city: “Among Sichuan Harbors One Has to Count Chongqing” (Sichuansheng shuimatou yao shu Chongqing) and “Talking of Chongqing” (Shuo Chongqing) (Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 1–2 and 5–8, respectively).

*Picturing the Markets*

The song “Among Sichuan Harbors” lists the gates to the city, at the same time giving us an approximate orientation of riverside markets in Chongqing (for full song text, see Appendix). For example:

[...]  
 千廝門花包子雪白如銀, *Thousand Servant Gate [Qiansimen], snow-white bundles worthy as silver,*  
 臨江門賣木材樹料齊整, *River Overlooking Gate [Linjiangmen] sells wood lined in perfect order,*  
 [...]  
 南紀門菜籃子涌出涌進, *Gate of Regulating Southern Kingdoms [Nanjimen] is crossed by baskets filled with vegetables.<sup>17</sup>*  
 [...]  
 儲奇門賣藥材供人醫病, *Holding Marvel Gate [Chuqimen] is where medicine is sold to treat the sick,*  
 太平門賣的是海味山珍, *Great Peace Gate [Taipingmen] is where rare delicacies are sold,*  
 [...]

Gates and docks in eastern Sichuan cities formed a unified space, being in very close proximity. At the same time, gates and docks often functioned as markets for the particular goods unloaded at them. The goods listed in the excerpt above were traditional products of Sichuan, the trading of which earned Chongqing much of its wealth. Two of these commodities need some explanation. “Snow-white bundles worthy as silver” most certainly referred to salt, for centuries the main export product of Sichuan. Salt was extracted in multiple areas of the province, but the biggest center was Zigong, a city up the Yangtze River from Chongqing (Von Glahn 1987, 72–87). “Rare delicacies” probably referred to a variety of food products brought to the city from the southwest of China, Southeast Asia, and the Lower Yangtze regions. While “Among Sichuan Harbors” gives rather laconic information about local markets, “Talking of Chongqing” is much more outspoken. It would be impractical to quote at length this *haozi* of sixty-five verses; therefore a few lines must suffice for our purpose (for full text, see Appendix). The song offers a detailed itinerary into the city, starting similarly to “Among Sichuan Harbors” (with few alterations), but later venturing into various wards and streets of Chongqing:

“朝天門”開字號兌換金銀。 *Facing Heaven Gate opens to shops changing gold and silver.*

What follows is a list of traditional goods and local produce. The song pilots from market to market as if trying to show all one could buy in Chongqing:

“道門坎”賣瓜帽還賣鉛粉， *Ridge of the Way [Daomenkan] sells gourd hats and lead powder,*<sup>18</sup>

“雙火牆”賣氈帽又賣氈纓。 *Twin Fire Wall sells [Shuanghuoqiang] felt hats and felt tassels.*

[...]

“大匠街”賣銅器又賣冬筍， *Great Artisan Street [Dajiangjie] sells brass ware and winter bamboo shoots,*

“新街口”賣衣綫又賣頭繩。 *New Street Door [Xinjielkou] sells cloth threads and ropes.*

[...]

“大梁子”賣冬帽又賣衣衾， *Great Beam [Daliangzi] sells winter hats and quilts,*

“神仙口”賣毛飾又包赤金。 *Immortals Door [Shenxiankou] sells woolen ornaments and red gold bundles.*

“泰子齋”教門館出售好餅， *Marvelous Peace [Taiziqi], in front of the school they sell delicious cakes,*

[...]

“米花街”賣布匹打成捆捆， *Rice Flower Street [Mihuajie] sells cloth tied into bundles, [etc., ...]*

Goods could be small or large, imports from the province or local handicrafts. The song represents a division of the city into specialized streets, each with shops carrying a single type of merchandise. Not much research has been conducted about the organization of city space in Chongqing, yet we know that at least throughout the Qing this was a prevalent mode of registering and locating trades and crafts (Gou 2011, 115–127). Evidence from other cities in Sichuan, especially Wang Di’s findings about Chengdu streets (2003, 23–44, 68–76), points to the accuracy of such representation. Some Chongqing street names, such as Wood Sellers Street (Muhuojie), Medical Herbs Street (Caoyaojie), and Porcelain Street (Ciqijie), also seem to point in this direction.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 4. “General Map of the Prefecture of Chongqing,” Guangxu year twelve (1886). *Source:* Li and Lei (2007, 2–3).

At times, “Talking of Chongqing” references specialties, such as cakes sold by the school gate. We cannot know whether the local baker was famous, or if the deliciousness of the cakes was a personal opinion of the song’s author or an addition of the singer recorded by the collectors. Cakes were not the only foodstuffs enjoyed, and knowledge about where to find fresh products or which places to avoid was of some importance:

“大陽溝”菜市場街不乾淨, [...] *Great Sun Creek [Dayanggou], vegetable market is not clean,*

Wine is another example of a local product lauded in popular tradition:

“洪崖洞”到伏天涼快得很,  
廟堂內豆花酒遠近聞名。  
*Cave of the Flooded Cliff [Hongyadong], on hot summer days is very cool,  
In the temple inside, bean-flower wine [is] far and near renowned.*



At least since 1750 (Qianlong 15th year), Hongyadong was a place revered by literati for its unique beauty—a waterfall flowing in the cave naturally cut in the high cliff of Chongqing. Many auspicious spirits were believed to reside there, which motivated scholars to carve cave walls with sculptures and inscriptions (Wang and Xiang [1939] 1967).<sup>20</sup> In 1939, the cave was still one of the main sights in the city with a sizable temple located inside (Lu 1939, 82–83). Interestingly, only in the work songs does there appear a remark about wine that was sold in the cave (or in its environs).

### *Religious and Mythical Imagery*

The first lines of “Among Sichuan Harbors” immediately push us into the world of the geomantic and religious imagery held by the boatmen:

四川省水碼頭要數重慶，	<i>Among Sichuan Harbors one has to count Chongqing,</i>
開九門閉八門十七道門：	<i>Nine gates open, eight gates closed, together seventeen gates;</i>
朝天門大碼頭迎官接聖，	<i>Facing Heaven Gate [Chaotianmen], great dock, invites officials, receives holies,</i>
[...]	

Urban images were constructed by the imagination of a mythical space. They were built by the memories and histories engraved more in the mind than in the stone and wood of Chongqing. The imagination of space had a cosmological meaning, representative of auspicious animals and shapes connoting moral fundamentals. As is visible in the *haozi* “Talking of Chongqing,” the city was seen (and made real through buildings and wells placed according to geomantic principles, or feng shui) to have the shape of a giant turtle, a potent symbol of longevity and persistence (Williams [1932] 1989, 403–406):

“沙井灣”“鹽井坡”烏龜眼睛。	<i>Sand Well Bend [Shajingwan], Salty Well Slope [Yanjingpo] are tortoise eyes.</i>
“三元廟”不撞鐘光是敲磬；	<i>Temple of Three Seasons [Sanyuanmiao], to make an empty sound, do not strike the bell,<sup>21</sup></i>
“龜頭山”敲了鐘不得安寧。	<i>Tortoise Head Mountain [Guitoushan], when the bell tolls one cannot remain in peace.</i>

The connection between magical animals lay in the same sphere of belief as the conception of numeric power. It was believed that an appropriate manipulation of the latter could protect people from harm and contribute to their success. Both traditions of Chongqing thus insisted on repeating a formula of number of city gates that corresponded with Nine Palaces and Eight Trigrams (*jiugong bagua* 九宮八卦)—a geomantic compass:

開九門閉八門十七道門[.] *Nine gates open, eight gates closed, together seventeen gates*  
[.]

The verses quoted above have received a great deal of attention from Chinese scholars and intellectuals, who to different degrees associated the shape and geomantic qualities of Chongqing city walls with premeditated actions by its constructors, Southern Song official Peng Daya (flourished before 1241) and early Ming official Dai Ding (fl. 1371) (Zhou Yong 2002, 147–150; Peng 2001, 57–58). Peng Botong insists that feng shui was intentionally applied by both constructors, drawing evidence from a quotation from the treaty called *Shuzhong guangji* (1643) by a late-Ming geographer, Cao Xuequan. Cao stated: “Today the circuit capital has seventeen gates, nine opened and eight closed; they resemble Nine Palaces and Eight Trigrams, or the turtle’s head turned toward Mountain Tu.”<sup>22</sup> It would be difficult to find much of the detail presented by Cao Xuequan, or an awareness of the people it mentioned, in the Chongqing *haozi*. Nevertheless, we can see that a number of motifs persisted in local culture and were engraved in the popular vision of the city, its shape, and the meaning of particular places that it contained.

“Talking of Chongqing” tells us which cults were revered by the commoners. Although there is insufficient proof that the whole city was conceived as being imbued with supernatural power, its various parts certainly were considered efficacious due to the presence or action of gods or the congregation of geomantic power. Qiansimen (the Thousand Servant Gate), for example, was recalled thus:

“千廝門”雞毛土地靈得很, *Thousand Servant Gate, Chicken Feather God’s efficacy is great,*  
還雞願燒香火要數船民。 *And wishes fly with incense smoke, innumerable crowds of boatmen come.*

Boatmen revered their particular local god and associated it with a city gate—the part of Chongqing they visited most. Chicken Feather God was a hero of popular stories, whose name derived from thanksgiving chicken blood sacrifices practiced by rivermen on their arrival at Chongqing. According to one story, he was a weasel reborn into a Bodhisattva caring for the life and safety of boatmen traveling on the Jialing River (Jialingjiang) as well as of the people residing close to the Thousand Servants Gate.<sup>23</sup> Another legend, in which this local spirit warns people of the conflagration that was to strike Chongqing in 1949, even portrays him as a local god of all lower-class people in the city (Jin et al. 1992, 63–65).

Cults of a bigger social scope, sometimes those valid throughout the whole Chinese world, were also mentioned in the songs. Among them we can find a King of Hell, Yama, prevalent in Buddhist narratives about the afterlife, as well as a Daoist savior-god, Zhenwu, or True Warrior.<sup>24</sup>

“十王殿”供得有十殿閻君。 *Ten Kings Palace [Shiwangdian] has ten palaces for Yama.*<sup>25</sup>

[...]

“浮圖關”咽喉地上省路徑， *Futu Pass [Futuguan] is the throat through which road enters the province,*<sup>26</sup>

兩條河圍繞着重慶山城。 *Two rivers surround the mountain city of Chongqing.*

“真武山”鐵桅杆永鎮巴郡， *Zhenwu Mountain [Zhenwushan]—Peak of Iron Masts—overlooks Ba Prefecture,*<sup>27</sup>

新年時朝山客求簽敬神。 *On New Year's people toward the mountain pay respects and ask for help.*

Chongqing songs were not entirely insensitive to the historical heroes that hailed from the city, but it is noteworthy that only one name appears in this tradition:

“七星崗”走下来”巴蔓子墳”。 *Seven Stars Mound [Qixinggang] walk down to Bamanzi grave.*

Bamanzi was a hero from the Warring States period, and the location and authenticity of his grave is debatable (Peng 2001, 34–36). On the other hand, he was a hero of a significant presence within local traditions, and his story circulated broadly among both literary and

plebeian circles of local society at least from the time Chang Qu composed his *Records of the States South of Mountain Hua* (*Huayang guozhi*), in the fourth century (see Liu 1984, 32).

History, whether fairly recent or shrouded in myth, was engraved in public places. For example, the only “piazza” of old Chongqing, an open space where major streets intersected, was associated with the following images:

“較場壩”地方寬多少美景, *Parade Field [Jiaochengba], is a broad place, how many  
spectacular views,*  
談生意講買賣賺金賺銀。 *Talking business, bargaining, earning gold and silver,*  
想當年春秋操好不齊整, *In these years all is without any order,*  
眾教頭操壩上大練兵丁。 *[When] crowds of privates are put to drill.*

Jiaochengba was seen as a place from which one could not only have an interesting and splendid view but also entertain oneself with a variety of visual experiences, viewing traders, bustling crowds, or soldiers drilled by their officers. According to research conducted by Peng, Jiaochengba was the place where, in the year 1600, Li Hualong (1554–1611), a Ming general famous for a successful Korean campaign, received oaths from troops preparing to suppress Yang Yinglong’s (1554–1600) aboriginal rebellion (2001, 92–93).<sup>28</sup> It also saw the dismemberment (*zhe 磔*) of imperial officials by the soldiers of the most infamous Sichuan rebel, Zhang Xianzhong. During the early Qing, the Yanwuting [Hall of Martial Arts], a place used for reviewing troops (*yuebing 閱兵*), stood on one side of the field. Eventually, however, houses started to cover the open space. By the last decades of the Qing, the old “piazza” was covered with narrow streets filled with shops of all kinds. In the 1920s, it was reconstructed to adjust to car traffic, becoming one of the main urban intersections (Peng 2001, 92–93). With its bustling markets and crossing traffic, Jiaochangba was described in stories as a place where the city lived to the fullest, a place where messy and colorful crowds congregated, busy with their daily duties and pastimes.

### Locating the Meaning of Images

Looking at the song texts presented above, it is worth examining what they did, in fact, represent. Was there a city like the one pictured in the songs? If we look at “Among Sichuan Harbors,” we can immediately read its neat division between particular objects of trade and gates

where these goods were received. However, such a description is not supported by other records from the late eighteenth century through the 1930s, when both the gates and docks were restructured to adjust to the needs of car and steamer traffic, respectively. There is little indication that a trade in salt was conducted solely at the Qiansimen or that Nanjimen was marked as the main entry point for groceries. The trade in other mentioned products, such as wood and medicine (one associated with Linjiangmen, the other with Chuqimen), although strongly proved to have been conducted in Chongqing, has not been confirmed as having been exclusively related to those specific areas of the city at any particular historical time. In the case of medicinal herbs, we can presume some relation between the location of *huiguan*, certainly the biggest business establishment in Qing Chongqing, and the port of entry, but this argument is forced at best.<sup>29</sup>

The stanzas depicting ritual practices of the city seem to be more accurate. Before urban restructuring conducted by the warlord Liu Xiang (1888–1938) and the mayor Pan Wenhua (1886–1950), during the decade preceding the Sino-Japanese War, Chaotianmen was indeed a place of receiving officials and meeting religious processions. The main city gate was a place of ritual importance, celebrated by literati for its scenic values as much as for its historical significance.<sup>30</sup> As the main entrance to Chongqing, it was built above the most active dock, which was placed at the confluence of Jialing and Yangtze and therefore provided a natural landing place for boats traveling on both rivers. The ritual functions of the gate were thus not the main activities performed there, but they were the most splendid, meaningful, and worth mentioning.

It is more difficult to assess the detailed description of the city presented in “Talking of Chongqing.” Long lists of goods, place names, temples, gates, and so forth suggest accuracy, easily leading one to believe that the song is a reliable guide to the city. All the street names can be easily confirmed through a careful reading of the Guangxu 12th year (1886) “Chongqing Prefecture Capital Map” (Li and Lei 2007, 8–13), as well as street lists in the Ba County Gazetteer of 1939 (Wang and Xiang [1939] 1967, 229–238). Nonetheless, we cannot determine whether or not the areas of the city mentioned in the song were, in fact, those where trade was conducted, or whether such sectioning of particular professions was characteristic of Chongqing. Considering that the place names recorded in the song are possible to confirm for the period stretching from roughly the mid-nineteenth century until the early 1940s, we could assume that

the represented city corresponded to some extent with the city's condition during that hundred-year timeframe.<sup>31</sup> Yet, on examination of the economic development of Chongqing from the time it became a treaty port and most prominently from the fall of Qing, we can see that new elements of the city's development are included in the song. This is especially evident in two fields: marketing structure and production. From at least the beginning of the twentieth century we can observe twin processes affecting the urban structure of Chongqing: first, the opening of manufactories and small factories focused on reeling silk and producing cotton yarn, bristle, matches, glass, and various machine tools, as well as printing presses; second, the concentration of markets into so-called "model markets," though without eliminating the local food and fish markets spread throughout all districts of the city.<sup>32</sup>

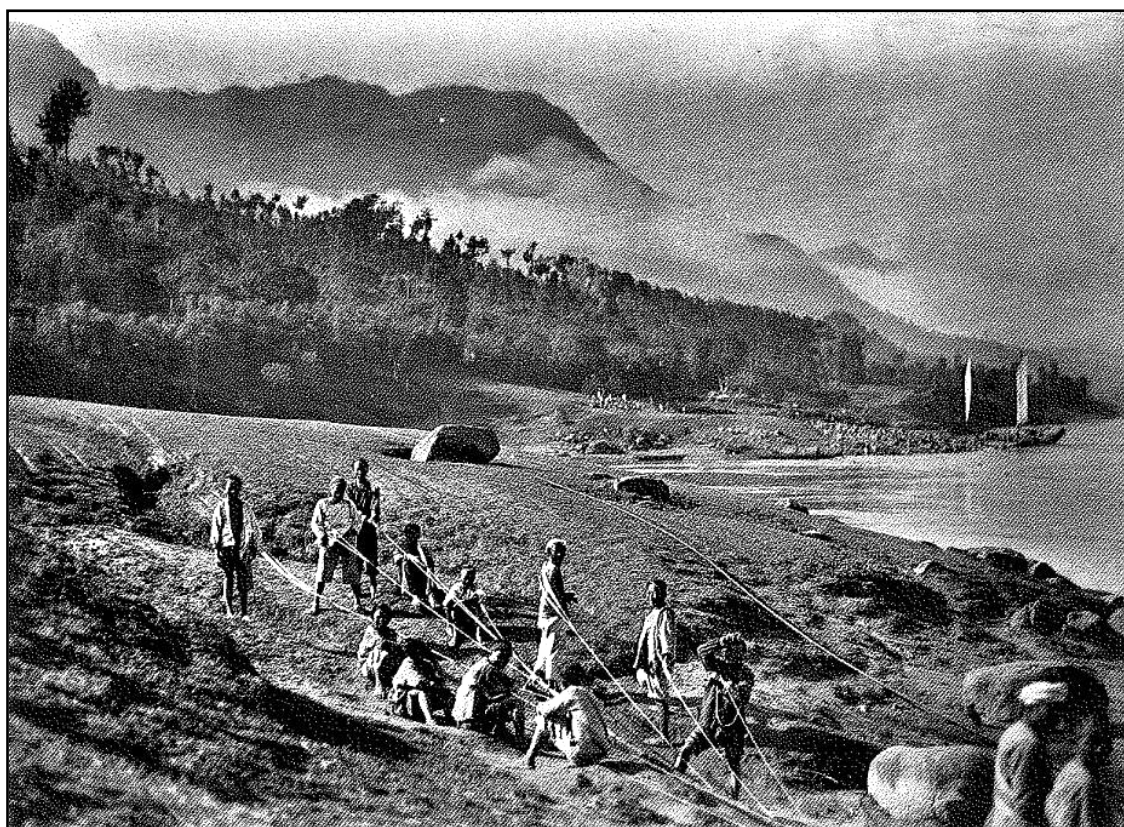


Figure 5. In the album belonging to Tamara Wyss, this picture is said to depict Wanxian, although Dai (2007, 18) speculates that it may actually show Chongqing. Irrespective of the location, the picture gives a unique view of the multilayered urbanization in Eastern Sichuan, which consisted of boats, also serving as houses; makeshift stilt houses between the riverbanks and the city walls; and a permanent urban settlement inside the walled city. Photo by Fritz Weiss; used with the permission of Tamara Wyss.

The fact that none of these changes were included in “Talking of Chongqing” suggests that the world it describes precedes 1891, the year when Chongqing was designated as “open port” and when large-scale restructuring was jump-started. To my mind, however, it is too simplistic to assume that this popular tradition, as others, was simply a photograph of the preindustrial and also precolonial reality. Instead, I believe that these traditions represent what was considered the native trade of Sichuan and Chongqing—a source of long-standing urban prosperity and culturally meaningful symbols of richness. If we look at the products mentioned in the song—silk, lead powder, winter bamboo sprouts, cloth quilts, iron pots, chopsticks, foodstuffs, mountain products, and medicine—we can find in them a statement of Chongqing power over regional trade during Qing. A curious confirmation of this point comes to light when we compare the mentioned goods with those taxed in the second half of the eighteenth century: mountain goods, Guangdong goods, medicine, iron pots, porcelain, cotton, silk, groceries, oils, alcohol, spices, pork, bristle, and so on (Wang Erjian 1761).<sup>33</sup> Or, as gazetteer compiler Wang Erjian stated in another place: “The produce of all Sichuan [Shu] congregates in Chongqing [Yuzhou], flowing to it by three rivers and gathering in this crossroad where innumerable goods can be found” (1761).<sup>34</sup> This statement followed a long list of native products such as medicine, porcelain, wooden and bamboo utensils, tea, wine, and other foodstuffs (beans, bamboo sprouts, fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts, spices, and so on); certain “forest goods,” such as furs of tigers, panthers, jackals, deer, monkeys, foxes, otters, badgers, and boars, found their place on the list as well (Wang Erjian 1761). The correspondence between the “traditional” trades of Western Sichuan, whose pivotal point was Chongqing, and the products mentioned in the songs is quite straightforward. How, then, should this urban representation be interpreted?

I insist that these popular traditions portray an image of the city transcending the needs of a guide. As their primary function was to map the spaces traveled by the boatmen, the listed place names were joined with messages that were commonly shared and culturally loaded. In case of Chongqing, it was a message of local urban pride in a prosperous center where all goods of the provinces were gathered. By marveling at the goods that filled urban markets from at least the early Qing, the boatmen expressed their sense of beauty. Local goods and products stunned them to an equal extent as, for example, religious festivals or spectacular views. The songs thus did not provide a guide to the markets of the city, but to the city as it was imagined, felt, and remembered, ignoring its more recent fluctuations and changes, which more often than not



antagonized the previous vision. If we consider that both of the songs analyzed here were collected in the 1980s, the prevalence of this urban image, rooted in the early glory of eighteenth-century prosperity, is quite instructive. It shows clearly the role of popular culture in mirroring the ideas, beliefs, and assumptions held by people, but not in neatly representing the elements of their “real” material existence.

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## Appendix: Song Texts

### 四川省水碼頭要數重慶（船工號子）

四川省水碼頭要數重慶，開九門閉八門十七道門：  
朝天門大碼頭迎官接聖，千廝門花包子雪白如銀，  
臨江門賣木材樹料齊整，通遠門鑼鼓响抬埋死人，  
南紀門菜籃子涌出涌進，金紫門對着那鎮臺衙門，  
儲奇門賣藥材供人醫病，太平門賣的是海味山珍，  
東水門有一口四方古井，對着那真武山魚跳龍門。  
(*Grand Compendium*, Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 1–2)

### 說重慶

四川省水碼頭要數重慶，開九門閉八門十七道門：  
朝天門大碼頭迎官接聖，千廝門花包子雪白如銀，  
臨江門開木廠樹料齊整，通遠門鑼鼓响抬埋死人，  
南紀門菜籃子涌出涌進，金紫門對着那鎮臺衙門，  
儲奇門賣藥材治人疾病，太平門賣的是海味山珍，  
東水門白鶴亭香火旺盛，正對着“真武山”古廟涼亭，  
“較場壩”地方寬多少美景，談生意講買賣賺金賺銀。  
想當年春秋操好不齊整，眾教頭操壩上大練兵丁。  
“三牌坊”富貴家表之不盡，“魚市口”到冬至要殺犯人。  
“學堂灣”“九眼橋”使人不信，橋頭上賣綢緞又賣綳綾。  
“道門坎”賣瓜帽還賣鉛粉，“雙火牆”賣氈帽又賣氈纓。  
“朝天門”開字號兌換金銀。“過街樓”賣蒸籠又（火+巴=熱）又滾，<sup>35</sup>  
“沙井灣”“鹽井坡”烏龜眼睛。“三元廟”不撞鐘光是敲磬；  
“龜頭山”敲了鐘不得安寧。  
“千廝門”雞毛土地靈得很，還雞愿燒香火要數船民。

“大匠”街賣銅器又賣冬筍，”新街口”賣衣綫又賣頭繩。  
 “長安寺”第一山千年古景，”后伺坡”看得見大河半城。  
 “大梁子”賣冬帽又賣衣衾，”神仙口”賣毛飾又包赤金。  
 “泰子齋”教門館出售好餅，轉過彎就是那”中營衙門”  
 “米花街”賣布匹打成捆捆，大街上小巷內坡坎不平。  
 “關爺廟”偃月刀生鐵鑄定，”桂花街””楊柳街”路窄難行。  
 “都郵街”分上下街長得很，”華光廟””會仙橋”通城有名。  
 “羅漢寺””治平寺”兩廟鄰近，”藥王廟”賣筷子價錢相應。  
 “東岳廟”織綾子機聲陣陣，”十王殿”供得有十殿閻君。  
 “大陽溝”菜市場街不干乾淨，”夫子池”有一个”學府衙門”。  
 “石板坡””黃葛樹”真正清靜，”香水橋”那條溝直通河心。  
 “九尺坎”原本有千年古景，”炮臺”上有一尊鐵炮將軍。  
 “洪崖洞”到伏天涼快得很，廟堂內豆花酒遠近聞名。  
 “大井灣””小井灣”說鬼迷信，”江北”面碛壩上扎過軍營。  
 “五福宮”地勢高全城看盡，”七星崗”走下來”巴蔓子墳”。  
 “浮圖關”咽喉地上省路徑，兩條河圍繞着重慶山城。  
 真武山鐵桅杆永鎮巴郡，新年時朝山客求簽敬神。  
 重慶城景致多難以說盡，最奇怪笑人窮不笑人淫。  
 (*Grand Compendium*, Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 5–8)

### Notes

1. See Maeda (2009) and Tow (2011).
2. See Wei (1989), Wei (1991), and Zhou Yong (2002).
3. There is an extensive literature on this topic; for an overview, see Ma (2006). Some of the more important recent works include Esherick (2000), Lee (1999), Carroll (2006), Stapleton (2000), and Yeh (2007).
4. For an official historical narrative about the development of Sichuan river transportation, see Zheng, Zhu, and Fu (2005, 12–22, 47–51) and the China Three Gorges Museum website (<http://www.3gmuseum.cn/article.asp?3-9-369-2>).
5. None of the observers provided an accurate number of the boats moving on the main rivers of Sichuan or moored in Chongqing. An estimate made by the Japanese Consulate in 1921 pointed to an overall number of 20,000 boats in Sichuan and 1,000 connecting Yichang and Chongqing (Matsuura and Dong 2010, 245–246). A higher number of boats entering Chongqing was given by Wang Di: from 607 in 1891 to 2,908 in 1899, stabilizing around 2,300 during the next decade (2002, 42–43). The drop in number of boats can be associated with the competition from companies operating steamers. See descriptions by Bird ([1899] 2010, 114–137, 148–149), Basil and Lewis (1940, 221–222), Little ([1888] 2010, 206–207), and Spencer (1938). Graham pointed to the number of people employed in transportation: “An important profession is that of boatman or tracker. Hundreds of thousands are employed in this way” ([1961] 1967, 23). See also Great Britain Foreign Office (1898, 29).

6. Jasienica saw a large number of traditional boats on Yangtze during his trip in 1956 ([1957] 2008, 207–208). Also see Dwyer (1961).
7. See Tuohy (1999, 48–50), Chang Jun (2009), and Chao (1942).
8. Qian Rong (1993, 71–74) also added chanting songs, which were, in his mind, unjustly placed between more leisure forms of *xiaodiao*. Both opinions broadly agree with the definition in the *Chinese Encyclopedia, Music Volume* (Zhongguo dabaike quanshu zongbianji weiyuanhui Yinyue wudao bianji weiyuanhui 1989). For an analysis of the genres and related discussions, see Tuohy (1999).
9. This approach was adopted in *Sichuansheng zhi* and in the work of Duan and Hu (2007).
10. Using Edison's wax cylinder phonograph, Weiss recorded eight *haozi* in the docks of Chongqing. His previous recordings conducted during the trip up-Yangtze in the same year were unfortunately lost by the courier company. For more on wax cylinders and Weiss's correspondence, see Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv Walzensammlungen (1912).
11. More than 7,000 songs were collected, out of which 1,300 were chosen for publication in various collections. The *Grand Compendium's* Chongqing volume contains 605 of them: 105 work songs, 70 political songs, 155 love songs, 100 life condition songs, 9 historical narrative songs, and 64 children songs (Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 2–3, 11).
12. For a historical analysis of Sichuan work songs see Duan and Hu (2007, 329–346).
13. The *Grand Compendium* contains only six examples of such songs, though not classified separately as in the case of *Work Songs* (Duan and Hu 2007).
14. The place names and their sequence find confirmation in Wang Erjian (1761, juan 1: jiangyu [territory]: shanchuan [mountains and rivers]).
15. In Sichuan dialect *tan* 灘 describes the river rapid (Duan and Hu 2007, 1044).
16. In Sichuan dialect *tuo* 沱 is a bay formed by meeting of two river currents, often existing in the confluence of two rivers (Duan and Hu 2007, 1044).
17. According to one source, the name Nanjimen was related to a phrase of a poem from *Shijing* 詩經 (Xiaoya 小雅, Siyue [Fourth Month] 四月, lines 19 and 20): “滔滔江漢，南國之紀，盡瘁以仕，寧莫我有，” which translates as “Grandly flow the Jiang and the Han, Regulators of the southern States. Worn out as I am with service, He yet takes no notice of me” (<http://baike.baidu.com/view/1232001.htm>). For a translation into modern Chinese, see the website “Classical Culture Cultivation” [Yuxin jingdian] with an annotated version of *Shijing*: <http://www.yshin.com/Article/fenleijingdian/200609/554.html>; for an English translation, see, for example, a page of the Chinese Text Project website: <http://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/si-yue>.
18. When turned into paste, lead powder was most probably used for makeup.
19. These names can be found on the 1886 map of Chongqing (Peng 2001, 93).
20. See Wang and Xiang ([1939] 1967, juan 3: guji [historic sites], 431–432).
21. The meaning of the verse is not clear.
22. See Cao (1643, Mingshengji di shiqi [17]: Shang Chuandong dao, Chongqingfu, Baxian fуго) and Peng (1981, 17).
23. Jialing is the second river of Chongqing; it forms a confluence with Yangtze in Chongqing. Chongqing people traditionally call it Xiaojiang (Small River).
24. For more on Zhenwu, see Seaman (1987, esp. the introductory essay, 1–39) and Grootaers (1952).

25. Dian (殿, palace) denoted the highest level Buddhist temple. Yanwang 閻王, Yanjun 閻君: Yama: King of Hell.
26. Two alternate names exist: Fotuguan 佛圖關 and Futuguan 浮圖關.
27. Peak of Iron Masts was an alternative name for Tu Mountain (Wang and Xiang [1939] 1967, 418).
28. Rebellion started in early 1599 and ended with suppression by Li Hualong troops and Yang Yinglong's suicide on July 15, 1600 (Lorge 2005, 136).
29. Until the last decades of nineteenth century the export trade in these goods was channeled through various *huiguan* run by sojourning merchants. In Chongqing they came from Huguang, Jiangxi, Fujian, Shaanxi, Jiangnan, Guangdong, and Baoningfu (Wei 1991, 90–96).
30. The pleasant view of the Yangtze and Jialing confluence was considered one of the Chongqing twelve beauty sights (*sierjing* 十二景) and named Night Lights on the Crossing Rivers (Zishui xiaodeng) (Lu 1939, 84).
31. An expression of discomfort with new street names, and thus proof of common usage of the old names, can be found in Yang Shicai's 1944 guide to Chongqing (33–38).
32. For more on the trade products of Chongqing in the beginning of 1930s, see Woodhead (1931, 57–71) and Wei (1991, 118–139, 189–210).
33. Wang (1761, juan 3: fuyi 賦役志 [taxes and corvée]: keshui 課稅 [taxes]).
34. Wang (1761, juan 10: fengtuzhi 風土志 [local conditions]: 物產 [products]).
35. No standard character: components and meaning according to editors of the *Grand Compendium* (Nie, Peng, and He 1989, 6).

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