

POEM TO BE SUNG TO THE TUNE OF "FULL RIVER RED"
By Yue Fei

Introduction

In 1127 the Northern Song dynasty came to an end as the Jurchen Liao conquered northern China and drove the Song court south to the Yangzi valley. There, from the capital at Hangzhou, the Song court continued as the Southern Song (1127-1279) to rule southern China. The Southern Song empire was an economically and culturally vibrant place, but the defeat at the hands of non-Chinese Jurchen people and the loss of territory rankled. So did the fact that the court was simply not strong enough to recover the lost territory.

Yue Fei (1103-1142) was an officer in the Northern Song army. When the Song retreated south in the face of Jin attacks, Yue Fei opposed the retreat. He continued, however, to serve the emperor, rising to the rank of general and engaging in battles with the Jin and in suppression of peasant uprisings. Yue Fei experienced success in his campaigns against the Jin in 1140. The Southern Song Gaozong Emperor and his advisors, however, sought to make peace with the Jin — which involved returning the northern territories that Yue Fei had just recaptured in his campaigns. Yue Fei and his allies stood in the way of the peace negotiations. Accordingly, Yue Fei was ordered to withdraw — which he did, declaring that "the achievements of ten years have been dashed in a single day." Yue Fei was arrested on charges of plotting rebellion (charges that his defenders insisted were trumped up) and executed in 1141.

Yue Fei wrote the following poem as a song to be sung to the tune of "Full River Red." The "Jingkang period" to which he refers is the last reign-period of the Northern Song — the period in which the Northern Song were defeated by the Jurchen Jin and retreated to the south.

Selected Document with Questions

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Poem to be Sung to the Tune of "Full River Red"
By Yue Fei

My hair bristles in my helmet.
Standing by the balcony as the rain shower stops,
I look up to the sky and loudly let Heaven know
The strength of my passions.
My accomplishments over thirty years are mere dust.
I traveled eight thousand *li* with the clouds and the moon
Never taking time to rest,
For a young man's hair grows white from despair.

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on

POEM TO BE SUN TO THE TUNE OF "FULL RIVER RED," BY YUE FEI

The humiliation of the Jingkang period
Has not yet been wiped away.
The indignation I feel as a subject
Has not yet been allayed.
Let me drive off in a chariot
To destroy their base at Helan Mountain.
My ambition as a warrior
Is to satisfy my hunger with the flesh of the barbarians,
Then, while enjoying a rest,
Slake my thirst with the blood of the tribesmen.
Give me the chance to try again
To recover our mountains and rivers
Then report to the emperor.

Questions:

1. How does Yue Fei's imagery of war compare to that of the Tang poets Li Bo and Du Fu?
2. Does the author's image, as conveyed in this poem, have anything to do with Confucian philosophy? Why or why not?
3. What image does the poet convey of Chinese male identity? How does this image of Chinese manhood compare to stereotypes with which you might be familiar, or with images of Chinese male identity expressed in other literature (such as the descriptions of Confucius in the *Analects*, for example)?