

EVA SHAN CHOU

Reconsidering Tu Fu

Literary greatness
and cultural context

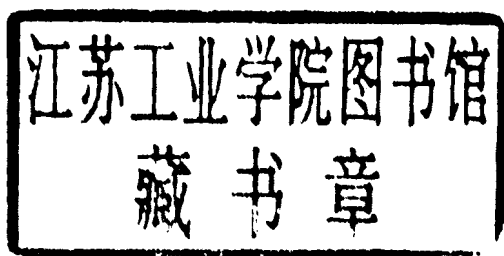
俞
樵
中
華
文
史
叢
刊

Foreword by James R. Hightower

Reconsidering Tu Fu

Literary greatness and cultural context

Eva Shan Chou



 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521440394

© Cambridge University Press 1995

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1995
This digitally printed first paperback version 2006

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Chou, Eva Shan
Reconsidering Tu Fu: literary greatness and cultural context/Eva Shan Chou
p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in Chinese history, literature, and institutions)
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-44039-4

1. Tu Fu, 712-770 – Criticism and interpretation. I. Chou, E.
Shan (Eva Shan) II. Tu Fu, 712-770. Poems. Selections. 1995.
III. Series.

PL2675.R43 1995 895.1'13 – dc20

94-25029
CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-44039-4 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-44039-4 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02828-8 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-02828-0 paperback

Foreword

Even the most casual acquaintance with Chinese poetry will have made the name of Tu Fu a familiar one, as the poet acknowledged throughout history by his countrymen to be China's greatest. And it is not only the poetry that is admired; the poet himself inspires respect, veneration even, as a good man. Though separated from us by a gap of thirteen centuries and an unfamiliar culture, we feel we know him, because the 1,400-odd poems reliably ascribed to him constitute a record of his life and his times that has earned him the epithet of poet-historian. There are poets of whom we know very little whose poetry is highly esteemed – Homer or Shakespeare, for example – and others of whom what we know does not enhance our appreciation of their poetry. In the case of Tu Fu, the identification of poet with the poetry is complete, to the point where it is possible to wonder how much of the esteem for the poetry is a product of admiration of the poet: how would we read "Journey to the North" if we thought it had been written by the lively Li Po? And conversely, how much do we like a poet who is continually telling us what a good man he is?

These are awkward questions that do not usually get asked. Professor Chou faces such problems and suggests solutions with far-ranging implications for future scholarship. By examining the part played in the judgment of Tu Fu's poetry by his status as a cultural icon created by the Confucian orientation of traditional critics, she is able to separate the "poetic and cultural factors in the legacy of Tu Fu," as she puts it, and to take a fresh look at the poetry. In the process she introduces a number of analytic concepts that significantly enhance our understanding of his work. Principal among these is an abrupt change of topic and tone that seems to break a poem into two unrelated parts, apparently fracturing its unity. She argues persuasively that this structural disjunction can be seen as a functional part of a poem that reinforces its effect by referring us back to the poet himself.

Foreword

Professor Chou's criticism of poetry inspires respect. Her analysis is of great subtlety and originality, clearly presented and mercifully eschewing fashionable literary-critical jargon. Scholars already familiar with the poems she cites will recognize the aptness of her observations and will find their appreciation of the poems increased. This has certainly been my experience. On the other hand, those who come to Tu Fu from outside the tradition or whose access is limited to translations will be afforded a real grasp of the poetic achievement of the original Chinese versification and a glimpse of its dazzling dexterity. This is literary criticism of high order, focused on the poetry and not constrained by theory or dogma.

Despite the profoundly novel ideas advanced, this is not a debunking, revisionist study. Professor Chou raises questions ignored, glossed over, or rationalized by traditional Chinese critics, and she arrives at readings that make it possible to appreciate the poetry at its real value. Tu Fu emerges with his work newly illuminated and his reputation intact, both as a poet and as a good man.

James R. Hightower
Victor S. Thomas Professor of Chinese Literature, Emeritus
Harvard University

Preface

The study of a monument is not easy to write. For ten centuries, scholars and appreciative readers have devoted themselves to the examination of Tu Fu's every word and action. Erudition and personal attachment together produced a body of work on this poet that is formidable not only in volume but in dedication. Indeed the intense personal devotion which Tu Fu has always been able to inspire secured for both his poetry and the responses to it a certain immunity from objective evaluation. Today, when the personal patterns of the cultivated past cannot be convincingly reproduced, a critic venturing upon the study of Tu Fu cannot presume to the roles of either learned scholar or passionate reader in the old mold. Other available roles for the modern critic seem limited to the false promise of revisionism or the naïveté of a fresh Western approach. It is hoped that the present work has avoided these tendencies by undertaking to examine Tu Fu in terms of his two distinct but related legacies, as a cultural monument and as a figure of great poetic achievements. In approaching Tu Fu anew, my intentions were also to reformulate and answer some questions that are often asked about Tu Fu and to pose questions that I have not found asked elsewhere.

A formal occasion for the expression of gratitude brings on reflectiveness and a certain somberness. Life engenders debts of gratitude of many kinds, and in an academic life, where intellectual and personal debts are often intermingled, it is difficult adequately to express all that is due.

My first thanks are owed to Professor James R. Hightower of Harvard University and Professor Ronald C. Egan, now of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Not the least of their importance to the present work is chronological. Professors Hightower and Egan had earlier supervised my Ph.D. thesis, which concerned a group of Tu Fu's late poems

Preface

and their employment of allusion. When, upon its completion, I decided to put it aside and to make an entirely new start, this time analyzing Tu Fu's poetry as a whole, they demurred at the practical consequences but were steadily encouraging in their confidence that such a project was possible. Each has generously read the chapters of this work in more than one version and made many improvements and corrections. Professor Hightower's sensitive appreciation for poetry has been a constant source of inspiration to me, especially in today's academia, where poetry is so often treated only as a "text." Moreover, his unerring sense for weak or trite arguments has saved me from many missteps. I am honored that he has written a Foreword here. Professor Egan has been both teacher and friend, invariably generous in sharing his insights and his extensive knowledge. In particular, the general argument of the section "Tu Fu and the Tradition of Tu Fu" in Chapter 1 was developed over the course of several months of enlightening conversations with Professor Egan. I am most grateful for his constant encouragement over the years.

To many others I owe much for advice and help on a range of matters. I thank Professors Denis C. Twitchett and Kao Yu-kung, both of Princeton University, for their support. Professor Kang-i Sun Chang of Yale University came to my aid, both practically and with moral support, at a difficult time. I would like also to thank Professors Donald Holzman of Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, David Knechtges of the University of Washington, Patrick D. Hanan of Harvard University, Morris Rossabi of CUNY and Columbia University, Arthur N. Waldron of the U.S. Naval War College and Brown University, and Dore Levy of Brown University. Dr. Grace Chūan-ying Yen of Academia Sinica, Taipei, made comments about early versions of the manuscript that were both sensitive and rigorous. Two anonymous referees for Cambridge University Press offered valuable suggestions which improved the order of presentation of material in Chapter 1. The members of the Chinese Study Group, with whom I enjoyed nearly five years of monthly meetings in New York City, were a source of friendly intellectual stimulation; they included Cheng P'ei-k'ai, Wang Hao, Wu Wei-yuan and Hsieh Shih-min, Li Yao-tsung, Yü Kuang, and Hung Ming-shui. I also thank Christie Lerch, Camilla Palmer, and Elizabeth Neal at Cambridge University Press for their expert assistance.

A fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities provided me with a year in which to work through the basic issues underlying Chapters 3 and 4. A travel grant from the American Council of Learned Societies enabled me to present a paper at a conference at the University of Durham, England, that resulted in some parts of Chapter 1. I am grateful as well to the Bunting Institute, Radcliffe College, and to

Preface

its director, Dr. Florence Ladd, for a fellowship year that provided intellectual stimulation and collegial friendships. A subvention from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation defrayed some of the costs of publication, for which I owe thanks. Chapter 2 has appeared in a somewhat different form in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*; this chapter benefited from the meticulous attention of the journal's editor, Dr. Joanna Handlin Smith.

I cannot end without acknowledging the friends and family who supported my work without questioning its practicality: my mother, Jun-mei Chang Chou, and my sisters May, Ida, and Ana; Christie and Chris Wilbur, Carol Munroe and Andraś Riedlmayer, Andrew Klein, Elizabeth Perry, Marsha Collins, Dennis Grafflin, Wendy Zeldin, Ginny Mayer. My daughter, Heather, has helped put books in library return slots since she could lift books and stand on tiptoe. My husband, Richard G. McCarrick, has by his unfailing support and interest provided the secure and appreciative haven that so sorrowfully eluded the subject of this volume.

Contents

<i>Foreword</i> by James R. Hightower	page vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 The legacy of Tu Fu	1
Historical background and biography	2
The cultural legacy	11
The poetic legacy	42
2 Social conscience: Compassion and topicality in the poetry	61
Subject matter	66
Realism	75
Stylized realism	82
3 Juxtaposition I: A structural principle	107
Juxtaposition defined	109
Examples	121
Juxtaposition and other structures	139
4 Juxtaposition II: A biographical analogue	161
Chronology	165
Mechanism	183
Solipsism	184
Coda	192
Conclusion: Sincerity reconsidered	197
<i>Selected editions of the works of Tu Fu</i>	209
<i>Works cited</i>	211
<i>Poems by Tu Fu</i>	217
English titles	217
Chinese titles	221
<i>Index</i>	229

1

The legacy of Tu Fu

Tu Fu is, by universal consent, the greatest poet of the Chinese tradition. In Chinese culture, his works have been virtually canonized because, as the expression of the Chinese mind and moral being in their highest form, their supremacy in literature has been placed beyond merely literary considerations. He himself has been viewed as the embodiment of public-minded dedication and unceasing loyalty, a man who sought all his life, with great constancy, to serve his sovereign and his state. In the literary matters of innovative technique and the establishment of many new subgenres, Tu Fu is also seen as without peer: his precedent was influential equally in setting a poetic rule and in breaking it. In the allusive, imitation-based tradition of classical poetry, his work constituted an endless source of quotation and precedent, the lines studied and imitated, the imagery echoed, the subgenres enlarged.

When the history of T'ang poetry came to be constructed during the Sung dynasty, admiration for Tu Fu's technical brilliance and for the moral excellence of his character combined to raise him from relative obscurity to the apex of T'ang poetry. His work, and that of his contemporary Li Po, defined the boundaries of the High T'ang period, and this period in turn came to be identified with the extraordinary flourishing of culture and political power seen in the middle decades of the eighth century. Although in truth the culture of the elite was to evolve to a higher, more sophisticated, and more subtle level in later dynasties, the literati of those centuries looked back to the T'ang era for their foundation and inspiration. In the manner of Confucius, they preferred to regard their innovations as transmissions or revivals of past achievements. In Tu Fu's work, they found a poet who was able to satisfy all the levels – aesthetic, moral, and human – on which the traditional scholar-official defined himself. The editions, commentaries, anthologies, selections, and remarks (*shih-hua*) produced by traditional connoisseurship and scholarship proliferated. Already by the end of the fourteenth cen-

tury, works on Tu Fu far outnumbered works on any other poet and they further multiplied with each succeeding century.¹ Even under the much altered conditions of today, Tu Fu is still routinely acknowledged to be the greatest Chinese poet. Now, as then, his reputation has been taken under government patronage. The sponsorship of monuments to Tu Fu, a tradition that dates to the Sung dynasty, is continued today by an elaborate complex of temples, halls, and gateways in Szechuan built on the putative site of his Thatched Hut, a mecca for visitors, both domestic and foreign.

Historical background and biography

The poetry of Tu Fu was written entirely out of his own experiences and the events he witnessed, but he lived in a fateful time, and so they gave him large themes. The crucial event in Tu Fu's life and work, and also in the history of the T'ang dynasty, occurred in the eleventh month of 755, when a brilliant era of prosperity and expansionism under Emperor Hsuan-tsung (r. 712–56) was brought to an abrupt end with the An Lu-shan rebellion. Fiscal, administrative, and military reforms during the first decades of Hsuan-tsung's reign had renewed the fortunes of the empire. By the 750s, the extent of its domain and the prosperity of its inhabitants invited comparisons, which were indeed frequently made, with the greatest moments of earlier Chinese empires. The onset of the rebellion revealed the interdependence and instability of the forces which held that empire together. Tu Fu's poetry, reflecting many of the shifting and dramatic events of the time, can be read on one level as a record of the devastation and decline of empire set in motion by that rebellion.

The rebellion, known in history after its instigator, An Lu-shan, was brought to an inconclusive end in 763, eight years after its beginning, but its repercussions lasted throughout the century and a half remaining to the dynasty. In the initial months, the rebellion was a clear-cut affair. Despite the many dramatic turns of fortune in those months, there were only two main actors (the imperial forces and the rebel forces under An Lu-shan), and the action followed a certain military and geographic logic. The rebels' choice of a line of advance and of targets, and the loyalists' choice of places at which to make a defensive stand, both followed the logic of a struggle for the control of the empire. The rebels began by making a rapid advance from their base in Yu-chou (modern

1. See the encyclopedic compilation *Tu chi shu lu*, by Chou Ts'ai-ch'üan, which provides a bibliographic description of every known edition of Tu Fu's works, including editions of selected poems and editions no longer extant.

Peking) down the Central Plains that lay on either side of the Yellow River. Within a month their forces had captured the secondary capital of Loyang. Six months later the main capital of Ch'ang-an fell to the rebel forces. Initially Ch'ang-an had been ably defended from the rebels in the Central Plains by the impregnable T'ung Pass, but the army guarding the pass was ordered, against military wisdom, to move out onto the plains to give battle, rather than merely holding their defensive positions. With the capitals lost, the choice on the imperial side was between striking at the rebel base in Yu-chou or attempting to recover the two capitals. The latter, more politically symbolic, course was taken, and in the next year (757) first Ch'ang-an and then Lo-yang were retaken by the imperial forces, with the help of Uighur mercenaries. Hereafter, however, the initial simplicity of allegiances and goals disappeared. The imperial victory was limited to the recovery of the capitals, whereas the rebel forces not only were unsubdued but now presented a more complex challenge. The leadership of the rebels passed by patricide to An Lu-shan's son, and at the same time Shih Ssu-ming rose from among An Lu-shan's generals to take command of a separate, nominally allied, rebel force. The division of rebel command coincided with the loss of logistical imperative on the rebels' part. Their forces, already occupying the Central Plains and unable to retake the capitals, lacked an obvious military goal and found themselves drawn into defensive campaigns to retain territories they had previously captured and to defend their line of supply from Yu-chou.

The fragmentation of command in the rebel ranks was matched by confused strategy on the imperial side. Control was difficult to assert, since opportunistic secondary rebellions flared in many parts of the empire. The imperial side faced the need for internal reorganization just at a time when the rebel situation had become more complex. Emperor Hsuan-tsung had abdicated to Su-tsung after the fall of Ch'ang-an, and Hsuan-tsung's unpopular chief minister, Yang Kuo-chung, had been executed to retain the loyalty of the troops. The subsequent reapportionment of power took place at a time when the quantity of power had suddenly increased. Generals defending the throne emerged among the chief beneficiaries, for power devolved upon individual generals for long periods of time, in civil as well as military matters. The power of the court was weakened rather than strengthened by the massive arming of its subjects, for the court's own generals became potential rebels. Concerted military action became more difficult to undertake at precisely the time when the military situation was more difficult to control. A prolonged stalemate resulted between imperial and rebel forces. The campaigns which interrupted this stalemate at intervals – most notably a

great assault on the rebel stronghold of Hsiang-chou (near Lo-yang) in 759, carried out by a combined force of nine imperial armies² – did not alter it markedly, and it was not until 763, eight years after the rebellion began, that all sides had been sufficiently weakened to agree to a settlement. This came down to accepting the existing division of territorial control, modified by the language of sovereignty: a nominal end to the rebellion was obtained by the surrender of the rebel generals, while the emperor in turn confirmed them in their commands.

The An-Shih rebellion permanently weakened the T'ang dynasty, for imperial control was never fully recovered in the remaining century and a half of T'ang rule. Control of the armies was essentially ceded to generals whose allegiance the court was too weak to compel. The revenues and policies of the provinces lying in the Yellow River plains to the northeast (modern Hopei, Shansi, and Shantung) were never successfully brought under the court's command. More immediately relevant to Tu Fu, the uneasy peace obtained in the Central Plains had little effect in Szechuan and along the Yangtze River, where Tu Fu lived from 759 onward. All up and down the Yangtze and its Hsiang River tributary, local rebellions continued to flare up. In addition, raids and incursions by Tibetans upon a weak Szechuan were frequent. Tu Fu himself never saw the end of warfare, and to the end of his life his poetry reflected the displacements and devastations of wartime.

When the An Lu-shan rebellion began, Tu Fu was forty-four, and almost all his great poetry still lay ahead of him. Tu Fu said of himself that he had written copiously since childhood, but very little has survived that dates from before the onset of the rebellion in 755: only about 130 of some 1,400 extant poems. Although this early period did produce some notable poems, the major themes and the tragic vision were still to come. In a sense, the rebellion gave him his subject: the crucial event in his life and poetry centered on the crucial event of the T'ang dynasty.

Tu Fu was in many ways an unlikely candidate for this exemplary role. His life, whether before or after 755, when recounted without the poetry, makes a record of indifferent achievement and gives little hint of the esteem in which he was to be held by posterity.³ Tu Fu was born in

2. In Tu Fu's poems, the aftermath of this assault is famously the setting for "Three Officials," 53/3/9–11, and "Three Partings," 54/3/12–14.
3. Brief official biographical accounts are given in *Chiu T'ang shu* 190C.5054–7 and *Hsin T'ang shu* 201.5736–8. Accounts more detailed than these depend largely on information gleaned from the poems. William Hung, in *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet*, translates 374 poems of biographical and poetic importance and joins them with a biographical narrative. See also A. R. Davis, *Tu Fu*, which gives a clear overview. Political events and

712 into a family of the official class whose distant ancestry he was proud to trace to the famous third-century general and *Tso chuan* commentator Tu Yü (222–84). In a more recent generation, Tu Fu's grandfather Tu Shen-yen was a middle-rank official, sufficiently notable as a poet to receive a biographical account in the "Garden of Letters" section in both of the T'ang histories.⁴ Little, however, is known of Tu Fu's father, aside from some of his official positions.⁵

Tu Fu's life, like that of any member of the official class, had as its inevitable punctuation the record of his attempts to gain office and their results. Tu Fu at first sought to take the examination route to office. He probably first took the examinations in the mid-730s, when he was twenty-three or twenty-four.⁶ Though he was perhaps a candidate from the capital prefecture, the prestigious provenance proved to be of no avail. He was unsuccessful, perhaps (following a hint in a later poem) the only one from the capital prefecture to fail that year.⁷ The question of why he failed has consumed much ink because the candidate is Tu Fu, later to be so esteemed for his literary achievements. It may be, however, that one need look no farther for a cause than his having omitted to cultivate his connections in the capital.⁸ Tu Fu next took the examinations some ten years later, in 747, again unsuccessfully. This time the cause is known to have been the chief minister Li Lin-fu, who, notorious

biographical information, copiously supported by quotations from the poems, are listed year by year in *Tu Fu nien-p'u*. This work also lists under its annual headings the poems known to have been written in that year or judged by the editors to be consistent with composition in that year.

4. Tu Shen-yen's biographies are in *Chiu T'ang shu* 190A.4999–5000 and *Hsin T'ang shu* 201.5735–6. *Chiu T'ang shu* places Tu Shen-yen and Tu Fu in separate chapters, whereas *Hsin T'ang shu* places Tu Fu's biography after his grandfather's. For a summary of the scholarship concerning the ancestry and family of Tu Fu, see Hung, *Tu Fu*, pp. 16–20, and his *Notes*, pp. 13–22.
5. Many issues connected with Tu Fu's life are much controverted, but they are only briefly mentioned in this summary of his life. For a careful reconsideration of such issues as the composition of Tu Fu's family, the dates of his examinations, and the dates of the rhapsodies offered to the emperor, see Ch'en Wen-hua, *Tu Fu chuan-chi T'ang Sung tsu-liao k'ao-pien* (hereafter *T'ang Sung tsu-liao k'ao*), pp. 1–120.
6. The exact date of Tu Fu's first attempt to pass the examinations is not known, four dates having been suggested by commentators (734, 735, 736, and 737). Hung argues for 736 (*Tu Fu*, p. 27, and *Notes*, p. 25), whereas Ch'en Wen-hua prefers 735 (*T'ang Sung tsu-liao k'ao*, pp. 55–66).
7. William Hung quotes the line "Alone I went to make my farewells" from "Wanderings of My Prime" and suggests that "alone" means that the other prefectural candidates had all passed (*Tu Fu*, p. 28). He also speculates that Tu Fu entered as a candidate from Ch'ang-an rather than Lo-yang, the prefecture to which his home village of Yen-shih belonged.
8. See, for example, the sensible discussion in Li Ju-lun, "Lo-ti-shih yü Tu Fu lo-ti" 落第詩與杜甫落第, in his *Tu shih lun kao*, pp. 89–94.

already for the small number of men passed during his years, this time passed no one at all.⁹ It was Tu Fu's second and last attempt.

Four years later, in 751, Tu Fu made an attempt to obtain a post by applying directly, so to speak, to the emperor. He presented a set of rhapsodies (*fu*) through an extra-examination avenue whereby if a submission caught the imperial attention a literary office might follow.¹⁰ For a brief moment, "the emperor marveled at his talent,"¹¹ but after the initial flurry of hope, this too came to nothing. A second attempt to gain the notice of the throne in 754 and a third, possibly in the following year, were received with complete silence. It was not until the very eve of the rebellion that Tu Fu succeeded in obtaining a position, a low-ranking sinecure in the heir apparent's establishment. Before taking up this position, Tu Fu made a journey to Feng-hsien County, some miles northeast of Ch'ang-an, where he had recently settled his family. It was while he was at Feng-hsien that events overtook him. An Lu-shan began his revolt, and the rapid advance of the rebel forces meant that Tu Fu never took up this first post that had been won after such a length of time.

The nature of his struggle for a livelihood changed with the onset of the rebellion, and with the passage of years it grew more desperate. But this was to become apparent only gradually. Initially Tu Fu did well out of the rebellion, for, a few months after it began, a demonstration of loyalty brought him the office at the emperor's court that he had so ardently sought. Shortly after the onset of the rebellion, apparently with his family now resettled in another village, Tu Fu had set out with the intention of joining the emperor in exile. His next poems show him to be in rebel-held Ch'ang-an, but when he was able to slip away from there, he made his way to the emperor's court in exile rather than going back to his family. For this act of loyalty in a perilous time, Tu Fu was rewarded with the first position he actually held, Commissioner of the Right.¹² It was in this office that he witnessed the imperial recovery of Ch'ang-an half a year later (in the ninth month of 757), and it was this office that he held for some months at the court of a recovered Ch'ang-an. Thus in its first year and a half, the rebellion produced for Tu Fu a post in the

9. This according to Yuan Chieh's testimony. Yuan Chieh too was failed in this round. He memorably explained Li Lin-fu's manipulation of the examination results in his "An Account for a Friend" 喻友, *Ch'üan T'ang wen*, *chüan* 383.

10. The system is described in *Chiu T'ang shu* 43.414; *Hsin T'ang shu* 47.2; translated, des Rotours, *Examens*, pp. 143-6. See also Hung, *Tu Fu*, p. 67, and McMullen, *State and Scholars in T'ang China*, p. 138.

11. 帝奇之. So said *Chiu T'ang shu* 190C.5054 and *Hsin T'ang shu* 201.5763. Tu Fu gives his own account in "Wanderings of My Prime," lines 57-8, and in "Don't Doubt Me," lines 3-7.

12. *Yu-shih-yi* 右拾遺; see des Rotours, *Fonctionnaires*, 1:187.

central bureaucracy and also a chance personally to witness dramatic and historic events from a central vantage point. A natural expectation of a quick victory and a return to normalcy seem to have guided Tu Fu's actions, and indeed initially events seemed to bear out such hopes.

This possibly heady tenure at court did not last long. Tu Fu seems to have been unsuited for the rigors of political life. Early in 758, as the result of a larger political quarrel at court, he was exiled to a provincial post at Hua-chou, a town which lay between Ch'ang-an and the T'ung Pass. After about a year in Hua-chou, Tu Fu seems to have decided to take his family out of the Central Plains, where battles still raged. We do know that in 759 he and his family left the Central Plains for Ch'in-chou in the far west, and that from there they went on to Szechuan Province in the southwest. It was, in the event, a permanent departure. Although in the eleven years remaining to him Tu Fu never ceased to make plans to return to the capital area, he was to die on a tributary of the Yangtze River.

From the time of his departure from the Central Plains, Tu Fu's fortunes gradually but steadily declined. He was in Szechuan Province for five years, the latter part of his stay apparently prolonged by the patronage of a younger friend, Yen Wu, governor of Szechuan, whom he had first met at court in Ch'ang-an. Yen was a dependable patron, it seems,¹³ for the Szechuan years – the Thatched Hut years – were relatively serene. Tu Fu left Szechuan, however, about the time of Yen Wu's death in 766, for reasons he does not mention in his surviving poems. The remaining four years of his life were spent in the river towns of the Yangtze, moving by stages downriver, in increasingly poor health. His longest stay was in K'uei-chou (766–8), where he purchased a farm with the help of another patron and where two years of a settled life produced the great poems of his last years. Then Tu Fu left K'uei-chou, again for reasons not stated or hinted at in his poems. The movements of his final two years seemed to be dictated by the search for a patron, a search that became quite desperate as ill luck dogged his tracks. One patron he sought at Heng-chou, on the Hsiang tributary of the Yangtze, had just

13. So one must suppose. There is much speculation concerning the relationship between Tu Fu and Yen Wu. A number of strange anecdotes about it are reported in Yen Wu's biographies (*Chiu T'ang shu* 117.3395–6 and *Hsin T'ang shu* 129.4484) as well as in Tu Fu's biographies. For example, Tu Fu is said to have sat on the end of Yen Wu's bed and taunted him; Yen Wu is said to have tried to kill Tu Fu and in fact to have killed one of his own father's wives. Plausible explanations of these episodes have been difficult to compose. The numerous suggestions that have been hazarded are discussed in Hung, *Notes*, pp. 93–5, and in Ch'en Wen-hua, *T'ang Sung tzu-liao k'ao*, pp. 147–74. One must suppose that some complex relationship existed between the two men that could not be conveyed by the usual biographical anecdotes; hence the inexplicable stories.

been transferred to T'an-chou downriver, where in any case he soon died. At the same time, a local rebellion broke out in T'an-chou, and so Tu Fu wavered, adrift between Heng-chou and T'an-chou, with no reliable news and no prospects. Finally he made plans to go on with his family to Pin-chou, where an uncle was an official. This turned out to be the last journey Tu Fu undertook. Heavy rains turned him back and, at T'an-chou once again, Tu Fu died.

With Tu Fu's death, the record, which is derived entirely from references in his poetry, ends. One wonders about the fate of the family left in such straits upon the death of its head, about his wife and children, who had, as he repeatedly wrote, followed him about in their refugee life. Fan Huang, who collected 290 poems of Tu Fu's for an edition shortly after Tu Fu's death, mentions that two sons, Tsung-wen and Tsung-wu, were then living in the Chiang-ling area (near Tung-t'ing Lake). Some years later, a son, probably Tsung-wen, was employed in a prefectural office in Kuei-lin. A grandson reappears in history, still in Chiang-ling, with a request to Yuan Chen (779-831) for a grave inscription for Tu Fu. His request, made in 813, is the last historical trace of Tu Fu's descendants. Self-proclaimed descendants continued to surface periodically. In the twelfth century, the grandson of one Tu Hsin-lao produced a family genealogy that showed him to be a thirteenth-generation descendant of Tu Fu's. In the twentieth century, scholars in the adventurous early years of archaeological and anthropological fieldwork met villagers near Lo-yang who claimed descent from the poet.¹⁴

Recounted in this way, Tu Fu's life makes sorry reading. Exuberance, however, and even gaiety thread through his life. A simple change of focus to the periods between the failed examinations and the frequent moves uncovers some extended periods of contentment. Tu Fu's peregrinations have defined the periods into which his life falls, and his poetry has supplied the phrases that sum up the pleasures of each of the periods of contentment. The poet's characterizations have guided commentators in their understanding of his life and are used in the account that follows.

14. For the information about the sons, see Fan Huang's "Preface to *Tu kung-fu hsiao-chi*," in *Tu Fu chüan*, 1:7. For the son employed near Kuei-lin, see Hung, *Tu Fu*, p. 282, and *Notes*, pp. 115. Yuan Chen's grave inscription for Tu Fu is in *Tu Fu chüan*, 1:14-15. On the twelfth-century claims to descent from Tu Fu, see Wang Li-ch'i, "Chi Tu Fu yu hou yü Chiang-ching" in *Ts'ao-t'ang* 2,2 (1981), 62-4. This article by Wang is in part a compliment to an old school friend, surnamed Tu, of the author's, and the author accepts the claim of descent out of regional loyalty. For the villagers near Lo-yang who claimed in 1931 their descent from the poet, see Cheng Te-k'un's account of a field trip in *Yenching Journal of Chinese Studies*, Suppl. No. 1 (1932), 89-90.