Chapter 47. Li Yong (678–747)

During the late 740s, when Li Yong 李邕 was 70, he served as prefect of Beihai 北海, in the northeast. At that time court politics were in violent disarray, and wild purges reached nearly to the heir apparent. Li Yong was falsely accused of plotting treason. The *Old History of the Tang* says:

747. The new moon of the first month. Li Yong, the prefect of Beihai, and Pei Dunfu, the prefect of Zichuan, were both implicated in the affair of Wang Zeng and Liu Ji. Envoys were sent to execute them on the spot.\(^{383}\)

Li Bo’s *Chronology* states:

Year 747, the first month. Li Yong, the prefect of Beihai, and Pei Dunfu, the prefect of Zichuan, were executed by flogging with a bamboo staff.\(^{384}\)

In a nineteenth-century photograph:

![Fig. 58. Execution by bamboo staff.\(^{385}\)](image)
Some ten years later, Li Bo visited Li Yong’s ancestral home, which had become a Buddhist temple, and wrote this poem.

**On Xiujing Temple in Jiangxia**  
*This temple is Li Yong’s former house.*

My kinsman Li Yong’s house  
is now a temple on the river’s southern shore.  
No jade tree in the empty courtyard,  
holy men sit meditation in the high hall.  
Green grass grows in the library,  
and white dust covers the zither room.  
The peach and plum he planted his whole life  
pass into nirvana without attaining spring.

“The zither room” refers to Confucius’ beloved disciple, Fu Buqi,  
who could tame men’s minds across space, just by plucking his  
琴 or zither.
Plum tree: in Chinese it is written with the same graph as the surname Li 李.

Nirvana, the extinction of every trace.