

**Document 2.5: “A Visit to High Beam Bridge” by Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610)**

*After passing the juren, the second of the civil service exams, Yuan Hongdao did not initially seek an official position. Instead, he spent time with family and friends and traveled widely. A few years later he did begin a career as an official and served in many local and central government positions. At the same time, he pursued his literary interests, writing in many different genres and influencing a wide circle of friends and admirers. The setting Yuan describes in this excerpt was outside the western city gate of the immense wall that surrounded Beijing.*

[The bridge] has the best view in the capital area. The embankment lies in the middle of water. Weeping willows extend for more than three miles. The river flows rapidly. The water is so clear that even the fins and scales of the fish at the bottom of the river can be seen. Buddhist temples dot the scene like pieces on a chessboard. Crimson towers and pearly pagodas beam among green trees. The Western Hills seem to be right within one’s reach, enchanting tourists with their colors from morning till night. In the height of spring, gentlemen and ladies from the city gather there, and the crowd is thick as clouds. No government official would ever refrain from making a trip there unless he were extremely busy.

On the first day of the third month, I had an outing with Wang Changfu and the Buddhist monk Jizi. A fresh green was sprouting at the tip of the willow branches. The hills shone from behind a thin mist. The river water rose up almost to the level of the embankment, and musicians were playing on their strings and pipes along both banks. Squatting on the root of an old tree, we drank some tea in place of wine, and, to accompany our drink, we looked at the patterns of ripples and the shade of trees and watched, like a stage performance, the birds in the air, the fish in the water, and the people who walked back and forth.

*The friends wondered about those who were busy partying, which they thought of as “out of tune with the charm and grace of mountains and rivers.” Later they chatted with a classmate of Yuan. Then before going home, they walked to a Buddhist temple, where they admired the plum blossoms.*

Source: Yuan Hongdao. “A Visit to High Beam Bridge.” *Vignettes from the Late Ming: A Hsiao-p’in Anthology*, ed. and trans. Yang Ye. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, 50-51.