Writing Home and Empire from the Margins:

Longing and Belonging in Du Fu's (712-770) Poetry

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2025

Abstract

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This dissertation explores the active, constructive role of poetry in times of crisis, focusing on Du Fu's 杜甫 (712-770) works composed during his prolonged exile following the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), a crucial turning point in Chinese history. I argue that Du Fu's literary experimentation—both reflective of and instrumental in shaping broader cultural transformations—was driven by his negotiation of evolving concepts of home and reimagined visions of the empire from the margins. By examining poetry's intersections with other spheres of material and social life—such as geography, transportation, and the circulation of information—I demonstrate how Du Fu's fragmented, contingent experience on the empire's peripheries, shaped by unfamiliar landscapes, compromised infrastructure, and disrupted communication, became a resource for generating new forms of anchoring. This process, I argue, ultimately contributed to reshaping the poetic medium itself.

While the issue of empire has long stood at the center of Du Fu's critical reception—often portraying him as a public-minded poet with unwavering commitment to the state—recent scholarship has sought to complicate this image by highlighting his interest in private life. This dissertation aims to contribute to this ongoing conversation by rethinking Du Fu's engagement with the empire—not as an abstract concept, but as something concretely embedded in material, cultural, and infrastructural formations. It also foregrounds belonging and the layered notion of

home as critical lenses through which to examine Du Fu's negotiation of the relationships between self, family, and state, as well as various forms of spatial affiliation amid societal collapse.

At the same time, this dissertation seeks to highlight the coexistence of diverse assumptions and ideals that inform literary practice. In the case of Du Fu, his post-rebellion poetry reveals both a receptivity to being shaped by a shifting world and a deep investment in the constructive and performative power of poetry—a vision of the art as a means of imposing order that transcends lived reality. Ultimately, this study invites broader reflection on how literary and cultural transformations often unfold through the convergence of divergent—and at times competing—forces, rather than through a linear or unified progression.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my advisor, Professor Wei Shang, who has guided me from the earliest stages of this project and provided invaluable feedback throughout the writing process. This dissertation would not have been possible without his generous support, incisive insights, and his unwavering push to think further and strive for greater clarity and intellectual depth. I have also benefited tremendously from discussions with my other committee members—Professors Robert Hymes, Michael Como, Lu Kou, and Lucas Bender—whose insightful comments and detailed feedback have sharpened my conceptual framework and helped me better situate my research both historically and within a broader scholarly context. Conversations with them have sparked new directions and ideas that I look forward to developing further as I revise the dissertation into a book manuscript. My gratitude also goes to my teachers at CU Boulder—Professors Paul Kroll, Antje Richter, Matthias Richter, and Terry Kleeman—who first introduced me to the field and taught me how to read texts closely and critically. During my graduate years at Columbia, I also had the opportunity to work with Professor Harrison Huang, whose scholarly interests and approaches have deeply influenced my own. I would also like to express my thanks to Professor Anna Shields at Princeton and Professor Xiaofei Tian at Harvard. The classes I took with them have remained a constant source of inspiration. My friends, colleagues, and the staff of the EALAC department have made my graduate life a rewarding and pleasurable experience. Finally, I want to thank my family for their love and support. My husband, Feng Long, not only shares my passion for classical Chinese literature but has also shared with me every joy, wonder, frustration, and fulfillment this writing journey has brought.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion (755–763) was a watershed event in Chinese history, with far-reaching implications across social, political, and cultural domains: it altered the relationship between the central court and the provinces, led to large-scale population movements, and reshaped the composition and role of the cultural elite.[1] At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770)—whose life was deeply intertwined with the rebellion, a defining event of his era—emerged as a transitional figure in Chinese literary history. Prior to Du Fu, the literary world was centered in the capital and polite society, with poetry composed for set occasions such as partings, banquets, and excursions. In the wake of Du Fu's poetic experimentation, writers began to move beyond conventional themes and occasions, exploring aspects of everyday life that had previously received little attention in the literary tradition. This dissertation examines the intersection of literary history and broader historical processes during this crucial transitional period through a study of Du Fu's poetry. It is guided by the belief that literature is both shaped by non-literary contexts and should be recognized as having its own logic and agency.

Specifically, I aim to demonstrate how Du Fu's literary innovations—which both reflected and helped shape broader cultural transformations—were deeply entangled with displacement and experiences on the empire's peripheries during a time of profound political and social upheaval. I

[1] For accounts of the An Lushan Rebellion, including its causes, developments, and consequences, see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); Pulleyblank, "The An Lu-shan Rebellion and the Origins of Chronic Militarism in Late T'ang China," in *Critical Readings on Tang China*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Kroll (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 518-44; Charles Peterson, "Court and Province in Mid- and Late T'ang," in *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 3: Sui and T'ang*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 464-560.

argue that his literary experimentation was driven by his negotiation of evolving concepts of "home" and new visions of empire from the margins, as he strove to reimagine lost connections and address crises of legacy, institutions, and patterns of belonging. By exploring the intersections of poetry with other spheres of material life and the social world, I demonstrate how Du Fu's engagement with an unfamiliar landscape, a disrupted transportation system, and a compromised information network shaped his visions of home and empire. These fragmented, contingent experiences on the empire's peripheries were not only turned into literary resources for the creation of various forms of anchoring—such as legible places, lasting dwellings, imagined communities, and symbolic homeland—but also transformed the poetic medium itself.

In revisiting canonical writers and works, scholars in the field of medieval Chinese literature generally pursue one of two main lines of inquiry. The first seeks a deeper understanding of literary canons by situating them within their original historical context, demonstrating how they had been shaped by the cultural and intellectual concerns of their time. The second approach focuses on the process of reception or canonization, analyzing how the received image of a writer has been constructed over time and influenced by the interests of later readers. This study, while drawing on the insights about the reception history of Du Fu,[2] takes the first path of investigation. This stems from the belief that direct engagement with Du Fu's works and their historical context deserves more scholarly effort given the large size of his corpus, the complexity of his works, as well as the importance of his status in literary history.

[2] For the reception of Du Fu, see Charles Hartman, "The Tang Poet Du Fu and the Song Literati," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews 30* (December 2008): 43-74; Eva Shan Chou, *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Chapter 1, "The Legacy of Tu Fu"; Ji Hao, *The Reception of Du Fu and His Poetry in Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Jue Chen, *Du Fu: The Song Dynasty Making of China's Greatest Poet* (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

Scholars that pursue the first line of inquiry in the study of medieval literature have examined various social forces and cultural trends in shaping literary writing.[3] While existing scholarship generally focuses on concepts and ideas, cultural practices and intellectual currents, this study, drawing on the "material turn" in the humanities over the past few decades, pays equal attention to the physical environment and material as well as infrastructural realities of life as crucial forces shaping human experience and literary imagination. I explore how landscape, local topography, routes and rivers, and information circulating along these routes played a role in informing Du Fu's visions of home and empire. In doing so, I highlight underlying forces that were crucial to Du Fu's writings during a time of profound cultural and social change—yet not fully accounted for in both premodern criticism and modern scholarship.

Du Fu's life was deeply intertwined with the events of the Tang empire—especially the An Lushan Rebellion—and his persistent engagement with these events in poetry has placed the theme of empire at the center of a longstanding interpretive tradition, one that remains worth revisiting. Following the fall of the capital and Emperor Xuanzong's 玄宗 (r. 712-756) flight in 756, Du Fu, upon hearing of Emperor Suzong's 肅宗 (r. 756-762) ascension in Lingwu 靈武 (in modern Ningxia), attempted to join the newly established court. However, he was captured by

[3] Some of the most important studies that have become foundational to the field include Xiaofei Tian's study of Liang dynasty court literature by situating it within the context of Buddhist teachings, particularly the Buddhist concept of "thought-instant" and the practice of visualization. Another example is Robert Ashmore's study of Tao Yuanming, which explores how conceptions of reading and understanding in the Six Dynasties period, particularly with regard to classical texts, may have shaped Tao Yuanming's poetry. Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502-557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365-427)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

rebel forces and taken back to the sacked city of Chang'an. In the spring of the following year (757), Du Fu managed to escape and finally reached Suzong's court-in-exile, where he was granted an official position. Less than a month later, however, he offended the emperor by protesting on behalf of a friend and political patron. As a result, not long after his return to Chang'an following the recovery of the two capitals, Du Fu was demoted to a provincial post in Huazhou 華州 (in modern Shaanxi), east of the capital. In the spring of 759, Tang forces suffered a disastrous defeat in their attempt to capture the rebels' last stronghold, resulting in a second loss of Luoyang and sparking a resurgence of the rebellion that would continue for several more years. At the same time, the capital region was devastated by a severe famine. In the seventh month of 759, Du Fu abandoned his post and took his family to the far western reaches of the empire in search of a more habitable place.

For the final decade of his life, he moved frequently across the empire's western and southern frontiers. After brief stays in Qinzhou 秦州 (in modern Gansu) and Tonggu 同谷 (in Gansu), he settled in Chengdu 成都 (in Sichuan), where he enjoyed a few relatively peaceful years—though these were interrupted by a two-year period of displacement to eastern Sichuan. This was followed by a journey down the Yangtze River and a subsequent relocation to Kuizhou 夔州 (modern Fengjie County 奉節縣 in Chongqing). After two years in Kuizhou, he spent the remainder of his life wandering through the areas across Hubei and Hunan, trying to return to the capital region while evading local unrest—but died before he could complete the journey.

Du Fu's poetry has long been interpreted through the lens of his biography—a mainstream approach among premodern commentators and critics that continues to be influential, especially in contemporary Chinese scholarship. This interpretive tradition emphasizes his socially engaged verse, portraying it as primarily motivated by his concern for the empire and his sympathy for

the common people. With Du Fu hailed as the greatest poet in Chinese history, his poetry is believed to be at the same time an authentic, faithful record granting unmediated access to the personality of the poet and the time in which he lived, and direct utterances of paradigmatic value judgment. Over the past few decades, scholars have been striving to work toward a more historically grounded understanding of Du Fu, seeking to unburden him from the weight of his attributed Confucian sagehood and to reconstruct alternative images of him. This reappraisal has brought to light the more personal and less solemn side of the poet, with growing attention given to lesser-studied works in which he writes thoughtfully about everyday subjects, such as the service of his servants or the building of a chicken coop.

This dissertation takes longing and belonging as its central interpretive lens for reading Du Fu's poetry, examining how he reimagines his relationship to the empire and negotiates new visions of home amid a life of restless exile. This framework emerges from both Du Fu's personal circumstances and the broader historical context in which he wrote. Du Fu was certainly not the first, nor the only, poet in exile in Chinese history. What distinguishes his case, however, is that he was not even an exiled official, but someone already removed from the state bureaucracy and virtually forgotten by the court. His was a more profound form of exile—one compounded by the fragmentation of the Tang empire itself, brought on by the An Lushan Rebellion and the ensuing regional instability. In other words, before Du Fu was posthumously elevated as the "poet historian" 詩史 and "poet sage" 詩聖, he lived as a refugee with limited means. His displacement to the margins of the Tang empire—during a time of national crisis—shattered familiar patterns of identity and belonging. As a result, the question of who he is, where he belongs, and how to find a "place" (in multiple senses of the word) became a central and urgent concern—one that precedes and underlies even his most public-minded poetry.

For Du Fu, as for most cultural elites of his time, the state and the family (or clan)—stood as two foundational pillars through which identity was defined. Unlike the landed, locally powerful aristocratic clans of the early medieval period, or their counterparts who would later develop strong regional bases in the Southern Song, Tang elites were largely a capital-based and bureaucratized class. Their status, prestige, power, and wealth were closely tied to office-holding within the imperial system.[4] This was true of Du Fu, who did not belong to one of the most prominent clans of his era. Thus, despite his estrangement from the court and imperial authority, Du Fu could hardly imagine a sense of belonging entirely outside the framework of the state and its institutions. His exile compelled him to reimagine his relationship to the empire—both its center and its periphery—in ways that would not have been possible had he not been displaced to its outermost regions.

In fact, simply moving to the margins does not necessarily result in a recalibrated relationship to the empire or a radically transformed approach to writing. In an article on poetry composed by exiled poets during the late seventh and early eighth centuries—some sent as far as modern Vietnam—Xiaofei Tian demonstrates that the so-called "exile literature" was, in many cases, an extension of "court literature," continuing the imagery and stylistic conventions of courtly writing. These poets often maintained ties with one another, remaining within the same courtly

[4] For the centralization of Tang elites—their bureaucratization and geographic concentration in the capital corridor around Chang'an and Luoyang—see David Johnson, "The Last Years of a Great Clan: The Li Family of Chao chun in Late T'ang and Early Sung," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37.1 (1977): 32-40; Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China: A Case Study of the Po-ling Ts'ui Family* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 91-93; Nicolas Tackett, *The Destruction of the Medieval Chinese Aristocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014); Mao Hanguang 毛漢光, "Cong shizu jiguan qianyi kan Tangdai shizu zhi Zhongyang hua" 從士族籍貫遷移看唐代士族之中央化, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 52.3 (1981): 421-510, republished in *Zhongguo zhonggu shehui shilun* 中國中古社會史論 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1988), 235-337. For discussions on the localization of the literati class during the Song dynasty, see, for example, Robert Hymes, *Statesmen and Gentlemen: The Elite of Fu-Chou, Chiang-Hsi, in Northern and Southern Sung* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

networks despite their geographic displacement.[5] Du Fu, however, found himself in a markedly different situation: lacking both an official post and a tightly knit community of mutual support. Moreover, these remote places were not merely temporary stops for him, but regions where he sought to build a home—though they constantly reminded him of their unfamiliarity. He engaged with local customs and ways of life while also entertaining the often-uncertain possibility of returning to a place where he truly belonged. Yet it is precisely during this prolonged displacement—navigating the margins of Tang territory in a state of isolation—that new visions of the empire began to emerge in his poetry.

Du Fu's encounter with the empire from its margins during a time of chaos not only rendered the empire palpably concrete, but also exposed its inner workings—revealing the paradox that we often understand how something functions only when it begins to break down. Such recognition was unlikely to arise from a life confined to the capital in a time of peace. Indeed, it was in the frontier regions—spaces that simultaneously testified to imperial reach and contested the very notion of civilization—that Du Fu began to see the "mountains and rivers" anew, beyond imperially sanctioned sacred sites or celebrated cultural landmarks. These margins were also where the empire's presence—and the breakdown of its institutions—was most acutely felt, and where Du Fu more consciously reflected on imperial infrastructure and its disruption. Moreover, it was in these borderlands that he began to move away from a normative, top-down vision of the empire as prescribed by canonical texts, and toward a more grounded perspective—shaped by local topographies and informed by a horizontal vision that emerged through movement along routes and rivers.

[5] Xiaofei Tian, "The Penumbra of the Great Tang: Poetry from the Margins of the Empire at the Turn of the Eighth Century," *T'oung Pao* 109 (2023): 478–526.

In contrast to the established interpretive tradition surrounding Du Fu and his works, this dissertation seeks to unravel the complexities of the concept of empire and to reveal its internal richness. In particular, my focus on Du Fu's engagement with geography, transportation, and the circulation of information is necessitated by the specific historical conjuncture in which he was writing—namely, the Tang dynasty's distinctive place in imperial history. The Tang marked a new era, distinguished by a highly developed infrastructure, driven by the need to control and mobilize resources across an expansive and diverse territory.

Compared with the Qin-Han dynasties and the period of division, the Tang significantly expanded its road network, radiating outward from Chang'an and Luoyang in all directions. These state-sponsored routes, known as *yilu* 驛路, were named for their integration with a rapid postal relay system. According to the *Tang liudian* 唐六典, 1,639 post stations (*yi* 驛) were established along these roads, spaced approximately every 30 *li*. Equipped with horses—or boats for stations along rivers—and hostels, these facilities supported both government communications and the travel of envoys and officials.[6] In addition to advances in land transport, the Tang also made remarkable improvements in water transportation. Building upon the Grand Canal, a major innovation of the Sui (581-618), the Tang invested in its renovation and added tributary canals to the Yongji Canal 永濟渠. They also enhanced transportation between the upper and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, which became a vital east–west corridor across

[6] *Tang liudian*, compiled by Li Linfu 李林甫 (d. 753) et al., annotated by Chen Zhongfu 陳仲夫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 5.163. For studies of transportation in the Tang and its relationship to literature, see Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, *Tangdai jiaotong tukao* 唐代交通圖考 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 6 volumes; Li Dehui 李德輝, *Tangdai jiaotong yu wenxue* 唐代交通與文學 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2023); Li Dehui, *Tang Song guanyi yu wenxue* 唐宋館驛與文學 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2019); Wu Shuling 吳淑玲, *Tangdai yizhuan yu Tangshi fazhan zhi guanxi* 唐代驛傳與唐詩發展之關係 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2015).

the empire.[7] Taken together, this highly developed infrastructure of land and water routes facilitated the movement of people, the transport of goods, and the circulation of information. In the Tang, imperial orders and documents could reach even the most remote regions in just eight to fourteen days.[8]

The fact that Du Fu was writing at a time when the imperial network had reached a high level of development—only to collapse suddenly at its peak—left a deep imprint on his work. This dissertation investigates how the material world and state infrastructures, compromised by rebellion and local unrest, profoundly shaped Du Fu's experience of exile and informed his poetic imagination. I argue that Du Fu did not engage with the empire as a monolithic or totalizing structure, but rather as a complex entity with layered material, cultural, and institutional realities. Dependent on state infrastructures for his travel and relocations—and acutely aware of their breakdown—Du Fu moved beyond a capital-centered vision of the realm. He came to understand how the empire functioned on the ground, confronted the failures of the Tang state, and forged new connections with its peripheries. At the same time, however, this decentered experience was accompanied by a powerful counterforce: the farther he moved from the imperial center, the more intensely he longed for it. As I will demonstrate, the capital, Chang'an, came to accrue deep symbolic significance, emerging as an idealized site where personal, ancestral, and political forms of belonging converged. Ultimately, I argue that just as the empire itself was far from homogeneous, Du Fu's evolving relationship to it was marked by complexity—a dynamic shaped by the tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces.

[7] For the revolution of water transport in the Tang, see Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973), Chapter 10 "The Revolution in Water Transport"; Yan Gengwang, *Tangdai jiaotong tukao*, Volume 4, 1155-62.
[8] Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, 133.

In addition to the state, the other crucial frame of belonging this dissertation explores is *jia* 家—a term encompassing physical, familial, and spiritual dimensions that has no exact equivalent in English. Though translated as "home" for convenience, *jia* first and foremost refers to the family: a group of individuals related by blood or marriage, who live together and transform a dwelling into a lived, emotional space. In premodern Chinese society, *jia* extended beyond the nuclear family and was closely tied to *zu* 族—clan or lineage—which played a central role in structuring social life and shaping identity. *Jia* also designates a physical residence, or *zhai* 宅—a place of dwelling (*ju* 居). In Du Fu's poetry, this spatial sense of *jia* appears alongside a cluster of related terms, including *yuan* 園 ("garden"), often associated with agrarian life and land ownership, and *xiang* 鄉, which refers to one's hometown or native place. The latter—particularly in compounds such as *guxiang* 故鄉 or *jiuxiang* 舊鄉—evokes not a private home but a socially imagined place imbued with memory and nostalgia. More broadly, *jia* can also take on symbolic dimensions, functioning as a spiritual site of belonging and a recurring literary trope in Du Fu's poetry as well as in Chinese literature more broadly.

For a literary man in medieval China, I propose three spatial affiliations that shape one's sense of home and belonging: the ancestral home base, the *junwang* 郡望 (regional place of origin associated with elite lineage), and the personal residence where the nuclear family was settled—even temporarily due to office-holding or, as in Du Fu's case, displacement. The ancestral home base refers to the location where a clan has been settled for generations, where extended family members have lived together and been buried over time. It is defined not only by land ownership but also by the presence of ancestral tombs, which, as scholars have noted, signify the social and economic foundation of a clan; their relocation often reflects a shift in the clan's regional center

of activity.[9] This ancestral or clan base is often referred to as one's "hometown" (*guxiang*)—especially when one is displaced from it or it has become inaccessible. It denotes not only the place of birth or upbringing but also the place to which one is expected to return, even after death, through the "return" of the bones.

For Du Fu, the ancestral home was his family villa near Luoyang, where his branch of the Du clan had been established since the time of his great-grandfather Du Yiyi 杜依藝, who relocated there while serving as magistrate of Gongxian 鞏縣. This relocation reflected a broader trend of the time: the growing concentration of cultural elites in the corridor region between the two capitals. Du Fu, who spent the formative first three decades of his life in Luoyang, would later recall his early years there with longing. After the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion, and with Luoyang under rebel control for several years, his desire to return deepened—even as the possibility of return became increasingly uncertain.

Junwang, also known as a clan choronym, denotes the ancestral place of origin associated with a surname. Tracing back to the great aristocratic clans of the early medieval period, *junwang* functioned as a key marker of identity, pedigree, and prestige. Like the ancestral home, or *guxiang*, *junwang* is a geographically grounded concept. However, the two are often not identical: as lineages expanded and relocated over generations, many individuals no longer lived in—or may never have even visited—their *junwang*. Nonetheless, *junwang* continued to serve as an important form of address, signifying clan identity and social prestige rather than denoting one's actual place of residence. During the Tang dynasty, as the literati class expanded, *junwang* retained its value as a form of cultural capital, even as its ability to distinguish prominent aristocratic clans from less elite families began to diminish. Over the course of the Northern and

[9] Mao Hanguang, "Cong shizu jiguan qianyi."

Southern Dynasties, through the Sui and into the early Tang, knowledge of ancestry and genealogy shifted from exclusive, rigorously maintained clan records to more widely circulated accounts accessible to literati of more diverse backgrounds. Claims of descent from prestigious *junwang* became increasingly common and were often accepted without careful scrutiny.[10] As the Tang scholar-official Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) observed of this trend: "When someone surnamed Yuan is mentioned, Chen Commandery is embellished; when someone surnamed Du is spoken of, he is linked to the Capital Prefecture" 稱袁則飾之陳郡，言杜則係之京邑.[11]

Interestingly, Liu Zhiji's criticism of contemporary genealogical embellishment aptly captures Du Fu's case. While the Du family's regional origin can be traced back to Duling 杜陵 in the Western Han dynasty—located within the Capital Prefecture (*Jingzhao fu* 京兆府)—Du Fu descended from a branch that had relocated to Xiangyang 襄陽 during the Jin–Song period (317–420 and 420–479).[12] This is why, in the imperial edict announcing his appointment as Reminder of the Left 左拾遺, he was referred to as "Du Fu of Xiangyang" 襄陽杜甫.[13] His biography in

[10] See, for example, Qiu Luming 仇鹿鳴, "'Panfu xianshi' yu 'weimao shiji': Yi Bohai Gaoshi wei zhongxin de yanjiu" "攀附先世"與"偽冒士籍"—以渤海高氏為中心的研究, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 2008 (2): 60-74; "Zhizuo junwang: Zhonggu Nanyang zhangshi de xingcheng" 製作郡望：中古南陽張氏的形成, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 2016 (3): 21-39.

[11] Liu Zhiji 劉知幾, *Shitong tongshi* 史通通釋, commentary by Pu Qilong 浦起龍 (1679-1762), edited by Wang Xuhua 王煦華 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009), 5.134.

[12] For discussions of the genealogy of the Du family and the relocations of Du Fu's ancestors, see Hu Yongjie 胡永傑, "Jin Tang shiqi Du Fu jiazu de boqian guocheng jiqi beijing kaolun" 晉唐時期杜甫家族的播遷過程及其背景考論, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究, 2017 (1): 33-40; Wang Liping 王力平, "Yuanhe xingzuan Dushi junwang shiliao chuyi" 《元和姓纂》杜氏郡望史料芻議, *Wenxian* 文獻 2001.10 (4): 96-103.

[13] The official appointment document conferring upon Du Fu the post of Reminder of the Left had already been engraved on stone as early as the twelfth century and was later recorded in the Gazetteer of Pingjiang, compiled during the Ming dynasty. The original artifact is said to have remained in the possession of Du Fu's descendants until the end of the Ming. William Hung proposed that the document must have been a forgery. However, his argument has since been refuted by recent research. In a detailed article, Deng Xiaojun 鄧小軍 argues convincingly that the document is highly likely to be authentic. See *Pingjiang xianzhi* 平江縣志, compiled by Xie Zhongxun 謝仲玩 (1702-1777) in 1742, revised by Shi Wencheng 石文成 in 1754, collected in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Hunan fu xianzhi ji* 中國地方志集成·湖南府縣志輯, vol. 8 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), 22.150; William Hung, *A Supplementary volume of notes for Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 64-5; Deng Xiaojun, "Tang shou Du Fu Zuo Shiyi gaoshen kao: jianlun Tangdai de huangdi zhijie

the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 also states that he was "originally a native of Xiangyang" (本襄陽人),[14] and the *Yuanhe xingzuan* 元和姓纂 lists him under the "Du clan of Xiangyang" 襄陽望 rather than "Du clan of Jingzhao" 京兆望.[15] Yet, like some of his forebears, Du Fu often referred to himself as "Du Fu from the capital" 京兆杜甫 in both formal and informal writings, such as memorials and commemorative texts for his ancestors.[16] By tracing his lineage further back to the Jingzhao branch, he was associating himself with a more prominent line of the Du clan, which by the Tang dynasty had attained greater cultural and political prestige than the Xiangyang branch.

While in Tang society claims to a *junwang* may not have conferred tangible political or social advantages, Du Fu's case demonstrates that ancestry and clan origin could still serve as important frameworks for identity and belonging—especially in times of crisis. His connection to Duling, his claimed *junwang*, was reinforced by his move to Chang'an in 746 in pursuit of political advancement, and by his brief settlement in Duqu 杜曲 (also known as Shaoling 少陵), located about eighteen leagues south of Duling, from 754 to 755—just before the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion. This connection would later serve as a reference point in his reconceptualization of an original home during his years of displacement.

Finally, during Du Fu's life as a refugee, the third type of spatial anchoring—personal homes for the core family, including even temporary shelters—was no less important. These include the Thatched Cottage in Chengdu, where he lived for a few relatively peaceful years; the various

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shouguan" 唐授杜甫左拾遺告身考——兼論唐代的皇帝直接授官, *Du Fu yanjiu xuekan* 杜甫研究學刊 131 (2017): 36-51.

[14] *Jiu Tang shu* (hereafter *JTS*), edited by Liu Xu 劉昫 (888-947) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 190.5054.

[15] *Yuanhe xingzuan* 元和姓纂, compiled by Lin Bao 林寶 (active in the early 9th century), edited by Cen Zhongmian 岑仲勉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994) 6.930-2.

[16] Examples include his "Ritual Memorial for My Maternal Grandfather and Grandmother" 祭外祖祖母文 and "Ritual Memorial for the Late Prime Minister, Lord Fang of Qinghe" 祭故相國清河房公文.

dwellings he occupied in Kuizhou, where he could hardly make himself feel at home; and even the boat he purchased, which served as a miniature, mobile shelter for him and his family during their travels from Chengdu to Kuizhou and as they drifted through Hubei and Hunan. Though Du Fu's attachment to these various forms of home differed, they nonetheless offered temporary comfort and security when other familiar places—those with which he was emotionally or geographically affiliated—were out of reach and could exist only through poetic evocation. His poetry reveals that while he persistently longed for his hometown, this desire was often complicated by a competing impulse: the possibility of making his home in exile a permanent one.

During Du Fu's years of displacement, these three loci of belonging—his hometown, where the family estate and ancestral tombs were located; the Du clan's region of origin, a spatial marker of his clan identity; and the humble shelters in exile that provided refuge for his immediate family—interacted with one another, each taking on different meanings and varying weight as his life circumstances changed. Together, they formed the foundation of Du Fu's understanding of home, self, origin, and belonging. At the same time, they rendered his concept of home elusive, diffuse, and dynamic. Indeed, emphasizing home as a central theme in Du Fu's poetry does not imply a focus on settled domesticity, but rather on his restless yearning for it. For Du Fu, home is not a given—a fixed place, a clear designation, or even a construct easily summoned through poetic language. Instead, it often emerges as a problem: torn between competing visions, resisting representation, and existing primarily as an absence or an unattainable ideal.

In the deepest sense, Du Fu could not find true settlement in exile, neither in his temporary dwellings nor in the homeland that had become unreachable. His conception of home was shaped

not only by personal displacement but also by the fragmentation of the empire during a time of national crisis. In the Chinese tradition, self, family, and state are conceived as concentric circles: the family forms the basic unit of the state, and the state functions as an extension of the family. Severed from this world of order—where home is anchored within a stable political structure—and alienated from the court and its bureaucracy, with his political ambitions unrealized, Du Fu's displacement became more than the loss of a personal home; it evolved into a deeper crisis of identity. As a result, Du Fu's quest for home and belonging inevitably extended beyond the personal sphere into the domain of larger communities and the public world. Whether in his poetic construction of temporary homes, his vision of his residence as a site of historical memory, or his reimagining of his original home as a lost paradise, these representations of home consistently bridge to broader structures—the state, the imperial center, ancestral lineage, the literati community, and the enduring cultural tradition. In this sense, Du Fu's longing for home is always also a longing for the empire restored to unity and wholeness—an order within which he, too, would have a rightful place. It is in this way that home and empire are closely intertwined.

This dissertation, then, explores two interwoven threads in Du Fu's work: evolving visions of the empire at its most precarious moment and from its periphery, and the longing for home amid the collapse of larger political structures. During a time when the Tang empire was under severe strain, Du Fu's quest for belonging and true settlement was deeply connected to broader social worlds, communities, and state structures. At the same time, he looked beyond the political realm toward the shared cultural tradition, or *wen* 文, as an enduring and alternative source of meaning and identity—one that transcends dynastic rises and falls. In fact, that Du Fu continued to compose poetry during his years of wandering amid social unrest—and did so with sustained

engagement in contemporary experience—is not something to be taken for granted.[17] Rather, it reflects a convergence of historical contingency and inner necessity. With limited material and social resources, poetry became the primary cultural capital Du Fu could command. Through his writing, Du Fu not only sought to maintain his sense of self as a member of the cultural elite in isolated hinterlands, but also hoped to achieve a lasting legacy—to be remembered and honored beyond death—since writing is traditionally regarded as one of the three paths to immortal fame.[18]

Over the course of his restless exile, Du Fu's investment in writing deepened. He became increasingly self-conscious as a poet, not only significantly expanding the traditional thematic repertoire but also treating new subject matter in ways that stretch the limits of classical poetry. For Du Fu, poetry was no longer simply a polite art demanded by social occasions. Given his isolated and marginal state, he wrote not only for an immediate audience but also for a potential broader one—including future readers—and for himself. Writing became a form of intervention: a way to form communities, reimagine lost connections, and enact the social roles of a literatus. In a word, it was a medium through which he could reorient himself when normal patterns of belonging had fallen apart.

Though Du Fu's poetry did not enjoy wide circulation during his lifetime, he took great care to preserve and compile his works, circulating them among relatives, friends, and even associates with whom he was not particularly close. In a manuscript culture, such efforts were essential to

[17] Lucas Bender in an article discusses poetry written on and during the An Lushan rebellion by poets other than Li Bai and Du Fu, arguing that these verses often work to transfigure current events instead of reflecting historical realities. See Bender, "Other Poetry on the An Lushan Rebellion: Notes on Time and Transcendence in Tang Verse," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 79, nos. 1–2 (2019): 1-48.

[18] This is based on a passage from the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, which states: "The highest is to establish virtue; next is to establish merit; next is to establish words. Though time passes, these will not fade—this is what is called immortality" 太上有立德，其次有立功，其次有立言。雖久不廢，此之謂不朽. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 24th year of Duke Xiang, 1088.

maximize the chances of transmission to future generations. His faith in the written word as a means of preserving identity and cultural continuity amid political turmoil stemmed from his belief that poetry was a family legacy. "Poetry is an endeavor of our family" 詩是吾家事, he wrote in a birthday poem to his son Zongwu 宗武.[19] This statement reflects his lineage: his grandfather, Du Shenyan 杜審言 (ca. 648-708), was a prominent poet and statesman at the court of Empress Wu (r. 690-705). Du Fu expresses similar pride elsewhere, declaring: "My grandfather's poetry is above all since ancient times" 吾祖詩冠古.[20] The influence of Du Shenyan's poetry on Du Fu has been noted by both premodern commentators and modern scholars. Moreover, the poems written by Du Shenyan and his court circle during their exile to the far south deeply resonated with Du Fu as he wandered through Hubei and Hunan. While Du Fu's late works in many ways diverge from the court poetry tradition represented by his grandfather, he still saw himself as an inheritor of that legacy—carrying forward a tradition that was not fixed or static, but flexible, resilient, and continually evolving.

Thus, for Du Fu, poetry was not merely a medium through which to negotiate his visions of home and empire, but an integral part of his connection to home, family, lineage, and his broader quest for rootedness. This helps explain Du Fu's increasing turn to poetry as a space where he sought meaning and belonging. *Wen*, the cultural tradition—though dependent on the state and its institutions for preservation and transmission—embodies an ideal that transcends political upheaval, integrating moments of crisis in ways that reinforce its resilience and adaptability. Ultimately, this dissertation explores, through the case of Du Fu, not only how men of letters navigated and reimagined the relationship between self, family, and state amid the disintegration

[19] "Zongwu's Birthday" 宗武生日, *Du Fu quanji jiaozhu* 杜甫全集校註 (hereafter *DFQJJZ*), edited by Xiao Difei 蕭滌非 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013), 9.2647.
[20] "To the Shu Monk, the Venerable Lüqiu" 贈蜀僧閭丘師兄, *DFQJJZ*, 7.2052.

of broader social structures, but also how poetry itself played a role in that process, enabling the reinvention of the literary tradition in times of crisis.

The life and works of Du Fu have been the subject of extensive scholarship in both Chinese and English. Chinese-language studies have largely followed a biographical approach established during the Song dynasty and further developed in the late imperial period. A representative example of this long-standing interpretive tradition is Chen Yixin's 陳貽焮 *Du Fu Pingzhuan* 杜甫評傳, which combines detailed historical context with close readings of Du Fu's poems and remains a valuable reference, alongside other classical studies in the same tradition.[21] In Western scholarship, this biographical model is exemplified by William Hung's *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet*, published in 1952.[22]

In recent decades, however, scholars have increasingly sought to move beyond this interpretive framework, which views Du Fu's poetry as the expression of a unified and coherent personality. Eva Shan Chou contributed to this shift by drawing greater attention to the formal and stylistic features of Du Fu's poetry, in addition to its thematic concerns.[23] Stephen Owen introduced the concept of "multiplicity" to characterize Du Fu's work—reflected in the diversity

[21] Chen Yixin, *Du Fu ping zhuan*, 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982). This three-volume work was reprinted by Peking University Press in 2011 and by Sanlian Shudian in 2022. See also Mo Lifeng 莫礪鋒, *Du Fu ping zhuan* 杜甫評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1993).
[22] William Hung, *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).
[23] Chou, *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context*.

of voices, shifts in style and theme both across and within poems, and syntactic ambiguity—an insight that has since been echoed and expanded by later scholars.[24]

Following Stephen Owen's landmark complete translation of Du Fu's poetry,[25] a few recent publications signal a renewed wave of interest in the poet and his legacy. The edited volume *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, compiled by Xiaofei Tian, brings together nine articles that address a wide range of issues—from "home, locale and empire" to Du Fu's relationship with Buddhism, and the creative reception of his works.[26] In his 2021 monograph *Du Fu Transforms: Tradition and Ethics amid Societal Collapse*, Lucas Bender examines how Du Fu gradually lost faith in the received cultural tradition as a means of fully capturing his experience in the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion. Bender argues that Du Fu increasingly turned away from normative models established by tradition, moving instead toward the moral sense-making of an individual. At the same time, however, Du Fu had not yet arrived at the clear moral frameworks that characterize post-medieval thought; his poetry, Bender contends, is marked by moral ambiguity and indeterminacy.[27] Drawing on theories of memory, Gregory Patterson's *Elegies for Empire: A Poetics of Memory in the Late Work of Du Fu* explores what he terms "a poetics of memory" in Du Fu's Kuizhou poems. Analyzing various forms of memory—cultural, historical, social, and autobiographical—Patterson argues that displacement and the breakdown of societal structures prompted Du Fu to anchor himself in the past as a way to counter forgetting and reimagine lost

[24] Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), "Tu Fu," 183-224.

My summary of the above-mentioned works is intentionally brief—both because they now constitute foundational knowledge in the field, and because they are treated in depth in two recent monographs, by Lucas Bender and Gregory Patterson, to which I will soon turn.

[25] *The Poetry of Du Fu*, translated and edited by Stephen Owen (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016).

[26] *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, edited by Xiaofei Tian (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020).

[27] Lucas Bender, *Du Fu Transforms: Tradition and Ethics amid Societal Collapse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2021).

connections.[28] These works have, in various ways, complicated the canonical image of Du Fu as the "poet historian" and "poet sage," while significantly deepening our understanding of his life and poetry.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the long interpretive tradition on Du Fu by foregrounding longing and belonging as central forces driving his literary creation and experimentation. Displaced in multiple senses—from a physical home, an ancestral homeland, and a proper place in society—amid broader societal collapse, Du Fu faced a pressing question: who he was and where he belonged in the world. How he reoriented his sense of self and reimagined connection and affiliation serves as a crucial lens through which to approach his work. While the quest for belonging—an effort to renegotiate his relationship to family, home, and empire—is a central concern in Du Fu's poetry, it remains insufficiently explored in existing scholarship.

As noted earlier, the dominant Chinese interpretive tradition, shaped by the ideological interests of later readers, recast Du Fu as an orthodox Confucian thinker, devoted to the state and compassionate toward human suffering. More recent studies have sought to complicate this image—highlighting, for example, his growing distance from the state, his turn to memory and the historical past, or his focus on domestic life—but they often remain constrained by the binary between state and individual, even in their critique of it. This dissertation aims to deepen our understanding of Du Fu's poetry by placing longing and belonging at the center of interpretation, and by probing the layered forms of affiliation that inform his work: places of origin and settlement, familial and social communities, as well as state structures and infrastructures. In

[28] Gregory M. Patterson, *Elegies for Empire: A Poetics of Memory in the Late Work of Du Fu* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2024).

doing so, it moves beyond viewing the state as a monolithic abstraction or the self as simply aligned with or alienated from it.

If Bender's insight into Du Fu's critical distance from the state and cultural tradition risks portraying him as a lone thinker—bewildered yet self-reliant, detached from his time and positioned outside of history—this dissertation proposes an interpretive framework more firmly grounded in social and cultural history. It does so by showing how the state, family, ancestry, and various forms of home and spatial affiliation remained crucial to Du Fu during his exile—even in their fragmented or compromised forms, and in ways that diverged significantly from earlier periods, before the collapse of the normal order. I further emphasize poetry writing as an active endeavor to reconstruct connections and frameworks of belonging. In other words, while Bender focuses on how Du Fu uses poetry to interpret and make sense of his experiences, I argue that poetry functions not only as a medium for *sense-making* but also for *meaning-making*—a generative act aimed at restoring meaning and relational ties amid disruption.

In his article "Foundings of Home: On Du Fu and Poetic Success," Jack Chen examines the idea of home in Du Fu's poetry. Focusing on Du Fu's Chengdu poems, Chen argues that "the gestures in Du Fu's poetry to found and locate a sense of home are, in fact, attempts to find significance beyond the context of empire and dynastic trauma, to find it even (or especially) within the ordinary."[29] Here, home is defined in an abstract sense and treated primarily as a literary trope, ultimately serving Chen's broader argument: that for Du Fu, poetic success in locating a sense of home lies in his self-consciousness and acknowledgment of the limitations of poetic representation. Departing from Chen's approach, this dissertation does not treat home merely as a poetic image or literary trope, but instead emphasizes a broader and more historically

[29] Jack Chen, "Foundings of Home: On Du Fu and Poetic Success," in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, 16.

grounded conception—one that encompasses familial, social, and political dimensions. This approach opens Du Fu's works to larger socio-historical inquiries, including institutional history and the evolving constitution, roles, and self-understanding of the literati class.

Moreover, while Patterson's discussion of memory in Du Fu's Kuizhou poems touches on the issue of belonging, his focus remains largely on memory-related themes—a long-established concern in Chinese literature—without fully accounting for the central role that belonging plays in Du Fu's poetic imagination. This dissertation places belonging at the forefront of inquiry. In addition, I foreground the contemporary conditions that shaped Du Fu's reimagining of place, community, and affiliation—such as geography, transportation networks, and the circulation of information—in order to more fully situate his writing within the material, infrastructural, and social realities of his time. This broader framework, I hope, will offer a fuller understanding of the contexts in which Du Fu's engagement with memory and identity takes shape.

This dissertation is structured into four thematically organized chapters that generally follow the chronological progression of Du Fu's works. While each chapter stands on its own, they tend to cohere around two thematic arcs: one centered on movement and circulation, the other on efforts toward settlement. The first arc includes Chapter One and Chapter Three. Chapter One examines Du Fu's engagement with geography and transportation during his travels through the empire's western frontiers, while Chapter Three focuses on what moves along roads and routes—particularly information and news about state affairs. The second arc encompasses Chapter Two and Chapter Four, which focus on Du Fu's time in Chengdu and Kuizhou, places

where he stayed for relatively extended periods. These chapters explore his attempts to create or reimagine different forms of settlement, including temporary and permanent homes as well as his lost homeland. Just as the ideas of home and empire are closely intertwined, so too are movement and settlement in Du Fu's experience of displacement. The gradual unfolding of unfamiliar landscapes during his journeys, along with the often-disrupted flow of information, became occasions for various forms of anchoring. Meanwhile, his conceptions of home were inevitably shaped by movement and the contingencies of exile. By interweaving these two thematic arcs, the dissertation traces both continuities and transformations in Du Fu's evolving reflections on home and empire over the course of his prolonged displacement.

Chapter One explores Du Fu's transformation of the foreign landscape as he ventured into the unfamiliar terrain of the far western empire and his reimagination of imperial space from its margins. Focusing on two poetic sequences that document his travels—first from Qinzhou to Tonggu, and then from Tonggu to Chengdu in the year 759—I argue that these poems are deeply invested in place-making: the creation of meaningful sites from the "mountains and rivers" that, though scarred by the turmoil of rebellion, have endured. These newly envisioned landmarks, in turn, became sites upon which Du Fu could inscribe his presence, thereby imbuing his refugee experience with meaning. Specifically, I show that Du Fu's poetic map-making was closely intertwined with geography, transportation, and the circulatory networks of the empire—elements he came to reflect on more consciously as he navigated the imperial periphery. Rather than representing mountains and rivers simply as elements of the natural environment, as is often the case in travel and excursion poetry, Du Fu understood them also as political landscapes, appreciating their geopolitical, military, and economic significance within the imperial system. In contrast to his literary precursors, who favored sites of cultural or historical memory, Du Fu

allowed the physical and infrastructural realities of the land to guide him. In a region not densely populated with established cultural landmarks, his sustained engagement with terrain, transportation, and imperial infrastructure gave rise to new modes of spatial imagination. Through this process, Du Fu constructed a poetic map that both established new literary sites and reconfigured existing ones.

Chapter Two explores the concept of "home" and its relationship to the empire as portrayed in Du Fu's poems written during his time in Chengdu, where he built his Thatched Cottage by a subtributary of the upper Yangtze River. While previous interpretations have often viewed these poems as presenting home as a non-social and non-political space, I argue that they instead reveal competing visions of home at a time when the state could no longer provide a stable foundation. Shaped by rivers that both demarcate a secluded space and evoke the broader imperial realm, the idea of home in these poems operates simultaneously as a retreat from the public world and as a bridge to it. This complexity deepens following Du Fu's two-year displacement in eastern Sichuan, when the motif of mobility—again inspired by the empire's waterways—begins to complicate his understanding of home as a fixed or stable place. Aware of the uncertainty of life and the fragility of the dwellings he constructed, Du Fu increasingly looked beyond the present moment, seeking to transform his Thatched Cottage into a cultural and historical site—an enduring home for his legacy in literary history and collective memory. Thus, in Du Fu's Chengdu poems, home emerges as a contested and multilayered concept—a space where private and public, material and symbolic, present and future visions intersect and are continually negotiated through poetry.

For Du Fu, in his displaced state, staying informed about the world around him—through both official reports and informal channels—was essential for navigating his sense of security and

maintaining a connection to the broader social and political sphere. Indeed, a notable portion of Du Fu's corpus consists of poems written in direct response to news, especially amid a disrupted information network. While his poems on public affairs and major state events have long been cited as evidence of his political insight and loyalty to the empire, in Chapter Three, I reexamine this body of work by drawing on a more diverse range of examples, investigating not only their subject matter but also their modes of composition. I argue that Du Fu's engagement with public affairs stems less from fixed ideological commitments than from a performative search for identity, community, and belonging amid crisis and isolation. On one level, I highlight the unstable ground upon which many of these poems were composed—a fluid, often unreliable web of information—as manifested in Du Fu's dramatization of his struggle with delayed or uncertain reports, including poems written in response to news that later proved false or unfounded. On another level, I call attention to the wide range of attitudes and roles he adopts, revealing the provisional nature of his responses—sometimes even taking contradictory stances on the same issue—which complicates the traditional image of him as the "poet-historian." Ultimately, I argue that, without necessarily intending to deliver authoritative moral or political judgment, his contingent engagement with a fractured world of communication and authority reflects a persistent search for self-positioning. Whether composing "poetry-as-memorial" or adopting the panegyrical style of court poetry despite his removal from court life, Du Fu's poems are not merely reflective but function as responsive acts of expression—addressed to a broader, imagined audience. Through them, he sought to reinsert himself into the cultural world of the elite from which he had been estranged, yet to which he continued to lay claim.

Chapter Four turns to Du Fu's Kuizhou period and beyond—a time that, I argue, marks a significant shift in his relationship to the empire, both its center and its peripheries, as well as in

his evolving conception of home. I demonstrate that the top-down, all-encompassing vision of the empire characteristic of Du Fu's early poetry is increasingly complicated, even problematized, in his post-rebellion works, culminating in the poems composed during his time in Kuizhou. This transformation—prompted by Kuizhou's unique combination of geographical isolation and transportation connectivity—represents a shift from a vertical view of the empire to a horizontal spatiality, marked by fragmentation, juxtaposition, and imagined connections, whether through imperial infrastructure or more intangible means. At the same time, I argue that Du Fu's engagement with the margins and his efforts to forge ties with the local sphere do not signify a turn away from the center. On the contrary, his attachment to the imperial center deepened the farther he moved into the peripheries, reshaping his sense of home. Beginning with his time in Kuizhou, his longing for home became increasingly fixated on a distant, unreachable, lost paradise: the capital, Chang'an—a space defined less by materiality and functionality than by an idealized fusion of personal home, ancestral homeland, and political belonging. By contrast, his temporary lodgings in Kuizhou, where he struggled to establish a true home, became spaces to be transcended through the act of writing. Ultimately, poetry itself emerged as a surrogate homeland—a medium through which Du Fu grappled with the immediacy of exile.

The organization of these chapters largely follows a chronological order based on the works they examine—with the exception of Chapter Three, which spans a broader temporal range of Du Fu's oeuvre rather than adhering to a geographically defined periodization. This structure reveals a progression from more tangible forms of home and belonging to increasingly symbolic ones: from concrete places to imagined communities, from real dwellings to fantasized homelands, and ultimately to writing itself as a final refuge—a transcendent space of belonging.

Du Fu's self-consciousness as a poet and his belief in the transformative power of writing are themes that run throughout this dissertation. In the "Conclusion," alongside summarizing the main argument, I further elaborate on Du Fu's conception of writing in relation to home, belonging, and empire, specifically through a return to poems on humble topics and domestic tasks. These poems have been instrumental in establishing Du Fu's stature as a pivotal transitional figure in Chinese literary history. I argue that these highly performative works are deeply intertwined with his experiences of displacement and alienation from the cultural center, and most clearly dramatize his growing investment in writing as an alternative space of meaning and belonging during a time when the empire was undergoing profound crisis. More broadly, I suggest that what would later be recognized as the rudiments of private subjectivity were not initially grounded in a clear-cut public/private dichotomy. Ultimately, I hope this dissertation contributes to broader reflections on the dynamics of literary and cultural history, in which significant transitions or transformations often emerge not through a linear progression, but through the convergence of multiple—and at times competing—forces.

Chapter One

Landscape Reconfigured:

Geography, Transportation, and Poetic Map-Making on the Western Frontiers

In the spring of 757, when Du Fu was taken captive by the rebels in the sacked capital Chang'an, he composed one of his most famous poems, "Springtime Gaze" 春望, which opens with a line full of pathos: "The capital has fallen, mountains and rivers remain" 國破山河在.[30] This line evokes a well-known anecdote from the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 concerning a banquet at Xinting 新亭, where a group of northern émigrés who had fled south after the fall of the Western Jin (265-316) had gathered. Confronted with the unfamiliar southern landscape—so different from the mountains and rivers of the north—Zhou Yi 周顗 (269-322) was suddenly overcome with nostalgia, lamenting: "The wind and light are the same, yet the mountains and rivers are different" 風景不殊，正自有山河之異.[31] Du Fu's case, however, was not quite the same—a difference reflected in the twist his line introduces: having not experienced geographic displacement in the same way as the Jin émigrés, he was gazing upon the same "mountains and rivers," yet the political world had fundamentally changed. The enduring presence of the mountains and rivers, on the one hand, underscores nature's indifference to political upheaval; on the other, it gestures toward a broader conception of imperial territory—one that extends beyond the now-collapsed political center.

[30] *DFQJJZ*, 3.779. I primarily follow Xiao's *DFQJJZ* as the base text for Du Fu's poetry. For textual variants and related issues, I also consult Qiu Zhao'ao's *DSXZ* and Stephen Owen's complete English translation. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[31] Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444), *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏, commentary by Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (462-521), edited by Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 2.101.

Two years later, in 759, Du Fu abandoned his post and took his family to the western frontier to seek for a habitable place. During his travels and relocations, he observed the unfamiliar topography and saw the distinctive landscape in the far western part of the Tang territory, vastly different from the capital region that he had been used to. How did his understanding of "mountains and rivers" evolve as he ventured into alien territory, experiencing and conceptualizing imperial space in ways that would have been impossible for a court official? How did the stability of mountains and rivers become complicated or compromised when the imperial cause was at its most precarious? How did Du Fu's engagement with places on the margins relate to his efforts to settle himself, both physically and psychologically?

This chapter explores these questions by examining two poetic sequences that document Du Fu's travel first from Qinzhou to Tonggu, and then from Tonggu to Chengdu in the year 759. As he navigated the outlying regions, his encounters with the "mountains and rivers" on the peripheries were fundamentally different from his earlier excursions to famed mountains, scenic spots, and historical sites during his youthful years of peace. In hindsight, the line "The capital has fallen, mountains and rivers remain" encapsulates the central theme of Du Fu's poetry during his restless journeys on the western frontier. For Du Fu, a weary traveler, the mountains and rivers are at once disturbing and comforting: disturbing because they are perilous, outlandish, and unfeeling, yet, besides their imposing and spectacular appearances, they are comforting in their potential to be transformed into legible places on the imperial map. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, a central concern of Du Fu's poetic sequences is the creation of meaningful sites from the "mountains and rivers" that remain—an act that allows him to leave his mark on these new landmarks and reimagine imperial space from its margins.

Though scholarship on Du Fu has explored his poetry's departure from established conventions in various ways,[32] additional attention is needed to highlight the hybridity of genre in his Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu poetic sequences. Written consistently in pentasyllabic "ancient style" form 五言古體, these two poetic sequences nonetheless exhibit dramatic variations in themes and subject matter, language and style, as well as modes of representation, both from poem to poem and sometimes within a single poem. Indeed, we would be hard-pressed to categorize these poems within any existing subgenres. Though often designated as "records of travels" (*jixing* 紀行), these poems defy such categorization. One of the major literary models for the two series is found in the poems classified under the categories of "Excursion" (*youlan* 遊覽) and "Travel" (*xinglü* 行旅) in the *Wenxuan* 文選, especially the works of Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433), the best represented poet in these sections. Yet, if the sites Xie avidly explored are represented as unoccupied, wild nature,[33] Du Fu takes great care to include geographical details, identify the places on the imperial map, and sometimes comment on the activities of local people.

Moreover, whereas poems on travel and excursions in the *Wenxuan* are more interested in individual sites, Du Fu devotes as much attention to routes as to sites. In this regard, Du Fu's travel poems resemble travel *fu* (*zhengfu* 征賦 or *shuxing fu* 述行賦), a genre going back to the Han dynasty, represented by works such as Ban Biao's 班彪 "Journeying North" 北征賦 and

[32] See, for instance, Stephen Owen's discussions of the complexity and "multiplicity" of Du Fu's poetry in *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry*, 183-224. In his article "Du Fu and the Failure of Lyric," Paul Rouzer examines Du Fu's tendency to undermine poetic conventions and question the communicability of poetic language. See Paul Rouzer, "Du Fu and the Failure of Lyric," *CLEAR*, Vol. 33, December 2011, 27-53. Lucas Bender's monograph, *Du Fu Transforms*, offers a comprehensive study of Du Fu's gradual departure from the tropologies established by tradition, turning instead to his own lived experience—a shift Bender describes as moving from a late medieval to a postmedieval paradigm of sense-making.

[33] For an elaboration on this point, see Xiaofei Tian, "Empire's Blue Highways: Li Daoyuan's Commentary on the *River Classic*," *Asia Major* 2022.35 (1): 90-2.

Pan Yue's 潘岳 "Rapsody on a Westward Journey" 西征賦, particularly in their narrative of itineraries.[34] As Du Fu repeatedly recounts the route he has traveled and envisions his destination, individual poems are linked together to form a larger structure. In this way, the two travel sequences as a whole can be seen as organized by a meta-structure of a travel *fu*.

Yet, unlike a travel *fu* that is primarily interested in sites imbued with historical memory along the way, many of the places Du Fu writes about barely have a history—it is Du Fu's poems that attempt to put the places on the imperial map whereby to draw them into history. To achieve this, Du Fu situates the places within a contemporary imperial network, highlighting their transportational, strategic, and economic significance. Hence, in addition to the descriptions of timeless landscape and evocations of historical memory that typically characterize travel poems or travel *fu*, Du Fu's works also integrate geographical details, accounts of local activities, and

[34] An earlier example of Du Fu's poetry influenced by the genre of travel *fu* is his "Journeying North" 北征 written in 757. This poem pays special tribute to Ban Biao's rhyme prose of the same title, "*Fu* on Journeying North." In the case of his Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel sequences, Du Fu often narrates his itinerary in the manner of a travel *fu*. A few passages may be quoted as examples:

忡忡去絕境， Worried and downcast, I leave this isolated realm,
杳杳更遠適。 Dim and distant, I journey farther.
停驂龍潭雲， I halt my chariot by the clouds of Dragon Pool,
回首虎崖石。 And look back at the rocks of Tiger Cliff.
——"Setting Out from Tonggu County" 發同谷縣

首路栗亭西， Setting out from the west of the Chestnut Pavilion,
尚想鳳皇村。 I still think of Phoenix Village.
季冬攜童稚， In the last month of winter, taking my young children,
辛苦赴蜀門。 We endure hardships as we head toward the gate of Shu.
——"Bark Ridge" 木皮嶺

山分積草嶺，The mountains divide at Haystack Ridge,
路異明水縣。Another road leads to Bright Water County.
旅泊吾道窮，Drifting along, my path comes to an end,
衰年歲時倦。In my declining years, I grow weary of the passing seasons.
——"Haystack Ridge" 積草嶺

See *DFQJJZ*, 7.1821, 7.1828, 7.1750.

commentary on local customs and issues. Taken together, no established category can fully capture the hybrid nature of these poems.

I argue that the hybridity of these poems arises from Du Fu's unprecedented approach to space and place at the empire's margins during a time of chaos, as he began to see the "mountains and rivers" in a new light. Confronted with the strangeness of the western frontier and an existential crisis triggered by the unraveling of his long-held values, the Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel sequences reflect his effort to invest meaning both in the foreign landscape and in his own dislocated existence as a refugee. These two poetic sequences, I argue, are fundamentally concerned with place-making and map-making. The western frontier through which Du Fu traveled was not populated with culturally significant sites rich in historical memories. Instead, many of the locations that stand out in his poetry lack historical prominence and have received little attention in the literary tradition. By imbuing these marginal places with meaning and crafting literary profiles for them, Du Fu transforms unfamiliar, undefined spaces into recognizable places—effectively placing them on his own poetic map and complicating the established literary landscape.

Scholars have approached the genre of poetic sequence by examining echoes between individual poems and analyzing the overarching narrative structure. In the case of Du Fu's Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel sequences, Lucas Bender's observation of a chiastic structure—where each poem in the first half of the sequence is echoed and reinterpreted by its parallel poem in the second half—offers valuable insight into the architecture of Du Fu's poetic sequences. Observations of such structural features are part of Bender's larger argument that these poetic sequences are products of Du Fu's thought process as he tries to make sense of

his experience that is constantly unfolding.[35] Xiaofei Tian, on the other hand, reading Du Fu's Qinzhou-Tonggu series from a Buddhist perspective, makes a compelling case for the pivotal role of Buddhism in shaping the structure of this poetic sequence. She proposes "reading the twelve poems as a carefully organized sequence that constitutes a coherent Buddhist narrative of transformation and enlightenment."[36]

Building on the studies of Bender and Tian—both of whom highlight the interconnectedness of the poems and their broader narrative—I attempt to approach the two poetic sequences from yet a different perspective. While both Tian and Bender interpret Du Fu's narrative progression as an inner, spiritual journey—Bender noting that Du Fu not only reached his destination but also "learned from his experience," and Tian suggesting a process of transformation and illumination—my aim is to foreground the spatial logic that underlies the two travel sequences and to attend to the material world, which simultaneously constituted a crucial part of Du Fu's experience and informed his poetic practice. I argue that in his Qinzhou-Chengdu travel poems, Du Fu takes an active role in shaping perceptions of the physical as well as cultural landscape on the western frontiers through poetry writing, and that his poetic map-making is closely intertwined with geography, transportation, and the circulatory network of the empire. As Du Fu navigates the unfamiliar territory, his dependence on the imperial infrastructure—such as roads and waterways, post-stations, mountain passes and ferry crossings—becomes more pronounced in his poetry as he seeks to create new landmarks and reshape existing ones.

Du Fu's poetic map-making not only renders the peripheries of the Tang empire more legible, but also creates meaningful sites that serve as anchorages for his own life as he drifted along the

[35] See Bender, *Du Fu Transforms*, Chapter Four, 141-178; "Three Narrative Poetic Series from Du Fu's Exile on the Western Frontiers," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. 51, Number 1 (June 2021), 1–68.
[36] Xiaofei Tian, "Feeding the Phoenix: Du Fu's Qinzhou-Tonggu Series," in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, edited by Xiaofei Tian (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 94.

margins of a crumbling state. In the two poetic sequences, Du Fu seeks to forge a connection with the places he writes about, positioning himself variously as observer, traveler, companion, or commentator. Though these locations were merely temporary stops he passed through on a restless journey, writing became a means of transforming them into literary sites—inscribing his presence onto the landscape and, in turn, securing a place for himself in literary history. Ultimately, I contend that the Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu sequences revolve around a double act of inscription: the inscription of place onto the literary map, and the inscription of the poet onto the sites he brings into being.

Du Fu's unconventional approach to space and place can be illustrated through a comparison between his travel poems and those of his predecessors. Before Du Fu, a couple of Tang writers tried their hand at writing poetic sequences documenting their travels.[37] One such precedent is Wang Bo 王勃 (650-676). Having suffered political setbacks in Chang'an, Wang Bo traveled to Shu in the year 669, and composed "Thirty Poems Documenting My Travel to Shu" 入蜀紀行詩三十首, of which nine have survived, together with Wang Bo's preface to this series. The first thing we may notice that distinguishes Du Fu's poetic series from Wang Bo's is the titling of the poems. While Wang Bo opts for verb phrases to describe his activities at various locations, such as "Staying for the Night at Fengzhou" 晚留鳳州 and "Going Across the San Pass in the Morning" 散關晨度—a common titling convention in travel and excursion poetry—Du Fu consistently titles his poems using place names alone: "Red Valley" 赤谷, "Iron Hall Gorge" 鐵堂峽, and so on. The only exceptions are the first poem in each set: "Setting Out from Qinzhou" 發秦州 and "Setting Out from Tonggu County" 發同谷縣. These exceptions can be explained

[37] For a survey of travel sequences in the Tang, see Li Dehui, *Tangdai jiaotong yu wenxue*, 342-353.

by the fact that these two poems provide framing narratives for the entire series. Additionally, rather than referring to specific locations along the journey, Qinzhou and Tonggu were large administrative regions where Du Fu began his travels. With this approach, it is the places themselves—rather than the poet's activities—that become the main focus of the poems.

Form and length also distinguish Du Fu from his predecessors. Most of Wang Bo's surviving poems in his series "Thirty Poems Documenting My Travel to Shu" are composed in regulated verse, with the remainder written as quatrains. In contrast to these more compact, integrated, and self-contained forms, Du Fu employs the ancient-style form, known for its flexibility and loose structure. As we will see, this form allows the poet to explore multiple themes and shift between different styles.

On a more fundamental level, Du Fu departs from tradition both in his choice of places to write about and in his approach to them. The following two poems from Wang Bo's "Thirty Poems Documenting My Travel to Shu" exemplify the conventional practices of travel poems prior to Du Fu.

散關晨度 Going Across the San Pass in the Morning[38]

關山凌旦開， The mountain pass opens forth at dawn,

石路無塵埃。 The stone road is free from dust.

白馬高談去， Lofty talks about white horse are gone,[39]

[38] *Wang Zi'an jizhu* 王子安集註, edited by Jiang Qingyi 蔣清翊 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 3.80.
[39] It is said that the sophist Gongsun Long 公孫龍 (ca. 320–250 BCE), when prohibited from entering a guarded pass while riding a horse, argued that a white horse is not a horse. As a result, he was allowed to pass. See *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 吕氏春秋校釋, edited by Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1984), 18.1188.

4 青牛真氣來。 Pure vapor on a blue-black ox comes.[40]

重門臨巨壑， Layered gates overlook vast ravines,

連棟接崇隈。 Linked roofs connect to towering cliffs.

即今揚策度， Now I go across, raising my whip,

8 非是棄繻回。 This is not the return of the one who discarded the taffeta-pass.[41]

深灣夜宿 Spending the Night at Deep Bay[42]

津途臨巨壑， The ferry crossing faces a vast ravine,

村宇架危岑。 Village dwellings are built on steep cliffs.

堰絕灘聲隱， A dike cuts off, sounds of rapids dampen,

4 峯交樹影深。 Mountain ridges crisscross, shades of trees deepen.

江童暮理楫， River lads at sunset gather up the oars,

山女夜調砧。 Mountain maids at night adjust their fulling blocks.

此時故鄉遠， At this moment, my hometown is far away,

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[40] This line alludes to the story of Laozi. Witnessing the decline of the Zhou state, Laozi decided to leave and travel westward. The guardian of the San Pass (or the Hangu Pass 函谷關, according to different sources) saw purple vapor rising from the pass, after which Laozi appeared riding a blue-black ox. See Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca.145-ca.86 BCE), *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1957), 63.2141.

[41] According to the *Hanshu*, when Zhong Jun 終軍 (?-113 BCE) was about to enter the pass to the capital, he was given a taffeta pass, which was supposed to be handed back upon his departure. Upon hearing the guardian's explanation of the taffeta pass's purpose, Zhong Jun replied: "As an ambitious man journeying westward, I shall never return" 大丈夫西游，終不復傳還, expressing his determination to attain a high position and accomplish great deeds in the capital. See Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 64b.2820.

[42] *Wang Zi'an jizhu*, 3.92. The *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華 version of the poem contains a variant in its title: "Spending the Night at Deep Ferry Crossing" 深渡夜宿. This title is more likely to have been the original, as Deep Ferry Crossing 深渡 was the name of a post station in Shu, which the eighth-century poet and statesman Zhang Yue 張說 (667-731) also wrote about. See *Wenyuan yinghua*, compiled by Li Fang 李昉 (925-996) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 289.1474; Zhang Yue's "Deep Ferry Crossing Post Station" 深渡驛, in *Zhang Yue ji jiaozhu* 張説集校註, edited by Xiong Fei 熊飛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 8.359.

8 寧知遊子心。 How could they know the traveler's heart?

These two poems represent the two major types of travel poetry prior to Du Fu, considering both poetic sequences—which make up only a small portion of the tradition—and, more commonly, individual poems. The first type consists of poems composed at post-stations, of which Wang Bo's "Spending the Night at Deep Bay" is an example. Poems belonging to this group tend to focus on the experience of passing by or staying at a post-station, with the expression of homesickness, the lament over frustrated political ambitions being some of the recurring themes. The second type—exemplified by "Going Across the San Pass in the Morning"—shows particular interest in sites of historical and cultural significance, including those associated with important figures or events, sacred places such as Buddhist temples, and locations already deemed significant in earlier literary works. With regard to the Shu region, Cen Shen 岑參(715-770), for instance, has a series of nine poems on its cultural and historical landmarks, including the shrine of the Former Lord and Marquis Wu 先主武侯廟, the lecture hall of Lord Wen 文公講堂, Sima Xiangru's zither platform 司馬相如琴臺, and so forth.[43] While there may be overlap or grey areas between the two categories, together they encompass the vast majority of Tang travel poems.

More often than not, the representations of a place and the descriptions of the landscape—vivid as they might be—are not specific and individualistic enough to allow the reader to identify the place on the imperial map. In the first poem, the descriptive scenes in the first and third couplets are couched in commonplace dictions and imagery. What allows us to identify the

[43] *Cen Jiazhou shi jianzhu* 岑嘉州詩箋註, commentary by Liao Li 廖立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 1.227, 1.229, 1.232.

mountain pass as one near the capital region are its historical references, captured in the allusions to historical figures and anecdotes associated with this particular mountain pass. In the case of the second poem, despite its representations of local features in the opening stanza, such as villages perched precariously on high cliffs and the presence of a dike, the poem does not capture the uniqueness of the place. Moreover, activities of local people sketched in the third couplet are rather common literary types that can be observed at any ferry crossing.

In fact, Chinese poetry, as a highly formalized literary genre deeply rooted in conventions governing its form, style, and content, does not present descriptive scenes as mere mimetic representations of the external world. Instead, even in the works of Xie Lingyun—the Six Dynasties master often celebrated as the progenitor of "landscape poetry"—landscape descriptions are constructed from a shared vocabulary and a repertoire of inherited images.[44] Yet, literary conventions are not static or immutable; they evolve continuously, shaped by both the innovations of individual writers and social-historical forces outside of literary history. In many ways, Du Fu's poetry stretches the limits of poetic conventions. In his travel poems from Qinzhou to Chengdu, the precision and vividness with which he incorporates geographical details and depicts the local landscape are unprecedented in the history of Chinese poetry. Take, for instance, "Dragon Gate Plankway" 龍門閣, a poem that captures the distinctiveness of a specific section of the wooden plankways along the route to Shu. The first two stanzas read:

[44] For a discussion of the early history of "landscape poetry," see Donald Holzman, *Landscape Appreciation in Ancient and Early Medieval China: The Birth of Landscape Poetry* (Taipei: National Tsing Hua University, 1996). In recent years, scholars have begun to draw attention to the fact that many works traditionally categorized as "landscape poetry" are as much concerned with textual memories as they are with representations of real, physical landscapes. In other words, the nomenclature of "landscape poetry" can be somewhat misleading. See Paul W. Kroll, "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High T'ang." *TP* 84 (1998): 62-101; Stephen Owen, "The Librarian in Exile: Xie Lingyun's Bookish Landscape." *EMC* 10-11.1 (2004): 203-26.

清江下龍門， A clear river flows down from the Dragon Gate [Mountain],

絕壁無尺土。 Its sheer cliffs bear not a single inch of soil.

長風駕高浪， Long wind rides on high waves,

浩浩自太古。 Vast and boundless, from the ancient past.

危途中縈盤， A perilous road winds around midway,

仰望垂線縷。 As I look up, a slender thread dangles.[45]

滑石欹誰鑿， Slippery rocks slanting, who drilled them?

浮梁裊相拄。 Floating pillars sway, leaning upon them.

……[46]

According to the *Fangyu shenglan* 方輿勝覽, a Southern Song geographical compilation, the Dragon Gate Plankway is the most dangerous passage in the Shu region, as holes must first be drilled into the surface of steep cliffs to construct the plank road's deck.[47] This distinguishing feature is perfectly captured in the third and fourth couplets. As such, to a well-informed reader, the place depicted in this poem can hardly be mistaken for a different place in another region or even a different section of the plank road to Shu. More examples can be cited to illustrate the depiction of regional features, such as the nest-dwellers in "Five Spirals" 五盤 and the bamboo bridges in "Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing" 桔柏渡. Of course, not all of the poems in the Qinzhou-Chengdu travel sequences exhibit the same level of specificity in landscape description

[45] The "slender thread" refers to a narrow mountain path.
[46] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1858.
[47] *Fangyu shenglan*, compiled by Zhu Mu 祝穆 (?-1255), edited by Shi Hejin 施和金 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 66.1156.

and geographical representation. Still, the extent to which the two poetic sequences as a whole foreground the uniqueness of particular places far exceeds what is typically expected in the tradition.

Beyond geographical description, Du Fu's engagement with places on the western frontier departs from poetic tradition through his distinctive selection of sites, which shape a poetic map that cannot be fully accounted for by the two major types of travel poems that dominate Tang compositions prior to him. Compared with his predecessors, who often focused on post stations and sites of historical significance, Du Fu was particularly drawn to places of geographical, transportational, and strategic importance, such as mountains, passes, plankways, and ferry crossings. It might be tempting to think of poems written at post-stations as being closely tied to transportation. However, these poems rarely focus on transportation itself. Instead, the vitality of post stations as sites of literary production primarily stems from their role in bringing together a community of literati—both readers and writers.[48] We know from Tang poetry as well as anecdotal sources that it was fairly common to compose a matching poem to earlier ones written on the walls or other material surfaces at a post station. The well-known story about Yuan Zhen 元稹 (799-831) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) coming across and responding to each other's poems inscribed on post stations attests to the popularity of such a practice.[49] This is to say, post

[48] The relationship between post stations and literary activities has been examined in several studies on the topic. See Li Dehui, *Tang Song shiqi guanyi zhidu jiqi yu wenxue guanxi zhi yanjiu* 唐宋時期館驛制度及其與文學關係之研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2008), 57–73; Li Dehui, *Tang Song guanyi yu wenxue* 唐宋館驛與文學 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2019); Wu Shuling 吳淑玲, *Tangdai yizhuan yu Tangshi fazhan zhi guanxi* 唐代驛傳與唐詩發展之關係 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2015); Yan Jihua 嚴紀華, *Tangren tibi shi yanjiu* 唐人題壁詩研究 (Taibei: Hua Mulan wenhua chubanshe, 2008); Christopher M.B. Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center Press, 2010), 199–214.

[49] For a discussion of the exchange poems between Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi, written at or sent through post stations, see Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper*, 208-211; Xiaofei Tian, "The Penumbra of the Great Tang: Poetry from the Margins of the Empire at the Turn of the Eighth Century," *T'oung Pao* 109 (2023): 478–526. For a discussion of poetic exchange and the building of social networks in the mid-Tang period, see Anna M. Shields, *One*

stations as sites of literary production and circulation revolve around the social network of Tang literate elites, rather than the transportation system.

Du Fu, by contrast, engages more deeply with geography and transportation, addressing these on two interconnected and mutually reinforcing levels. At the most basic level, unbound by the established landscape of cultural sites, the poetic map he constructs overlaps with the transportation map to a far greater extent than is seen in the tradition. We may take poems produced in Lizhou 利州 as an example. Because the major route from the capital region to Shu—namely, the route from Jinniu Post Station 金牛驛 to Chengdu—runs through Lizhou, it was one of the most traveled prefectures in Sichuan in the Tang. Yet the number of poems written by Tang literate elites in Lizhou was comparatively small, at least disproportionate to its crucial role in the transportation system, possibly because of the scarcity of historical and cultural sites. In other words, the transportation map and the cultural-literary map do not always align—Lizhou serves as a prime example of this divergence. Before Du Fu, a few Tang literati who composed poems in Lizhou primarily wrote about two post stations—Deep Ferry-Crossing Post Station 深渡驛 and the Three Wellsprings Road 三泉路—as well as a Buddhist site, the Niche for Buddha Statues 佛龕.[50] Du Fu, by contrast, focused on places of geo-military and transportation significance, particularly mountain ridges, plankways, and ferry crossings: "Five Spirals [Ridge]" 五盤, "Dragon Gate Plankway," "Stone Cabinet Plankway" 石櫃閣, and "Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing."[51] By devoting four poems to places in Lizhou—one-third

Who Knows Me: Friendship and Literary Culture in Mid-Tang China (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[50] For a list of poems composed in Lizhou in the Tang, see Zhang Zhongcai 張仲裁, *Tang Wudai wenren ru Shu kaolun* 唐五代文人入蜀考論 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013), 266–267.

[51] Of these four locations Du Fu chose to write about, only the Five Spirals 五盤 and the Dragon Gate Plankway 龍門閣 have appeared in the works of earlier writers. Namely, Shen Quanqi 沈佺期 (656-716) has two poems dedicated to these two places respectively. Upon closer reading, though, we may notice that the one titled "Lodging

of the entire series from Tonggu to Chengdu—Du Fu highlighted the crucial role of Lizhou in the Tang transportation system.

With regard to the two poetic series as a whole, transportation plays an important part in shaping Du Fu's poetic map. In a region not populated with historical and cultural landmarks, geography and transportation served as alternative resources for Du Fu to transform unfamiliar landscape into meaningful sites. Indeed, many of the places Du Fu wrote about had never made their way into poetry by his time. Some of them were barely mentioned in other contemporary sources, in which case it took extraordinary effort for commentators to tease out relevant information from later historical and geographical works. Clearly, Du Fu sought to create his own poetic map by establishing new literary sites and reimagining old ones. Ultimately, Du Fu's travel poems are more intricately intertwined with the transportation map; on the literary map, however, he was treading a less traveled path.

Not only did Du Fu draw upon the transportation map to construct his poetic map, but geography and transportation also shaped his perception of space and place, inspiring new forms of spatial imagination. This is fundamentally inseparable from the historical circumstances of Du Fu's writing. Venturing into unfamiliar territories, counting on impaired, unreliable transportation to reach his next destination, Du Fu's restless journey at the margins of the Tang empire led him to perceive the imperial fabric in a more visceral way. At the opening of this chapter, I quoted Du Fu's famous line, "The capital has fallen, mountains and rivers remain." Once displaced to the empire's margins, his perception of the mountains and rivers shifted

for the Night at Seven Spirals Ridge" 夜宿七盤嶺, with "Seven Spirals" being another name for "Five Spirals," is about Shen's experience lodging at the post station rather than the mountain ridge itself. In fact, even after Du Fu, poems about post-stations and Buddhist sites make up a large portion of the total amount of poems written in Lizhou. Among them, the Jialing Post-Station 嘉陵驛 and the Choubi Post-Station 籌筆驛 are most favored by literati travelers in mid- and late-Tang. See *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, edited by Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645-1719) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980, hereafter *QTS*), 95.1023; 96.1038.

markedly from how he would have viewed them during routine journeys for official duties or leisurely excursions in times of peace. Instead of viewing the landscape through the lens of past texts and highlight well-established landmarks, Du Fu's poems began to feature mountain passes, waterways, counties, villages, and even locations known only locally. Moreover, Du Fu appreciated the mountains and rivers on the western frontiers not merely for their spectacular appearance but also for their geopolitical, military, and economic significance, seeing them as symbolic manifestations, infrastructural mechanisms, and material resources of the state. With a geographer's eyes, Du Fu paid attention to the unique topographical features of a place and reflect on their geo-military potential. He also took care to comment on local customs and local activities such as salt producing, bamboo gathering, and arrow making, seeing even an obscure place in the most far-flung area as being part of the circulatory network of the empire. Ultimately, a new vision of imperial space arises from the empire's margins.

In a passage discussing the innovativeness of Du Fu's travel poems written on his journey to Shu, Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 insightfully notes Du Fu's departure from traditional modes of writing about travel and excursions:

> The mountains and rivers of the Shu circuits are extraordinary and unparalleled. Had Du Fu composed in the manner of ordinary excursions and sightseeing, his work would have been like that of others. But Shaoling [Du Fu] sought the unusual and unearthed the hidden, paring and carving them into something unfamiliar and novel, so that each poem opened up a new world. Later, Fang Zhengxue [i.e., Fang Xiaoru 方孝孺 (1357-1402)] from Tiantai traveled to Shu. Upon seeing the landscapes there, he put aside his brush, lamenting to himself his lack of Zimei's [i.e., Du Fu] talent. How much more so would this be the case for others!

蜀道山水奇絕，若作尋常登臨覽勝語，亦猶人耳。少陵搜奇抉奧，削刻生新，各首自辟境界，後來天台方正學入蜀，對景擱筆，自歎無子美之才，何況他人乎。[52]

Here, Qiu Zhao'ao rightly points out Du Fu's deviation from the common experience of excursion and sightseeing, for which *shanshui* 山水 is often the core subject matter. Yet, what Qiu Zhao'ao has not fully elaborated on is that the new ground Du Fu broke was not simply a matter of style, nor should it be attributed to the poet's artistic excellence alone. More importantly, compared with his literary predecessors, Du Fu took a fundamentally different approach to the "mountains and rivers" he encountered.

Adopting the Chinese term *shanhe* 山河 from Du Fu's line, "The capital has fallen, mountains and rivers remain," I argue that his poetic sequences on the western frontiers focus primarily on *shanhe* rather than *shanshui*. While both *shanhe* and *shanshui*—along with terms such as *shanchuan* 山川, *shanquan* 山泉, and *jiangshan* 江山—belong to a group of semantically related terms, they carry distinct nuances and associations.[53] Although they overlap in meaning in certain contexts, they are not always interchangeable. A key difference is that *shanhe* tends to carry stronger political connotations than *shanshui.* As geographical features, mountains and rivers are used as natural fortifications throughout history. In a passage from the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, Zifan 子犯 speaks about the geographical advantage of the state of Jin: "Within and beyond are

[52] *Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳註 (hereafter *DSXZ*), commentary by Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 (1638-1717) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 9.861.
[53] For a discussion of the provenance of the term *shanshui* and its connection to other related terms, see Harrison Huang, "Excursion, Estates, and the Kingly Gaze: The Landscape Poetry of Xie Lingyun" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 3-6.

mountains and rivers" 表裏山河.[54] Zifan was referring to the Taihang Mountain and the Yellow River as defensive barrier for the state of Jin. Because of their geo-military functions, *shanhe* is often used to refer to imperial territory. Thus, speaking of the ruthless expansion of the state of Qin in the late Warring States period and the chaos it causes to the realm, the *Shiji* 史記 uses the phrase: "Carving up the realm, tearing apart its mountains and rivers" 宰割天下，分裂山河.[55] Here, *shanhe* is synonymous with *tianxia*, "All-Under-Heaven." *Shanhe* as a territorial concept is also attested in the well-known anecdote about the banquet at Xinting, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The deep sense of nostalgia and dislocation experienced by the northern émigrés—captured in Zhou Yi's lament, "The wind and light are the same, yet the mountains and rivers are different"—is expressed through a perceived territorial difference, as the familiar northern landscape was replaced by the unfamiliar terrain of the south. In this context, *shanhe* encompasses not only the physical landscape, but also the cultural and political spaces associated with it.

Shanshui, on the other hand, is primarily used to refer to nature and the natural environs, without foregrounding mountains and rivers as the embodiment of the imperial realm. Though it does not exclude the political and economic aspects of mountains and rivers, *shanshui* in certain contexts represents places of seclusion and withdrawal. In the literary profiles of recluses included in the "Biographies of the Concealed and Free-Roaming" 隱逸列傳 in the *Songshu* 宋書, one of the recurrent themes is delight in *shanshui* as typical of the lifestyle of a recluse.[56] In this sense, *shanshui* is closely related to terms such as "mountains and wilds" 山野 and "rivers

[54] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jijie* 春秋左傳集解, commentary by Du Yu 杜預 (222-284) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1977), 7.374.
[55] *Shiji*, 48.1963.
[56] The Liu-Song dynasty (420-479) was a period marked by the popularity of reclusion, as well as imperial patronage of recluses.

and lakes" 江湖 in designating spaces away from the court and the urban area.[57] In classical Chinese poetry, *shanshui* is often the motivation behind travel and excursions, as suggested by Qiu Zhao'ao's remarks quoted earlier. In fact, Wang Bo's "Thirty Poems Documenting My Travel to Shu" is precisely an example of compositions written on "excursions and sightseeing" 登臨覽勝 referred to by Qiu Zhao'ao, with a primary focus on *shanshui*. This can be illustrated by Wang Bo's preface to his poetic series, which allows us a glimpse into his motivations and the main interest of his poems.

> In the fifth month of the second year of the Zongzhang reign (668-670), on the day of *guimao*, I traveled from Chang'an to Shu for sightseeing. I set out from the narrow paths of Bao and Xia [Gorges] and reached the precipitous routes of [Mount] Min and Emei. After crossing dark valleys and going through emerald hills, I arrived nearly a month later. As for collecting the majestic forms of the mountains and rivers, observing the marvelous creations of Heaven and Earth: cinnabar gorges competing with their rushing currents, blue peaks rising unevenly, surging waves billowing in fury before collapsing in prostration, heavenly cliffs stretching out, jutting and jagging—these are indeed unsurpassed sights in the universe. Even Zhuang Zhou's amazement at the perilousness of Mount Lüliang,[58] or Marquis Han's timidity

[57] As demonstrated by a couplet from Wang Anshi's "Presented to Li Shiyun" 贈李士雲: "Mr. Li is a man of mountains and rivers, yet he often dwells within city walls" 李子山水人，而常寓城郭. Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086), *Linchuan xiansheng wenji* 臨川先生文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 2.96.

[58] This refers to a story from the "Understanding Life" 達生 chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. The narrative recounts how Confucius once visited Lüliang, where a waterfall plunged thirty fathoms, sending foam and spray across forty miles. The waters were so treacherous that even turtles, alligators, fish, and tortoises could not survive in them. 孔子觀於呂梁,縣水三十仞,流沫四十里,黿鼉魚鱉之所不能游也. See Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1918), *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 19.162-3.

at the towering Mount Mengmen[59]—how are they worth mentioning? Undoubtedly, those who climb a small mound will generate thoughts about Mount Heng-Huo,[60] and those who drift along a tiny creek will be filled with longings for rivers and lakes. How much more so for me, who has personally witnessed scenes of extraordinary beauty, who has set foot in the numinous realm, where mists and auroras offer delights in the mornings and evenings, and wind and moon are aided by forests and springs. Alas! The inspiration that mountains and rivers provide is endless. How could I be without feelings? Thus, I have composed in proper tonal patterns to express myself through chanted verse. I compiled thirty poems and sent them to those who might be interested.

總章二年五月癸卯，余自常安[61]觀景物於蜀，遂出褒斜之隘道，抵岷峨之絕徑，超玄谿，歷翠阜，迨彌月而臻焉。若乃採江山之俊勢，觀天地之奇作，丹壑爭流，青峰雜起，陵濤鼓怒以伏注，天壁嵯峨而橫立，亦宇宙之絕觀者也。雖莊周詫呂梁之險，韓侯怯孟門之峻，曾何足云？蓋登培塿者起衡霍之心，遊涓澮者發江湖之思。況乎躬覽勝事，足踐靈區，煙霞為朝夕之資，風月得林泉之助。嗟乎！山川之感召多矣，余能無情哉？爰成文律，用宣行唱，編為三十首，投諸好事焉。[62]

What we can glean from the preface is that the gist of Wang Bo's thirty poems is encapsulated in the phrase "what mountains and rivers inspire" 山川之感召. Written in an ornate, parallel style, a large part of this preface is about the natural landscape on his travel to Shu. Though Wang Bo

[59] Mengmen refers to a mountain located west of present-day Hui County 輝縣 in Henan Province. During the Spring and Autumn period, it served as a strategic pass for the State of Jin. However, commentators have been unable to identify the specific allusion to Marquis Han in Wang Bo's preface.
[60] Mount Heng is also known as Mount Huo.
[61] Chang'an 常安 is a variant for Chang'an 長安.
[62] *Wang Zi'an jizhu*, 7.226-227.

includes a brief account of his itinerary and speaks about the perilous terrain on the western frontiers, the focus is not on transportation or the geo-military function of mountains and rivers; instead, *shanshui* is chiefly appreciated for their spectacular sights.

The foregoing discussion of *shanhe* and *shanshui* is not intended to draw a strict distinction between the two, as their meanings often overlap and they are interchangeable in certain contexts. Nevertheless, considering the subtle nuances they carry as well as the cultural meaning and associations they have accumulated over time, I suggest that *shanhe* serves as a broader and more effective concept than *shanshui* to interpret Du Fu's travel poems on the western frontiers. Although the marvelous appearances of mountains and rivers form a key subject in his travel sequences, much of his poetry cannot be readily subsumed under the concept of *shanshui*. Unlike Xie Lingyun—an avid seeker of *shanshui* whose work exerts a noticeable influence on Du Fu's travel poems—Du Fu rarely writes about pristine nature. Instead, he is more focused on mountains and rivers as integral parts of imperial territory, shaped by human activities and imperial structures. During his restless journey at a time when the empire was torn by military uprisings and warfare, Du Fu often saw the rugged terrain for its strategic significance. The steep cliffs of the Iron Hall Gorge 鐵堂峽 naturally evoked thoughts of rebels who had been wreaking havoc. He wrote about Dragon Gate Town 龍門鎮, a heavily garrisoned frontier settlement, sympathizing with soldiers who, like him, had known the harshness of cold and the ache of displacement. He also lamented the futility of military forces stationed at the frontier while the central regions remained threatened by rebel uprisings. On other occasions, Du Fu turned his attention to local activities—such as salt production and bamboo gathering—which formed integral parts of the empire-wide circulation network.

Due to his incorporation of geographical details and his broader interest in *shanhe*—which extends beyond the natural landscape—Du Fu's Qinzhou-Chengdu travel poems share many concerns with regional geographical works, such as accounts of travel routes, topography, local resources, and landmarks. This connection has long been recognized by critics, with the idea that Du Fu's poetry scroll could serve as a map-guide (*tujing* 圖經) circulating as early as the Southern Song.[63] However, as Du Fu came to be celebrated as the "poet-historian," his role as the "poet-geographer" is often acknowledged but simultaneously taken for granted. After all, "poet-historian" and "poet-geographer" are but two sides of the same coin. If insights often tend to come with oversights, Du Fu's critics and commentators rarely delve deeper into the implications of the radical moves he was making.

It is true that Du Fu's travel poems reproduce geographical details and local knowledge with precision, as commentators and critics have pointed out. What sets Du Fu apart, however, is that geography and transportation are not merely tangential to his poems but central to his poetic place-making and map-making. This focus cannot be fully explained by citing the long-accepted wisdom that Du Fu's poetry is a faithful record of his life. Rather than merely writing *about* the various localities on his perilous journey, Du Fu writes them *into* poetry. For Du Fu, a restless refugee journeying through the western regions in search of a habitable place, poetry became a means of making sense of unfamiliar encounters and coping with the strangeness of his surroundings. Through verse, he transformed the scarred yet enduring "mountains and rivers"

[63] The Southern Song poet and scholar Li Yizhi 林亦之 (1136-1185) wrote in his "Respectfully Sent to Lin Huangzhong, Pacification Commissioner of Yun'an and Vice Minister of the Baowen Pavilion" 奉寄雲安安撫寶文少卿林黃中: "Setting up a tent headquarter in the city of the Viscount of Kui, the poetry scrolls of Duling [Du Fu] serve as my map-guides" 夔子城頭開幕府，杜陵詩卷作圖經. This quote is also cited by Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187-1269) in his *Poetry Remarks of Houcun* 後村詩話, and by Qiu Zhao'ao in his *DSXZ*. Liu Kezhuang, *Houcun shihua*, edited by Wang Xiumei 王秀梅 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), *Xinji* 新集 *juan* 2.176.

into memorable sites—a process that ultimately reconfigured the landscape of the imperial periphery.

Naming, Topography, and Self-Representation

Du Fu shows a keen interest in names, recognizing their crucial role in shaping the identity of a place. When comparing the travel sequences of Wang Bo and Du Fu, we have seen a notable difference in their titling practices. Unlike Wang Bo, who often uses occasional titles reflecting the action of the poet, Du Fu typically titles his poems with place names alone. By doing so, he places the focus on the places themselves, giving the titles a sense of universality that is absent in the more situational titles used by others. Moreover, Du Fu often incorporates place names into the main body of the poem itself. Though not the first to do so, he demonstrates a persistent interest in explaining or expanding on these names, which often derive from topographical features of the landscape, as in "Iron Hall Gorge" 鐵堂峽 and "White Sand Ferry-Crossing" 白沙渡:

山風吹遊子， Mountain gusts blow on this wayfarer,
縹緲乘險絕。 Into the misty distance I ascend the steep and impassable heights.
硤形藏堂隍， The gorge in its shape shelters a majestic hall,
壁色立積鐵。 The cliff in its mien hoists an iron façade.[64]

[64] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1888.

水清石礧礧， The water is limpid, the stones clear and distinct,

沙白灘漫漫。 The sand is white, the rapids spread far and wide.

迴然洗愁辛， In this remote place, my worries and pains are washed away,

多病一疏散。 All my many ailments are instantly dispelled.[65]

Most of the toponyms in Du Fu's travel poems were already in place, or at least in local use, by the time he began his journey, so he may not have been involved in creating them. However, by frequently recording local topography and versifying the landscape, Du Fu gives each place a distinct identity, making its name writ large in the landscape itself.

Not only did Du Fu consistently show how place names were realized in the actual topography, but he also reflected on how toponyms were actualized in his own experience—sometimes only in the back of his mind, and even with a touch of irony. In this way, Du Fu was able to establish a personal connection to the place. In his "Mud Labor Mountain" 泥功山, for instance, Du Fu begins by seeing the road conditions as reflecting the pertinence of the mountain's name. Yet, as he turns to reflect on himself and his family, he finds an unexpected similarity between the topography and human experience.

泥功山 Mud Labor Mountain[66]

朝行青泥上， In the morning, we walk through blue-black mud,

暮在青泥中。 At dusk, we are still in blue-black mud.[67]

[65] *DFQJJZ*, 7.2012.
[66] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1932.
[67] The phrase "blue-black mud" 青泥 evokes a line from Li Bai's famous "Hardships of Traveling to Shu" 蜀道難, which reads, "The Blue-Black Mud [Ridge], how winding and twisting!" 青泥何盤盤. However, as scholars have

泥濘非一時， This mire did not form overnight,

4 版築勞人功。 Pounding earth with planks strains men's labor.

不畏道途永， I do not fear the endless road,

乃將汩沒同。 But I dread that we may all drown together.

白馬為鐵驪， White horses turn into iron-black steeds,

8 小兒成老翁。 Little kids become old men.

哀猿透卻墜， Mournful gibbons leap but fall back,

死鹿力所窮。 Dead deer have exhausted their strength.

寄語北來人， I send words to those coming from the North:

12 後來莫匆匆。 Do not hurry to follow us.

As the first two couplets make clear, the mountain derives its name from the muddy roads that demand human labor. However, we also know that the mountain's name is alternatively written as "Lord of Mud Mountain" 泥公山 (with *gong* 公 being homophonous with *gong* 功) in some other sources like the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 and the *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記. This version of the name is based on the external form of the mountain, as one of its muddy slopes is said to resemble an old man.[68] We have good reason to speculate that Du Fu was acquainted with this

pointed out, the Lord of Mud Mountain, located northwest of Chengxian 成縣, is not near the Blue-Black Mud Ridge 青泥嶺 that Li Bai wrote about, which is located in Huixian 徽縣. See Li Jizu 李濟阻 et al., *Du Fu Longyou shi zhuxi* 杜甫隴右詩注析 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1985), 273-274; Wen Hulin 溫虎林, *Du Fu Long-Shu dao shige yanjiu* 杜甫隴蜀道詩歌研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015), 53-55.

[68] The late Tang poet Zhao Hong 趙鴻 also dedicated a poem to Mud Labor Mountain, which includes the couplet: "A standing stone in the shape of a muddy old man, a bizarre and grotesque appearance created by nature" 立石泥翁狀，天然詭怪形. See *Fangyu shenglan*, 70.1223; *Chengxian xinzhi* 成縣新誌, edited by Huang Yong 黃泳 et al. (Taibei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1970), 1.125. The *QTS* version of this poem has *nigong* 泥功 instead of *niweng* 泥翁, which does not align well with the term *zhuang* 狀, referring to the outer appearance of the rock, and may

local knowledge, for when he turns his attention to his family, he immediately notices that his boys—with mud spattered all over them, perhaps tottering from the swampy paths—look very much like old men. The connection between the topography of the place and the human travelers is mirrored on the verbal level, as *gong* 公 and *weng* 翁 (in line 8) are both semantically and phonetically close. Thus, Du Fu observes that his family, almost incidentally, embodies what is suggested by the place name—"Lord of Mud"—becoming living representations of the landscape.

One notable aspect of this poem is its adoption of the *yuefu* 樂府 or *gushi* 古詩 style.[69] Du Fu innovated by using this form to convey personal experience and by blending the *yuefu* mode with occasional poetry.[70] Besides "Mud Labor Mountain," there are still a few other poems from the Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu poetic series that are evocative of this tradition, such as "Salt Well" 鹽井, "Stone Niche" 石龕, and "Chengdu Headquarter" 成都府. Traditionally, *yuefu/gushi* poetry tends to focus on a limited set of themes and topoi, featuring a persona that represents a universal type rather than a specific historical individual.[71] This style imparts a sense of universality to the experience described in Du Fu's poem, raising the question of whether the white horses and little children are part of Du Fu's own retinue or merely literary types. More importantly, Du Fu's use of the *yuefu* form contributes to his act of place-making, which he

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therefore be a corruption of the text in the transmission process. This poem by Zhao Hong, along with two others by the same poet—"Du Fu's Thatched Roof in Tonggu" 杜甫同谷茅茨 and "Chestnut Pavilion" 栗亭—was clearly written in homage to Du Fu. See *QTS*, 607.7010-1.

[69] For a discussion on the provenance of these two categories and the porousness of their boundaries, see Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

[70] This practice did not begin with Du Fu's Qinzhou-Chengdu travel poems but can already be seen in some of his earlier works, such as the well-known "Three Officials" and "Three Partings." For a discussion of Du Fu's blending of the *yuefu* style with the occasional poetry mode, see Chou, *Reconsidering Tu Fu*.

[71] For scholarship on *yuefu* poetry, see Joseph Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1992); Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*.

achieves through literary means. Specifically, Mud Labor Mountain—a little-known location with scant historical recognition—is elevated through one of the most archaic and venerated poetic forms, reflecting the poet's effort to rescue the site from obscurity and confer upon it lasting literary significance.

In some instances, Du Fu plays with place names in less obvious ways. A case in point is the poem "Flying Immortal Plankway" 飛仙閣. While the perfect congruity between the place and the poet's experience in "Mud Labor Mountain" poignantly highlights the hardships of an itinerant life, in "Flying Immortal Plankway," the poet's irony and bitterness stem from the incongruity between the name and his own reality.

飛仙閣 Flying Immortal Plankway[72]

土門山行窄， At Earthen Gate, the mountain roads narrow,[73]

微徑緣秋毫。 A slim path traces the outline of an autumn hair.

棧雲闌干峻， The plankway through the clouds, its railings are high,

4 梯石結搆牢。 Stairway of stone, its frame solid and secure.

萬壑敧疏林， Upon countless ravines lean sparse groves,

積陰帶奔濤。 Amassed shades are girdled by rushing torrents.

寒日外澹泊， The cold sun outside is pale and dim,

8 長風中怒號。 Long winds rage within, howling in fury.

[72] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1846.

[73] Despite some commentators' efforts to identify the place "Earthen Gate" 土門, such attempts have not led to any convincing conclusions. The first character, *tu* 土, has a textual variant *chu* 出, which would render the compound as a verb phrase meaning "going out of the gate."

歇鞍在地底， Resting the horses at the base,

始覺所歷高。 Only now do I realize how high we've climbed.

往來雜坐臥， Those passing by sit or lie haphazardly,

人馬同疲勞。 Men and horses alike are weary.

浮生有定分， This floating life has fixed allotment,

飢飽豈可逃。 Hunger and fullness are beyond my control.

歎息謂妻子， With a sigh, I say to my wife and children:

我何隨汝曹。 Why am I followed by you?

Legend has it that the "Flying Immortal Plankway" got its name because it was the resting place of the Daoist immortal Xu Zuoqing 徐佐卿, who transformed into a crane. While this poem does not mention the name of the place, Du Fu seems to reflect on his distance from an immortal towards the end. Having traveled along plankways high in the clouds, Du Fu's life is not so different from that of a "flying immortal" (albeit ironically), except for one crucial difference: he has a family. The sudden complaint in the closing couplet may seem to come out of nowhere at first, but when connected to the place name, it makes perfect sense. Once these connections are recognized, the otherwise unexpected ending takes on added pathos.

Transportation, Circulation, and the Larger Imperial Realm

If Du Fu's explication of and play with place names serve both to accentuate a location's memorable features and to establish a personal connection to it, he also constructs a literary

profile for a given locality through other means. Earlier, I highlighted Du Fu's interest in geography and transportation, arguing that his Qinzhou–Chengdu poetic series focuses primarily on *shanhe*—mountains and rivers that represent, and indeed constitute, the imperial territory—rather than merely depicting the natural landscape. In fact, geography, transportation, and the circulatory network of the empire play a crucial part in Du Fu's construction of his poetic map. While poems about travel and excursions typically focus on discrete sites—as Wang Bo's "Thirty Poems Documenting My Travel to Shu" does—Du Fu often situates the various places on the western frontiers within a larger imperial context. This context includes the transportation system, the established system of sacred mountains, and the empire's circulatory networks. By doing so, Du Fu brings these obscure locales on the periphery into the fold of imperial territory, making them part of the larger imperial landscape. In other words, although these places may have been included in local geographical works, their existence remained shadowy. It is Du Fu's poetry that makes the empire's margins more visible and tangible.

As he traveled across the western frontiers beyond the traditional Chinese heartland, Du Fu was struck by the wondrous sights of mountains in the Gansu and Sichuan regions. To give them significance within a broader and more visible domain of the empire, Du Fu draws upon the established system of famed mountains as a reference point. In his poem written on ascending the Bark Ridge 木皮嶺 west of the Hui County 徽縣 in Gansu, Du Fu, amazed by the steepness of the thrusting peaks, laments that "For the first time I learn that beyond the five Marchmounts, there are other mountains worthy of veneration" 始知五嶽外，別有他山尊.[74] Indeed, it was only at the peripheries that Du Fu came to appreciate mountains other than those that have long enjoyed fame in the empire.

[74] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1828-9.

This couplet from “Bark Ridge” thus aptly encapsulates one of Du Fu’s strategies of place-making: the creation of new sites by expanding the established map of sacred mountains. However, this statement is not entirely accurate if we take it literally and read all of his poems as direct transcriptions of his thoughts. In the poem “Green Sunlit Gorge” 青陽峽, for instance, when the poet was still on his journey from Qinzhou to Tonggu, he had already learned the lesson that he would later articulate more clearly in “Bark Ridge.”

青陽峽 Green Sunlit Gorge[75]

塞外苦厭山， Beyond the fortresses, I am terribly weary of the mountains,
南行道彌惡。 Journeying south, the road only grows worse.
岡巒相經亙， Mountain ridges stretch out and crisscross,
雲水氣參錯。 Vapor of clouds and waters mix and mingle.
林迴峽角來， Groves extend far, the gorge’s angle appears suddenly,
天窄壁面削。 The sky narrows, the cliff face is pared down.
溪西五里石， West of the creek, five leagues of rocks,
奮怒向我落。 Infuriated, they come down on me.
仰看日車側， High up I observe the sun’s carriage slanting,
俯恐坤軸弱。 Down below, I fear the earth’s axis is fragile.
魑魅嘯有風， Where ghosts and goblins whistle, wind comes,
霜霰浩漠漠。 Frost and sleet permeate, vast and dim.

[75] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1733. The Green Sunlit Gorge is also known as Green Ram Gorge 青羊峽. It is said, according to local knowledge, that a stone cave on the cliffs resembles the shape of a green ram.

昨憶踰隴阪， I recall recently crossing over the Long Slope,

高秋視吳嶽。 In high autumn, I look upon Mount Wu.[76]

東笑蓮華卑， To the east, I laugh at Lotus Flower's low height,[77]

北知崆峒薄。 To the north, I come to realize the thinness of Mount Kongtong.[78]

超然侔壯觀， Outstanding, the gorge rivals the grandest views,

已謂殷寥廓。 I thought it magnificent and boundless,

突兀猶趁人， Its pointed protuberances seem to have been in pursuit of me,

及茲歎冥寞。 But here, I sigh at its vast emptiness.

While the opening couplet suggests that the mountains beyond the passes elicit only antipathy, by the poem's end, the once-menacing Green Sunlit Gorge—having stirred fear, worry, and toil—comes to inspire awe, if not admiration, in the poet. This skillfully crafted narrative unfolds across both time and space. Having elaborately described the precipitous Green Sunlit Gorge and the perils of his journey (lines 3-12), Du Fu shifts to recounting his past experience traveling through the Long Slope 隴阪 (line 13) on his way to Qinzhou. There, he had the opportunity to view Mount Wu 吳嶽 (line 14), which, according to Du Fu, immediately overshadowed both Mount Hua to the east and Mount Kongtong to the north. Mount Hua, one of the five Marchmounts, and Mount Kongtong, where the Yellow Emperor allegedly consulted Master

[76] Mount Wu is in the southwest of Longxian 隴縣 in modern Shaanxi. According to the "Book of *Fengshan* Sacrifice" 封禪書 of the *Shiji*, Mount Wu is one of the seven famous mountains west of Mount Hua 華山, the Western Marchmount. See *Shiji*, 28.1372.

[77] Lotus Flower is a peak of Mount Hua.

[78] Mount Kongtong is in the west of modern Pingliang, Gansu province. It is said that the Yellow Emperor once ascended this mountain. See Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844-1896), *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, edited by Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 11.379.

Guangcheng 廣成子 about the Dao,[79] were both prominent peaks with a long cultural and textual history. By asserting that Mount Wu—a lesser-known peak—surpasses both in certain respects, Du Fu challenges the canonical hierarchy of sacred mountains. Then Du Fu shifts from the past to the present moment, coming to realize that Mount Wu is no match for the Green Sunlit Gorge, which, having gained little national fame, lies in an even more outlying region. Thus, twice does the poet compare what he sees with the famed mountains he has known from the past. The shift from the past to the present mirrors a movement from the center to the periphery, as well as a descent in the traditional hierarchy of mountain classification. Du Fu's journey through the western frontiers allows him to discover lesser-known or previously uncelebrated places. By defining these peripheral mountains in relation to exalted peaks that have long enjoyed imperial patronage and national fame, Du Fu effectively expands the established system of renowned mountains.

As both the infrastructure that ensures the empire's functioning and the symbolic embodiment of the empire itself, the transportation network provided another framework for Du Fu's poetic map-making. Unlike those who traveled for leisure during times of peace, Du Fu, throughout his restless journey, was deeply concerned with transportation and its uncertainties—especially at a time when the system was vulnerable to disruption by local riots. His dependence on transportation prompted him to think about it more consciously and theoretically. Earlier I demonstrated that Du Fu's travel poems more profoundly engage with transportation than his contemporaries and literary precursors, and he draws upon the transportation map to construct his poetic topography. In fact, transportation not only informed Du Fu's selection of locations to write about, but also inspired his representations of localities. With the empire's roads, routes,

[79] See *Zhuangzi jijie*, 11.93.

and waterways ensconced in his mental map, Du Fu gives transportation an unprecedented role in travel poems such as the "Auspicious Cypress Ferry-Crossing":

桔柏渡 Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing[80]

青冥寒江渡， Deep-blue sky, a ferry crossing by the chilly river,

駕竹為長橋。 Joined bamboo forms a long bridge.

竿濕煙漠漠， The poles are damp, mist fills the air,

4 江永風蕭蕭。 The river stretches far as the wind whistles.

連笮動嫋娜， The linked bamboo bridge sways gently, undulating with grace,

征衣颯飄颻。 The traveler's clothes rustle, flowing and fluttering.

急流鴇鷁散， Above the rushing torrents, bustards and herons scatter,

8 絕岸黿鼉驕。 By the sheer cliffs, turtles and alligators embolden.

西轅自茲異， My westward carriage departs from here,

東逝不可要。 Flowing eastward, it [the river] cannot be met again.

高通荊門路， High, it will pass through the route to Jingmen,

12 闊會滄海潮。 Widening, it will meet the tides of the dark-blue sea.

孤光隱顧眄， The lone light vanishes as I turn back,[81]

遊子悵寂寥。 The wayfarer is left desolate and forlorn.

無以洗心胸， With no way to cleanse my mind,

[80] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1868. *Jiebai* 桔柏 is written as *jibai* 吉柏, "Auspicious Cypress," in the *JTS*. See *JTS*, 9.233. It is said that the name derived from an old cypress in Zhaohua County 昭化縣, which local people called the "auspicious cypress." See *Fangyu shenglan*, 66.1157.

[81] The lone light refers to the sunlight reflected on the surface of the river.

16 前登但山椒。 I march on, only mountains ahead.

By the time Du Fu arrived at the Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing, he had been traveling along the Jialing River 嘉陵江, alternately taking water and land transport. The Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing marked the point where the poet would take a different direction from the river and travel through the mountain paths to Chengdu. Like the other poems in the two poetic series, this one captures the unique features of the ferry crossing, focusing on the special bamboo bridges in the area. What is particularly worth noting is the second half of the poem, where Du Fu traces his own movement as well as the course of the Jialing River on the empire's transportation map. Identified as the point where the course of the Jialing River diverges from the major route to Shu, the Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing becomes immediately recognizable on the imperial map.

Moreover, the second half of the poem forges a close bond between the poet and the river, which has become a travel companion as its course largely coincides with the poet's itinerary thus far. The Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing is the place for parting. In the Chinese poetic tradition, the subgenre that is most concerned with transportation is poetry on parting (*songbie shi* 送別詩). Written upon seeing someone off, it has become a customary practice in the Tang to envision the route the departing one is going to take or to name important sites along the way.[82] In "Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing," Du Fu employs the conventions of poetry on parting, but in his case, to bid farewell to the Jialing River. The theme of parting is made explicit in lines 9-10. Following that, as is typical in poems on parting, lines 11-12 evokes the larger water route

[82] For a study of poetry on parting, see Xu Zhiyin 許智銀, *Tangdai songbie shi yanjiu* 唐代送別詩研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2020).

across the empire, tracing the river's passing through Jingmen and flowing into the sea. The despondence Du Fu feels not only derives from his parting with the river, which has been a source of comfort for a weary traveler, but is also exacerbated by the contrast between the river's "return" to the sea, its final destination, and Du Fu's heading toward a foreign place and an unknown future.

The special affinity Du Fu feels toward the river, in addition to its potential to "cleanse the mind and bosom" as he suggests, may also relate to the river's capacity to "connect" 通 (line 11). In a world filled with blockages, rivers—unlike mountains, which cause obstructions—represent a connecting force. The crucial role of rivers and water transportation will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Two, which focuses on Du Fu's poems written during his time in Chengdu, when his life became even more closely tied to rivers. For now, it suffices to say that transportation plays a key role in inspiring "Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing." The innovativeness of this poem must have been appreciated by Du Fu's successors. The late-Tang poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 (ca. 813-858), an admirer of Du Fu, wrote two poems bidding farewell to the Jialing River. Clearly modeled on Du Fu's "Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing," Li Shangyin's quatrains push further in the direction of subjectification and personification in their treatment of the river.[83]

The poem "Five Spirals" offers another example of how literary imaginings are shaped by material, geographical, and infrastructural realities—and how these same realities, in turn, enable and enrich the literary imagination.

[83] Li Shangyin, "Parting with the Jialing River at Wangxi Station, Two Quatrains" 望喜驛別嘉陵江水二絕. See *Li Shangyin shige jijie* 李商隱詩歌集解, edited by Liu Xuekai 劉學鍇 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 1233.

五盤 Five Spirals[84]

五盤雖云險， Though the Five Spirals is said to be perilous,

山色佳有餘。 The mountain’s appearance holds an abundance of beauty.

仰淩棧道細， Above, the soaring plankways are narrow,

4 俯映江木疏。 Below, trees reflected in the river are sparse.

地僻無網罟， In this remote region, there are no fishing nets,

水清反多魚。 The water is limpid—yet fish are plentiful.

好鳥不妄飛， Good birds do not fly aimlessly,

8 野人半巢居。 The rustic folk half-dwell in nests.

喜見淳樸俗， I am delighted to witness pure and simple customs,

坦然心神舒。 Calmly, my heart and spirit are at ease.

東郊尚格鬥， The eastern suburbs are still embroiled in battle,[85]

12 巨猾何時除。 When will the great devils be cast out?

故鄉有弟妹， In my hometown, I have brothers and sisters,

流落隨丘墟。 They drift about, following the ruins and desolation.

成都萬事好， Chengdu has good things aplenty,

16 豈若歸吾廬。 Yet how can it compare to returning to my own hut?

[84] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1853.

[85] The eastern suburbs refer to Luoyang, the eastern capital. At the time this poem was written, Luoyang was under the control of the rebel leader Shi Siming 史思明 (703-761).

Taking pleasure in the natural beauty of Five Spirals Ridge despite the risks it poses, Du Fu experiences a moment of relief and contentment, further reinforced by the sight of pure local custom. However, this relief is quickly dispelled as his thoughts turn to Luoyang, the eastern capital and his hometown, where rebels continue to wreak havoc. The poem concludes with Du Fu's longing for his former residence, despite the many attractions of Chengdu.

The abrupt shift from the poet's present location to the eastern capital, along with the accompanying change in mood, can be explained by the way the pure customs at Five Spirals Ridge prompt thoughts of other parts of the empire, where life and local customs are crumbling due to warfare. Additionally, the "dwelling" of the local folks—likened to the nesting of birds, *chaoju* 巢居—reminds the poet of his own home. Yet, for those familiar with the location of Five Spirals Ridge, the shift in the poem also reflects a geographical division. Specifically, Five Spirals Ridge, also known as Seven Spirals Ridge, is traditionally regarded as the boundary between Qin and Shu.[86] Du Fu, well-versed in classical texts, including geographical works, and a seasoned traveler, is likely to have been aware of this. Thus, as Five Spirals Ridge marks the spatial transition from the Central Plains to the region of Shu, it is fitting that the poet reflects on the eastern capital he has just left behind.

The geographical significance of Five Spirals Ridge also helps explain the mention of Chengdu in the closing couplet. While it would not be entirely out of place to refer to Chengdu, the final destination, at any point in his journey, the poet is now at a moment when he has just entered the territory of Shu. Thus, the poem "Five Spirals Ridge" marks a significant moment

[86] This is recorded in various geographical sources. For instance, *Dushi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要 records that the Five Spirals Ridge "has since ancient times been the dividing point between Qin and Shu" 自昔為秦蜀分界處. *Dushi fangyu jiyao*, compiled by Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹 (1631-1692) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019). 68.5638. See also the "Monograph on Geography" 地理志 in *Mingshi* 明史, compiled by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1672-1755) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 81.4211; *Sichuan tongzhi* 四川通志, Yinying Wenyuange Siku quanshu edition (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1985, 23.4059.

when a vision of Chengdu is especially pertinent. Moreover, we might wonder where the statement "Chengdu has good things aplenty" (line 15) comes from, since the poet has not yet approached Chengdu. It is possible to read this line conditionally, in which case the final couplet would be rendered as "Chengdu may have good things aplenty, yet how can it compare to returning to my own hut?" Alternatively, if we take it as a statement, Du Fu might be asserting a widely accepted truth, based on what he has learned about Chengdu—either from others or from literary works like the grand *fu* of the Han and Wei-Jin dynasties, which eulogize the Shu capital. Additionally, now that the geographical significance of Five Spirals Ridge is clear, we can further infer that, for Du Fu, his initial encounters in Shu—the striking landscape of the ridge and the region's simple, genuine way of life—offer him a lens through which to understand the broader region, including its capital, Chengdu. These early impressions allow him to affirm the image of Chengdu he had previously formed through textual knowledge.

The discussions above are not intended to argue that the poem "Five Spirals Ridge" would not have been possible—at least in its present form—without the poet constantly reflecting on the specific geographical location of the place and its spatial significance on the imperial map. Rather, they seek to illuminate the role of geographical knowledge and material reality in mediating literary imagination in general and Du Fu's poetic map-making in particular.

In some cases, Du Fu does not explicitly foreground transportation itself, but it is the circulatory network of the empire, sustained by transportation, that underpins his literary place-making. In poems such as "Salt Well" 鹽井 and "Stone Niche" 石龕, individual places are situated within the broader imperial landscape through their roles in the circulation of goods and the movement of resources.

鹽井 Salt Well[87]

鹵中草木白， In the saltland, the grass and trees are white,

青者官鹽煙。 Bluish green is the smoke from government salt-making.

官作既有程， As the government project follows its schedule,

煮鹽煙在川。 Smoke from boiling salt pervades the river.

汲井歲楬楬， Drawing from the well, they toil all year round,

出車日連連。 Carts are sent out, one after another, every day.

自公斗三百， From the state, each peck is sold for three hundred cash,

轉致斛六千。 When passed on for resale, each bushel fetches six thousand.[88]

君子慎止足， Gentlemen are cautious to stop when they've had enough,

小人苦喧闐。 Petty men labor to make a hubbub.

我何良歎嗟， Why do I sigh deeply?

物理固自然。 This has always been the way things are.

石龕 Stone Niche[89]

熊羆咆我東， Bears roar to my east,

虎豹號我西。 Tigers and leopards howl to my west.

我後鬼長嘯， Behind me, ogres give out long whistles,

我前狨又啼。 In front of me, snub-nosed monkeys cry out.

[87] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1717.
[88] A bushel is equivalent to 10 pecks (*dou* 斗).
[89] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1744.

天寒昏無日， The weather is cold, dim, with no sun,

山遠道路迷。 The mountains are far, the path is lost in the distance.

驅車石龕下， Driving my carriage below the Stone Niche,

8 仲冬見虹蜺。 In the second month of winter, I see a rainbow and an iris.

伐竹者誰子， Who is the one cutting the bamboos?

悲歌上雲梯。 Singing mournful songs, he climbs the ladder to the clouds.

為官采美箭， Gathering fine arrows for the state,

12 五歲供梁齊。 For five years he has supplied Liang and Qi.

苦云直篠盡， Bitterly, he says straight bamboo poles are all gone,

無以充提攜。 There is nothing to fill the baskets for carrying.

奈何漁陽騎， What can be done about the Yuyang cavalry?[90]

16 颯颯驚烝黎。 Sweeping like the wind, they have terrified the common folk.

In the first poem, the activity of salt-making depends on an empire-wide system that controls salt production and regulates its sales. The poem reflects how government activity imprints itself on the local landscape. The smoke from boiling salt has stripped the green from the trees and grasses of the region. Beyond the physical transformation of the landscape, the schedule (*cheng* 程) of salt production overrides the natural agricultural cycle, dictating the rhythm of local life. People here toil in the salt wells all year round, rather than following the seasonal agricultural rhythm. The irony in the last line is striking, as the poet, in his indignation, laments, “this has

[90] The Yuyang cavalry refers to the rebel armies during the An Lushan Rebellion, with Yuyang being the stronghold of the rebel leaders An Lushan and Shi Siming.

always been the way things are," since nothing in this scene aligns with the natural order (*ziran* 自然). Places like the Salt Well—which are deeply entwined with, and even dominated by, state institutions—dot the imperial landscape. It is such places that remind Du Fu of the pervasive reach of imperial power, even at the empire's fringes, prompting him to reflect on the disruption caused by imperial imposition on local life.

In "Stone Niche," Du Fu shifts his focus to the tasks of bamboo-cutting and arrow-making, both essential to supporting the war-torn regions in the eastern part of the Tang empire. The poem opens with a depiction of the surroundings near Stone Niche, using the language of ancient-style ballads, and it enumerates the dangers from all directions, reminiscent of the "Summons" poems in the *Chuci* 楚辭.[91] Not only is this place geographically obscure—a wilderness inhabited by threatening beasts, compounded by the sun's absence and roads that disappear in the distance—but it is also temporally disordered due to climatic abnormalities. The sight of a rainbow and iris in winter is an unnatural occurrence. Against this eerie backdrop, the mournful song of the bamboo cutter emerges. Despite Du Fu's interest in seeing the landscape as an externalization of place names, "Stone Niche" is only briefly mentioned in the poem as an abstract toponym. The absence of the Buddha statues that the Stone Niche is supposed to hold is no mere oversight, and may even carry a certain irony. The Buddhas, after all, fail to show compassion toward the suffering local people or protect the place with their divine power. Throughout the poem, the wilderness and anonymity of the location called "Stone Niche"

[91] The opening of Du Fu's poem is directly modeled on Cao Cao's 曹操 (155-220), "Bitter Cold: A Ballad" 苦寒行, particularly the couplet "Bears crouch toward me, tigers and leopards howl from both sides of the road" 熊羆對我蹲，虎豹夾路啼. See *Wenxuan* 文選, compiled by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531) et al., commentary by Li Shan 李善 (?-689) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 27.1283. At the same time, the enumeration of dangers from four directions recall the "Great Summons" 大招 and "Summoning the Soul" 招魂 from the *Chuci*. See *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補註, commentary by Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 (1090-1155) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 10.216-27; 197-215.

contrasts sharply with other geographical references. The regions to which the bamboo arrows are transported are named after the ancient states of Liang and Qi—regions with long histories. The place causing upheaval in the empire is identified by a specific administrative unit: Yuyang, the stronghold of the rebel leader An Lushan, which had become notorious during the Tang dynasty. Lacking a history of its own, the Stone Niche is nonetheless situated within the contemporary context of the empire and its infrastructural network, which facilitates the mobilization of resources. This context—responsible for the Stone Niche's dire circumstances—is precisely the framework through which the poet constructs a narrative for the place, rendering it both legible and memorable.

Du Fu's Poetic Place-Making in the Context of His Time

I have argued that Du Fu's two poetic series written on the western frontiers are primarily concerned with "mountains and rivers" (*shanhe*) as imperial space, rather than as timeless landscape. The preceding discussions of poems such as "Salt Well" and "Stone Niche" further support this interpretation, emphasizing Du Fu's focus on the foreign landscape as shaped by imperial structures and state activities. These discussions not only highlight the spatial dimension of Du Fu's map-making but also touch upon its temporal aspect, as his poetic constructions of places are deeply embedded in the contemporary context of his time.

While history is certainly present in Du Fu's Qinzhou-Chengdu travel poems—through references to historical figures, legends, or classical texts[92]—Du Fu also constructs a literary profile for the places he depicts by situating them within a contemporary context. He

[92] In poems such as: "Phoenix Terrace" 鳳凰臺, "Deer Head Mountain" 鹿頭山, and "Sword Gate" 劍門. *DFQJJZ*, 7.1759; 7.1885; 7.1874.

foregrounds the imperial system and its circulatory networks, which link these locations to other parts of the empire. This approach sets Du Fu's work apart from literary precedents, which tend to treat "mountains and rivers" primarily as elements of the natural landscape or focus on sites steeped in cultural and historical memory. In fact, even in poems dedicated to places with long histories, Du Fu's representations are often shaped by the social and political issues of his time. This is best illustrated by "Sword Gate," perhaps the most problematic poem in Du Fu's Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu poetic sequences.

劍門 Sword Gate[93]

惟天有設險， Heaven set up this strategic pass,

劍門天下壯。 The Sword Gate is the grandest under Heaven.

連山抱西南， Continuous mountains embrace the southwest,

4 石角皆北向。 The angles of rocks all face the north.

兩崖崇墉倚， Crags on both sides lean like lofty ramparts,

刻畫城郭狀。 Carving and delineating the shape of city-walls.

一夫怒臨關， With one man fiercely guarding this pass,

8 百萬未可傍。 A million do not dare approach.

珠玉走中原， Pearls and jade rush to the Central Plain,

岷峨氣悽愴。 Mount Min and Mount Emei stand dejected in spirit.

三皇五帝前， Before the time of the Three Sovereigns and Five Thearchs,

[93] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1873.

雞犬各相放。 They let their chickens and dogs roam free.[94]

後王尚柔遠， Later kings value "pacifying the distant,"[95]

職貢道已喪。 The proper way of tribute and taxes has been lost.

至今英雄人， Even to this day, heroic men

高視見霸王。 Look haughtily, behold the rule of a hegemon.

併吞與割據， Swallowing territories and carving out independent regimes,

極力不相讓。 Exerting their utmost, they refuse to yield.

吾將罪真宰， I will blame the True Sovereign,

意欲鏟疊嶂。 Hoping to level the layered mountain-screens.

恐此復偶然， But perhaps this is once again an accident,

臨風默惆悵。 Facing the wind, I fall silent, disheartened and melancholic.

This poem has puzzled generations of commentators due to its disjointed structure, marked by abrupt shifts between differing, if not opposing, ideas that do not cohere smoothly. The poem can be roughly divided into three sections. The opening section (lines 1-8) presents the geo-military significance of Sword Gate. This mountain pass derives its name from a pair of sharp, towering peaks that face each other like swords. Due to its strategic location, Sword Gate has long been

[94] This line highlights the isolation and self-sufficiency of the Shu region in an era when its inhabitants rarely interacted with those from the central plain. It alludes to a passage from the *Laozi*: "Neighboring states face each other, with the sounds of chickens and dogs heard across one another. Yet people never mingled, not even until death" 鄰國相望，雞犬之聲相聞，民至老死，不相往來. *Laozi jiaoshi* 老子校釋, edited by Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 80.309.

[95] "Pacifying the distant" is derived from a phrase in the *Book of Documents*: "Pacifying those who are distant and treating with kindness those who are near" 柔遠能邇. See *Shangshu jinguwen zhushu* 尚書今古文注疏, complied by Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753-1818), edited by Chen Kang 陳抗 and Sheng Dongling 盛冬鈴 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1.60.

considered the gateway to Shu. As Zhang Zai 張載 of the Western Jin wrote in his "Inscription on the Sword Passageway" 劍閣銘, "This is the gateway to Shu, serving as its stronghold and fastness" 惟蜀之門，作固作鎮[96]—a place that has been repeatedly fought over by ambitious warlords. With the opening couplet granting the Sword Gate cosmic significance by attributing its origin to the work of Heaven, the poem goes on to describe the site's topographical features: a chain of mountains forming a natural defensive barrier for the Shu region, with rocky angles facing north—toward the imperial court—as if in defiance of central authority. Reinforcing this image are crags that resemble ramparts and parapets. The difficulty of this fortress is encapsulated in the fourth couplet: "With one man fiercely guarding this pass, / A million people dare not approach," a reformulation of a widely known epigram with a long textual history.[97] Taken together, the opening section describes Sword Gate as a natural defensive barrier for Shu, suggesting that the physical terrain plays a significant role in the region's historical autonomy.

The fifth couplet, however, takes a sudden turn, shifting the focus of the poem. It observes that the court's excessive exaction of local goods has troubled and distressed the local populace, a sentiment reflected even in the dispirited air surrounding the two famed mountains of the region—Mount Min and Mount Emei. Thus, in the middle section of the poem (lines 9-14), Du Fu reflects on the problems caused by the tribute system and over-taxation. He traces the origins of the tribute practice, contrasting the idyllic, self-sufficient communities during the era of the

[96] *Wenxuan*, 56.2410.

[97] This idea, expressed in a similar formulation, appears in early texts such as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子: "With one man guarding the pass, a thousand dare not cross" 一人守隘，而千人弗敢過也. The phrase is echoed in later texts, including Zhang Zai's "Inscription on the Sword Passageway" mentioned earlier, Zuo Si's 左思 "Fu on the Capital of Shu" 蜀都賦, and Li Bai's "Hardships of Traveling to Shu" 蜀道難. See *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋, commentary by He Ning 何寧 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 15.1073; *Wenxuan* 4.175-200; *Li Taibai quanji* 李太白全集, commentary by Wang Qi 王琦 (1696–1774) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 3.162-168.

Three Sovereigns and Five Thearchs with the later institutionalization of tribute, when the divide between the center and the periphery began to emerge as a significant problem.

Following this, the final section (lines 15-22) revisits the issue of local militarism, which is introduced in the opening section through the description of the place's topography. This issue is now made more explicit and placed within a contemporary context. The poem concludes with a fanciful wish on the poet's part to pare down the mountain-screens in an effort to put an end to the separatist history of Shu.

Thus, the poem's disjunctive structure arises from its interweaving of two distinct concerns—the problem with the center and that with the periphery—which appear to stand in tension with each other. This thematic incoherence is further complicated by a textual issue: the fact that the poem contains an odd number of couplets makes it an anomaly in both the Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu poetic sequences, where all other poems uniformly consist of an even number of couplets. Some commentators suggest that a couplet is missing and attempt to amend the text by adding a couplet that allegedly appears in some old manuscript copies of Du Fu's poetry.[98] On the other hand, through a formal analysis of the architecture of the Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel sequences, Lucas Bender proposes that it is more likely that a spurious couplet has been inserted into this poem. Specifically, he suggests that the fifth couplet, "Pearls and jade rush to the central plain, / Mount Min and Mount Emei stand dejected in spirit," was "inserted at some point by a Sichuanese partisan who wanted to justify the region's occasional rebelliousness by blaming it on the rapaciousness of the northern government."[99] Yet simply

[98] Qiu Zhao'ao claims that he once saw an old manuscript of Du Fu's poetry, which contains an extra couplet before line 9, "Pearls and jade rush to the central plain." This couplet, not included in the mainstream received version, reads: "The rivers and mountains store fine essence, the Heavenly repository brings forth its many treasures" 川嶽儲精英，天府興寶藏. See *DFQJJZ*, 7.1883.
[99] Bender, "Three Narrative Poetic Series," 27.

removing the fifth couplet does not resolve what has long been perceived as an inconsistency in the poem, because it is logically followed by four lines (lines 11-14) that clearly address the tribute system. The contrast between lines 11-12 and lines 13-14 tells a familiar story of historical decline, a long-standing trope in Chinese historiographical narratives. This narrative contrasts the supposed inappropriateness of later tribute policies with the primitive simplicity of antiquity. Still, some commentators, troubled by the poem's incoherence, attempt to establish a causal link between the two issues it raises—over-taxation and local militarism—suggesting that heavy taxation demanded by the court might at least partly explain the local rebellions. While this scenario is logically possible, it is neither made explicit nor even hinted at in the poem. Therefore, this interpretation remains speculative.

Interestingly, a memorial Du Fu composed in 763, four years after passing through the Sword Gate, offers some insight into what may have been on his mind when writing his poem "Sword Gate"—both the memorial and the poem reveal his persistent concerns with issues facing the Shu region. The memorial was written during Du Fu's stay in Langzhou, in eastern Sichuan. Titled "A Memorial Presented on Behalf of Governor Wang of the Lang Prefecture Discoursing on the Safety and Danger of Ba and Shu" 為閬州王使君進論巴蜀安危表, this petition to the emperor was composed on behalf of Langzhou's governor regarding the security of Shu, as the region at the time was beset by internal uprisings and external threats, particularly from the Tibetans. In the memorial, Du Fu, writing in the name of Governor Wang, makes two major appeals to the throne: first, the remission of taxes for the people of Shu; second, the appointment of a prince or a prestigious minister with longstanding service to the Tang to take charge of the region.

The first request responds directly to the contemporary situation: since the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion, the court had lost tax revenues from Henan and Hebei, as well as grain

supplies from the fertile Jiangnan region. As a result, the burden of maintaining the state's tax base increasingly fell on the people of Shu. Du Fu raises this issue right after complimenting the emperor for restoring peace to the entire realm through the suppression of the rebel forces:

> Yet tribute and taxes from Henan and Hebei have not been received; transportation [of grain] from the Yangtze and Huai regions is no longer as it once was. Since the military campaigns, Jiannan has been the only region from which taxes and collected goods continue to flow abundantly,[100] and whose leaders arrive one after another. Jade Forest and the other treasuries depend most heavily on this region for their supplies.[101]
>
> 然河南河北，貢賦未入；江淮轉輸，異於曩時。惟獨劍南自用兵以來，稅斂則殷，部領不絕。瓊林諸庫，仰給最多。[102]

If the people of Shu were once able to exert themselves in service to the state, Du Fu continues, the situation has worsened due to the infighting among local warlords:

> Recently, treacherous vassals and villainous men have repeatedly disturbed the normal social order. People throughout Ba and Shu are oppressed and drained.
>
> 近者賊臣惡子，頻有亂常，巴蜀之人，橫被煩費。[103]

[100] Jiannan was one of the ten "circuits" *dao* 道 established in the Tang. It includes a large part of modern Sichuan and Gausu, northeastern Yunnan, and southwestern Guizhou.
[101] Jade Forest is one of the imperial treasuries.
[102] *DFQJJZ*, 22.6467.
[103] *DFQJJZ*, 22.6467.

The growing military expenditures, driven by local uprisings and exacerbated by military conflicts with Tibet, have put the people of Shu in dire straits. Consequently, Du Fu stresses the urgent need to reduce taxes:

> As for the imperial order on tax exemption, in addition to cutting down on military expenses, I humbly wish that the various other taxes can be reduced as much as possible. Then the several prefectures in Jiannan may be revived from their dire situation.
>
> 又天下徵收赦文，減省軍用外，諸色雜賦名目，伏願損之又損之，劍南諸州，亦困而復振矣。[104]

At the same time, Du Fu presents his second proposal, aimed at ending local unrest fueled by military strongmen:

> I humbly wish that your Highness may …immediately dispatch an imperial prince[105] to serve as the guardian, to assuage the burden of the exhausted people and to suppress the uprisings.
>
> 伏願陛下…速以親賢出鎮，哀罷人以安反仄。[106]

Thus, Du Fu identifies two major causes of suffering in the Shu region: excessive taxation and local militarism. However, the relationship between the two is not one of cause and effect—

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[104] *DFQJJZ*, 22.6468.
[105] *Qinxian* 親賢 literally means "imperial kinsmen and worthies." In this passage, Du Fu is primarily referring to the former, specifically, an imperial prince. In the subsequent section, he proposes that appointing a worthy minister who has long served the Tang dynasty as a second-best choice.
[106] *DFQJJZ*, 22.6467.

heavy taxes did not directly lead to local rebellions. After all, the uprisings in Sichuan were not driven by the oppressed common people or their interests. In reality, the people of Shu are victims of both the exploitative court and the greedy local commanders.

Thus, the two major issues addressed in Du Fu's memorial—the onerous tax burden imposed by the court and the uprisings of regional warlords—align closely with those raised in the poem "Sword Gate." The resonance between the memorial and the poem reflects Du Fu's persistent concerns about the Shu region, which have long preoccupied him. Considering Du Fu's memorial, the juxtaposition of the two seemingly unrelated or even oppositional issues in "Sword Gate" begins to make sense and seems less jarring. Rather than interpreting them as causally connected, it is more likely that the problems of the center and the periphery are presented as two separate but equally pressing issues of the time. Their juxtaposition contributes to the poem's disjunctive quality. If there is a connection, it becomes apparent when viewed through the lens of the common people of Shu, who have been burdened both by the central court and local warlords. However, this connection is not at all clear from the poem itself.

Reading the "Sword Gate" alongside the memorial Du Fu wrote a couple of years later provides an opportunity to trace his train of thought. The apparent incoherence of the "Sword Gate" might have been easily understood by Du Fu's contemporary audience, who were well-cognizant of the situation of the Shu region at the time, but became less accessible to later readers. In fact, the Sword Gate is one of the few locations on Du Fu's poetic map with a long textual history. As expected, Du Fu pays homage to the literary tradition, echoing earlier writings, especially Zhang Zai's "Inscription on the Sword Passageway" mentioned earlier. However, whereas Zhang Zai, in his inscription, offers a general admonition to future administrators of Shu against local militarism—with the timeless tone befitting the genre of

"inscription"—Du Fu speaks to specific issues of his own day. History is not absent in Du Fu's poem, as he presents an account of Shu's incorporation into the tribute system from a historical perspective. However, the narrative Du Fu creates for the Sword Gate, along with the key issues he highlights, is firmly rooted in the sociopolitical realities of his time. As a result, the "Sword Gate" reveals a crucial aspect of Du Fu's map-making: his focus on contemporary contexts. This is a significant departure from traditionally literary practices, given the weight of the historical past in shaping literary constructions and representations of locales. In the case of "Sword Gate," the contemporary framework of Du Fu's place-making shapes the structure of the poem. Driven by his preoccupation with two pressing issues of his time, Du Fu brings them together in a single poem—though not without tension. If a poem in the Chinese tradition is generally expected to be an integrated and self-contained unit, *"Sword Gate"*—even with its use of the relatively flexible "ancient style" form—displays a disjointed structure that sets it apart from mainstream poetic conventions.

The Poetic Medium and the Double Act of Inscription

In the preceding discussion, I have sought to show that in Du Fu's Qinzhou–Tonggu and Tonggu–Chengdu poetic sequences, the unfamiliar landscape of the western frontiers functions not merely as a backdrop for self-expression; rather, these poems are fundamentally concerned with transforming the enduring "mountains and rivers" into meaningful places. From this foundational act of place-making emerge new landmarks and literary sites that serve as points of anchorage for Du Fu's restless life amid crisis and displacement, enabling him to inscribe himself onto the literary map he constructs. Ultimately, these two poetic sequences culminate in

a dual act of inscription: the inscription of new landmarks onto an otherwise undefined terrain, and the inscription of the poet himself onto the sites he has rendered significant.

As we have seen in the poems discussed thus far, Du Fu connects himself and the places in a variety of ways: by seeing his own life as an embodiment of the natural landscape, sometimes with irony; by imagining himself as a travel companion, as in "Auspicious Cypress Ferry-Crossing"; by assuming the role of a geographer and ethnographer, documenting local geography and customs; and as a commentator, reflecting on contemporary social and political issues while sympathizing with the local people. In fact, there is one more special way in which the self and the place are linked—one that operates on a different level. This occurs when the dual act of inscription converges on a meta-poetic realm, involving a self-conscious reflection on the poetic medium itself. In the final section of this chapter, I will examine two prominent examples: "Stone Cabinet Plankway" 石櫃閣 and "Chengdu Headquarter" 成都府. As I will show, in both poems, the dual act of inscription involves a deliberate use of poetic forms and styles, coupled with a reflection on the very act of literary representation.

石櫃閣 Stone Cabinet Plankway[107]

季冬日已長， In the last month of winter, the day grows longer,
山晚半天赤。 Late in the mountains, half of the sky is tinged with red.
蜀道多早花， On the roads of Shu, early flowers are many,
4 江間饒奇石。 In the river, marvelous rocks abound.
石櫃曾波上， The Stone Cabinet is above the rushing waves,

[107] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1863.

臨虛蕩高壁。 Facing the void, it dangles from lofty cliffs.

清暉回群鷗， Clear light illuminates a flock of gulls returning,

瞑色帶遠客。 The hue of dusk envelopes distant travelers.

羈棲負幽意， Lingering as a sojourner, I've gone against my longing for seclusion,

感歎向絕跡。 With deep sighs, I set forth for the trackless wilds.

信甘孱懦嬰， I am resigned to be constrained by my weakness and faint-heartedness,

不獨凍餒迫。 Besides the pressing cold and hunger.

優遊謝康樂， Free and easy was Xie Kangle [i.e., Xie Lingyun],

放浪陶彭澤。 Wild and unrestrained was Tao Pengze [i.e., Tao Yuanming].

吾衰未自由， In my declining years I cannot yet follow my heart's desire,[108]

謝爾性有適。 I yield to you in having fulfilled your inborn nature.

Having passed the Five Spirals Ridge, the dividing line between Qin and Shu, Du Fu continued his journey through the precarious wooden plankways of the Shu region. One such passageway, known as the Stone Cabinet Plankway, inspired the poem above. In the first half of the poem, Du Fu celebrates the Stone Cabinet Plankway using vocabulary and poetic patterns drawn from the literary past, through which the unorganized and purposeless landscape of the Shu mountains acquires meaning and becomes a legible place. The primary literary precursor for Du Fu in this poem is Xie Lingyun. Specifically, the pairing of a mountain scene and a river scene in lines 3-6,

[108] The phrase "In my declining years" 吾衰 echoes Confucius' lament (in the *Analects* 7:5): "How much have I declined! It has been a long time since I last dreamed of the Duke of Zhou" 甚矣吾衰也！久矣吾不復夢見周公. See *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋, compiled by Cheng Shude 程樹德 (1877-1944) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 13.441.

along with the carefully crafted parallelism in lines 7-8, evokes Xie Lingyun's characteristic style.[109] Moreover, phrases such as "clear light" 清暉 and "the hue of dusk" 暝色 recall lines from Xie's best-known poems.[110] On the other hand, the straightforward diction—particularly in the first two couplets—and the sense of tranquility conveyed in the fourth couplet are reminiscent of the poetry of Tao Yuanming 陶淵明.

In fact, the names of Tao Yuanming and Xie Lingyun are soon invoked in the second half of the poem, when Du Fu turns inward, noticing a disjunction between the natural scene he depicts with elegant poetic language—wonderous, perilous, yet tinged with serenity—and his own troubled state of mind. As lines 9–10 suggest, Du Fu is not in the mood to appreciate the beauty that surrounds him. Forced to leave his homeland in search of a place to settle, he fails to attain the ideal of reclusion represented by Tao Yuanming. Nor does he resemble Xie Lingyun, who was drawn to remote, uninhabited regions in pursuit of the marvelous. A traveler and refugee, Du Fu enters the "trackless wilds" not with a sense of wonder, but with deep lament. Thus, while Du Fu evokes the styles of past literary masters, he ultimately acknowledges that he falls short of fully emulating either model—he lacks the carefree nature of a mountain lover and the unrestrainedness of a recluse. This contrast between Du Fu and his literary precursors is more than a mere difference in personality. For readers familiar with the literary tradition and attuned to the strong echoes of the past in Du Fu's poem, it amounts to a comment on the poetic medium

[109] For scholarship on the poetry of Xie Lingyun, see J. D. Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream: The Life and Works of the Chinese Nature Poet Hsieh Ling-yün (385-433), Duke of K'ang-Lo* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967); Kang-i Sun Chang, *Six Dynasties Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), Chapter II, 47-78; Xiaofei Tian, *Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), Chapter 3, 119-41.

[110] Specifically, the phrases Du Fu adopts recall lines from Xie Lingyun's "Returning from My Retreat in Mountain Cliffs, Composed on a Lake" 石壁精舍還湖中作, which read: "Wooded valleys take in the hue of dusk, clouds and mists withdraw their evening glow" 林壑斂暝色，雲霞收夕霏, and "From morning till dusk changes the weather, / Mountains and rivers are brimming with a pure gleam. / The pure gleam brings joy to men, / The wayfarer, feeling at ease, forgot to return" 昏旦變氣候，山水含清暉。 清暉能娛人，遊子憺忘歸. *Wenxuan*, 22.1044.

itself. In other words, Du Fu is not only highlighting the deviation of his life from his literary models, but also exposing the mechanism of poetic representation, revealing it as a deliberate artistic construct through his use of established forms. In this sense, if the making of the "Stone Cabinet Plankway" into a memorable place is accomplished through poetic means, Du Fu's inscription of himself takes the form of a self-conscious reflection on the very poetic forms and styles he employs in his place-making.

Ironically, even Du Fu's reflections on his distance from his literary models are couched in language that echoes none other than Xie Lingyun and Tao Yuanming, to whom he has just self-effacingly acknowledged his own inferiority. Lines 11-12, for instance, rework a line from Tao Yuanming with a subtle but meaningful twist. In one of his "Drinking Wine" 飲酒 poems, Tao writes: "Cold and hunger are what have always beset me" 凍餒固纏己.[111] This line appears in the context of a reflection on his former life as an officeholder—a position that failed to shield him from material hardship. That experience ultimately leads him to withdraw from official life in favor of reclusion, which brings him both freedom and peace of mind. Du Fu, by contrast, does not choose reclusion as his path. His reworking of Tao's line complicates its original meaning by suggesting that he struggles not only with cold and hunger, but also with his own lack of resolve. Meanwhile, the intertwining of physical suffering and mental weakness that exacerbates it is a familiar theme in Xie Lingyun's work, as seen in his line: "Awkwardness and illness press on me, one after the other" 拙疾相倚薄.[112] Thus, even as Du Fu asserts his divergence from his literary models, his use of similar terms and the rehearsal of comparable ideas reveals his indebtedness to them.

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[111] *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian* 陶淵明集校箋, edited by Gong Bin 龔斌 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 3.246.

[112] From Xie Lingyun's "Stopping by the Shining Villa" 過始寧墅, *Wenxuan*, 26.1238.

If “Stone Cabinet Plankway” highlights the disjunction between Du Fu’s personal experience and the literary styles and personae he adopts, in “Chengdu Headquarter”—the final poem of Du Fu’s two travel series—he attempts to merge his individual experience with the universal archetypes established by the literary past.

成都府 Chengdu Headquarter[113]

翳翳桑榆日， Dim and dusky is the sun filtered through mulberries and elms,
照我征衣裳。 Shining upon this traveler’s clothes.
我行山川異， I march on and on, as mountains and rivers change,
忽在天一方。 Suddenly, I find myself on the other side of the sky.
但逢新人民， I encounter only new people,
未卜見故鄉。 Uncertain when I’ll see my hometown again.
大江東流去， The great river flows eastward,
遊子去日長。 Many days have passed since this traveler departed.
曾城填華屋， The tiered city is packed with splendid mansions,
季冬樹木蒼。 In late winter, the trees are verdant.
喧然名都會， Busy and bustling is this famed metropolis,
吹簫間笙簧。 With bamboo flutes playing, mingled with reed pipes.
信美無與適， Magnificent indeed, yet I have nowhere to go,
側身望川梁。 Leaning to the side, I gaze at the river bridges.

[113] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1893.

鳥雀夜各歸， Birds and sparrows each return at nightfall,

中原杳茫茫。 The Central Plain is distant and dim.

初月出不高， The crescent moon rises but not high,

眾星尚爭光。 While countless stars still vie for their light.

自古有羈旅， Since ancient times, people have traveled away from home,

我何苦哀傷。 Why should I grieve so deeply?

Written consistently in the *yuefu/gushi* style, this poem aligns with the long-standing tradition of poetry centered on the traveling man.[114] By adopting the *yuefu/gushi* form, the poet elevates his personal experience into a universal literary archetype. Indeed, while most places described in the two travel sequences are individualized, with their unique features emphasized, Chengdu—the capital of Shu, long celebrated and written about—appears here only in generic terms. Aside from the mention of lush greenery in the winter months in line 10, which evokes the warm southwest climate distinguishing Chengdu from the capitals of the Central Plain, the city's other features, such as its lavish buildings and musical instruments, remain sufficiently generic to apply to any major urban center. Even the sudden shift from a bustling, prosperous metropolis to a lone traveler out of sync with his surroundings is a familiar trope in the *yuefu* tradition.[115] The sense of alienation is alleviated toward the end of the poem, as the poet reflects that wayfarers have been many throughout history. Thus, if everything before the final stanza can be seen as an

[114] For a thorough study of *yuefu* and *gushi* poetry, especially the fluid boundaries between these two categories, see Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*.

[115] An example is Bao Zhao's 鮑照"Written to the Title 'Socializing with a Guest at the Youngster's Place, A Ballad'" 代結客少年場行, in which a description of the magnificent buildings and extravagant lifestyle in the capital city is followed by the speaker's sudden lament: "What am I doing here alone? Dejected and disheartened, I harbor countless worries in my heart" 今我獨何為？坫壈懷百憂. See *Bao Canjun jizhu* 鮑參軍集註, edited by Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 3.192.

elaboration of a couplet from the "Five Spirals" poem discussed earlier—"Chengdu has good things aplenty, yet how can it compare to returning to my own hut?" 成都萬事好，豈若歸吾廬—"Chengdu Headquarter" ultimately concludes on a more reconciliatory note, with the poet beginning to accept his lot.

The term *jilü* 羈旅 in the second-to-last line refers not only to a particular type of experience shared by many but also designates a literary motif exemplified by this poem itself. Du Fu knows that "since ancient times, people have traveled away from home" because this experience has been recorded in writing. Moreover, the *yuefu/gushi* form employed in this poem belongs to one of the earliest poetic genres in China, particularly suited for writing about universal experiences. As such, the entire poem can be seen as an enactment of its final couplet, versifying the poet's experience of *jilü* in a poetic form that has "since ancient times" been used to represent this motif. In other words, what is striking about this poem is the seamless union between form and content. Du Fu organizes and formulates his own experience according to existing literary types, thereby finding companionship in the literary past. This, in turn, offers him comfort, enabling him to transcend his intense emotional response to his circumstances by recognizing the universality of his experience.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the broad range of the literary tradition Du Fu draws upon, as well as the blending of poetic subgenres in his two travel sequences. Although Du Fu imitates and incorporates a variety of existing literary styles, the echoes of Xie Lingyun—particularly in his depictions of landscapes—and the adoption of the *yuefu/gushi* style stand out in the Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu poetic series. In this regard, the two poems discussed above, "Stone Cabinet Plankway" and "Chengdu Headquarter," highlight two of the most important literary resources Du Fu relies on at this stage of his life and literary

development. Therefore, the self-reflexive elements toward the end of these poems can be understood as commenting on the two travel sequences as a whole. Du Fu categorizes his life of wandering as *jilü*, aligning himself with an established literary type. At the same time, despite claiming distance from the Six Dynasties aristocrat Xie Lingyun, the mountain lover and nature explorer, as well as the recluse Tao Yuanming, Du Fu draws upon their literary legacies to construct his poetic map. Ultimately, the double act of inscription is achieved not only through literary means but also through a heightened awareness of the poetic medium itself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that Du Fu's displacement to the empire's margins gave rise to a new way of seeing its mountains and rivers—not merely as elements of the natural landscape or as backdrops for historical and cultural landmarks, but as components that both constitute the imperial territory and are shaped by state infrastructure. The various places Du Fu chooses to write about are ones he encountered during his precarious journey—temporary stopovers rather than destinations of refuge or settlement. Yet through poetry, he infuses these places with meaning: through naming practices, detailed geographical representation, and by situating them within a broader imperial context. Compared with his literary precursors and Tang contemporaries, Du Fu is more willing to let material and social realities inform his work. Rather than privileging textual and historical memory, his poetic map is intimately tied to geography, transportation, and the circulatory networks of the empire. By transforming these obscure localities into legible sites, he reconfigures the imperial landscape.

On another note, if a fundamental assumption in Chinese poetry and poetics is that poetry serves as a medium for self-expression, then in Du Fu's two travel sequences, self-expression and self-representation take on a distinctly spatial form. Specifically, by linking himself to various places—presenting himself as a travel companion, seeing himself as a manifestation of the landscape, commenting on local issues and customs, or reflecting on the poetic forms employed in his place-making—Du Fu inscribes his presence onto the new landmarks he constructs. Ultimately, his Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel sequences not only render the margins of the Tang empire more legible and perceptible, but also create meaningful sites that serve as points of anchorage for his wandering life.

Chapter Two

Competing Visions of Home:

River, Mobility, and Commemoration in Du Fu's Chengdu Poems

After traversing the perilous, mountainous terrain of the western frontiers, Du Fu finally arrived in Chengdu in late 759, a metropolis in the southwestern part of the Tang empire. It was here, in the spring of 760, that he built his Thatched Cottage with the assistance of a local governor.[116] In the two poetic series he wrote from Qinzhou to Chengdu, Du Fu grappled with the unfamiliarity of the western frontiers and his own existential crisis, as his long-held values began to crumble. Through poetry, he was able to not only create legible "places" from the alien landscape, but also to inscribe his own presence on the new landmarks and literary sites he created, whereby to invest meaning in his own experience as a restless wayfarer. Having arrived in Chengdu and built his cottage, Du Fu began to engage with a different kind of space—one often referred to as "home." Indeed, during his many years of wandering since leaving the capital region, Du Fu's time in Chengdu was the only extended period in which he seriously considered the possibility of building a permanent home where he could spend the remainder of his life. Of all the residences Du Fu inhabited throughout his turbulent life, the Thatched Cottage was the place where he most successfully managed to feel at home.

The concept of home in Du Fu's post-rebellion works has already begun to receive scholarly attention. An important article on this subject is Jack Chen's "Foundings of Home: On Du Fu and Poetic Success." Focusing on Du Fu's home-building in Chengdu, Jack Chen argues that "the gestures in Du Fu's poetry to found and locate a sense of home are, in fact, attempts to find

[116] That is, Pei Mian 裴冕 (703-770), who was serving as the governor of Chengdu and the military commissioner of western Sichuan at the time.

significance beyond the context of empire and dynastic trauma, to find it even (or especially) within the ordinary."[117] If Jack Chen defines the notion of home through a sense of the ordinary—positioning it as a space beyond state structures—I aim to complicate this view by uncovering competing visions and impulses at play in Du Fu's home-building. Given the close ties between home (or family) and state in Chinese tradition, I argue that the vision of home as a private space does not offer Du Fu a strong enough anchorage for a sense of belonging or ultimate fulfillment, especially in an era when the larger social fabric had fallen apart. Despite his attempts to turn his Thatched Cottage into a place of reclusion, "home" became a contested concept pulled in different directions by conflicting forces. This reveals Du Fu's struggle to construct a sense of home at the empire's margins, when the center could no longer hold.

Specifically, by highlighting the geographical and material conditions of his Thatched Cottage, I argue that Du Fu's physical and discursive constructions of home were informed by rivers and water transportation, which gained unprecedented significance during the Tang dynasty. In particular, the dual functions of rivers—both as boundaries that demarcate a secluded space and as conduits to other places, thus evoking the broader imperial landscape—contributed to tensions at the heart of Du Fu's conception of home. Moreover, the notion of home in Du Fu's poetry was neither monolithic nor static. In fact, his time in Sichuan can be roughly divided into three periods during which longstanding concerns were complicated by new issues and ideas:

The Founding of a New Home (760-762): From the construction of the Thatched Cottage in 760 to the seventh month of 762, when Du Fu left Chengdu for Mianzhou to see off his friend and patron, Yan Wu 嚴武 (726-765).

[117] Jack Chen, "Foundings of Home: On Du Fu and Poetic Success," in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, edited by Xiaofei Tian (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 16.

A Two-Year Displacement (762-764): A period during which Du Fu relocated several times in eastern Sichuan, unable to return to Chengdu because of local rebellions.

The Thatched Cottage Regained (764-765): From Du Fu's return to Chengdu in 764, after Yan Wu was reappointed governor of Shu, to the fifth month of 765, when Du Fu left Chengdu following Yan Wu's death.

As we will see, the two unsettled years from 762 to 764 had a perceptible impact on Du Fu's conception of home. Over the course of his displacement, Du Fu became more aware of life's unpredictability. Consequently, the vision of travel and mobility—again inspired by the empire's waterways—began to complicate the idea of home as a fixed place. At the same time, especially after his return to the Thatched Cottage in 764, Du Fu increasingly viewed it not merely as a place of shelter and belonging—the basic functions of home—but as a "home" that would hold his life even after his death, a potential cultural site infused with historical memories.

Shifting Roles of Rivers and Competing Visions of Home

Earlier, on his way to Chengdu, Du Fu lamented his parting from the Jialing River at the Auspicious Cypress Ferry Crossing, imagining the river and himself as travel companions.[118] From his years in Chengdu onward, Du Fu's life became even more closely tied to rivers. The river system in Chengdu—the Min River 岷江 and its branches—was considered part of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River,[119] with the Flower-Washing Creek 浣花溪—beside which

[118] For a discussion of the poem, see Chapter One, pages 16-17.

[119] According to canonical texts such as the *Book of Documents* 尚書, the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海經, and the *Commentary on the River Classic* 水經註, the source of the Yangtze River is Mount Min in Sichuan. The "Yu gong" 禹貢 (Tribute of Yu) chapter of the *Book of Documents* says: "Mount Min is the source of the Yangtze River" 岷山導江. *The Classic of Rivers* similarly records that "the Yangtze River originates from Mount Min" 江出

Du Fu's Thatched Cottage was built—being one of its subtributaries. Later, in 765, Du Fu was to travel down the Yangtze River in a boat he acquired while in Chengdu, sailing as far as its middle reaches before settling in Kuizhou, a transportation hub where Han and non-Han peoples mixed. Two years later, he set off on his boat again, journeying further south and spending his final years wandering through Hubei and Hunan. Given these experiences, it is not surprising that rivers came to occupy a central place in Du Fu's poetry, beginning with his time in Chengdu.

In her article on Li Daoyuan's 酈道元 (466 or 472-527) *Commentary on the River Classic*, Xiaofei Tian begins by asking, "How did people think about imperial space in premodern times?" To which she answers, "By boundaries and borders, no doubt, but perhaps even more by routes and rivers."[120] Indeed, as she continues to explain, it is through routes and rivers that people travel, resources are moved around, information is disseminated, and, in a word, the empire extends its power. Du Fu lived in an era when rivers and the expanding water transport had become crucial for the functioning of the empire. The Sui and Tang dynasties witnessed dramatic development of water transport. In addition to the construction of the Grand Canal in the Sui and its refurbishing in the Tang, transportation between the upper and the lower reaches of the Yangtze River also greatly advanced.[121] The Three Gorges area came to serve as a major transportation hub linking Shu in the west and Chu 楚 and Wu 吳 in the southeast. The expansion and substantial advancement of water transport significantly contributed to economic

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岷山. Since ancient times, the Min River has been mistakenly regarded as the primary source of the Yangtze River. Although some premodern scholars, such as Xu Xiake 徐霞客, pointed out this misunderstanding, it was not fully clarified until modern times.

[120] Tian, "Empire's Blue Highways," 75.

[121] For the revolution of water transport in the Tang, see Mark Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire: The Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), Chapter 1 "The Geography of Empire"; Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, Chapter 10 "The Revolution in Water Transport"; Yan Gengwang, *Tangdai jiaotong tukao*, Volume 4, 1155-62.

growth, prompting Elvin to describe it as a "medieval economic revolution."[122] The flourishing water transportation marks the Tang as distinct from what came before. As Mark Lewis argues, "For most of China's history before the middle of the Tang, empires were primarily regional constructs, with each locale providing its own material needs."[123] Due to the greatly advanced water transportation, which played a crucial role in Tang economy and social life, the Tang heralded a new age with regard to the empire's capability of mobilizing its resources across different regions.

In Du Fu's time, improved transportation along the Yangtze River made water transport more common than overland routes for shipping bulk goods from Shu to the capitals. Moreover, for the regular travel of scholar-officials, water routes often provided a feasible—if not more pleasant—alternative to the dangerous mountain paths. The upper branches of the Yangtze River that run through Chengdu were bustling with people and boats. Seeing the comings and goings of boats was part of Du Fu's everyday experience. Clearly, the water routes were what connected Chengdu to other parts of the empire, not to mention that the river system also facilitated travel and transportation within the region. As rivers had such a prevalent presence in the social life in Sichuan when Du Fu took up residence there, it is no coincidence that rivers—the Brocade River 錦江 and its tributary the Flower-Washing Creek—figured prominently in Du Fu's poetry from this period. Not only did Du Fu dedicate quite a few poems to the Flower-Washing Creek in front of his Thatched Cottage, but more importantly, river played a crucial role in shaping Du Fu's discursive—in addition to physical—construction of "home."

Before delving into the works of Du Fu, it is worth considering earlier literary representations of rivers and reflecting on how the changing state of water transportation might influence literary

[122] Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, pt. 2, Chapter 10.
[123] Mark Lewis, *China's Cosmopolitan Empire*, 22.

imagination. Rivers have always held strong fascinations for writers and accumulated rich associations in the Chinese literary tradition: to a perceptive viewer, the flowing river suggests the inevitability of change as well as the unceasing passage of time, an association that goes back to Confucius;[124] the vast expanse of water—as what causes separation or evokes a sense of distance—arouse longings in traveling men or lonely women; as sacred and mystical spaces, rivers serve as sites where one might encounter a divine being, such as a goddess. These long-established associations with rivers are certainly present in Du Fu's poetry, as he was deeply conversant with the literary tradition and embraced its diverse legacy. Yet, I emphasize that two opposing yet related attributes of rivers—their ability to both demarcate and connect—underlie Du Fu's spatial imagination in general and his representations of home in particular.

In fact, the multifaceted roles of rivers in both the natural environment and human societies can be understood through two core functions: demarcating and connecting. Rivers mark boundaries, delineate space, and often serve as natural barriers. At the same time, they connect different regions, acting as conduits for movement and exchange. These dual functions—and their dynamic interplay—give rivers vitality and explain their significant role in social life. However, in literary imaginations, there is often a marked disparity between these two functions. From the very beginning of the Chinese literary tradition, rivers have been associated with distance and separation. Examples abound even with a cursory reading of the earliest poetry collection, the *Odes* 詩經. The poem "The Han River is Broad" 漢廣, for instance, contains the following lines:

[124] This refers to a well-known passage from the *Lunyu* (9:17): "Standing by a river, the Master says: 'What passes away is just like this! It does not stop day or night'" 子在川上曰："逝者如斯夫！不舍晝夜。" *Lunyu jishi*, 18.610.

漢之廣矣，The Han River is wide,

不可泳思。It cannot be swum across.

江之永矣，The Yangtze River flows far,

不可方思。It cannot be crossed with a raft.[125]

In these lines, both the breadth and the length of a river is thought to create separation and mark distance. The predominance of such associations persisted throughout the Six Dynasties period and into the Tang.[126] By contrast, connectivity, as well as movement and mobility enabled by rivers, rarely played a notable part in literary imaginations before the eighth century. We can explain this phenomenon by citing the strong hold that conventions exert on writers from generation to generation. However, part of the issue may also stem from the relatively underdeveloped water transportation in premodern times. With the advancement in water transportation, particularly during the Sui and Tang dynasties, as discussed earlier, changes in literary approaches to rivers began to take place. By the middle of the Tang dynasty, representations of rivers as conduits for movement and connections between places became more

[125] *Mao* 9.

[126] The perception of rivers as what cause separation is ubiquitous in Six Dynasties literature. To cite a few examples:

山川阻且遠，Mountains and rivers are blocked and distant,
別促會日長。The farewell is brief, the day of reunion is far-off. (Cao Zhi 曹植)

故鄉邈已夐，My hometown is far and distant,
山川脩且廣。Mountains and rivers are vast and expansive. (Xie Tiao 謝朓)

風雲有鳥路，Amid wind and cloud there is a path for birds,
江漢限無梁。Yet the Yangtze and the Han rivers separate us for lack of a bridge. (Xie Tiao)

For the above quotes, see *Wenxuan*, 20.974; *Xie Xuancheng ji jiaozhu* 謝宣城集校註, ed. Cao Rongnan 曹融南 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 3.276; 3.205.

common in poetry.[127] This provides a historical context for reading the poetry of Du Fu. Discussions in this chapter will show that Du Fu not only participated in the new perceptions and imaginations of rivers of his time, but also played a crucial role in bringing about and shaping these developments. In Du Fu's Chengdu poems, I argue that two competing roles of rivers underpin his conception of home: one as a force that creates a secluded space, and by extension, a disengaged way of life; the other as a connector, linking his home to other parts of the empire and serving as a medium for imagining imperial space. Ultimately, despite Du Fu's attempt to make his home a place of reclusion, he finds that rivers continually draw his attention to the outside world.

Approaching Du Fu's Chengdu poems from the notion of home as a private, nonpolitical space is based on an important insight: namely, the observation that Du Fu often adopts a reclusive persona in many of his poems from this period, with his cottage modeled on a hermit's abode.[128] Nevertheless, it should be noted that such a vision of home is merely one strand among others in Du Fu's Chengdu poems, and spatial imaginings and representations in Du Fu's poems from this period are in fact much more complicated. One thing that distinguishes Du Fu from the recluse-poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?-427)—despite the latter's strong presence in Du Fu's Chengdu poems—is that whereas Tao's poems provide little information about the exact location of his residence, we can definitely identify where Du Fu lived on a map of the empire. Tao Yuanming rarely mentioned the place where he lived, and when he did, it was only in general terms, such as "the southern village" 南村, as in the poem "Relocation" 移居. This lack of

[127] A few examples can be cited, such as the first poem in Li Bai's 李白 (701-762) "Songs of the Autumn Bank, Seventeen Poems" 秋浦歌十七首. See *Li Taibai quanji*, 8.417-23. However, it is only in Du Fu's post-rebellion poems that the motif of rivers as a connecting force finds its most developed and nuanced expression.
[128] Some examples are: "Becoming a Farmer" 為農, "Having a Guest" 有客, "Country Cottage" 田舍, "Drinking Alone" 獨酌, "Cold Food Festival" 寒食, "Hiding My Traces, Three Poems" 屏跡三首.

specificity aligns with the obscurity of the place, which is exactly what a recluse's residence is supposed to be. Du Fu, in contrast, takes great care to situate himself and his Thatched Cottage on the imperial map. As a result, his poems make it clear where he resided in Chengdu, despite poetic claims and representations of its hiddenness.

How did Du Fu locate himself or identify the location of his Thatched Cottage in Chengdu? By local landmarks, for sure, but also by rivers:

浣花流水水西頭，West of the Flower-Washing Creek's flowing water,

主人為卜林塘幽。The host has chosen for me a secluded place amid groves and ponds.[129]

萬里橋西一草堂，A Thatched Cottage west of the Ten-Thousand-League Bridge,

百花潭水即滄浪。The water of Hundred-Flower Pond is exactly my Canglang.[130]

水檻溫江口，My river deck is at the mouth of the Warm River,[131]

茅堂石筍西。My Thatched Cottage is to the west of the Stone Bamboo-Roots.

移船先主廟，I row my boat to the temple of the First Ruler,[132]

洗藥浣花溪。and rinse my herbs in the Flower-Washing Creek.[133]

[129] "Choosing a Site for My Dwelling" 卜居, *DFQJJZ*, 7.1907.
[130] "Wild Man" 狂夫, *DFQJJZ*, 7.1955.
[131] Warm River is a tributary of the Min River.
[132] Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223), the founding ruler of Shu Han (221-263), one of the Three Kingdoms.
[133] "Three Quatrains" 絕句三首, *DSXZ*, 14.1464. This set of three poems was recovered from a twelfth century manuscript, and they are not included in *DFQJJZ*.

西嶺紆村北，The Western Ridges wind to the north of the village,[134]

南江繞舍東。The Southern Rivers encircle my cottage from the east.[135]

In these quotes, the upper stream of the Yangtze River that runs through Chengdu and one of its tributaries—the Flower-Washing Creek in front of Du Fu's residence—serve as signposts to his Thatched Cottage, with the Flower-Washing Creek receiving extensive treatment in poetry for the first time. In fact, what we see here is that Du Fu continues his place-making that began in his Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel sequences, as discussed in Chapter One. By versifying his Thatched Cottage and incorporating geographical details, Du Fu effectively placed both his cottage and the otherwise obscure Flower-Washing Creek on the map of the empire.

The river system in Chengdu played a central role in Du Fu's conception of home and empire. Given how frequently Du Fu wrote affectionately about his Thatched Cottage and the Flower-Washing Creek outside his gate, it is often overlooked that the river itself serves as a reminder of his dislocation from the outset. When Chengdu is referred to as a "river city" 江城, or the suburb where Du Fu lived is called a "river village" 江村, an implicit contrast is drawn between Chengdu and the two capitals—Chang'an and Luoyang—where the poet once lived and considered his home. In other words, the term "river" (*jiang* 江) as a modifier in these phrases already conveys a sense of alienation and strangeness on its own. This idea is made clear and given a poetic twist in the following poem titled "Cloudy Mountains."

[134] The Western Ridges refer to the Western Mountains 西山, also known as the Snowy Ridges 雪嶺, the main peak of Mount Min.
[135] The Southern Rivers are Pi River 郫江 and Liu River 流江. "Dispelling My Blues, Respectively Presented to Yan, Lord of Zheng, in Twenty Couplets" 遣悶奉呈嚴鄭公二十韻, *DFQJJZ*, 11.3276.

雲山 Cloudy Mountains[136]

京洛雲山外， The capital Luoyang lies beyond the cloudy mountains,[137]

音書靜不來。 Not a word or letter comes to me.

神交作賦客， My spirit communes with the *fu* writers,[138]

力盡望鄉臺。 My strength spent at the Terrace of Homeward Gaze.[139]

衰疾江邊臥， Feeble and ill, I repose by the riverside,

親朋日暮回。 As sunset comes, my relatives and friends depart.

白鷗元水宿， White gulls naturally dwell by the water,

何事有餘哀。 Why do you bear such excessive grief?

As Chengdu lies in the low-lying, far southwestern region of the empire, Du Fu often commented on its low terrain (*bei* 卑) and remoteness (*pian* 偏 or *pi* 僻). In the opening couplet, the cloudy mountains surrounding the flat plain not only obstructed Du Fu's view but also blocked communication from the eastern capital, Luoyang, Du Fu's hometown. The failure to reach beyond the cloudy mountains led the poet to focus on his immediate surroundings, referencing famed literary figures from the Shu region as well as a local landmark—the Terrace of Homeward Gaze—one that, ironically, did not alleviate but instead reinforced his longings for home. The poem thus progresses from the broader imperial sphere to the local area, and then, in

[136] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1977

[137] The term *jingluo* 京洛 can refer specifically to the eastern capital, Luoyang, or more generally to capital cities. An alternative rendering of this line is "The capital cities lie beyond the cloudy mountains."

[138] Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18 AD) and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-117 BC), famous *fu* writers from the Han dynasty.

[139] Several places are known to have a "Terrace of Homeward Gaze." Here it refers to the one in Sichuan, north of the Huayang County 華陽縣.

the next couplet, to the domestic space where the poet finds himself alone at dusk, lying in illness. The theme of homesickness carries over into the final couplet where it acquires added pathos. The closing couplet, serving as a kind of punchline of the poem, is particularly relevant to our discussion of Du Fu's relationship to rivers. Here, the poet's sense of alienation becomes more poignant as he gazes at the white gulls by the riverside. While the river is the natural habitat for the gulls, for the poet, it serves only as a reminder of his displacement from the familiar environment of the capital region. In other words, although the river brought the poet and the white gulls into proximity, it carried different meanings for each: whereas the gulls "naturally dwell by the water," for Du Fu, there is nothing "natural" about his "reposing by the riverside" (line 5). Therefore, we might argue that the grief in the gulls' cries was less their own than the grief projected onto them by the perceiving poet.

Du Fu's time in Chengdu alternated between moments of joy and contentment in his new home, and moments of torment when the sense of dislocation overtook him and prevented him from truly feeling at home. As Jack Chen has aptly pointed out, Du Fu's home in Chengdu was "marked strongly by its secondariness."[140] Tension was often built into his efforts of building a home in a place that constantly reminded him of its foreignness. If the river was part of the natural landscape Du Fu encountered in the far southwestern region—a reminder of his dislocation that he painfully came to realize from time to time—it nevertheless took on new functions and associations in his physical and discursive constructions of home. In fact, the site for Du Fu's home was chosen in part for the seclusion provided by the Flower-Washing Creek. In the following two poems written during his early days in Chengdu, the river in front of the

[140] Jack Chen, "Foundings of Home," 23.

residence, rather than marking foreignness, is turned into an attraction within the home's surroundings and, more importantly, serves to mark off a secluded space for his home.

卜居 Choosing a Site for My Dwelling[141]

浣花流水水西頭， West of the Flower-Washing Creek's flowing waters,
主人為卜林塘幽。 The host has chosen for me a secluded spot amid groves and ponds.
已知出郭少塵事， I know well that outside the city walls, worldly affairs are few,
更有澄江銷客愁。 There is also a clear river that soothes the traveler's sorrow.
無數蜻蜓齊上下， Countless dragonflies flit up and down in unison,
一雙鸂鶒對沈浮。 A pair of mandarin ducks face each other, floating with the current.
東行萬里堪乘興， On a whim, I shall journey east for ten thousand leagues,
須向山陰上小舟。 Embarking on a small boat toward Shanyin.[142]

江村 River Village[143]

清江一曲抱村流， The clear river flows, its bend embracing the village,
長夏江村事事幽。 In the long summer, everything in the riverside village is serene.
自去自來堂上燕， Swallows in the hall come and go of their own accord,
相親相近水中鷗。 Gulls in the water are intimately familiar with one another.
老妻畫紙為棋局， My old wife draws on paper to make a chessboard,

[141] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1907.
[142] In modern Shaoxing, Zhejiang province.
[143] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1965.

稚子敲針作釣鉤。 My young children hammer needles into fishing hooks.

但有故人供祿米， As long as my old friend provides grains from his official salary,

8 微軀此外更何求。 What else do I need beyond this humble life of mine?

In both poems, the river contributes to the sense of seclusion (*you* 幽) that defines the neighborhood where Du Fu lived. As the first poem describes, the clear river, in addition to shielding the area from the hustle and bustle of the city, also dispels the cares of a traveler. It is commonly believed that a river's clear water has the power to purify the mind and wash away worries—an assumption on which Du Fu's claim is based. The poem continues to depict a lovely scene of dragonflies flitting about and mandarin ducks floating by, as the poet gazes up and down along the river. Beyond offering visual enjoyment, the river also sparks the idea of a boat trip down the Yangtze, all the way to Shanyin in Zhejiang. The closing couplet alludes to an anecdote from the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 about Wang Ziyou 王子猷 (338-386), from the Eastern Jin dynasty. According to the story, Wang once thought of an old friend on a snowy night and immediately set off by boat to visit him. However, upon arriving at his friend's door early the next morning, he turned back without meeting him, as his mood had already faded. By evoking this story, Du Fu suggests a vision of a spontaneous life in his new residence, where he is cut off from worldly concerns. This spontaneity, already embodied by the creatures around him—as lines 5-6 show—aligns him with the famed cultural figure from the fourth century, who exemplified such a quality. I have emphasized the advanced water transportation in the Tang and mentioned earlier that the sight of boats coming and going, including those from the Wu region, was part of Du Fu's everyday experience. Indeed, as Du Fu wrote in one of his best-known poems: "Outside my gate moor boats sailed ten thousand leagues from Wu in the east" 門泊東吳

萬里船.[144] This is perhaps what led to the thought of a boat trip to Wu in "Choosing a Site." In other words, what Du Fu describes as a whimsical thought had its material and infrastructural basis in the developed waterways connecting Shu and Wu.

While the first poem repeats the term *shui* 水, the second poem emphasizes *jiang* 江 in its opening couplet, highlighting the river's role in marking a space of seclusion and tranquility. Gulls appear again, but instead of evoking the poet's sense of displacement as in "Cloudy Mountains," they now symbolize the harmony and contentment of domestic life, setting the tone for the next couplet. The ease and enjoyment of life in the river village naturally lead to the rhetorical question near the end, which expresses the contentment the poet found in his life at the Thatched Cottage. Interestingly, there is a hint of sarcasm, if not bitterness, in the closure. The mention of Du Fu's "old friend" 故人, who provided for the poet's family with his official salary (*lu* 祿)—much like the "host" 主人 in the first poem—reveals the illusory nature of a self-sufficient world. It exposes Du Fu's life at the Thatched Cottage as inherently tied to the larger social order, reliant on the imperial system. The closing couplet thus both affirms the self-sufficiency of the poet's life in the river village and acknowledges its dependence on the outside world, from which it seeks to demarcate itself.

Du Fu's home-building involves not only the physical construction of his Thatched Cottage but also discursive construction of "home" through poetry, a process through which he inscribes meaning onto the physical structure and even reimagine the material reality. One of the dominant narratives, as seen in the two poems discussed above, is that of a reclusive life in a space demarcated from the public world, yet not entirely severed from it. In this narrative, the outlying southwestern city Chengdu is depicted as cut off from the empire's turmoil, with its geographical

[144] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3226.

isolation turned into an asset. As Du Fu wrote in his poem "Becoming a Farmer" 為農: "The Brocade Neighborhood is beyond smoke and dust, / In the riverside village, there are eight or nine households" 錦里煙塵外，江村八九家.[145] Here, "smoke and dust" refers to the warfare devastating other parts of the empire. Moreover, located outside of the city walls, the Thatched Cottage is further removed from the bustling urban center of Chengdu, along with public service associated with it. At the same time, however, Du Fu's poems also call attention to the ties between his cottage and the world beyond it. These include the patronage of local governors, suggested by the "host" in "Choosing a Site," as well as his friend's financial support in "River Village," which makes the life of a recluse possible. Besides, other poems also highlight commercial exchanges between the city and the recluse's residence. For instance, "Rising Early" 早起 ends with the lines "My servant boy comes from the city market, returning home with ale in the jar" 童僕來城市，瓶中得酒還.[146] Here, the commercial exchange is not just about the purchase of a random commodity, but wine—the very item without which the adoption of the recluse's role, and the representation of a reclusive life, would be incomplete, if not impossible.[147]

Modeling oneself as a recluse was a well-established practice by Du Fu's time. What set Du Fu apart, however, was his self-awareness of both the vast potential and the limits of literary imagination. In the following poem, the transformative power of poetry over the physical world

[145] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1944.
[146] *DFQJJZ*, 8.2193. For a discussion of this poem, see Bender, *Du Fu Transforms*, 183-84.
[147] For the cultural meanings of wine and drunkenness, as well as their relationship to literature, see: Nicholas Morrow Williams, "The Morality of Drunkenness in Chinese Literature of the Third Century CE," in *Scribes of Gastronomy: Representations of Food and Drink in Imperial Chinese Literature*, ed. Isaac Yue and Siufu Tang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 27–44; Charles Kwong, "Making Poetry with Alcohol: Wine Consumption in Tao Qian, Li Bai and Su Shi," in *Scribes of Gastronomy*, 45–68.

is brought to the fore. However, this is soon undercut by the poet's painful recognition of the fragility of literary representation.

狂夫 Wild Man[148]

萬里橋西一草堂， A Thatched Cottage west of the Ten-Thousand-League Bridge,[149]
百花潭水即滄浪。 The water of Hundred-Flower Pond is exactly my Canglang.
風含翠篠娟娟淨， Wind embraces verdant bamboos, clean and charmingly swaying,
4 雨裛紅蕖冉冉香。 Rain moistens red lotuses, fragrant and lithely bending.
厚祿故人書斷絕， Letters from old friends with ample salaries have ceased,
恆飢稚子色淒涼。 My young children, always hungry, appear pale and forlorn.
欲填溝壑惟疏放， About to fill the ditches, I can only remain free and unrestrained,
8 自笑狂夫老更狂。 I laugh at myself, for being wilder as I grow old.

As in many of Du Fu's poems from this period, the first half of this poem portrays the seclusion of the poet's residence and the tranquility of its surroundings, creating an ideal image of a recluse's cottage. What is particularly interesting for our discussion is the second line, where Du Fu suggests that the Hundred-Flower Pond—a section of the Flower-Washing Creek—can serve as the imaginary literary locale of "Canglang" 滄浪, or Gray-Blue Waves, for the poet. Though there is an actual river called "Canglang," variously identified as the Han River or a branch of it

[148] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1955.
[149] A bridge in the south of Chengdu.

in different sources,[150] in the literary tradition, "Canglang" is a nonspecific term designating an imaginary locale for a recluse, who may choose either to serve or to retreat, depending on the changing times.[151] The equation between the Hundred-Flower Pond and Canglang can only be established through a poetic assertion, as Du Fu does in the second line. This statement attests to the power of words and literary imagination in transforming physical reality. In making such an explicit claim, the second line in effect reveals the mechanism behind Du Fu's poetic representation of rivers in many of his Chengdu poems.

Yet, if the first half of the poem emphasizes the transformability of the river through literary imagination, the second half exposes the limits of Du Fu's literary conceit. Starting with the third couplet, there is a sudden shift from the natural world to the human realm, accompanied by a change in tone from contentment to bitterness, with a touch of wry humor. It is as if the poet, unable to continue the story he initially intended, is instead forced to confront harsh reality. The vivid colors and charm of the bamboos and lotuses (lines 3-4) are replaced by the pale complexion (*se* 色) and gloomy countenance of the poet's children (line 6), a contrast also observed by Lucas Bender.[152] The water imagery continues, but now the Hundred-Flower Pond, or the poet's Canglang, has morphed into ditches, where he fears dying without a proper burial.

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[150] In the *Book of Documents*, the chapter "Tribute of Yu" 禹貢 records that "The Yang River originates from Mount Bozhong. Flowing eastward, its lower course becomes the Han River. And further downstream, it is known as the Canglang River" 嶓冢導漾，東流爲漢。又東爲滄浪之水. See *Shangshu jinguwen zhushu*, 3.193. In his *Commentary on the River Classic*, Li Daoyuan cites Liu Chengzhi's 劉澄之 *Yongchu shanchuan ji* 永初山川記, which states that "The Xia River is the 'Canglang' mentioned in ancient texts, which also appears in the 'Fisherman's Song' from the *Chuci*" 夏水，古文以爲滄浪，漁父所歌也. See *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng* 水經註校證, compiled by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (ca. 466-527), edited by Chen Qiaoyi 陳橋驛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 32.755.

[151] This association has its locus classicus in the "Fisherman" from the *Chuci* 楚辭, which states: "When the water of Canglang is clear, it can be used to wash my cap strings; when the water of Canglang is muddy, it can be used to wash my feet" 滄浪之水清兮，可以濯吾纓。滄浪之水濁兮，可以濯吾足. A similar passage also appears in the *Mencius* 4A:8. See *Chuci buzhu*, 7.180-81; *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集註, compiled by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 7.280.

[152] Bender, *Du Fu Transforms*, 185.

As such, the second half of the poem presents a moment of crisis, marking the breakdown of the poetic vision established in the first half. Confronting life's harsh realities, Du Fu ultimately has no choice but to adopt another poetic posture—*kuang* 狂, or being wild and unrestrained.

There are various ways to envision and invest meaning in a river, depending on the frame of reference. The conception of the Flower-Washing Creek as Canglang, or as a boundary defining the space of a recluse, involves imagining the river as a body of water detached from or indifferent to imperial concerns. Indeed, equating the Flower-Washing Creek with Canglang removes its geographical specificity, transforming it into a literary space of reclusion, rich with cultural meanings and associations. Nevertheless, there is another side to the story: the idea that rivers are precisely what define and shape imperial space, and through which people imagine it. While in Chengdu, Du Fu's attention was not always focused on domestic life. In fact, he often reflected on the capitals, the empire, and its problems. As we will see, the river in front of his cottage frequently triggers thoughts of the imperial space beyond his immediate surroundings. Even in poems where Du Fu adopts a reclusive persona, such as the following two, the supposed space of a recluse is portrayed as open to the larger world, and what seems like a reclusive life is undermined by concerns about the empire.

野老 Old Rustic[153]

野老籬前江岸迴， In front of the old rustic's hedge, riverbanks bend,

柴門不正逐江開。 The wicker gate opens askew, chasing the river's flow.

漁人網集澄潭下， Fishermen's nets are cast into the clear pond,

[153] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1972.

4 估客船隨返照來。 Merchants' boats arrive in evening twilight.

長路關心悲劍閣， With the long roads on my mind, I grieve over the Sword Plankway,[154]

片雲何意傍琴臺。 A strip of cloud, with what intention does it lean upon the Zither Terrace?[155]

王師未報收東郡， No word has come about the retaking of the eastern commanderies by the emperor's armies,[156]

8 城闕秋生畫角哀。 By the city's pylons, autumn sets in, painted bugles sound mournfully.

遣愁 Dispelling My Sorrows[157]

養拙蓬為戶， Cultivating my awkwardness, tumbleweeds form my gate,

茫茫何所開。 In the vast, hazy expanse, where does it open?

江通神女館， The river flows past the Temple of the Divine Maid,[158]

4 地隔望鄉臺。 The land is separated from the Terrace of Homeward Gaze.

漸惜容顏老， More and more, I am saddened by my aging face,

無由弟妹來。 There is no way for my brothers and sisters to come.

兵戈與人事， Warfare and the events of life,

8 回首一悲哀。 As I look back, all grieve me deeply.

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[154] The Sword Plankway is a strategic garrison on the main route from Shaanxi to Sichuan.
[155] The Zither Terrace in Chengdu is where the Han *fu* writer Sima Xiangru is said to have played zither.
[156] The eastern commanderies refer to the region east of the capital, including the eastern capital Luoyang and its nearby regions that were still under rebel control when Du Fu wrote this poem.
[157] *DFQJJZ*, 14.3935. Scholars have different opinions on the dating of this poem. While Qiu Zhao'ao attributes it to Du Fu's Chengdu period, Huang He 黃鶴 dates it to 766, when Du Fu was in Kuizhou. The modern scholar Xiao Difei, editor of *DFQJJZ*, follows Huang He in assigning the poem to Du Fu's Kuizhou period. However, I believe there is strong evidence supporting Qiu Zhao'ao's view on this matter. See note 159 for further discussion.
[158] The Temple of the Divine Maid is in Wushan County 巫山縣 in modern Chongqing.

Both poems begin with vocabulary and imagery associated with an eremitical life, such as the poet's self-designation as an "old rustic," the "wicker gate," and the act of "cultivating one's awkwardness." If anything stands out among these otherwise familiar images, it is the hermit's gate, which opens toward the river. Indeed, while the default gesture of a recluse is to close the door, Du Fu in these two poems deliberately tells us where his wicker gate opens and what it faces. In the first poem, the gate that opens at an angle, as if following the river's course, suggests the unconventional and spontaneous nature of the cottage's owner, setting up expectations of the typical lifestyle of an "old rustic." However, such expectations are soon undermined. As the next couplet reveals, the river, far from marking a secluded space, becomes a site for profitable activities and commercial exchanges. The fishermen here are not cultural figures traditionally associated with solitude and detachment; rather, like the merchants in the following line, their activities represent trade, mobility, and the commerce of the empire. The sight of fishermen's nets and merchants' boats on the river evokes thoughts of movement and the long roads (line 5) that connect this "old rustic's" cottage to other regions of the empire. As the poem progresses, it moves from landmarks in Shu—the Sword Plankway and the Zither Terrace—to the eastern capital and its surrounding areas still under rebel control. By the end of the poem, the poetic persona is far removed from the ideal of an "old rustic."

The second poem similarly opens with the humble gate of a supposed recluse, as the self-effacing phrase "cultivating my awkwardness" typically applies to one who withdraws from public service. It then poses a rhetorical question about the location of his gate—and, by extension, his residence—using the term *mangmang* 茫茫, which conveys both the obscurity of the place and a sense of disorientation on the poet's part. To specify his location and dispel the

anonymity of his surroundings, Du Fu points to the Yangtze River and landmarks in Shu (the Terrace of Homeward Gaze) and Chu (the Temple of the Divine Maid). Paradoxically, while the Terrace of Homeward Gaze is closer to Du Fu's home in Chengdu, it is portrayed as beyond his reach, whereas the Temple of the Divine Maid, located in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, is depicted as connected (*tong* 通) to him by the river. The irony lies in the fact that the poet is cut off (*ge* 隔) not only from his hometown but even from the place where one might at least gaze toward home.[159] The immediate and intuitive connections the poet makes between his current location in Chengdu and a site in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River (line 3) have their material and infrastructural basis in the advanced water transportation in the Tang, as discussed earlier. With Du Fu's thoughts "journeying" down the river, it is not surprising that his siblings come to his mind in the third couplet. From Du Fu's other poems, we know that he had siblings in the Shandong region, with whom communication was severed due to the rebellion.[160] Had they wished to visit each other, they would have taken the water route through the Yangtze River, passing the Temple of the Divine Maid. Thus, the expanded vision of imperial space,

[159] Without recognizing the intended irony, the couplet might seem counterintuitive: the landmark from which Du Fu is separated (*ge*) is, in fact, closer than the place the river connects (*tong*) him to. This is likely why Huang He attributes the poem to Du Fu's Kuizhou period, in which case the Temple of the Divine Maid would be geographically closer to the poet than the Terrace of Homeward Gaze. Nevertheless, as our earlier discussion shows, rivers play a significant role in Du Fu's Chengdu poems, inspiring him to reflect on the connections between different regions. In particular, tracing the route of the Yangtze River—including the places it passes through, from Shu to Chu and even to Wu—emerges as a recurrent theme in these poems. For example, in the second poem of his "Seeing off My Brother [Du] Ying on His Way to Qizhou, Three Poems" 送舍弟穎赴齊州三首, Du Fu writes: "The river passes through the One Pillar Watchtower, / The sun sets by the Terrace of Homeward Gaze" 江通一柱觀，日落望鄉臺. The One Pillar Watchtower is a landmark in Jingzhou, constructed under the commission of Liu Yiqing 劉義慶. Like the Temple of the Divine Maid, it is located in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. As such, this couplet strongly echoes the second couplet of "Dispelling My Sorrows." Given that scholars unanimously date this poem to 764, it makes perfect sense to consider "Dispelling My Sorrows" as coming from the same period when Du Fu was in Shu. *DFQJJZ*, 11.3301.

[160] For example, the third poem of "Seeing off My Brother [Du] Ying on His Way to Qizhou, Three Poems" reads: "My several aunts are now on the seacoast, / My two brothers are also in Shandong. / Taking leave, you will find your way through arms and weapons, / Come again when the roads are clear of obstruction" 諸姑今海畔，兩弟亦山東。去傍干戈覓，來看道路通. *DFQJJZ*, 11.3302. Shandong 山東 in Tang dynasty referred to the vast region east of Mount Taihang 太行山, encompassing modern Shandong, Hebei, and parts of Henan provinces.

inspired by waterways, prompts reflections on state affairs like warfare, to which Du Fu's dislocation in old age and separation from his siblings are closely tied. Ultimately, both "Old Rustic" and "Dispelling My Sorrows" depict a recluse who does not shut himself away but instead opens his gate to a river that connects him to the outside world.

River, Mobility, and Home between Here and Elsewhere

If Du Fu was often torn between making himself feel at home in his new residence and finding himself displaced from his original home, between attempting to demarcate a secluded space for a reclusive life and seeing its inevitable connections to the public world, his relationship to his Thatched Cottage in Chengdu and his conception of home more broadly were to be altered and reshaped by the period of unsettled life between 762 and 764. In 762, Du Fu's old friend and patron Yan Wu, the governor of Shu, was summoned to go back to the capital to take up service at court. Du Fu went to Mianzhou 綿州 to see him off. Soon afterwards, rebellion led by the local military commissioner Xu Zhidao 徐知道 (?-762) broke out. Du Fu fled to Zizhou 梓州 as a result, and brought his family to join him in Zizhou later that year. In the next two years he relocated several times in eastern Sichuan, between Hanzhou 漢州, Langzhou 閬州, and Zizhou, only to return to his Thatched Cottage in Chengdu in 764, when Yan Wu was reappointed as the governor of the region.

During the period of constant relocation from 762 to 764, Du Fu sometimes entertained the idea of home not as a fixed place, but as wherever one happens to find themselves, or as something found by chance. The pessimistic version of this idea can be summed up by the opening couplet of his "Far Roaming" 遠遊: "A humble man, who takes note of me? / Having

lost my way, home is wherever I come upon" 賤子何人記，迷方著處家.[161] What this conveys is that home is both nowhere and, therefore, everywhere. In some of his other poems, a more cheerful version of this idea is presented and embraced, though not without some mixed feelings. This is the case when Du Fu says that "home is wherever I get drunk" 得醉即為家 in a poem he composed during a feast he attended in Tongquan 通泉,[162] or when he claims, upon returning to his Thatched Cottage in the spring of 764, that "whenever I follow my whim, that is home" 乘興即為家.[163] These are, of course, mere poetic claims or poetic gestures, nevertheless, their recurrence still reveals a heightened awareness of the fragility of home-building once the original home is lost. It also bespeaks a readiness to accept life's unpredictability as well as mobility as part of his vision for his years ahead.

In fact, river not only triggers thoughts about the larger imperial realm, but also inspires a vision of mobility, which complicates the conception of "home" as a fixed locale. During his time in Chengdu, Du Fu sometimes thought about leaving Shu to travel down the Yangtze River. An early example is "A Cottage" 一室, dated to 761 by Qiu Zhao'ao or to the year before by some other commentators, in which the sight of boats on the river in a dismal twilight stirs Du Fu to imagine leaving for Chu in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River.[164] Travel and migration featured more frequently in Du Fu's poetry after 762 when he was displaced one more time: this time, from his second home in Chengdu. Besides the Chu region, Du Fu also expressed the desire to go to Wu, the southeastern area that had always held strong fascination for him, and

[161] *DFQJJZ*, 10.2753.
[162] "Accompanying Attendant Censor Wang at a Banquet in a Wild Pavilion in the Eastern Mountains of Tongquan" 陪王侍御宴通泉東山野亭, *DFQJJZ*, 9.2737.
[163] "Return in Spring" 春歸, *DFQJJZ*, 11.3135. For a discussion of the latter two poems, see Jack Chen, "Foundings of Home," 23-5.
[164] *DFQJJZ*, 8.2300.

about which he had fond memories about his youthful journeys. The prospect of traveling to Chu or Wu may have been part of Du Fu's plan to return to Chang'an or Luoyang. He could have either sailed down the Yangtze River to Jingzhou, then taken the overland route to the capitals, or continued by boat all the way to Yangzhou and proceeded along the canal. In all these possible scenarios, the empire's waterways played a crucial role for Du Fu to envision prospective trips and navigate life's uncertainties.

Not only did Du Fu contemplate various possibilities, but he also made preparations for his journey and was on the verge of setting out at one point. We still have poems in which he bids farewell to his friends and associates in Shu.[165] In the end, the trip was canceled when news arrived that Yan Wu would return to the region as governor. Thus, after two years of dislocation, shifting visions, and abandoned plans, Du Fu returned to his Thatched Cottage in Chengdu in 764. However, the thought of leaving Shu lingered even after his return to Chengdu, a vision that finally came to fruition after Yan Wu's death, when Du Fu took his family down the Yangtze River and settled in Kuizhou for the next two years.

I argue that over the course of his stay in Chengdu, Du Fu became more acutely aware of travel and migration to be part of his life ahead, and increasingly saw the fragility of his efforts to build a permanent home. If rivers, by evoking the broader imperial realm, connect home to the public sphere, then by suggesting the possibility of movement, they undermine the very concept of home in the here-and-now. In the following two poems, we see how the empire's waterways direct Du Fu's gaze and poetic vision toward places of his longing and desire, pointing to a home that always lies elsewhere. These two poems were both composed while Du Fu was in Zizhou:

[165] An important piece is "About to Depart for Wu and Chu, I Present This Farewell Poem to Deputy Zhang [Yi] and Other Gentlemen at the Headquarter, with *Liu* as the Assigned Rhyme Word" 將適吳楚，留別章使君留後兼幕府諸公，得柳字.

the first was written upon hearing the retaking of Henan and Hebei in 763 after the defeat of Shi Chaoyi 史朝義 (?-763), whereas the second one was written not long after the defeat of Shi Chaoyi or the recapture of the eastern capital Luoyang late in the previous year. In both poems, rivers and waterways serve as core images for articulating a vision of mobility.

聞官軍收河南河北 Upon Hearing Imperial Troops' Retaking Henan and Hebei[166]

劍外忽傳收薊北，Beyond the Sword Gate, news of the recapture of Jibei arrived suddenly,

初聞涕淚滿衣裳。The moment I heard, tears soaked my clothes.

卻看妻子愁何在，I look back at my wife and children, wondering where their sorrow has gone,

漫卷詩書喜欲狂。Carelessly rolling up my scrolls, I am overcome with joy!

白日放歌須縱酒，In the bright daylight, singing loudly, I should indulge in wine,

青春作伴好還鄉。With green spring as my companion, I will return to my hometown.

即從巴峽穿巫峽，Soon I will pass through the Ba Gorge and the Wu Gorge,

便下襄陽向洛陽。Then go down to Xiangyang, and from there, head toward Luoyang.

春日梓州登樓二首 Ascending a Tower in Zizhou on a Spring Day, Two Poems[167] (II)

天畔登樓眼， At heaven's edge, from the tower, my eyes gaze,

隨春入故園。 Following spring into my old garden.

戰場今始定， The battlefield is finally at peace,

[166] *DFQJJZ*, 10.2747.
[167] *DFQJJZ*, 10.2755-6.

4 移柳更能存。 But could the willows I transplanted have survived?

厭蜀交遊冷， I am weary of the friendships in Shu that have grown cold,

思吳勝事繁。 I long for the many marvelous things in Wu.

應須理舟楫， I should, without a doubt, prepare my boat and oars,

8 長嘯下荊門。 Let out a long whistle, and head down to the Gateway to Jing.[168]

The first poem is one of Du Fu's many best-known pieces. Commentators and critics have noted the sense of immediacy and spontaneity in this poem, evident in the portrayal of a series of uncontrollable actions: from the initial tears of joy, to the poet absent-mindedly wrapping his scrolls, and finally, to the thought of returning to his hometown in Luoyang. The second to last couplet has often been acclaimed because it nicely captures the joy of a homeward journey, with the poet enjoying the springtime scene along the way. Equally fascinating and more unconventional is the last couplet, in which Du Fu visualizes his journey on a mental map. The repetition of *xia* 峽 and *yang* 陽 in the place names carries on the sense of urgency and spontaneity from the preceding lines, mimicking on the verbal level the speediness of the imagined homeward trip. Thus, despite his physical limitations, the poet was able to vicariously experience the joy of a homecoming journey that had yet to occur, through literary imagination. This poem is one of many in Du Fu's corpus written in response to news he received. Poetry allowed him to engage with his ongoing experiences and to envision the future, enabling his writing to outpace reality.

[168] Jingmen 荊門, or the Gateway to Jing, is one of the two mountains that form the narrow valley leading from Shu to Chu.

Similar observations can be made about the second poem. While the physical body of the poet is confined to the outlying region at the edges of the sky, we are told that his eyes—perhaps more precisely, his mind's eye—have the freedom to travel. With an expanded vision, the poet conjures up the map of the empire. Though not as dramatic as "Upon Hearing Imperial Troops' Retaking Henan and Hebei," this poem similarly invokes the vision of an upcoming journey, moving from a roaming of the eyes to a prospective trip. Again, it is a trip through the empire's waterways.[169] It is worth noting that the poet expresses simultaneously the longing for his home in Luoyang and the desire to go to Wu. In fact, for Du Fu, a homeward journey and a trip to Wu are not at odds with each other, because one possible route to go back to Luoyang is to take water transportation first along the Yangtze River all the way down to Yangzhou (the Wu Metropolis) and then go north via the Huai River 淮河 and the Bian Canal 汴渠 to Luoyang. This is also the itinerary Du Fu envisioned in a long poem written a few years later while in Kuizhou: "Mist and rain envelope the Wu Gorge, through the Yangtze and Huai Rivers I will pass Mengzhu" 煙雨封巫峽，江淮略孟諸.[170] Facing the Three Gorges, Du Fu imagined going down the Yangtze River to the southeast before turning to the canal and the Huai River to travel north. Mengzhu is the name of a marsh to the northeast of Shangqiu in Henan. As the Mengzhu Marsh is by the side of the Bian Canal, a return trip to Luoyang through the canal will certainly take the poet to the vicinity of Mengzhu.[171]

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[169] Another poem that similarly expresses Du Fu's wish to move to the Wu region is "Coming Across Recorder Liu of Tangxing, My Cousin" 逢唐興劉主簿弟, in which he says: "Beyond the Sword Gate, those in office are aloof, / from Within-the-Passes post-horses are infrequent. / In a light boat let us drift down to the Wu Metropolis, / the Recorder, what do you think?" 劍外官人冷，關中驛騎疏。輕舟下吳會，主簿意何如？See *DFQJJZ*, 8.2395.
[170] *DFQJJZ*, 19.5558.
[171] In his monograph *Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China: Geography, Cartography, and Literature* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2018), Ao Wang examines the interplay between geographical-knowledge production, spatial representation, and literary practice in mid-Tang China. In particular, his discussion of the "interactive geography" of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen also touches on the practice of mental-mapping, used by the two friends to trace each other's movement and create a sense of connectedness in a textual space. While I build on Ao Wang's work to explore the intersection of literature and geography, I seek to complicate his argument. Whereas he

The two poems above, among others, attest to the significance of rivers in Du Fu's visions of home as he navigated his life as a refugee. While rivers in early classical Chinese poetry were often associated with distance and separation, Du Fu pushed the literary imagination of rivers in new directions, seeing the empire's waterways as a connecting force in a world filled with blockages and limitations. Dependent on water transport for frequent travel and relocation, Du Fu had the empire's river system etched in his mind, always conscious of his connections to his hometown and the places he longed to reach—via waterways. The vision of movement and mobility inspired by rivers was not something Du Fu simply embraced; it revealed his struggle to find true settlement. Even during his years in Chengdu, a period of relative peace, the Thatched Cottage was not the place where he could fully make his home. Instead, especially after his two-year displacement, we find Du Fu often torn between returning to his original home, settling forever in where he was, and preparing to move to his next destination.

In the first section of this chapter, we have discussed Du Fu's failed attempts to delimit an enclosed space for himself, as his gate opened to a river that connected him to the larger world. Furthermore, with the river reminding him of the possibility of movement, even the foundation of a stable home was undermined. Home, rather than being a fixed location, increasingly became a contested concept, pulled in different directions by competing impulses. This pattern continued to the end of Du Fu's life. During his time in Kuizhou and the years he drifted through Hubei and Hunan, the boat he acquired in Chengdu—both a means of transport and sometimes a mobile home—became a key image in his poetry. This image complicated the notion of a permanent

attributes innovations in poetry to the advancement of geographical knowledge during the mid-Tang period, I emphasize Du Fu's role in inspiring and shaping spatial imaginations in this time, when many of its major writers considered Du Fu their literary model. As discussed in this chapter, the dramatization of an imagined journey, the tracing of movements on a mental map, and rivers as channels of longing became familiar literary tropes in Du Fu's poetry, stemming from his deep engagement with geography and transportation at the empire's margins. These literary innovations would be inherited and further developed by later writers, including those of the mid-Tang generation.

home, pointing to a vision of home that always lies elsewhere. This "elsewhere" could be Du Fu's hometown in the central plains, as he frequently expressed in his poems. An example is a well-known line from his "Autumn Meditations, Eight Poems" 秋興八首, which reads: "A lone boat tethered—a heart longing for my old garden" 孤舟一繫故園心.[172] But even this "old garden" of Du Fu's was neither stable nor unchanging. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, his conception of his original home was formed and reshaped during his long exile—not only did it "move" from Luoyang to Chang'an, but his vision of this lost home became increasingly idealized. Ultimately, it was no longer a physical place he could return to in the literal sense. For Du Fu, as the concept of home became more dispersed, dynamic, and elusive—not merely a specific place he could easily identify—poetry became the medium through which he could navigate his competing visions of home. In his rootless state, the quest for a place where he could find true peace remained unfulfilled, at least during the period we have been focusing on. As a result, this quest continued to drive his poetry, prompting Du Fu to create alternative spaces and experiment with new poetic strategies.

Commemoration and the Making of the Thatched Cottage into a Cultural Site

After two years of unsettled life in eastern Sichuan, Du Fu returned to his Thatched Cottage in 764. Once his Thatched Cottage had been lost and regained, Du Fu began to write more fondly about his hut, attending to its physical surroundings and material conditions. At the same time, however, an elegiac tone began to set in, largely due to the looming possibility of future travel and the awareness that his beloved cottage might not last as long as he had hoped. If rivers and

[172] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3790.

water transportation inspired a vision of mobility that complicated the idea of home as a fixed locale, the uncertainties of the future and the challenges of finding true settlement also led Du Fu to look beyond this life, seeking alternative frameworks of meaning and belonging that might endure even after his passing.

In the final years of his stay in Chengdu, looking at his cottage from a future perspective, Du Fu became increasingly drawn to the idea of leaving material traces. He often made analogies, implicitly or explicitly, between himself and worthy men from the past such as Wang Can 王粲 (177-217) and Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-168 BCE), whose former residences have turned into sites remembered by later generations. An example is his "River Village on a Spring Day, Five Poems" 春日江村五首, written in 765 while Du Fu was taking a sick leave from his post at Yan Wu's headquarter. With the first four poems focusing on Du Fu's recollection of his life in the river village, the last poem looks further back into historic time, concluding the series with companionship he found in worthy men from the past—namely, Wang Can and Jia Yi—whose lives bear striking resemblance to Du Fu's own:

宅入先賢傳， Their residences have found their way into biographies of past worthies,

才高處士名。 Their talents were extraordinary, yet their names are those of recluses.

異時懷二子， In a later age, I think longingly of the two gentlemen,

春日復含情。 On a spring day, I am overwhelmed with sentiment.[173]

Having fled from Chang'an, which was in chaos due to the riot led by Dong Zhuo 董卓 (?-192), Wang Can went to Jingzhou to join the retinue of Liu Biao 劉表 (142-208). It was in Jingzhou that Wang Can composed his well-known "*Fu* on Climbing the Tower" 登樓賦 to lament his

[173] *DFQJJZ*, 12.3353.

displacement and express his longing for home. Jia Yi in the Chinese literary tradition is often cited as a typical example of one who did not meet his time. Banished to Changsha, he was only recalled late in life, upon which Emperor Wen of Han consulted him not about state affair but about ghosts and divinities. If the connection between Wang Can and Du Fu is all too obvious—men with literary talent who became a refugee in a time of national crisis—then Jia Yi's promotion in mid-life seems to hint at Du Fu's new post at Yan Wu's headquarter, a belated appointment that reflects a belated appreciation. Another commonality that links Wang Can and Jia Yi, besides their political setbacks and literary virtuosity, is that both left material traces—specifically, their former residences—which have achieved immortality by being included in the collective biographies of worthy men. Knowing well that in the Chinese tradition, the one who remembers often becomes the one who is remembered,[174] Du Fu, by remembering and paying tribute to former worthies, in effect inserts himself into the lineage of men whose dwellings have become important historical sites.

The vision of his Thatched Cottage as a potential cultural site was also inspired and reinforced by his visits to the former dwellings of renowned Tang figures such as Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂(661 or 656-702) and Fang Guan 房琯 (697-763), occasions on which he composed poems.[175] Compared to the poems from his early years in Chengdu, those Du Fu composed after his two-year dislocation show an interest not only in the physical and discursive construction of a "home"—a place of shelter and belonging—but also in viewing the Thatched Cottage as a material marker of his life that could take on symbolic meaning. This new interest in the physical

[174] For an elaboration of this idea, see Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).
[175] "The Former Residence of Reminder Chen" 陳拾遺故宅, "Accompanying Wang of Hanzhou, Detaining Du of Mianzhou, to Go Boating on the West Lake of Lord Fang" 陪王漢州留杜綿州泛房公西湖, "Stopping by the Former Residence of Guo [Yuanzhen], Duke of Dai" 過郭代公故宅.

structure of his residence, *zhai* 宅, was not identical to the concept of home, but it represented a quest of home in another sense: once his cottage became a cultural site, he would find a different kind of place for himself—in literary history and collective memory—where his rootless life could be forever enshrined.

Meanwhile, Du Fu was well aware that material traces achieve immortality not through physical means, but through writing.[176] This belief drove him to turn to poetry as a more enduring form to give his cottage a lasting life in literature. In the first section of this chapter, I argued that Du Fu's discursive constructions of "home" in Chengdu incorporated the act of place-making that began in his Qinzhou-Tonggu and Tonggu-Chengdu travel poems. By providing specific geographical details and consistently locating his newly found home by rivers and local landmarks, Du Fu virtually transformed his Thatched Cottage into a legible and memorable place on the imperial map. In fact, as I will demonstrate next, Du Fu continued his place-making after his return to his Thatched Cottage in 764, yet with a different approach. Specifically, I argue that Du Fu's attempt to turn his residence into a cultural site was further achieved through commemorating things in his Thatched Cottage by writing a group of what I call "commemorative poems." This group of poems—including "Deck by the Water" 水檻, "Broken Boat" 破船, "Four Pine Trees" 四松, "A Poem on Peach Trees" 題桃樹, and "Thatched Cottage" 草堂—is characterized by shared stylistic features and narrative techniques. This has been noticed by the Qing dynasty scholar Wang Hao 汪灝 (1651-1718), who once remarked: "Upon returning to Chengdu, every occasion and every object became the subject of a poem.

[176] This idea was expressed in various ways on different occasions. An example is "The Former Residence of Reminder Chen." Though the poem begins by focusing on Chen Zi'ang's residence as a physical structure, it ends with Du Fu predicting the deterioration of its material condition, shifting instead to Chen's writing as the means by which immortality will be achieved, despite the impermanence of the material world. *DFQJJZ*, 9.2703.

Though not premeditated, they were linked by their similar form and style" 再歸成都，一事一物輒得一詩，雖各不相謀，而體卻聯絡.[177] In these poems, not only were his Thatched Cottage, the pine and peach trees he planted, and the neglected, broken boat all turned into poetic topics, but they gained a deeper significance through their connection to Du Fu's life, and by extension, to the larger world, becoming witnesses to broader history.

Du Fu seemed to be particularly keen on things broken, things out of the state of normality. This certainly had to do with the deteriorating material condition of his cottage that could not have escaped his eyes once he returned to his residence after a two-year absence. But on top of that, as things with a history, broken objects may strike a viewer and intrude upon the normal order of things as markers or symbols of time. Two poems in the group are dedicated to things broken: "Deck by the Water" and "Broken Boat." The former, about which Stephen Owen and Lucas Bender have both offered insightful interpretations,[178] is worth revisiting here.

水檻 Deck by the Water[179]

蒼江多風飆， Above the gray-blue river, whirlwinds abound.

雲雨晝夜飛。 Clouds and rain sweep by day and night.

茅軒駕巨浪， My thatched hut rides the giant waves,

4 焉得不低垂。 How could it be anything but sagging?

遊子久在外， The traveler has been away for long,

[177] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3151.
[178] This poem has been examined by Stephen Owen in his discussions on the discovery of the private sphere in Du Fu's poetry. Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 91-2. See also Lucas Bender, "Ironic Empires," in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, edited by Xiaofei Tian (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 56-72.
[179] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3155.

門戶無人持。 And the house has no one to look after it.

高岸尚為谷， Even lofty banks can turn into valleys,

何傷浮柱欹。 Why grieve over a pillar's slanting?

扶顛有勸誡， "Support what is tottering," the admonition goes,[180]

恐貽識者嗤。 I fear being laughed at by those with discernment.

既殊大廈傾， Now that it is not the collapse of a grand mansion,

可以一木支。 Simply propping it up with a pole will suffice.

臨川視萬里， Overlooking the river, I can see ten thousand leagues,

何必欄檻為。 What good would a balustraded deck do?

人生感故物， Yet in my life, I have been moved by old things,

慷慨有餘悲。 Stirred to deep emotions, I bear excessive sorrow.

The key to interpret this poem lies in how to make sense of Du Fu's radical move in writing about such commonplace topic as a tottering deck in poetry. As Stephen Owen points out, "whether to repair a sagging deck had never been a question that was felt to merit serious poetic treatment."[181] While some premodern commentators, taking the poem to be allegorical, see in it Du Fu's concern with the public world even in a domestic setting, Owen by contrast emphasizes Du Fu's discomfort with applying values pertaining to the state to personal matters, which he argues in effect asserts the existence of a private domain. To add further nuance to Owen's

[180] The phrase "support what is tottering" derives from a passage from the *Analects*: "If he does not hold up someone who is faltering, nor support one who is tottering, then how can he serve as a guide?" 危而不持，顛而不扶，則將焉用彼相矣? *Analects*, 16:1.

[181] Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 91.

discussions, Bender emphasizes precisely Du Fu's ambivalence in applying high cultural forms and imperial values to domestic topics, arguing that this reflects Du Fu's liminal position on the margins of the empire.[182] If the different readings of this poem are largely framed around the dichotomy between the public and the private, with a particular focus on the interpretation of lines 9-10, I would like to contextualize this poem within the broader group of commemorative works to which it belongs, and analyze its overall narrative structure.

A notable feature of the group of commemorative poems as a whole is their strong narrative urge. In these poems, Du Fu is keen on telling a complicated story about a thing, be it a tottering porch or a broken boat, foregrounding their intimate connections to his own life. The narrative complexity of these poems is often manifested in competing motivations, wavering stances, changing visions, and mixed feelings. The poem "Deck by the Water" cited above, for instance, features a narrative with many twists and turns. It opens by explaining why the deck of Du Fu's cottage has fallen into disrepair: its location in the humid and windy area near the river, the lack of someone attending to it during the poet's absence, and the inevitable forces of nature's mutations. Indeed, compared to the transformation of lofty banks into deep valleys, there is nothing surprising or significant about the deterioration of a deck. By this point, the poet seems to try to let go of the thought about the crumbling deck that has bothered him more or less. Yet he still decides to mend the deck, citing an admonition from the *Analects* to justify this act.[183] The saying "support what is tottering" is quoted as if to counter the enormous power of nature

[182] Bender, "Ironic Empires," 56-72.

[183] Qiu Zhao'ao takes the object of ridicule Du Fu worries about to be the very act of citing a canonical phrase and applying it to his trivial domestic matters, an interpretation followed by Stephen Owen. This reading requires taking line 10 "I fear being laughed at by those with discernment" to be a self-reflexive comment on the very poetic language adopted in the preceding line. If this is the case, however, it is not made clear or given any hint in the poem. A more straightforward reading that does not involve filling in extra information is that failure to live up to Confucius' precept—that is, to not repair the deck—will be derided by sensible and learned men. In this reading, the couplet with an allusion to the *Analects* is a sophisticated and poetic way of saying that the poet has to get the broken deck fixed.

that has built up in the preceding lines, with cultural power the phrase possesses as it comes from one of the most revered canons. Meanwhile, there is certainly an intended comic effect when an elevated phrase is applied to a humble object such as a broken deck. After this justification for repairing the deck, the poet feels the need to also justify his offhand and simple solution: perfectly cognizant of the nature of this repair work, he decides that supporting the deck with a wooden pillar will be adequate. The poem takes yet another direction as Du Fu comes to the realization that he does not even need a deck in the first place (lines 13-14). This is followed by the closing couplet in which he spells out the truth: it is his emotional attachment to old things that motivated him to fix the deck and, as we may infer, to compose the poem.

The many twists and turns that characterize the narrative of "Deck by the Water"—as some premodern commentators have also noted[184]—do not lend themselves easily to allegorization. Shifting between different stances and perspectives, and featuring a psychological complexity, the poem does not attempt to elevate the tottering deck from its messy material existence to make it a symbol for something else. While Du Fu seeks to imbue material objects with significance beyond their everyday utility, he simultaneously keeps one foot firmly in the concrete, material world. After a long, tortuous psychological journey, the poet's final word in the closing couplet should be considered carefully: not only does the term "old things" 故物 connect back to the poem's title, but sentimentality toward old things is also a recurring motif throughout the group of commemorative poems.[185] Thus, whereas Owen argues that "no matter how much Du Fu strains to allegorize his domestic structure, it remains stubbornly no more than a deck, ironizing

[184] For example, Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733-1818) commented that "Each line introduces a turning point. With one stroke [of the strings], three sighs are followed" 一句一轉，所謂一彈再三歎. *DFQJJZ*, 11.3157.
[185] Xiaofei Tian discusses mid-Tang sentimentality toward old objects in her article "The Cultural Politics of Old Things in Mid-Tang China," *Journal of American Oriental Studies* 2020;140(2):317–343.

his attempts at interpretation and foregrounding their excess,"[186] I contend that the desire for allegory is far outweighed by a narrative impulse in "Deck by the Water" and the other commemorative poems in the group. Moreover, the concrete, material things in the domestic sphere, rather than being something Du Fu attempts to overcome, are precisely what he celebrates in and through his poetry.

In fact, to commemorate things in the Thatched Cottage and turn his residence into a cultural site, Du Fu rarely foregrounds a public/private dichotomy. Instead, domestic things acquire a significance and become memorable precisely because of their connection to the public world. This is more obvious in poems such as "Thatched Cottage" and "On Peach Trees." But even in poems less directly concerned with events unfolding across the empire, Du Fu takes humble, concrete things to be witnesses to the vicissitudes of his life, which are again an epitome of the chaotic era he lived in. Apart from the deck, another broken thing that resulted from a turbulent life and turned up as a poetic topic was a dilapidated boat. Earlier we have mentioned that Du Fu purchased a boat while he was in Chengdu, in which he sometimes took his family for a pleasure trip along the creek near his cottage. This boat, as Du Fu found out after his return, was buried and damaged. Yet, it was precisely this neglected, broken boat that seemed to epitomize his life as a refugee.

破船 Broken Boat[187]

平生江海心， For all this life I harbor a heart for rivers and seas,

宿昔具扁舟。 In former days I have prepared a small skiff.

[186] Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 92-3.
[187] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3158.

豈惟青溪上， How could it be that only on the green-blue creek

日傍柴門遊。 I roam everyday near my wicker gate?

蒼皇避亂兵， In haste and panic, I fled riotous armies,

緬邈懷舊丘。 In the far distance, I long for my old hamlet.

鄰人亦已非， My neighbors are not the same as before,

野竹獨修修。 Wild bamboos alone are tall and slender.

船舷不重扣， The flanks of the boat cannot be struck again,

埋沒已經秋。 Having been buried for more than a full autumn.

仰看西飛翼， Raising my head, I gaze at the wings flying toward the west,

下愧東逝流。 Looking down, I am put to shame by the waters flowing eastward.

故者或可掘， The old one may still be unearthed,

新者亦易求。 And a new one will be easy to get.

所悲數奔竄， What grieve me are the frequent flights of mine,

白屋難久留。 For it is hard to stay long in the plain hut.

Among the objects in his Thatched Cottage that Du Fu writes about, the boat stands out due to its complex relationship with the cottage. While the cottage symbolizes a reclusive, sedentary lifestyle, the boat, in contrast, represents mobility. This opposition between the boat—bearing the poet's longing for rivers and seas—and the "wicker gate" 柴門, which by synecdoche stands for his cottage, is made clear in the opening stanza. However, the military uprising and Du Fu's subsequent flight changed everything. The outbreak of the riot and its aftermath not only shattered his dreams of rivers and seas, but also blurred the distinction between the boat and the

cottage. Having grown decrepit and buried for years, the boat has become little more than a pile of rotting wood, scarcely distinguishable from the building—merely a reminder of unfulfilled aspirations. Following Du Fu's displacement, his desire to travel and roam was overshadowed by the prospect of a restless life drifting from place to place—as the boat seemed to be foreboding—not as a traveler or explorer, but as a refugee. Thus, if at the beginning of this poem, it is the boat—rather than the cottage—that represents the ideal life always lying elsewhere, a reversal occurs in the final section as the poet fixates on his hut, having come to the realization that the boat is easily replaceable, whereas the hut is not.

Things attract attention when they break. Inspired by the sight of his long-neglected, damaged boat, Du Fu takes up his brush, seeing in this concrete object the entire story of his life—from his first taking up residence in Chengdu to his recent displacement, and perhaps even more unsettled years in the foreseeable future. In fact, the interest of "Broken Boat" largely arises from the disparity between the seeming insignificance of the object named in the title—a straightforward, intentionally blunt title, devoid of pretension—and the weight the broken boat carries once we understand the full story behind it. Such disparity calls attention to the act of writing, or to use Owen's words, the "interpretive act" by which trivial things acquire enormous significance.[188] For Du Fu, merely repairing the broken boat and the tottering deck is not enough to free him from his emotional attachment to old things; he must verbalize his thoughts and actions by writing a poem about them, even though this is an unconventional move given the commonplace nature of the topic.

The relationship between writing and leaving material traces comes to the fore in his "Four Pine Trees" 四松. During the three years Du Fu was away, the pine trees he had planted grew

[188] Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 89-94,

rapidly, despite some withered leaves and branches. Upon his return, the survival and flourishing of the pines brought comfort to his weary soul. Yet, while the first half of the poem focuses on the durability of the four pines' physical existence, the second half turns to its transcendence, as Du Fu begins to entertain the idea of using the pine trees as timber for his coffin. In this way, both he and the pines he planted would share a common fate. But he soon realized that this was wishful thinking, given his own rootlessness and the uncertainty about whether he would be able to spend the rest of his life in the Thatched Cottage. As an alternative, Du Fu suggests in the final stanza that the best way to commemorate his connection to the four pines is through writing poems: "Harboring deep feelings, I shall compose a poem for now, / Then life's happenings and their traces can both be forgotten." 有情且賦詩，事迹可兩忘.[189] Once written into poetry, Du Fu claims, everything encapsulated by *shi ji* 事迹—a term that refers both to the events connected with the four pines and to the physical existence of the pine trees as material traces of all that has occurred—is no longer significant.[190]

Ironically, *shi ji* can be forgotten precisely on the condition that a poem has been composed for it, that is, after it has been remembered through poetry. Chen Yixin suggests that Du Fu planted the pine trees so that these evergreens will survive the savage of time and still mark the location of his residence even after the poet himself is long gone and his cottage beyond recognition.[191] Though it is now difficult if not impossible to retrieve Du Fu's original intention, such a speculation is not ungrounded given his interest in the making of his residence into a

[189] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3151.
[190] For discussions on the concept of *ji*, see Shang Wei 商偉, "'Di yi yi shi chuan:' tixie shengdi de 'ji' yu 'wen'" "地以一詩傳"：題寫勝地的"迹"與"文," *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, Vol. 60, No.3 (2023), 99-112; Wu Hung, *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*, Chapter One "Internalizing Ruins: Premodern Sensibilities of Time Passed" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 11-92.
[191] Chen Yixin, *Du Fu ping zhuan*, 957.

memorable site. Yet more important than the physical survival of the four pines is their remembrance through writing, much like the five willows (*wu liu* 五柳) that mark the residence of Tao Yuanming according to his fictionalized autobiography—a connection suggested by their parallel phrasing. Indeed, while poetic compositions and material traces are similar in that both are removed from the original, the key difference is that the former are more enduring.

It has often been noted that Du Fu went beyond traditional occasions and themes in poetry, making him the first poet in the Chinese literary tradition to write extensively about the everyday life of the individual. Yet what has not been thoroughly addressed is how the new poetic topics were discovered and how Du Fu's approaches to them developed over time. In fact, the expansion of thematic range for poetry was driven by different agendas, and the poet's approaches to his new subject matter can vary remarkably across different periods of his life. Granting that early examples can be cited from Du Fu's large corpus showing his interest in domestic life and everyday activities, which makes any argument based on a clear-cut chronology suspicious, I argue that it was during his time in Chengdu that we see the first peak of his interest in commonplace objects in domestic life. Such experimentations were primarily driven by his attempt to make his Thatched Cottage into a memorable cultural site. In the group of commemorative poems whose titles recall the traditional genre of "poetry on things" (*yongwu shi* 詠物詩)—except that things they celebrate rarely belong to the common repertoire of *yongwu* poetry—Du Fu's approaches to things differ from established practices in crucial ways.

There are two major approaches to things in the Chinese poetic tradition: one is allegorical, with the "Ode of the Tangerine" 橘頌 attributed to Qu Yuan 屈原 as an early precedent, the other is represented by the subgenre of "poetry on things," or *yongwu* poetry, developed in the

Southern Dynasties.[192] Du Fu departs from the *yongwu* tradition in his special interest in old, commonplace, or sometimes broken things in the domestic sphere—unlike customary topics for *yongwu* poems often composed in a court setting.[193] Moreover, whereas traditional *yongwu* poetry seeks to capture the appearances as well as inner qualities of things, often in an evocative way, whereby to showcase the sensibilities of the poet, Du Fu is keen on bringing to light the story behind an object and creating a narrative for it. Once incorporated into a narrative, a thing acquires a history and particularity hardly found in *yongwu* poetry. On the other hand, as has been discussed earlier, Du Fu's poems on domestic things rarely gravitate toward the metaphorical. Unlike allegorical poems in which an object is represented as standing for something that belongs to a different category or sphere, things in Du Fu's cottage are celebrated for their concrete existence in the material world. Even if we try to assign metaphorical meanings, they may keep changing as the narrative goes.

Moreover, it has been my contention that for Du Fu, the commemoration of his Thatched Cottage does not revolve around a public/private dichotomy. In fact, to transform his residence into a site of historical significance, Du Fu often finds in commonplace objects the echo of larger historical events. The inevitable connections between the domestic and public spheres are clearly foregrounded in the final two poems to be discussed, "On Peach Trees" and "Thatched Cottage."

題桃樹 On Peach Trees[194]

[192] For studies on poetry on things, see Zhao Hongju 趙紅菊, *Nanchao yongwu shi yanjiu* 南朝詠物詩研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009); Cynthia L. Chennault, "Odes on Objects and Patronage during the Southern Qi," in *Studies in Early Medieval Chinese Literature and Cultural History: In Honor of Richard B. Mather & Donald Holzman*, edited by Paul W. Kroll & David R. Knechtges (Provo, Utah: T'ang Studies Society, 2003), 331-98.

[193] Some customary topics for *yongwu* poetry include natural phenomena, plants and animals, implements for aristocratic activities such as musical instruments, writing utensils, and so forth.

[194] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3148.

小徑升堂舊不斜， The narrow path leading up to the hall used to be straight,

五株桃樹亦從遮。 Now, the five peach trees are allowed to spread their shade.

高秋總饋貧人實， In high autumn, they have always offered fruit to the poor,

4 來歲還舒滿眼花。 In the coming year, they will again bloom, filling my eyes with blossoms.

簾戶每宜通乳燕， The curtained door is always open for nurturing swallows to pass through,

兒童莫信打慈鴉。 My children, do not willfully harm the caring crows.[195]

寡妻群盜非今日， Widows and a host of rebels are no longer what we have today,

8 天下車書正一家。 Across the realm, carriage tracks and writing scripts are becoming one.

Opening with the five peach trees in Du Fu's courtyard and concluding with the entire realm in a newly acquired state of peace and stability, this short, regulated verse shifts its focus in unexpected ways. Its rambling style and disjointed quality have been noted by commentators and critics. Huang Sheng 黃生 (1622-?), for instance, characterizes this poem as a "composition born of random inspiration," whose appeal he comes to appreciate only later:

> This is again a composition born of random inspiration. Others are not able to imitate it, and it cannot be imitated. In the past, I was dissatisfied with the fact that the ideas conveyed in the poem are disconnected, and the poem closes with the remarks of a pedantic scholar. I did not realize that it was exactly under this topic that when such remarks are included, the cliché is turned into something marvelous.

[195] *Ciya* 慈鴉 refers to a type of crow also known as *ciwu* 慈烏 ("benevolent crows") or *xiaowu* 孝烏 ("filial crows"), because they are said to feed their parents when they grow up, to repay their parent for their nurturing.

此亦漫興之作，人不能學，亦不可學。曩嫌此詩意甚散漫，結又作頭巾語。不知惟此題入此語乃覺化腐為奇。[196]

What Huang Sheng found unsatisfactory at first was the desultoriness of the composition—its loose structure and choppy narrative. He particularly singles out the conclusion, in which Du Fu expresses his concern for the empire, deeming it the lofty talk of a pedant that feels out of place within the poem as a whole.

Yet, in fact, the coherence of the poem becomes clearer when we consider what is said alongside what is left unsaid. Specifically, Du Fu's recent displacement and the changing circumstances of the time form an underlying layer of the poem. When this poem was composed—in 764, upon Du Fu's return to Chengdu—the imperial carriage had returned to the capital, Chang'an, the Tibetan troops that had once harassed the western border had withdrawn, and the riots in the Shu area—directly responsible for Du Fu's displacement two years earlier—had been quelled. Even more significant to Du Fu's life was the reappointment of his friend and patron, Yan Wu, who, as governor of Shu, had gained fame for successfully defending the region against Tibetan invasions. Though the Tang regime still faced serious challenges, and Du Fu often expressed his concerns in his poems, the arrival of Yan Wu gave him reason to feel optimistic about the state of affairs in the Shu region—and, by extension, the Tang empire as a whole. This is captured in the final couplet: widowed wives, the result of frequent wars, and rebel troops have become things of the past. As the imperial house regains central authority, the standardization of scripts and measures is only a matter of time.

[196] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3150.

Although happenings in the larger world beyond the domestic sphere are not directly mentioned until the closing couplet, Du Fu's turbulent life in an age of social unrest is subtly implied from the very beginning. The poem opens with a comparison between the past when a narrow path in the courtyard led straight to the hall, and the present, when the grown peach trees have altered the course of the path—a contrast that suggests the poet's long absence. Following this, the second couplet further reveals the imprint of the poet's unsettled life, as the first thing that comes to his mind is that his peach trees provide sustenance to those in hardship.[197] The shift in focus from the peach trees' fruits as sustenance to their flowers as a source of visual pleasure mirrors the changing times, as peace has been restored to the country. The expectation of the trees' flourishing in the coming year (line 4) also carries an implicit message about Du Fu himself: he looks forward to a settled life, one in which he no longer has to leave his cottage. Following this, the poet's care for his peach trees extends to other creatures in his cottage, such as swallows and crows. From the path for men in the beginning, the poem turns to the passageway for swallows in the third couplet. Just as Du Fu allows the growing peach trees to change the path for people, he similarly exhorts his family to share their living space with swallows and to be gentle with the crows that may have built their nests on the peach trees. Having just ended his restless life, Du Fu is not only filled with joy at his own return but also feels a strong urge to help the other living things in his cottage "feel at home." Thus, the poet's

[197] The idea of allowing the poor to help themselves to fruit from his trees is echoed in several later poems by Du Fu. For instance, in a poem from "Autumn Fields, Five Poems" 秋野五首, a series composed in Kuizhou, Du Fu wrote: "When jujubes are ripe, I let others to knock them down, / once mallows are overgrown with weeds, I will hoe them myself" 棗熟從人打， 葵荒欲自鋤. The same idea is expressed with more specificity in another poem from the same period written to an Administrator Wu, to whom Du Fu had loaned his house in Rangxi when he moved to the East Village 東屯. In this poem, titled "Another Poem Presented to Administrator Wu" 又呈吳郎, Du Fu makes a special point about making the hedge sparse so that the neighboring widow will not be prevented from getting jujubes from his jujube trees. The most relevant lines read: "I let my western neighbor to knock down jujubes from in front of the hall, / having no food, childless, a single woman by herself" 堂前撲棗任西鄰，無食無兒一婦人. For these two poems, see *DFQJJZ*, 17.4921, 17.5057.

recent experience of displacement has deeply shaped both his perception and the way he views the world. The harmonious domestic life he now enjoys becomes a miniature reflection of the peaceful world he envisions. Therefore, the closing couplet, in which Du Fu comments on state affairs, is not as abrupt as it might initially appear.

As the preceding analyses show, "On Peach Trees" provides another example supporting my earlier argument: Du Fu commemorates the things in his Thatched Cottage by integrating them into a larger narrative—one that reflects both his own turbulent life and the events unfolding in the Tang empire, of which his unsettled life is a part. Yet, my argument is not a mere reiteration of the traditional wisdom that Du Fu's concern for the empire is so pervasive and intense that there is not a single moment he does not think about the fate of the state. In this view, the commonplace topics are nothing more than what have stimulated the poet and inspired the occasion for writing. In the end, it is Du Fu's public concern and political dedication that make the poem a serious and profound piece. The comment made by the Qing dynasty statesman and scholar Fan Tingmou 范廷謀 (1662-1734), for instance, is representative of the mainstream reading of the poem "On Peach Trees" as well as the established approach to Du Fu's poems on humble topics in general:

> This is the *xing* [stimulus or evocative imagery] form of poetry. The peach trees serve as an accidental trigger for the composition, and through this trivial subject, the poet conveys profound concerns and broader principles. Across the eight lines of the poem, Du Fu moves from the peach trees to thoughts of the impoverished people, from them to birds, then to widowed wives, and finally to the rebels. In this progression, his empathy for the common people and his emotional connection to the world around him converge.

His gentleman's inner disposition and his political capabilities are fully expressed here. It should not be mistaken for a *yongwu* poem.

此詩之興體，偶借桃樹以起興，於小題中抒寫大胸襟大道理。通首八句，因桃樹而念及貧人，因貧人而念及禽鳥，而遂及寡妻群盜，仁民愛物之心一時俱到，公之性情、經濟具見於此，勿認作詠物詩看。[198]

Fan Tingmou categorizes the poem "On Peach Trees" as the *xing* form, a term that goes back to the exegesis of the *Odes*, referring to the evocative image at the opening section of a poem that indirectly suggests the main theme. For Fan Tingmou, the peach trees do not matter in and for themselves; rather, they are but a convenient topic and a starting point that leads up to something more important. This is why Fan concludes that "On Peach Trees" is not a *yongwu* poem: as Du Fu lodges his greater concerns in trivial topics, the poem should not be read as one about the peach trees, but the reader needs to see through the trivial topic into the deeper significance Du Fu seeks to convey. Thus, although Fan's conclusion resonates with my earlier discussions of Du Fu's departure from the *yongwu* tradition in the group of commemorative poems, his conclusion is drawn for a different reason.

My interpretation of Du Fu's poems on familiar objects in his Thatched Cottage takes a different direction from that of premodern critics. By linking this group of commemorative poems to the recurring theme of leaving material traces and transforming his residence into a memorable site through poetry, I argue that, rather than serving as a prelude to broader concerns, the domestic objects that witness Du Fu's life are the very focus of his affection and the central concern of his poetic representation. Much like in a *yongwu* poem, the objects celebrated in Du

[198] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3150.

Fu's poems are placed at the center, standing on their own without being reduced to a mere pretext for writing or a lead-in to something else. At the same time, by placing these domestic items within a larger context and integrating them into a narrative that extends beyond their physical existence, they are imbued with meaning and deeper significance.

The final poem to be discussed, "Thatched Cottage" 草堂, more clearly dramatizes the connection between the object named in the title and the broader history with which its material existence is deeply intertwined. This poem can be divided into three parts. The opening section consists of the first stanza (lines 1-4), which tells the core theme of the poem and provides its overarching narrative framework:

昔我去草堂， In the past when I left my Thatched Cottage,
蠻夷塞成都。 Barbaric folks filled the city of Chengdu.
今我歸草堂， Now I come back to my Thatched Cottage,
4 成都適無虞。 Chengdu is just free from troubles. [199]

This opening is modeled after a stanza from "Picking Brackens" 采薇 in the *Odes*, a poem about soldiers who left their home to guard the frontiers: "Formerly when I took leave, willows were swaying gently. /Now I come back, rain and snow fall in profusion" 昔我往矣，楊柳依依。今我來思，雨雪霏霏.[200] The core idea of these first two couplets is a contrast between the past and the present, which is further developed in the second and third sections, respectively. The second section (lines 5-36), beginning with the line "Let me recount when the turmoil first

[199] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3141.
[200] *Mao* 167.

started” 請陳初亂時, gives a detailed account of the local rebellion in the Shu region that have caused Du Fu’s displacement. This recent history of Shu, depicting a world of treachery and chaos, is written with a gravity and solemnity that befits the subject matter. After this long narrative about events on a much grander scale, the poem shifts back to Du Fu’s cottage in the third section (lines 37-60), in which the poet reflects on his return to the Thatched Cottage after abandoning his plans to travel southeast:

賤子且奔走， This humble man quickly fled,
三年望東吳。 For three years, I had gazed toward Wu in the east.
弧矢暗江海， Bows and arrows cast a shadow over rivers and seas,
難為遊五湖。 It was hard to travel across the Five Lakes.[201]
不忍竟舍此， I could not bring myself to leave this [my cottage] behind,
復來薙榛蕪。 So I came back to remove the brambles and weeds.
入門四松在， Entering the gate, the four pines were still there,
步屧萬竹疏。 Pacing around, the myriad bamboos were sparse.
舊犬喜我歸， My old dog was overjoyed at my return,
低徊入衣裾。 Walking back and forth beneath the hem of my robe.
鄰舍喜我歸， My neighbors were overjoyed at my return,
酤酒攜胡蘆。 Purchasing wine and carrying it in gourds.

[201] Five Lakes usually refers to Taihu 太湖 and four other nearby lakes. During the Spring and Autumn period, Fan Li 范蠡, a minister of the Yue Kingdom, assisted King Goujian of Yue in defeating the State of Wu. After completing this mission, he withdrew from public life and boarded a light boat to roam the Five Lakes. Subsequently, the term “Five Lakes” became associated with retreat and seclusion.

大官喜我來， The high official was glad to see my return,

遣騎問所須。 Sending a horseman to inquire what I needed.

城郭喜我來， The city walls were glad to see my return,

賓客隘村墟。 With guests and visitors filling the village.

天下尚未寧， The realm is still not at peace,

健兒勝腐儒。 Strong warriors surpass pedantic scholars.

飄飄風塵際， At a time when drifting through wind and dust,

何地置老夫。 How can a place be found for an old man like me?

於時見疣贅， For the age, I see myself as a useless wart,

骨髓幸未枯。 Fortunately, marrow in my bones has not dried out.

飲啄愧殘生， Drinking and nibbling, I feel ashamed of this fading life of mine,

食薇不願餘。 Feeding on brackens, I wish for nothing more.[202]

Du Fu recounts what he saw upon entering the gate: his pine trees and bamboos, his old dog, and people who came to send their greetings. The adoption of the ballad style in lines 45-52—a section reminiscent of the *yuefu* poem "Song of Mulan" 木蘭辭—coincides with a change of mood from indignation and distress to excitement and joy upon Du Fu's return to his home in Chengdu. Yet toward the end of the poem, Du Fu moves away from the atmosphere of conviviality as he reflects on the circumstance of the whole realm—which is still not at peace—and expresses his wish for nothing more than a humble, reclusive life.

[202] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3142. "Feeding on brackens" alludes to the story of Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齊. After King Wu of Zhou overthrew the Shang dynasty, Boyi and Shuqi, ashamed to eat the grain of the Zhou, retreated to the Shouyang mountain where they lived on wild bracken for sustenance. Eventually, they starved to death.

The interest of this poem lies in the contrast between the specificity of its title and the grand historical narratives in the main body. With its sweeping historical accounts and Du Fu's autobiographical reflections, the poem could easily have been titled something like "Expressing My Cares" 述懷, as some of Du Fu's longer poems are. Yet, the poet chooses "Thatched Cottage" with its concreteness to foreground his cottage as the central focus of the poem. That the Thatched Cottage is the main subject is reflected not only in the title but also in the poem's structure. As in the other poems dedicated to objects in his Thatched Cottage, Du Fu here also crafts a narrative for his humble hut, linking the small and the grand, and bridging the private and the public. What is particularly remarkable about the poem's structure is that, although events in the larger world have a greater impact on life in the Thatched Cottage than vice versa, it is the microhistory of the cottage that frames the macrohistory. In other words, the history of Shu is narrated through the lens of Du Fu's relationship with his Thatched Cottage. Both beginning and ending with reflections on his cottage, this bookended structure is further reinforced by the image of "bracken" 薇, which is evoked in the opening stanza through the reference to the ode "Picking Brackens" and reappears in the final line, where Du Fu envisions himself living out his years, feeding on bracken like Boyi and Shuqi. Ultimately, the story of Du Fu's relationship with his cottage serves as the framing narrative, within which events in the public realm are introduced, thereby elevating the significance of his Thatched Cottage as a witness to broader history.

In fact, not only does "Thatched Cottage" further illustrate Du Fu's efforts to commemorate his residence—one that may take on symbolic meaning and become a historical site—but the poem also serves as a key example to conclude our discussion of the concept of home and its relationship to empire. Toward the end of the poem, a sudden shift from joy to the feeling of

uncertainty and melancholy (beginning with line 53) adds one more complication to the narrative. Reflecting on the state of the realm, which is still not at peace, Du Fu does not truly feel secure or at ease: "At a time when drifting through wind and dust, / How can a place be found for an old man like me?" 飄飄風塵際，何地置老夫? The irony lies in the fact that Du Fu's sense of homelessness persists, as indicated by his lack of a true "place" in the world, despite his physical return to his Thatched Cottage. The issue goes beyond whether he considers the Thatched Cottage his home or feels at home there. Rather, the more fundamental question is: What does "home" mean when the state itself may not endure?

Thus, the poem invites a rethinking of "home" as something more dynamic, uncertain, and complex—contingent not only on one's personal circumstances but also on the broader sociopolitical context. The home Du Fu left behind in the two-capital region is not merely a physical location, but a lost home, belonging to an unreachable past—a time when home was securely anchored within the fabric of a stable state. During his exile at the peripheries of a crumbling empire, Du Fu was removed from a world where self, family, and state formed concentric circles in perfect harmony. Is it possible to build a home—a private space that offers shelter and security—when the state fails to provide a stable foundation? Du Fu seems to find this impossible. His lack of a "place" in the world, conveyed in the final section of "Thatched Cottage," certainly does not refer to a private home. Instead, this rootlessness is connected to his sense of uselessness as is suggested in the subsequent line, and specifically, the lack of a position in the bureaucratic system to serve the state. Yet unlike many literati-officials who once suffered from demotion or exile, the problem Du Fu was facing was more complex and profound. The promotion of warriors over literati-scholars in eras of turmoil and warfare (lines 53-54) reflects crises of institutions and the received cultural legacy—the very foundation of a state. In the end,

the vision of living out his remaining years in the Thatched Cottage does not comfort Du Fu. Instead, there is a bitterness in the closure in which Du Fu expresses his wish for nothing more than a humble, reclusive life, feeding on brackens.

A passage from the *Peach Blossom Fan* 桃花扇 offers an intriguing reference point for understanding Du Fu's conception of home during a time of national crisis. Completed in 1699, this historical drama by the early Qing playwright Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718) recounts events leading to the collapse of the Ming dynasty. Toward the end of the play, the protagonists—the scholar Hou Fangyu and the courtesan Li Xiangjun—reunited on Qixia Mountain after a long separation, hoping to find refuge there following the fall of the Ming state. When speaking of their affections for each other, the Daoist master reproached them for their ignorance of the tremendous changes that had taken place in the world: "You two love-stricken idiots! Where now is the state? Where is the home? Where is the lord? And where is the father?" 兩個癡蟲，你看國在那裡，家在那裡，君在那裡，父在那裡?[203] The point is that the fall of the state caused home, family, and personal affections to lose their foundation. This is exactly the situation Du Fu was facing. Thus, it is not surprising that in Du Fu's post-rebellion poetry, the creation of a private home was never fully realized without complication. At a time when the state could no longer maintain order and long-established values were unraveling, the quest for home inevitably involved broader concerns. For Du Fu, "home" in the ultimate sense must encompass his "place" in the public world—a place that enables him to fulfill his social roles and political aspirations. In fact, later, beginning with Du Fu's time in Kuizhou (766-768), as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four, there is a politicization of "home," reflected in a shift in Du Fu's conception of his original home. While he primarily considered Luoyang his hometown during

[203] Kong Shangren, *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1997), 4.258.

his years in Chengdu, by the time of his Kuizhou period, Chang'an gained greater significance and came to replace Luoyang as the focal point of his yearning for home.[204] In other words, as Du Fu moved further into the empire's margins, his longing for the political center intensified, and in retrospect, "home" and the imperial center became synonymous in his mind. But even in Du Fu's Chengdu poems, as has been discussed in this chapter, home is not merely a place marked off from the public world, but a space to negotiate broader concerns and competing visions. For Du Fu, writing home and writing empire are intimately intertwined.

Conclusion

In Chapter One, I have examined Du Fu's place-making in his two series of travel poems written from Qinzhou to Chengdu, focusing on how he created meaningful sites from the mountains and rivers of the empire's western frontiers at a time when the center no longer held. In this chapter, I demonstrate that Du Fu continued his place-making during his years in Chengdu, which took on different forms as it was the making of a "home" that came to be the central concern of his poetry during this period. As Du Fu built his home by the side of the Flower-Washing Creek, a tributary of the upper Yangtze River, I argue that river and water transportation played a crucial role in informing and shaping his conception of home. Specifically, just as the river simultaneously demarcates a secluded place and evokes the broader imperial space, Du Fu's discursive constructions of home similarly encompass competing visions. Despite his attempts to transform his home into a space of reclusion, Du Fu remains

[204] Du Fu grew up in Luoyang, where his family was based. For the first thirty-four years of his life, he had stronger ties to Luoyang than to the capital, Chang'an. It was only in 746 that he moved to Chang'an, where he spent the next ten years seeking political advancement.

acutely aware of its connections to the public world. Moreover, especially beginning with his two-year displacement in eastern Sichuan, the vision of movement and mobility, again inspired by the empire's waterways, took on greater weight and came to complicate his notion of home as a fixed place. For Du Fu, in his rootless state, the concept of "home" is increasingly caught in the tension between "here" and "elsewhere." Cognizant of life's unpredictability and the impermanence of the homes he built, Du Fu also looked beyond this life and sought for more enduring frameworks of belonging. By writing a group of commemorative poems, Du Fu attempted to transform his residence into a potential cultural site, infused with historical memories.

At a time when peace had not yet been fully restored and the state had yet to regain its central authority, Du Fu was not only displaced from his home but also confronted the erosion of the very foundation of "home." In such a context, the idea of "home" as a private space, demarcated from the public world, could no longer provide Du Fu with a sense of true settlement. Hence, in both creating a home for his remaining years and transforming his Thatched Cottage into a symbolic site for posterity—an enduring "home" that would embody his life and hold his legacy long after his death—Du Fu recognized the inextricable connection between the private and the public, the personal and the imperial. Just as Du Fu saw his cottage as connected to the larger imperial realm via waterways, his transformation of his residence into a memorable site similarly drew on broader history as both a frame of reference and a source of meaning. Thus, home became a space of competing visions—private and public, material and cultural, past and present, here and elsewhere—that Du Fu negotiated through his poetry. While the ideal of home—a space that would restore unity and wholeness—was not fully realized, the search for this ideal became the driving force of Du Fu's poetry, which would continue to play out in

varying forms as he moved further from the imperial center and deeper into the peripheries of Chinese civilization.

Chapter Three

Navigating the Flux:

Poetic Engagement with News in Times of Crisis

It has long been noted that Du Fu often ventured beyond the traditional occasions prescribed for poetry and significantly expanded the scope of subject matter with classical verse. However, the question of what forces drove such literary experimentation remains complex.[205] In previous chapters, I have examined Du Fu's poetic innovations by exploring his experience at the empire's margins in a turbulent time—experience with geography and transportation—and by analyzing how Du Fu constructed meaning and forms of anchoring during his years of displacement. This chapter turns to another key factor that shaped Du Fu's life as a refugee and motivated him to move beyond conventional poetic occasions: the information network. Closely tied to transportation, this network relied on the well-developed post-station system, which served as an official channel for relaying information to and from the court. Information was also exchanged in more intimate settings, often carried by people traveling the transportation routes—such as envoys and itinerant officials—who acted as key agents in this process.

As with transportation, access to information—especially about critical events such as riots and warfare—was crucial to the survival of Du Fu and his family amid their displacement. In times of crisis, when regular channels of communication were disrupted, information became both a source of deep anxiety and a desperately sought connection. There is little doubt that *xiaoxi* 消息—"news"—figures prominently in Du Fu's poetry. He was always eager to learn what was happening elsewhere in the empire: in the capitals, on the frontiers, and in regions with

[205] For discussions of Du Fu's relationship to literary tradition and poetic conventions, see Bender, *Du Fu Transforms*; Rouzer, "Du Fu and the Failure of Lyric."

personal significance, as his family, relatives, and friends were dispersed across multiple locales, and he himself was often preparing to move again. For Du Fu, *hearing* was at least as important as *seeing*; even a cursory reading of his works reveals how frequently terms associated with "hearing" (*wen* 聞) appear. Yet information is more than a recurring theme in his poetry. In a notable number of poems, it is the reception of specific news that triggers the act of composition itself.

According to poetic conventions up to Du Fu's time, poems were typically composed in response to set "occasions"—such as parting, banquet, court gathering, or seasonal moments—defined by long-standing literary norms. Du Fu, however, ventured into new territory by making the reception of information the very *occasion* for poetic composition.[206] This is not to say there were no precedents. Li Bai 李白, for instance, responded to news of Wang Changling's 王昌齡 (698-756) demotion with a poem of consolation, titled "Hearing of Wang Changling's Demotion to Longbiao, I Send These Words from Afar" 聞王昌齡左遷龍標遙有此寄.[207] However, such examples are relatively rare and scattered in pre-Du Fu poetry collections and anthologies. Moreover, although Li Bai's poem was prompted by news he had heard, its address to a specific recipient places it within the traditional category of "presented poems" (*zeng shi* 贈詩) or "exchange poems" (*zengda* 贈答). Du Fu, by contrast, not only transforms his engagement with news and information into poetic occasions, but also resists shaping them to fit conventional genre frameworks. Many of these works are not addressed to individuals, nor are they clearly

[206] Some examples include: "Delighted to Hear that the Imperial Armies Are Already at the Edge of Rebel-Held Territory" 喜聞官軍已臨賊境二十韻, "Upon Hearing Imperial Troops' Retaking Henan and Hebei" 聞官軍收河南河北, "Lately I Heard" 近聞, "Delighted to Hear that the Rebels and Tibetan Marauders Have All Withdrawn, I Orally Composed Five Poems" 喜聞盜賊蕃寇總退口號五首, "Upon Hearing That the Military Commissioners of the Various Circuits of Hebei Have Come to Court, I am Delighted and Orally Composed Twelve Quatrains" 承聞河北諸道節度入朝歡喜口號絕句十二首.
[207] *QTS*, 172.1769.

directed at a specific audience. In doing so, he expands both the thematic scope of classical Chinese poetry and the prescribed modes of poetic response that had traditionally governed it.

This chapter focuses on Du Fu's poems that engage with the information network, particularly news concerning government affairs and major state events. These poems—and others like them—have long been cited as evidence of Du Fu's compassion and his dedication to the state. However, such readings, which emphasize the subject matter of his work, stem from a specific moral and ideological agenda and fall short of fully accounting for Du Fu's distinctive mode of writing. Recent scholarship has sought to complicate this traditional view. For example, in an effort to bridge the often-separated discussions of Du Fu's poetic artistry and his role as a moral exemplar, Eva Shan Chou introduces the concept of topicality as an alternative to compassion—a term she argues places undue focus on the poet rather than the poems themselves. Given that topicality is a more neutral term, unburdened by moral overtones, she proposes that "recasting the concept of compassion as one of topicality enables one to open the discussion to literary issues."[208] While topicality primarily refers to content, Chou emphasizes the literary features and technical subtleties of Du Fu's so-called "compassion poems," including their language and style. Nonetheless, by focusing on the "depiction of topical events," Chou ultimately treats poetry as secondary—a form of documentation or representation of events—without fully departing from traditional interpretive frameworks.

This chapter, by examining Du Fu's engagement with the information network, highlights the performative nature of his poems composed in response to news about contemporary events. I argue that these poems are not merely representational or reflective accounts of what happened, but responsive acts of expression through which Du Fu enacts his role as a member of the literati

[208] Chou, *Reconsidering Tu* Fu, 65. See also her article, "Tu Fu's Social Conscience: Compassion and Topicality in his Poetry," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51 (1991): 5–53.

before an imagined or symbolic audience—ultimately serving as a means of negotiating identity and belonging amid political upheaval and personal displacement. Specifically, I will highlight the fluid, uncertain, and often unstructured "ground" upon which many of Du Fu's poems were composed—the flux of information that had not yet congealed into fixed historical "reality"—as well as the contingent, situational nature of his responses to it. In many respects akin to modern blog entries, Du Fu's poems were meant to participate in ongoing conversations about events that were still unfolding. In other words, Du Fu was very much *in* the events he wrote about, rather than reflecting on them from a retrospective or authoritative standpoint. In this way, the chapter resonates—across multiple dimensions—with Lucas Bender's argument regarding the often ambiguous and open-ended moral vision that characterizes Du Fu's poetry.

Moreover, as the Tang empire faced both internal uprisings and conflicts with neighboring states, effective and uninterrupted transmission of information often broke down. For Du Fu, the arrival of news was frequently disorienting, as he had to grapple with both its uncertain veracity and the delays in its delivery. By examining poems that stage the disruption of communication and foreground the problem of truthfulness—alongside poems about information that turned out to be unsubstantiated or even mistaken—this chapter reconsiders Du Fu in a new light, diverging from the canonical image of him as the "poet historian." Ultimately, I argue that Du Fu's poetic engagement with news—marked by the distinctive modes of writing he employs, including the time-boundedness of his poems, their unstable foundations, the provisional visions they articulate, and the imagined audiences they invoke—signals a radical departure from established poetic norms.

Du Fu's poetic engagement with news, I argue, stem from a deep longing to remain part of an elite community and to stay connected to the broader social world during his exile. In a time of

crisis, the imperial vision was no longer sustained solely by mastery of the classical textual tradition and its orthodox values, but also depended on up-to-date knowledge of the Tang state's condition. In other words, staying informed about current events—and offering commentary on them—became a defining feature of cultural elite identity. I suggest, therefore, that when Du Fu offered advice on contemporary matters in poems that functioned like memorials, or composed celebratory pieces in the tone and style of court poetry despite his physical removal from the court, he was using poetry as a means of participating in a social world from which he was estranged but to which he continued to lay claim.

In such works, Du Fu's voice is not always one of admonition or authoritative judgment. Rather, poems of panegyric often coexist with those offering social or political critique. In some cases, Du Fu even adopts oppositional stances on the same issue or event across different poems. These shifting perspectives and multiplicity of attitudes attest to the situational nature of his poems as responsive acts of expression. They cannot be reduced to a straightforward transcription of the thoughts or opinions of Du Fu as a historical individual, but must instead be understood as enactments of the multiple poetic roles he could assume for different purposes. These examples also reflect how, for a Tang literatus like Du Fu, whose identity and social standing were closely tied to office-holding, the boundaries between personal and public concerns were inherently porous. Self-promotion and dedication to the state were not opposing impulses but complementary aspects of the same cultural ideal. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that navigating and responding to a compromised, fluid network of information allowed Du Fu—despite his displacement—to remain part of an imagined community. His engagement with this fractured world of communication and authority reflects an ongoing search for identity and belonging amid uncertainty and change.

Poetry as Memorial and the Performance of Court Knowledge

Unlike the preceding chapters, which explore space and place as central to shaping Du Fu's experiences, thoughts, and poetic visions, this chapter focuses on the circulation of information—something not confined to, but often transcending, spatial boundaries. It also reveals the temporal framework of Du Fu's writing. As a result, this chapter addresses a broader temporal span of his work, rather than adhering to a geographically defined periodization. Although the poems discussed here are arranged thematically and driven by argument, they largely follow a chronological arc—from those composed in the early years following the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion, to those written in Shu, and finally to his Kuizhou and post-Kuizhou works. This temporal progression allows us to trace Du Fu's increasing struggle with a compromised communication network and the unreliable flow of information after his displacement to the empire's margins, as well as his deepening desire to remain connected to the world as his isolation grew more acute.

That Du Fu's poems are not only reflective of past events but also intended to engage with events still unfolding is evident in a series of works composed during the early years of the rebellion.[209] Among them, the poem "Block the Luzi Pass" 塞蘆子 serves to introduce several core issues this chapter will explore: the time-sensitive nature of Du Fu's poetic responses, his transgression of generic boundaries, and the question of audience.

[209] These include poems such as "Grieving Over the Green Slope" 悲青坂, "Grieving Over Chentao" 悲陳陶, and "Block the Luzi Pass" 塞蘆子.

塞蘆子 Block the Luzi Pass[210]

五城何迢迢，The five citadels, how far and distant they are,[211]

迢迢隔河水。Far and distant, separated by the river's waters.

邊兵盡東征，The frontier armies have all embarked on their eastern campaigns,

城南空荊杞。South of the city walls, the land lies overgrown with thorny shrubs.

思明割懷衛，Siming has seized the Huai and Wei Prefectures,

秀巖西未已。And Xiuyan's westward advancement has not yet ended.[212]

迴略大荒來，Turning back to advance from the vast wilderness,

崤函蓋虛爾。Mount Xiao and the Hangu Pass would be of no use.

延州秦北戶，Yan Prefecture is the northern gate of Qin,[213]

關防猶可倚。Its military defenses can still be relied upon.

焉得一萬人，How to raise ten thousand soldiers,

疾驅塞蘆子。And gallop to block the Luzi Pass?

岐有薛大夫，In Qi, there is the Grandee Xue,[214]

旁制山賊起。Who can subdue the mountain bandits from the side.

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[210] *DFQJJZ*, 3.755.

[211] In the Tang dynasty, the five citadels refer to five fortresses under the control of the Shuofang 朔方 military commissioner: Dingyuan 定遠, Feng'an 豐安, the Western Fortress of Surrender, the Middle Fortress of Surrender, and the Eastern Fortress of Surrender. These fortresses are located in present-day Inner Mongolia, north of the northernmost bend of the Yellow River.

[212] Gao Xiuyan 高秀巖 was originally a subordinate of the famed Tang general Geshu Han 哥舒翰 (?-757), but later defected to serve the rebel leader Shi Siming.

[213] The Luzi Pass was located at the northern tip of Yan Prefecture.

[214] Grandee Xue refers to Xue Jingxian 薛景仙, the Governor and Defense Commissioner of Fufeng 扶風, whose successful defense of Qizhou 岐州 played a crucial role in securing the supply chain from the middle-lower Yangtze region to Qin and Shu regions during the rebellion.

近聞昆戎徒，I have recently heard of the tribes of the Kun and Rong,[215]

為退三百里。Who retreated three hundred miles due to him.

蘆關扼兩寇，The Luzi Pass holds back the two brigands,

深意實在此。My deep thoughts truly lie in this matter.

誰能叫帝閽，Who can shout to the emperor's gatekeeper?

胡行速如鬼。The barbarians move as swiftly as ghosts!

Dated to 757, the second year of the Zhide Reign, this poem was written when Du Fu was detained in the capital, Chang'an, which was under the control of the rebels. During this time, Du Fu anxiously followed the latest developments of the rebellion. In the poem, he expresses his concerns and offers suggestions regarding an urgent situation of the time. Early in the first month of 757, the rebel leader Shi Siming and his general Gao Xiuyan began a siege of Taiyuan. The Luzi Pass, a strategic fortress located between Taiyuan and Pengyuan 彭原—where Emperor Suzong and his displaced court had taken refuge—became vital due to the unfolding situation. If Taiyuan were captured and the rebels continued their westward advance to take control of the Luzi Pass, the imperial court would be directly threatened.

Du Fu was particularly alarmed by the court's preoccupation with defending against attacks from the east, while overlooking the possibility of a northern route that the rebels might take. Since the survival of the Tang dynasty and the possibility of retaking the imperial capitals hinged on control of the Luzi Pass, Du Fu urged the court to fortify it. This was an urgent matter, as the imperial armies previously guarding the northern frontiers—the "five citadels" (line 1)—had

[215] Kunyi 昆夷 and Quanrong 犬戎 were non-Han peoples from the regions to the northwest of the Chinese heartland. In this context, these terms are used to refer to the rebels.

been depleted and mobilized to defend the eastern part of the empire. If the rebels were to capture the Luzi Pass, there would be insufficient forces available to mount a successful defense.

Fortunately for the Tang, things did not unfold as Du Fu had feared. Before Taiyuan was conquered, An Lushan was murdered, and the ensuing chaos among the rebels caused them to abandon the siege of Taiyuan. As a result, they never had the opportunity to advance to capture the Luzi Pass. Hence, not long after Du Fu wrote "Block the Luzi Pass," the situation that prompted the composition no longer existed, rendering Du Fu's preemptive suggestion mere empty words—words that history would never have the chance to validate, as events took a different course. Thus, "Block the Luzi Pass" perfectly illustrates the time-bound nature of some of Du Fu's compositions. Central to the poem is a time-sensitive message that speaks to the particular situation of a particular historical moment that might not be relevant or even comprehensible outside of that time frame.

Moreover, "Block the Luzi Pass" demonstrates that Du Fu's poems about contemporary affairs are not merely reflective and retrospective, but are meant to actively participate in ongoing conversations about events still unfolding. The attempt, or poetic gesture, to intervene and to have a real impact on the course of history blurs the boundary between poetry and memorial. Indeed, the view of "Block the Luzi Pass" as a memorial written in verse form has been variously expressed by Du Fu's commentators. Pu Qilong, for instance, points out that, "this poem is about Du Fu's strategy devised for border issue" 此杜氏籌邊策也, and that "using rhymed verse to write a memorial, he has accomplished the words of one lineage" 以韻語為奏議，成一家之言矣.[216] Wang Sishi 王嗣奭 (1566-1648) similarly observes the poem's departure

[216] Pu Qilong 浦起龍 (1679-1762), *Du Du xinjie* 讀杜心解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 1.28.

from the traditional function of poetry, saying: "Clearly, this is an itemized discussion of border affairs; how can it be merely regarded as a poem?" 明是條陳邊事，豈可以詩論？[217]

At the same time, however, Du Fu's poem differs from a memorial in that he knew it would have little chance of reaching the imperial ear. The lack of access to the emperor and the problem of communication come to the fore in the closing couplet. *Dihun* 帝閽 (line 19), referring to the emperor's gatekeeper in Du Fu's poem, originates from Qu Yuan's "Li sao" 離騷 ["Encountering Sorrow"], where it refers to the gatekeeper of the Heavenly God. The use of this term evokes a sense of obstruction and disillusionment in its original context, where the speaker of "Li sao," having failed to find his time in the terrestrial realm, ascends to Heaven. Yet, upon arriving at the Heavenly gate, he is not allowed to enter: "I ask the gatekeeper to open the gate; leaning against the Changhe Gate, he simply stares at me" 吾令帝閽開關兮，倚閶闔而望予.[218] By evoking the context of "Li sao" and calling for someone other than himself to shout to the gatekeeper—as suggested by "who can" (line 19)—the final couplet reflects a certain desperation on Du Fu's part. Indeed, trapped in the sacked capital, Du Fu had no means of participating in the state's decision-making. Nevertheless, it is perhaps precisely this state of confinement and isolation that prompted him to resort to poetry as a channel for communication.

The dim prospect of his poem reaching the emperor or those in power does not render it meaningless, for Du Fu certainly had a broader audience in mind. Due to the perspicacity of Du Fu's judgment on the rebellion and his military strategy conveyed in "Block the Luzi Pass," the poem has been regarded by later commentators as evidence of his prescience and political savvy. However, not all of Du Fu's poems about state affairs are intended to offer wisdom or specific

[217] Wang Sishi 王嗣奭 (1566-1648), *Du Yi* 杜臆 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 2.61.
[218] *Chuci buzhu*, 1.29.

suggestions. In fact, quite a few poems in his corpus were written in response to good news, to celebrate these occasions, express his joy, and wish for a promising future. This is the case with "Wash the Arms and Horses" 洗兵馬, a poem composed in 759 when Du Fu took a temporary leave from his post in Huazhou and returned to his family villa near Luoyang.

The historical context of this poem is that the two capitals had been recaptured, and the Tang forces, along with their allies, had reclaimed much of the territories previously held by the rebels, with the only remaining stronghold being Xiangzhou 相州, or the city of Ye 鄴城.[219] In the ninth month of the previous year, 758, a combined force—allegedly numbering two hundred thousand soldiers and led by the military commissioners of nine prefectures—besieged the city of Ye. By the second month of 759, when the poem was written, the situation was becoming increasingly hopeful for the Tang, as the rebel forces in the besieged city were facing a severe shortage of food and supplies. Du Fu's poem was composed precisely at this propitious moment.

Despite its length, the poem's structure is quite clear, consisting of four sections, each marked by a change in rhyme. Since the poem is too long to quote in full, I have substituted the middle two sections with brief summaries. The poem reads:

洗兵馬 Wash the Arms and Horses[220]

Section I (lines 1-12):

[219] Xiangzhou is the modern-day Anyang 安陽 in Henan province.

[220] *DFQJJZ*, 5.1252. An original note says that this poem was "composed after the recapture of the two capitals" 收京後作. The phrase "wash the arms and horses" alludes to a narrative in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑, in which King Wu of Zhou, en route to his campaign against the Shang tyrant Zhou 紂, is caught in a sudden storm. When his advisor Sanyi Sheng 散宜生 questions whether this might be an ill omen, King Wu reinterprets the rain as a celestial act of purifying the weapons. *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證, compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE), edited by Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 13.329.

中興諸將收山東，The generals of the restoration are reclaiming Shandong,[221]

捷書夜報清晝同。A letter of victory arrived at night, making it feel like clear daylight.

河廣傳聞一葦過，It is said that a single reed has crossed the broad river,[222]

4 胡危命在破竹中。The lives of the barbarians are threatened by the force of splitting bamboo.[223]

祇殘鄴城不日得，The only stronghold left is the city of Ye, which will be retaken in no time,

獨任朔方無限功。The Commissioner of Shuofang is solely entrusted with boundless achievements.[224]

京師皆騎汗血馬，The imperial armies all ride horses that sweat blood,[225]

8 回紇餧肉葡萄宮。Uighur soldiers are fed with meat in the Grape Palace.[226]

已喜皇威清海岱，Already rejoicing that royal power has purified the realm to the seas and Mount Tai,[227]

常思仙仗過崆峒。I often think of the time when the imperial procession passed Mount Kongtong.[228]

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[221] Shandong refers to the region east of the Taihang Mountain 太行山.
[222] This line alludes to the ode "The River is Broad" 河廣 from the *Shijing*: "Who says that the River is broad? It can be crossed with a single reed" 誰謂河廣，一葦杭之 (*Mao* 61). It refers to the imperial army crossing the Zhang River 漳水 to lay siege to the city of Ye.
[223] The phrase "splitting bamboo" is often used to describe a swift and irresistible force.
[224] The Commissioner of Shuofang was Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697-781).
[225] A fine breed of horses from the Western Regions, particularly the Ferghana horses.
[226] The Grape Palace was the name of a palace from the Han dynasty where the leader of the Xiongnu was hosted during his visit to the Han capital. This line refers to Emperor Suzong's hosting of a Uighur tribal leader in the Great Illumination Palace 大明宮 in 757, where they feasted together.
[227] *Haidai* 海岱 refers to the region lying in between Bohai 渤海 and Mount Tai 泰山.
[228] Mount Kongtong was on the route from the capital to the border city of Lingwu, where Emperor Suzong, having fled Chang'an, took refuge and later proclaimed himself emperor. When Emperor Suzong and his armies returned to the capital to quell the rebellion, they passed Mount Kongtong once again on their way.

三年笛裏關山月，For three years, in the sound of the flute, the moon rises over frontier mountains,

12 萬國兵前草木風。Before the soldiers of myriad states, grasses and trees stand in the wind.[229]

Section II (lines 13-24):

This section celebrates the achievements and contributions of Crown Prince Li Yu 李豫 (726-779) and other key ministers and generals—such as Guo Ziyi, Li Guangbi 李光弼 (708-764), and Wang Sili 王思禮 (?-761)—in pacifying the rebellion, as well as the ensuing peaceful life enjoyed by people throughout the realm. This is followed by an account of the return of the imperial carriage to the capital and the emperor's filial devotion to his father, the retired Emperor Xuanzong.

Section III (lines 25-36):

This section opens with a note of caution directed at upstarts—those who rose to prominence through military service—warning against arrogance and unchecked ambition. It then proceeds to praise the former prime minister Zhang Hao 張鎬 (?-764), and concludes with an optimistic prediction of the rebels' defeat and the restoration of Tang imperial rule.

[229] After being defeated by the Eastern Jin armies at the Fei River 淝水, Fu Jian 苻堅 (337-385), the ruler of the Former Qin 前秦 dynasty, managed to escape. Climbing the city tower of Shouchun 壽春 with his brother Fu Rong 苻融 (340-383), he gazed at the Jin army, whose formation was well-organized and whose soldiers were in high spirits. Looking toward the north, he saw that the grasses and trees on the mountains appeared to take on human shapes. He then said to his brother, "These are also formidable enemies. Who says they are few?" Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579-648) et al., *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 114.2918.

Section IV (lines 37-48):

寸地尺天皆入貢，Every inch of the earth and every foot of the heaven offer tribute,

奇祥異瑞爭來送。Extraordinary omens and rare auspices compete to be presented.

不知何國致白環，I wonder which state will send a white jade disc,[230]

40 復道諸山得銀甕。And it is also said that silver urns are obtained from various mountains.[231]

隱士休歌紫芝曲，Recluses cease singing the Song of the Purple Mushroom,[232]

詞人解撰河清頌。Poets are ready to compose "Hymns on the River's Clearing."[233]

田家望望惜雨乾，Farmers look eagerly for the rain to stop,

44 布穀處處催春種。While cuckoo birds everywhere urge the spring sowing.

淇上健兒歸莫懶，Valiant fighters by the Qi River, do not delay in returning,[234]

城南思婦愁多夢。Longing wives south of the city are haunted by endless dreams.

安得壯士挽天河，How can strong men be found to turn over the Heavenly River,[235]

48 淨洗甲兵長不用。And cleanse the arms and weapons—never to be used again!

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[230] It is said that during the time of Shun 舜, the Queen Mother of the West 西王母 presented a white jade disc and a jade pendant. *DFQJJZ*, 5.1263.

[231] The silver urn is a legendary auspicious vessel said to spontaneously fill itself with water. Its appearance symbolizes the presence of a virtuous ruler—one who governs with moderation in feasting, fairness in punishment, and the moral influence to inspire the people to refrain from wrongdoing. *DFQJJZ*, 5.1263.

[232] "The Song of the Purple Mushroom" refers to a song sung by the Four White-Haired Elders 四皓, who retreated to Mount Shang 商山 to escape political turmoil during the late Qin dynasty. Two lines from the song read: "Luminous, luminous, the purple mushrooms— / They can soothe our hunger" 曄曄紫芝，可以療飢.

[233] During the Yuanjia reign period (424–453 CE) of the Liu Song dynasty, both the Yellow River and the Ji River reportedly turned clear—an event interpreted as an auspicious omen. Bao Zhao 鮑照 (c. 414–466) composed the "Ode on the Clarity of the River" 河清頌 to commemorate this portent of virtuous rule. *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, in *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, edited by Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762-1843), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), *Quan Song wen juan* 47.2693-4.

[234] "Valiant fighters by the Qi River" refers to the Tang soldiers besieging Xiangzhou, as the Qi River runs close to Xiangzhou.

[235] The Heavenly River refers to the Milky Way.

A central debate surrounding this poem in late imperial China was whether it was intended as a celebratory piece or as an indirect criticism of contemporary politics and those in power. An important figure in this debate was Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), who, by seizing upon certain lines from the poem and identifying tortuous referents, argued that it should be read as a criticism of Emperor Suzong for his lack of filial piety and his mistrust of important ministers from his father's court. The tenuousness of his evidence and his misinterpretation of certain allusions made his argument the target of criticism from other commentators and critics.[236] Thus, even in the cultural context of the late imperial period, which saw a pervasive interest in teasing out "deeper significance in subtle words" 微言大義, Qian's extreme stance was not widely accepted. The overall celebratory tone of Du Fu's poem can hardly be dismissed. As Pu Qilong has remarked: "At the time, Qingxu was trapped in an encirclement, and the imperial armies' momentum was growing. His Lordship [i.e., Du Fu] composed 'Wash the Arms and Horses' in the eastern capital to boost their morale. The poem is filled with words of joy, excitement, and hopeful expectancy" 時慶緒圍困，官軍勢張。公在東都作《洗兵馬》以鼓舞其氣，皆忻喜願望之詞.[237]

Yet Qian Qianyi's notorious reading of "Wash the Arms and Horses" is revealing in that it betrays an anxiety over the panegyric nature of some of Du Fu's compositions, as panegyric poetry is often considered shallow and flattering, lacking moral seriousness. Moreover, this is a piece in which Du Fu does not demonstrate his foresight regarding the unfolding events of the day. Less than a month after Du Fu composed this poem, the imperial forces of Tang suffered a

[236] For details of Qian Qianyi's argument and those of his opponents, see *DFQJJZ*, 5.1267-71.
[237] Pu Qilong, *Du Du xinjie*, 2a.258.

disastrous defeat when the rebel leader Shi Siming, with his troops, came to the rescue of An Qingxu. Though the Tang forces far outnumbered the rebel armies, the lack of a unified leader resulted in one of the most famous fiascos in Chinese history.

In fact, there are a few places in Du Fu's poem that demonstrate a certain ambivalence or suggest a gentle remonstration, though Du Fu certainly had no doubt about an impending victory for the Tang. One of these places that has attracted the attention of Du Fu's commentators is line 6, "The Commissioner of Shuofang is solely entrusted with boundless achievements," which has been regarded as Du Fu's admonition regarding the lack of a unified leader. According to historiographical sources, Emperor Suzong did not appoint a single leader for the joint forces that were dispatched to reclaim Xiangzhou, because both Guo Ziyi, the Commissioner of Shuofang, and Li Guangbi, the Commissioner of Hedong, were prestigious ministers, and it would be inappropriate to subordinate one below the other. As a result, only a palace eunuch, Yu Chao'en 魚朝恩 (722-770), was appointed as the Inspector of the Armies to coordinate the campaign.[238] What is peculiar about line 6 is the fact that it is at the same time a statement—rather than an imperative—and a statement that does not align with reality.

One possibility, as some commentators have proposed, is that Du Fu expresses what he wishes to be the situation, with Guo Ziyi given full authority and leadership. Another possible scenario is that Du Fu did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the situation, and he simply assumed that the most distinguished general, Guo Ziyi, to be the chief commander. This is certainly plausible, given the uncertainties surrounding the transmission of information. As will be further examined in a later section, limited access to up-to-date information—and the presence of

[238] "The emperor, finding it difficult to place either Ziyi or Guangbi under the other's command—since both were revered founding ministers—chose not to appoint a supreme commander. Instead, he assigned the eunuch Yu Chao'en as Inspector of the Armies" 帝以子儀、光弼俱是元勳，難相統屬，故不立元帥，唯以中官魚朝恩為觀軍容宣慰史. *JTS*, 120.3452.

inaccurate information—was fairly common, especially during times of chaos. In either case, however, the emphasis is on the second half of the line—"with boundless achievements" 無限功—as Du Fu anticipates immeasurable merits and honor an successful campaign will yield, just like in the preceding line, the focus is on the imminence of the conquest of the rebels' last stronghold—"which will be retaken in no time" 不日得.

Another instance where Du Fu expresses his reservation about the contemporary situation is in the first stanza of Section III. Here, he admonishes the upstarts of the time, including court officials and palace eunuchs who rose to high positions through imperial favor, as well as men of humble origins granted military titles in exchange for their service during times of crisis. Nevertheless, his admonition targets a broader social phenomenon of the period, rather than the specific campaign at the city of Ye. A similar case is the closing couplet, which expresses Du Fu's wish for an age of eternal peace, while at the same time containing an indirect admonition. As the An Lushan rebellion itself was partly caused by militarism and expansionism in the Tang, the hope for arms and weapons to be put away is certainly a warning against the abuse of military forces in the future.

Nevertheless, these direct criticisms and veiled remonstrances embedded in the poem do not undermine its overall celebratory tone. Throughout Du Fu's poem, there is no hint of doubt about the imminent fall of the city of Ye and a total victory for the Tang, which is clearly expressed from the beginning. The idea that "The only stronghold left is the city of Ye, which will be retaken in no time" 祇殘鄴城不日得 (line 5) echoes a similar expression from one of the essay questions Du Fu drafted for the *jinshi* examination, not long before his composition of "Wash the Arms and Horses," which reads: "The host of generals from East of the Mountain have gathered like clouds, letters of victory from Qi River are arriving everyday" 山東之諸將雲合，淇上之捷

書日至.[239] In fact, the prospect of a swift conquest of the rebels' last stronghold was widely shared at the time. The *Zizhi tongjian* records the dire situation of the rebels in the besieged city—facing a shortage of food and supplies, even a rat was worth four thousand in cash—and states that "all thought the city could be taken in a single day" 人皆以為克在朝夕.[240] The optimism reached its climax in Section IV, where Du Fu envisions a promising future once the rebellion is quelled: the appearance of auspicious omens, recluses coming out of seclusion to take up public service, the composition of eulogies, and the prospect of a settled life for both farmers and soldiers.

Thus, the main purpose of "Wash the Arms and Horses" is to share in the widespread sentiment of the time and to celebrate a favorable occasion through poetry. Despite direct or indirect remonstration interwoven in certain parts of the poem, the work as a whole is acclamatory and eulogistic. Rather than attempting to provide authoritative judgment or sharp foresight on contemporary events, the poem aligns more closely with panegyric poetry than with poetry of social and political criticism. Yet, the point goes beyond simply saying that Du Fu does not always have the transcendental perspective later critics have often attributed to him and that many of his poems reflect his limited views on contemporary situation. Instead, the poem is an example showing the diverse attitudes toward and ways of engaging with news about contemporary events. While panegyric poetry was often composed in court settings or under imperial command, Du Fu carved out a space for himself by transforming contemporary events into the "occasions" for his poems. In doing so, he sought to participate in the political discourse

[239] *Qishang* 淇上 here refers to the city of Ye, situated by the Qi River. See Du Fu, "Essay Questions on State Policy for the *Jinshi* Examination at Huazhou" 華州試進士策問, *DFQJJZ*, 22.6418.
[240] *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (hereafter *ZZTJ*), compiled by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1956), 221.7068.

of his time, despite not belonging to the court circle and at a moment when the imperial court was still in the process of fully restoring its central authority.

The panegyric approach of "Wash the Arms and Horses," along with its attempt to recreate a courtly setting, is further demonstrated by its echoes of imperial edicts and documents in several places throughout the poem—an aspect worth noting. In Section I, the phrase "the force of splitting bamboo" 破竹 is found in an edict that Emperor Suzong sent down in the eleventh month of 757, after the recapture of the two capitals. In this proclamation, Emperor Suzong recounts how, following the outbreak of the rebellion and the flight of the imperial family, he managed to reassemble the remaining forces, served as the chief commander himself, and—with the help of imperial princes, ministers, and allied foreign troops—fought valiantly to quell the rebels. The righteous campaigns that have restored peace to the realm are described as "Whose momentum resembles the crushing of deadwood, as easy as the splitting of bamboo" 勢若摧枯，易同破竹.[241]

In Section II, in which Du Fu compliments the various ministers and an imperial prince for their great achievements, he echoes another imperial decree, which praises Guo Ziyi, prime minister and the military commissioner of Shuofang, with the words "his discernment and wisdom are broad and far-reaching, while his plans and tactics are deep and profound" 識度弘遠，謀略沖深. It continues to add that "Looking back from the present to the past, few could match him" 以今觀古，未足多之.[242] These phrases are reworked by Du Fu to construct his admiring evaluation of Guo Ziyi in line 14: "Prime Minister Guo's plans are profound, rare since

[241] *JTS*, 10.248.
[242] "Edict Appointing Guo Ziyi as Supreme Commander of the Eastern Capital and Allied Military Circuits" 命郭子儀充東京畿等道元帥詔, in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, compiled by Dong Gao 董誥 (1740-1818) et al. (Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 42.285.

ancient times” 郭相謀深古來少. Toward the end of Section II, after describing the return of the imperial retinue and various officials in flowering spring, Du Fu depicts the harmony of the imperial family, particularly the filial piety of the emperor and the crown prince: “The crane carriage and phoenix palanquin are prepared throughout the night, to pay respect at the Dragon Tower at the crow of the rooster at dawn” 鶴駕通宵鳳輦備，雞鳴問寢龍樓曉.[243] This couplet derives from the same imperial edict where the phrase “the force of splitting bamboo,” discussed earlier, originates. The relevant passage reads: “Now, the ancestral temples near Hangu Pass and the Luo River have been restored, and the retired emperor has been welcomed back from Ba and Shu. Clearing the way for the imperial carriage, I will set things back on the correct path; paying my morning respects at the gate of the rest-chamber, I will offer my greetings to His Highness” 今復宗廟於函洛，迎上皇於巴蜀；導鑾輿而反正，朝寢門而問安.[244]

These echoes with imperial edicts and pronouncements demonstrate Du Fu’s intimate knowledge of court politics and state affairs—a key marker of one’s status as a cultural elite. They also attest to his efforts to reconstruct the relationships and dynamics of a court setting within the poetic space despite his distance from the court. Like “Block the Luzi Pass,” “Wash the Arms and Horses” is a composition built upon an unstable foundation of an unfolding event, whose significance is closely tied to a particular historical moment. Yet, upon this unstable foundation, a whole architecture is constructed. The poem’s main purpose goes beyond the specific messages it conveys; more significantly, it creates a space for Du Fu to engage with the community he aspires to join.

[243] The crane carriage and phoenix palanquin refer to the equipage of the crown prince and the emperor, respectively. The Dragon Tower is the residence of the retired emperor.
[244] *JTS*, 10.248.

Our discussions thus far demonstrate that Du Fu's poems engaging with contemporary affairs—such as "Block the Luzi Pass" and "Wash the Arms and Horses"—are not primarily documentative or representational. Rather than merely describing events and reflecting on them, these poems function as active, immediate responses to unfolding circumstances. By casting his poetry in the rhetoric of a memorial, or by invoking an imperial setting through his display of court knowledge and adoption of a courtly eulogistic style, Du Fu asserts his identity and enacts the role of a scholar-official—even as that role existed more fully within the realm of poetic performance than in lived experience. These two poems also reveal the diverse and open-ended approaches Du Fu employs in addressing topical subjects: moral admonition and practical advice are blended with eulogy and celebration, while reflections on the past are interwoven with visions of the future. In other words, Du Fu's poetic responses to the news of the day are more complex and varied than what is suggested by his canonical image as the "poet historian" or "poet sage."

Eulogy and Remonstration: Opposing Stances on the Same Issue

At times, Du Fu reveals shifting—even contradictory—perspectives on the same issue, as in his responses to the designation of Jingzhou as the southern capital. In 760, Lü Yin 呂諲, governor of Jingzhou, proposed to the throne that Jingzhou be made the southern capital—a recommendation Emperor Suzong accepted. As a result, the title of southern capital was transferred from Chengdu in Shu—designated as such in 757 due to Emperor Xuanzong having taken refuge there—to Jingzhou, located in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. This shift

became the target of Du Fu's criticism in his "Establishing a Capital, Twelve Couplets," written after he had settled in his Thatched Cottage in Chengdu.

建都十二韻 Establishing a Capital, Twelve Couplets[245]

蒼生未蘇息，The common people have not yet revived and relaxed,

胡馬半乾坤。Foreign horses are galloping through half of the realm.

議在雲臺上，A proposal was discussed atop the Cloud Terrace,[246]

誰扶黃屋尊。But who will uphold the honor of the yellow canopy?[247]

建都分魏闕，Establishing a capital to have a share of the high gate towers,

下詔辟荊門。A decree is sent down to open up the Gate of Jing.

恐失東人望，I fear this will dash the hopes of people in the east,

其如西極存。And what to do with the survival of the western extremity?

時危當雪恥，The times are tough, we should strive to wipe away humiliation,

計大豈輕論。For a grand plan, how can it be easily proposed?

雖倚三階正，Though the "Three Stairs" are rectified and can be relied on,[248]

終愁萬國翻。In the end, I worry the myriad states may descend into chaos.

[245] *DFQJJZ*, 8.2061.
[246] The Cloud Terrace was a hall within the Han palace complex where Emperor Ming 漢明帝 (r. 57-75) had portraits painted of distinguished ministers who played a crucial role in the restoration of the Han.
[247] The "yellow canopy," or "yellow chamber," refers to the imperial carriage, distinguished by its canopy of yellow silk.
[248] The "Three Stairs," also known as "Three Stair Stars" 三台星, is a group of six stars arranged in three tiers, symbolizing the hierarchical social order—from the emperor and empress, to dukes and high officials, down to lowly clerks and common people.

牽裾恨不死，Tugging on the imperial robe, I regret for having escaped death,[249]

漏網辱殊恩。Slipped through the net, I am unworthy of the special favor.

永負漢庭哭，I will never be on a par with the one who cries at the Han court,[250]

16 遙憐湘水魂。From a distance, I sympathize with the spirit in the Xiang River.[251]

窮冬客江劍，In late winter, I sojourn in Jiang-Jian,[252]

隨事有田園。And, shaped by circumstance, have come to dwell among fields and garden.

風斷青蒲節，The wind broke the joints of sweet-flags,

20 霜埋翠竹根。While frost buried the roots of verdant bamboo.

衣冠空穰穰，Those in official robes and caps bustle in vain,

關輔久昏昏。The capital and its neighboring regions have long been shrouded in gloom.

願枉長安日，May the sun in Chang'an condescend,

24 光暉照北原。To shine upon the northern plains with its brilliance.

When Emperor Suzong granted Lü Yin's proposal and sent down an edict to make Jingzhou the southern capital in 760, the northeastern region of the Tang was still controlled by the rebels,

[249] This is an allusion to the story of Xin Pi 辛毗 (?-235) from the state of Wei during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280). When the emperor of Wei resolved to relocate ten thousand households from Jizhou to Henan, the plan was widely considered inappropriate due to plagues of locusts and the ensuing famine. Xin Pi remonstrated so forcefully that, when the emperor ignored him and turned to retreat, Xin grabbed his robe in protest. See Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), *Weishu* 魏書, 25.697. This story serves as a reference to Du Fu's former role as Reminder of the Left 左拾遺, whose primary duty was to offer remonstrations. It is particularly associated with Du Fu's defense of Fang Guan (697-763), a well-known incident that ultimately led to his own demotion.

[250] This alludes to Jia Yi's remonstration to Emperor Wen of Han, in which he offered numerous proposals for reform. *Hanshu*, 48.2230.

[251] Qu Yuan (c. 340–278 BCE), though loyal to the Chu court, was slandered and exiled by the king. In despair, he ultimately drowned himself in a tributary of the Xiang River. Later, when Jia Yi was banished to Changsha, he composed a *fu* to mourn Qu Yuan.

[252] "Jiang-Jian" refers to the region along the Yangtze River in Shu, specifically indicating Chengdu in this context.

while the western frontiers had been harassed by Tibetan invasions. For Du Fu, these were more urgent issues than setting up the southern capital in the relatively peaceful southeastern region unmarred by the rebellion. This is the main point made in the first half of Du Fu's poem. Namely, in a time of chaos, the immediate priority should be to quell the rebellion and bring relief to the suffering populace. Du Fu places the blame on powerful courtiers for making such an ill-timed proposal—as indicated in the second couplet—one that not only fails to uphold the dignity of the sovereign but also threatens to further fragment the empire (line 12).

Beginning with line 13, the second half of the poem abruptly shifts to Du Fu himself, reflecting on his failed remonstration at court and the subsequent displacement from the capital. His reclusive life in the outlying western region (lines 17-18) prevents him from participating in state affairs at court. This isolated state is captured in the evocative imagery of lines 19-20—sweet-flags and bamboos weathering wind and frost—which appear to symbolize his thwarted ambitions and waning vitality in a time of adversity. In contrast to his own alienation from the court, those "in official robes and caps" (line 21) within the capital region fail to fulfill their duties or embody the roles they are meant to perform. Thus, the second half of the poem highlight his estrangement from the court community and lack of avenue to present his remonstration. As a result, he again resorts to poetry, where he appeals to the throne with the request to extend imperial grace to the northern plains that were still in the hands of the rebel leaders (lines 23-24).

Hence, in "Establishing a Capital," Du Fu—assuming the role of a righteous courtier despite his alienation from the court—seeks to fulfill the sociopolitical function of classical poetry. In this poem, Du Fu conveys his criticism both directly and through more subtle forms of disapproval. One such method is his use of directional terms throughout the poem: the east, west,

and north represent regions beset by social unrest and military conflicts. In contrast, the conspicuous absence of the "south"—the direction of Jiangling, the designated capital—serves as a subtle yet effective critique, suggesting Du Fu's reservations about the ill-conceived and misguided decision to establish a capital there.

If "Establishing a Capital" represents a paradigmatic moral-political stance, another composition in Du Fu's corpus responds to the same historical event by adopting a markedly different—if not oppositional—stance. This composition is the poem titled "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" 江陵望幸:

江陵望幸 Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling[253]

雄都元壯麗，This majestic capital is grand and magnificent as it is,

望幸欻威神。Anticipating an imperial visit to suddenly bestow it with imposing divine power.

地利西通蜀，With its favorable location, it connects to Shu in the west,

4 天文北照秦。Its heavenly constellation shines upon Qin in the north.

風煙含越鳥，Wind and mist envelope birds from Yue,

舟楫控吳人。Boats and oars of Wu people pass through here.

未枉周王駕，It has not yet troubled the carriage of King Mu of Zhou with a visit,[254]

8 終期漢武巡。But in the end, it hopes for an inspection tour by Emperor Wu of Han.[255]

[253] *DFQJJZ*, 10.2982.
[254] King Mu of Zhou was known for his extensive tours across the entire realm.
[255] Emperor Wu of Han, who once traveled to Jiangling, is here used as a reference to the reigning emperor, Daizong of the Tang dynasty.

甲兵分聖旨，Arms and soldiers have been dispatched by imperial command,

居守付宗臣。Regency can be entrusted to a royal minister.

早發雲臺仗，Make haste to set off with the guards of the Cloud Terrace,

12 恩波起涸鱗。May the waves of your grace revive the stranded fish.

In contrast to his earlier criticism of establishing Jiangling as the southern capital, Du Fu in this poem celebrates the new capital and expresses eager anticipation of an imperial visit. Similar to "Wash the Arms and Horses" discussed earlier, this is also a panegyric piece. Yet, while "Wash the Arms and Horses" is written in the song-style verse (*gexing ti* 歌行體), "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" is composed in a stately and elegant style of the regulated verse. Specifically, both the structure and language of this poem follow the conventions of court poetry composed at imperial command to celebrate imperial rituals and excursions—particularly those by the court poet Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456). It opens with a glorification of Jiangling as a metropolis and the emperor's divine power, followed by an evocation of the geopolitical and cosmic significance of the newly established capital. Unlike the conspicuous absence of the "south" in "Establishing a Capital," this poem depicts Jiangling as the center of the realm, connected to Shu, Qin, Yue, and Wu in the four directions respectively. The evocation of King Mu of Zhou and Emperor Wu of Han as historical precedents is a common trope in poems composed for imperial excursions. In the final stanza, Du Fu expresses his yearning for an imperial tour, concluding the poem with a conventional gesture often adopted by court poets: an appeal to the emperor's boundless grace, which he hopes might soon extend to those in straitened circumstances—including men like himself. Thus, in every aspect, "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" belongs to the tradition of panegyric poetry, drawing heavily on court poems

about imperial rituals and excursions for its diction, rhetoric, and style—even though Du Fu, during his sojourn in Shu and far from the capital, was neither a court poet nor writing within a court setting.

Du Fu's markedly different attitudes in "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" and "Establishing a Capital" must have puzzled his commentators, who regard his poetry as a transparent reflection of his life and thoughts. Indeed, the mainstream interpretation of "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling"—including its dating, historical context, and the search for Du Fu's original intent—has been shaped, whether or not explicitly acknowledged, by the desire to reconcile his apparent inconsistency on this issue. "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" has traditionally been dated to the year 763, three years after the composition of "Establishing a Capital." In this year, the Tibetans, taking advantage of the lack of strong defensive forces in the western part of the Tang empire, launched a significant invasion and briefly captured the capital Chang'an. As a result, Emperor Daizong (r.762-779) fled to Shanzhou 陝州. Commentators link Du Fu's poem to this particular historical juncture, claiming that Du Fu wrote the poem because Emperor Daizong was planning to temporarily move to Jiangling. Qiu Zhao'ao, for instance, says that "I surmise that at the time, Emperor Daizong had the intention of visiting Jiangling, and therefore he [i.e., Du Fu] composed the poem" 意是時代宗有意幸江陵，故有此作.[256] Zhu Heling 朱鶴齡 (1606-1683) made a similar point, claiming that "Rumor has it that Emperor Daizong hoped to pay an imperial visit to Jiangling, hence the poem was composed" 傳聞代宗欲巡幸江陵，故有此作.[257]

[256] *DSXZ*, 12.1272.
[257] Zhu Heling 朱鶴齡 (1606-1683), *Du Gongbu shiji jizhu* 杜工部詩集輯註, punctuated by Han Chengwu 韓成武 et al. (Baoding: Hebei Daxue chubanshe, 2009), 10.414.

However, there is no record in major historiographical sources that Emperor Daizong planned a visit to Jiangling during his refuge in Shanzhou. Moreover, even if there was rumor circulating at the time about a possible imperial visit to Jiangling, this is nowhere implied or mentioned in Du Fu's poem. This is to say, the attribution of the poem "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" to the year 763 is mostly a matter of speculation, upon which a backstory is constructed to explain its obvious contradiction with the earlier poem. This is elaborately explained and made explicit by Pu Qilong, who comment is revealing:

> In "Establishing a Capital, Twelve Couplets," His Lordship [i.e., Du Fu] strongly criticizes the proposal concerning Jiangling. However, when we consider this poem, which appears to encourage the imperial carriage to advance, it is possible that, upon first hearing news of the emperor's flight to Shan, he imagined the Tibetan invaders to be wild and rampageous, deeply fearing that the imperial carriage might be displaced. As a result, he likely conceived the idea of temporarily avoiding the invaders' sharp edge. This view was indeed driven by his feelings of loyalty and affection. How could it be that he is contradicting his earlier argument?
>
> 公作《建都》十二韻，大以江陵之舉為非。茲顧若為勸駕者，蓋以初聞幸陝之信，懸揣蕃寇披猖，深懼乘輿播越，姑結為遠避其鋒之想。亦忠愛之心所迫耳，豈自背其初論哉？[258]

As Pu Qilong's comment makes clear, the dating of "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" and the untenable claim about its historical context have been driven by anxiety over its deviation from the orthodox Confucian perspective presented in "Establishing a Capital."

[258] Pu Qilong, *Du Du xinjie*, 5.737.

Ultimately, Du Fu's commentators sought to resolve the contradiction by establishing a temporal gap between the two compositions and offering explanations grounded in shifting historical circumstances.

In fact, the traditional dating and interpretation of "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" lack internal evidence. Indeed, the poem contains few historical references, with the exception of one line, which Du Fu's commentators have largely dismissed, as it does not align with interpretations that support their agenda. This is line 9, "Arms and soldiers have been dispatched by imperial command" 甲兵分聖旨, which almost certainly refers to the establishment of the Army of Eternal Peace 永平軍 in Jiangling following its designation as the southern capital in 760.[259] This is the only occasion from this period when the emperor allocated military force to Jiangling. Yet, Du Fu's commentators interpret this line and the following one as referring to the appointment of Wei Boyu 衛伯玉 (?-776) as the governor of Jingzhou, an event that occurred in 763, to facilitate their association of this poem with Emperor Daizong's flight to Shanzhou in the same year. There are two problems with this reading. The first is that the allotment of "arms and soldiers" 甲兵 is left unexplained, which is obviously not the same as the appointment of a governor. The second is that it requires taking the term *jushou* 居守 in the following line as referring to the guardian of Jingzhou, while the term in other sources almost exclusively refers to the role of one who is left behind to take charge of the capital during the emperor's time away. By contrast, if we take seriously the reference to the establishment of the Army of Eternal Peace,

[259] "In 760 (the first year of the Shangyuan era), Lü Yin first proposed the establishment of Jingzhou as the Southern Capital. The emperor approved the request by imperial edict. Accordingly, Jingzhou was renamed Jiangling Prefecture, with Lü Yin appointed as its prefect. A force of ten thousand Yongping troops was stationed there to guard the strategic corridor between Wu and Shu." [上元元年] 諲始建請荊州置南都，詔可。於是更號江陵府，以諲為尹，置永平軍萬人，遏吳、蜀之衝. See *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (hereafter *XTS*), compiled by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 140.4649.

which would place the poem shortly after Jiangling's elevation to the status of the southern capital in 760, lines 9-10 would make perfect sense and align closely with the eagerness conveyed throughout the poem: now that armies have been assigned to the newly designated capital, the role of the regent, or stay-behind guard, can be entrusted to a noble minister. This arrangement will allow the emperor to set off soon.

Hence, it is highly likely that "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" was written not long after Jiangling's designation as the southern capital in 760, and relatively close in time to the composition of "Establishing a Capital." This is further supported by the echoes between the two poems, despite their differing stances on the same issue. In addition to the shared and effective use of directional terms—as previously noted—there are also linguistic and imagistic resonances throughout both texts. For example, the description of the establishment of a new capital as getting a "share" 分 of imperial symbolism or military forces is seen in lines 5-6 of the first poem, "Establish a capital to have a share of the high gate towers, A decree is sent down to open up the Gate of Jing" 建都分魏闕，下詔辟荊門, and similarly in line 9 of the second poem, "Arms and soldiers have been dispatched by imperial command" 甲兵分聖旨. Besides, "Cloud Terrace" in line 3, "A proposal was discussed on the Cloud Terrace" 議在雲臺上, reappears in "Make haste to set off with the guards of the Cloud Terrace" 早發雲臺仗 (line 11) in the second poem. Moreover, both poems adopt the image of the fish in Du Fu's self-representation. In "Establishing a Capital," he describes himself as one who has slipped through the net, confessing, "Slipped through the net, I am unworthy of the special favor" 漏網辱殊恩 (line 14), while in "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling," he projects himself in the image of the "stranded fish" longing for imperial favor, with the final line reading: "May the waves of your grace revive the stranded fish" 恩波起涸鱗.

The preceding discussions are not merely intended to argue for the proximity of the compositional dates of the two poems. The larger point is that "Establishing a Capital" and "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" were likely written in response to the same event—the designation of Jiangling as the southern capital. Moreover, their contrasting approaches are not primarily due to changing circumstances, but rather reflect the shifting roles and perspectives that Du Fu adopts. As one who consciously edits his works and compiles his own collection, Du Fu does not feel obliged to address his inconsistency. Unlike his later commentators who views him as the poet sage whose works always impart paradigmatic moral values, he sees no problem in adopting either the role of a virtuous minister or that of a court poet writing panegyric pieces. In both cases, poetry served as a vehicle for him perform and maintain his identity as a scholar-official, and to engage with the social and political realms he felt both connected to and alienated from.

For Du Fu, public and private concerns coexist rather than conflict with one another. In fact, the expression of public concerns itself often serves as a form of self-promotion. In both poems, Du Fu eventually turns to himself: one laments his exile, while the other more explicitly expresses his hope for the bestowal of imperial favor. Du Fu's commentators, emphasizing Du Fu's concern for the public good, read the "stranded fish" in the final line of "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling" as referring to the straitened common people waiting to be revived by the emperor's overflowing grace. Given that Jingzhou was a relatively peaceful region unscathed by internal rebellions or external threats, referring to people in that area as "stranded fish" seem a bit out of place. Rather than a general, unspecified reference, the term is more likely to refer to Du Fu himself, given that the verb *qi* 起 can mean both to revive and to call to office. Earlier I have elaborated on Du Fu's drawing upon the tradition of court poetry in his

"Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling." A customary practice of court poetry is to end with an expression of humility, in which the poet acknowledges his own lack of talent. Du Fu adheres to this convention by turning back to himself in the poem's closing lines—but with a subtle twist: he is not even a humble court poet, but one alienated from the court and longing for imperial grace. Ultimately, by writing the two poems in response to Jiangling's designation as the southern capital, Du Fu skillfully intertwines a personal narrative of dislocation with broader public concerns, seeking to maintain a connection to the cultural elite, even from the periphery of official power.

Disrupted Communication and Misinformation

If the smooth flow of information reflects the normal functioning of the empire, the disruption of communication lines signals its disintegration. During Du Fu's exile on the empire's margins, even obtaining up-to-date news was often difficult due to the disruption of established information networks. The breakdown of information channels is captured in a number of Du Fu's poems:

烽火連三月，Beacon fires were lit for three months in a row,

家書抵萬金。A letter from home is worth ten thousand in cash.[260]

數州消息斷，From several prefectures, news has been cut off.

[260] "Springtime Gaze" 春望, *DFQJJZ*, 3.779.

愁坐正書空。Sitting in sorrow, I write in the air.[261]

Du Fu not only thematizes the disruption of communication infrastructure in his poems, but he makes poetry the means of staying connected to the world and the broader community. In addition to writing in response to the news he receives, he also composes poems when he is unable to access the latest updates or feels disoriented by the unreliability of the information he hears. As such, his poetry became intimately intertwined with a compromised communication network.

An example of Du Fu using poetry to trace contemporary events is a series of poems he composed following the Tibetan occupation of Chang'an and Emperor Daizong's flight to Shanzhou in 763—an event introduced earlier in the discussion of "Anticipating an Imperial Visit to Jiangling." At the time, Du Fu was displaced in eastern Sichuan due to local rebellions.

巴山 Ba's Mountains[262]

巴山遇中使，In the mountains of Ba, I encountered an imperial envoy,

云自陕城來。Who told me he had come from the city of Shan.

盜賊還奔突，The rebels continue their wild rampage,

4 乘輿恐未回？I fear the imperial carriage has not yet returned.

天寒召伯樹，The cold sky looms over Duke Shao's tree,[263]

[261] "Facing Snow" 對雪, *DFQJJZ*, 3.748. *Shu kong* 書空 alludes to a story from the *Shishuo Xinyu* in which Yin Hao 殷浩 (?-356), after being demoted and exiled, would trace the characters *duo duo guai shi* 咄咄怪事 ("how absurd!") in the air. This phrase later became an idiom expressing bewilderment or indignation. *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 28.865.

[262] *DFQJJZ*, 10.2979.

[263] It is said that the Duke of Shao adjudicated legal cases beneath a birchleaf pear tree 甘棠. After his death, the tree was commemorated and became a landmark honoring his rule. The Duke of Shao's tree is located in the

地闊望仙臺。The vast earth stretches at the Terrace of Gazing at the Immortal.[264]

狼狽風塵裏，Stumbling in panic amid wind and dust,

8 群臣安在哉。Where are the many courtiers?

早花 Early Flowers[265]

西京安穩未？Is the western capital at peace yet?

不見一人來。Not a single person has come from there.

臘月巴江曲，In the twelfth month, by the bend of the Ba River,

4 山花已自開。Mountain flowers have already bloomed on their own.

盈盈當雪杏，Graceful and bright, apricots bloom against the snow,

豔豔待春梅。Gorgeous and vibrant, plum blossoms await the coming spring.

直苦風塵暗，I am troubled only by the haze of wind and dust,

8 誰憂客鬢催。Who worries about the quick graying of this sojourner's temple-hair?

These two poems, written close in time, form an interesting pair to be read together. The first poem was composed upon encountering an envoy from the displaced court in Shan, who brought news about the flight of the emperor and the rebels' continued ravage. After the report from the envoy in line 3, line 4 expresses Du Fu's concern about the uncertain situation at the present

southwestern corner of Shanzhou. *Maoshi Zhengyi* 毛詩正義, commentary by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200), sub-commentary by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 2000), 1.91 (*Mao.16*).

[264] The Terrace of Gazing at the Immortal is said to have been built at the site where Emperor Wen of the Han visited the Lord Above the River 河上公 to offer sacrifices after the latter's ascension to Heaven. The terrace lies thirteen leagues southwest of Shanzhou.

[265] *DFQJJZ*, 10.3014.

moment, given the lapse of time since the envoy departed from the court to travel to the far western region. In the second half of the poem, Du Fu envisions the desolate surrounding where the displaced Emperor Daizong found himself, and, in the final line, accuses the various officials—civilian and military—for their neglect of duties and failure to protect the emperor and the royal family. As a response to the latest news Du Fu receives, the poem is primarily to demonstrate his concern about the development of the Tibetan invasion, more than to offer wisdom or informative judgment about contemporary events. Even his critical evaluation of the myriad officials in the closure very much echoes received information. According to historical sources, "when the Emperor Daizong fled to Shanzhou, officials hided themselves and ran away, the Six Armies scattered and escaped" 代宗出幸陝州，官吏藏竄，六軍逃散.[266] This must have been a notorious incident at the time, something Du Fu may have learned about from the imperial envoy he met.

If the composition of the first poem is prompted by news brought by a palace envoy, the occasion for the composition of the second poem is the lack of updated news. In many ways, the second poem echoes the first, making it a kind of companion piece. Not only do both poems use the same rhyme—with *lai* 來 being the first rhyme word in both poems—but in terms of their subject matter, the second one is very much a follow-up on the first. It similarly opens with a couplet that foregrounds people—especially envoys or travelling officials—as sources of information, but in this case, it is the absence of one coming from the court that distresses Du Fu, who is anxious to learn the situation of the capital city. Whereas in "Ba's Mountains," news Du Fu heard inspires his imagination of the emperor's displaced state, in "Early Flowers," the lack of news forces him to turn to his immediate surrounding in eastern Sichuan, as he notices the

[266] *ZZTJ*, 223.7151.

quiet blooming of early flowers in the mountains—the first signs of spring. However, if the arrival of spring typically evokes melancholy over the passage of time, Du Fu fails to generate such customary sentiments. As the final couplet suggests, they have been displaced by more urgent concerns. Thus, like the first poem, the second also concludes with "wind and dust" 風塵—a reference to the ongoing strife that weighs on Du Fu's thoughts.

In both poems, Du Fu's longing for news about the court and the capital is emphasized through references to his current location in the distant eastern Shu region, where spatial isolation often hinders or delays the flow of information. This is reflected in the mention of "Ba's mountains" in the first poem and the depiction of mountain flowers by "the bend of the Ba River" in the second. In fact, in the remote, secluded area of Shu, news did arrive late. The capital Chang'an, lost to the Tibetans in the tenth month of 763, was soon recaptured, and, in the twelfth month of the same year when Du Fu composed the poem "Early Flowers," the imperial retinue already set off from Shanzhou to return to Chang'an. Deprived of timely access to news from the Central Plain, Du Fu turns to poetry as a means of expressing his anxiety, desperately attempting to keep up with the unfolding events of his time.

Du Fu's engagement with the information network through poetry prompted him to transgress formal conventions and reshape the poetic medium itself. For a regulated verse, a four-stage progression is widely followed in the Tang: *qi* (to begin), *cheng* (to continue), *zhuan* (to make a turn), and *he* (to conclude). Coupled with this structural rule is another formal rule regarding the alternation of nonparallel and parallel couplets. The norm is to begin with a nonparallel couplet, proceeds through two parallel couplets, and conclude with another nonparallel couplet.[267] Du Fu's "Early Flowers" presents a variation in terms of both rules. While the opening couplet of a

[267] For a discussion of the structural rules of pentasyllabic regulated verse, see *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*, edited by Zong-qi Cai (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), Chapter 8, 161-180.

regulated verse typically sets the time, place, and theme for the entire poem, Du Fu begins his poem with a couplet too abrupt and unexpected to serve as an opening: “Is the western capital at peace yet? Not a single person has come from there.” This sudden, offhand question, phrased in straightforward and prosaic language, bespeaks Du Fu’s anxiousness. It is as if he was too impatient to write a proper opening, but had to directly get to his point. On the other hand, the second couplet, which denotes time and place and is written in nonparallel form—again, a violation of the formal rule—resembles a traditional opening more than the first couplet does. Following this, the paralleled images normally constitute the middle couplets of a regulated verse is now delayed and condensed in the third couplet alone. The final couplet returns to the human world and the poet’s present condition as prescribed by conventions, but its adoption of the parallel form again presents an abnormality.

Thus, the poem “Early Flowers” demonstrates how Du Fu’s engagement with a disrupted information network through poetry reconfigures the traditional structure of regulated verse. In the closing couplet, he reveals that his anxiety over the disorder in the capital has superseded the customary emotional responses to the passing season, as prescribed by literary tradition. Given the poem’s deviation from established norms, it can be understood as an extended enactment of its final couplet: a disruption of traditional poetic structure driven by the desire to engage with the information network and stay updated on current events—an impulse expressed from the very beginning.

The abrupt opening of “Early Flowers” positions the poem as a follow-up to prior information—either news Du Fu had received or an earlier composition of his—which gives the poem a sense of continuity within a broader network of ideas and information. This responsive and interconnected quality is also manifested in other poems addressing contemporary events,

including several composed around the same time as "Early Flowers" (or shortly thereafter) concerning the Tibetan capture of Chang'an in 763. One such poem is "Getting Rid of My Worries" 遣憂, which begins with:

亂離知又甚，I have learned that turmoil and separations have worsened even more,

消息苦難真。The news I hear is difficult to verify, which troubles me deeply.[268]

As in "Early Flowers," the opening couplet here is once again too abrupt to serve as a proper introduction. This effect is heightened by the adverb *you* 又 ("even more" or "once again"), which frames the poem as a sequel to earlier ideas or works. The Tibetan invasion of Chang'an took place six months after the suppression of the An Lushan rebellion, triggering another wave of disorder in the Tang state after only a brief period of respite. This historical context informs the first line of "Getting Rid of My Worries," with many of Du Fu's earlier poems about "turmoil and separations" 亂離 serving as its literary backdrop.

A very similar opening that foregrounds the recurrence or continuation of chaos, as well as the disorienting effect of unproven information can be found in fourth poem of "Springtime Grief, Five Poems" 傷春五首, whose opening stanza reads:

再有朝廷亂，Once again, the court has fallen into chaos,

難知消息真。It is difficult to determine whether the news is true.

近傳王在洛，Recent rumors say that the emperor is in Luoyang,

[268] *DFQJJZ*, 10.2976.

復道使歸秦。And then it is said that envoys have returned to Qin.[269]

Like the adverb *you* 又 in the previous quote, the phrase "once again" 再有, carrying a strong emotional tone, similarly frames the poem as a continuation of an ongoing conversation. As mentioned earlier, the capital Chang'an was recovered shortly after its fall to the Tibetans in the tenth month of 763, and by the twelfth month of that year, the imperial carriage had returned to Chang'an. However, accurate information about this event did not reach the far-flung Shu region until the spring of 764. Even when Du Fu wrote this poem in the spring of 764, Emperor Daizong's return to Chang'an—suggested by line 4—remained just one version of the story. The other version, claiming the court had moved to Luoyang, was indeed mere rumor: Emperor Daizong did not relocate to Luoyang after his flight to Shanzhou, despite some court ministers' proposal to do so.[270]

Du Fu's engagement with the unreliable flow of information and his poetry's embeddedness in a fragile information network is also evident in the poem he composed upon hearing relatively credible news about the recovery of the capital, Chang'an, shortly after his composition of "Springtime Grief, Five Poems."

收京 Retaking the Capital[271]

復道收京邑，And then it is said that the capital was recovered,

[269] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3042.
[270] The Tibetan invasion and occupation of Chang'an led to widespread public and court criticism of Cheng Yuanzhen 程元振 (?-764), who had initially suppressed information about the threat and had sown mistrust between Emperor Daizong and his military commanders by slandering key generals. Fearing retaliation, Cheng attempted to persuade the emperor to relocate the capital to Luoyang. However, this plan was ultimately halted when Guo Ziyi submitted a memorial opposing the move. *XTS*, 137.4604-5.
[271] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3049.

兼聞殺犬戎。I also heard that the barbarian Rong people were killed.[272]

衣冠卻扈從，Those in official robes and caps escorted the emperor after all,

4 車駕已還宮。His Majesty's carriage has returned to the imperial palace.

剋復誠如此，If the capital is truly reclaimed like this,

扶持在數公。It is due to the support and assistance of several dukes.

莫令回首地，Do not let the place where they turned back in longing,

8 慟哭起悲風。Once again witness the rise of bitter weeping in the mournful wind.

While titling the poem with "Retaking the Capital" seems to suggest the certainty of this event, the poem itself reveals Du Fu still grappling with the disorienting effects of news whose credibility is difficult to assess. As in the previously discussed poems, the opening couplet is again unusually abrupt. Commentators read the first line as referring to a second recovery of the capital—taking *fu* 復 to mean "once again," with the first instance being the recapture of Chang'an from the rebels led by An Lushan and Shi Siming. However, given that *fu* modifies *dao* 道 rather than the act of retaking the capital, and that *fu* is often used as a connective or continuative adverb without necessarily implying repetition, I render the phrase as "And then it is said," whose function is similar to its role in the couplet quoted earlier from "Springtime Grief": "Recent rumors say that the emperor is in Luoyang, And then it is said that envoys have returned to Qin" 近傳王在洛，復道使歸秦. Thus, the opening line frames the news of the capital's recovery as just one in a series of updates, each presenting a different scenario.

[272] The "barbarian Rong" here refers to the Tibetans.

In the second line, the killing of barbarian foreign troops is once again presented as hearsay. In fact, the recovery of Chang'an was achieved by Guo Ziyi primarily through strategies and tactics, rather than by military force.[273] Hence, again, the information Du Fu acquired was not reliable, and he did not shun from incorporating unverified information into his poetry. The bewildering impact of uncertain news sources is also seen in the third couplet. The term *cheng* 誠, a conditional marker meaning "if indeed," implies that Du Fu is not completely certain about the situation. At the same time, he attributes the restoration of imperial power—if indeed true—to the accomplishments of a few prestigious ministers—men such as Guo Ziyi. Following that, the final couplet expresses a mild remonstrance, admonishing the emperor and those in power to be mindful and to not let history repeat itself.

Thus, the poem simultaneously offers Du Fu's judgments and comments on the recovery of the capital while demonstrating his engagement with a constantly shifting web of information, where truth and falsehood are intermingled. The poem's openness to and continuity with a broader discourse of ideas and information are not only apparent in the abrupt opening, but also discernible in the more nuanced implications Du Fu embeds. An example of this can be found in line 3. While it is perfectly natural for the various officials to follow the imperial carriage on its return journey—a fact that might not even warrant mention—Du Fu highlights this detail with the word *que* 卻, meaning "nevertheless," or "after all," which introduces an element of unexpected contrast. In fact, this line must be understood in relation to the specific historical context mentioned earlier: when Emperor Daizong fled the capital in the face of an impending Tibetan occupation, the various officials as well as military generals escaped rather than coming

[273] Guo Ziyi rallied scattered troops, advanced strategically from Shangzhou 商州 to Lantian 藍田, and used deception and a small force to intimidate the Tibetans—ultimately reclaiming Chang'an without a battle, as the Tibetans fled. See *ZZTJ*, 223.7150-4.

to his aid. As previously discussed in connection with "Ba's Mountains," Du Fu may have learned of this through a court envoy. In the same poem, he expresses disapproval of the ministers' failure to fulfill their duties: "Stumbling in panic amid wind and dust, / Where are the many courtiers?" 狼狽風塵裏，群臣安在哉? Returning to "Retaking the Capital," the use of the word *que* in line 3 thus conveys a note of sarcasm, directed at the officials who abandoned the emperor during his time of peril but rejoined him only once the threat has subsided. The full significance of this line—and its subtle implications—becomes apparent only when the poem is situated within a broader context of information circulation and interpreted as part of an ongoing political conversation.

The preceding discussions of Du Fu's poems written in response to contemporary events highlight their immediate and contextualized nature. While classical Chinese poetry is generally composed on set occasions, with each poem being an integrated, self-contained unit,[274] a notable portion of Du Fu's poems are open to and built upon a fragmented and fluctuating network of information. This ongoing engagement with the unfolding events of his time makes Du Fu's poems similar to modern blog posts, as both are frequently updated with new posts or compositions, reflecting a desire to stay connected to happenings of the world. The key difference, of course, is that unlike the easy accessibility and rapid dissemination of modern mass media, Du Fu was writing in a relatively isolated state, with his poems shaped by disruptions in the information network. Moreover, rather than interacting with an existing platform, Du Fu had to transform his poetry into his own platform. Since his poems did not enjoy

[274] A special case is the subgenre known as "exchange poems," or *zengda shi* 贈答詩, in which a poem is written in response to another composition. However, even exchange poems, despite their inherently intertextual nature, largely adhere to the same structural conventions that govern classical Chinese poetry.

wide circulation, he was engaging not only with a real audience, but more importantly, with an imagined one.

The compromised information network serving as a fragile foundation for Du Fu's poems is evident not only in his dramatization of his anxiety over the veracity of the news he receives, but also in poems composed from unverified or unverifiable knowledge, or even misinformation. For instance, Du Fu has a series of three quatrains, each dedicated to a contemporary incident based on what he has heard. The subject matter of these three poems is relatively independent from one another: a series of riots in the Shu region, a heart-wrenching tale of northern families who fled to Shu seeking refuge, and the brutal actions of palace armies who killed men and took women captive. Du Fu's accounts of these episodes are not corroborated by other sources, whether official or unofficial histories. This is not surprising, especially in the case of the second poem, which tells the story of ordinary people rather than important state affairs and thus does not merit attention in official histories. However, even the first poem's references to local revolts in Shu, which led to the killing of prefects, are not attested in any other sources. The poem reads:

三絕句 Three Quatrains[275]

I

前年渝州殺刺史，Last year, the prefect of Yu Prefecture was killed,[276]

今年開州殺刺史。This year, the prefect of Kai Prefecture was killed.[277]

群盜相隨劇虎狼，The many bandits, following one another and more ferocious than tigers and wolves,

[275] *DFQJJZ*, 12.3466.
[276] Yu Prefecture corresponds to modern-day Chongqing.
[277] Kai Prefecture is equivalent to Kaixian 開縣 in present-day Chongqing.

食人更肯留妻子。Devoured people, showing no mercy even to wives and children.

For Du Fu's commentators who view his poems as truthful records of the time, the unverified incidents in the first couplet present, at once, a curious problem, yet one that is easily explained away and, therefore, not much of a problem at all. An extreme stance is taken by Shi Gu 師古 (active during the Southern Song dynasty), who fabricated certain facts to lend credence to Du Fu's poems, a stance that has since been discredited by other commentators.[278] The mainstream view, however, is that Du Fu's poems serve as supplements to various histories, addressing the omissions within them.[279] This is plausible, given that the Tang histories are not always comprehensive, particularly with regard to regional histories. However, it is equally plausible that Du Fu's knowledge may have come from unreliable sources. This remains difficult to determine without the discovery of new evidence. Nonetheless, we can point to other examples that are undeniably based on false information.

A series of twelve quatrains was composed by Du Fu during his stay in Kuizhou, dated to 767, allegedly in immediate response to hearing that the military commissioners of the Hebei prefectures had presented themselves at court. Although the An Lushan rebellion officially ended with the death of Shi Chaoyi 史朝義 in 763 and the surrender of the various prefectures previously controlled by the rebels, the Hebei prefectures largely remained autonomous, refraining from paying tribute or making regular visits to the court due to a lack of trust. Therefore, the news of the military commissioners of Hebei attending the imperial court must

[278] See *DFQJJZ*, 12.3466-7. For further examples of fabricated historical accounts and forged sources in the commentary tradition on Du Fu, see Mo Lifeng 莫礪鋒, "Dushi 'Wei Su zhu' yanjiu" 杜詩"偽蘇註"研究, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 (01) 1991: 66-7.

[279] Xia Lishu 夏力恕 (1690-1754), for instance, regards these three poems as "truthful records of the time, filling the lacunae of official histories" 蓋當時實錄，可備史書. *DFQJJZ*, 12.3469.

have been exhilarating for Du Fu. Nevertheless, there is no record of this occasion in any historical sources. In fact, the visits of military commissioners to the court are typically noted in official histories. For example, the *Jiu Tangshu* records that in the first month of 767, the commissioner of Huainan 淮南, Li Zhongchen 李忠臣 (716-784), paid a court visit. Additionally, in the third and eighth months of the same year, the military commissioners of Biansong 汴宋 and Fengxiang 鳳翔 also attended the court. If the leaders of the Heibei prefectures had indeed paid their respects at court, it would have been too significant an event to be omitted by historians. Therefore, in this case, even Du Fu's commentators generally concede that it was likely the result of misinformation on his part.

Despite their varied focus, the twelve poems are arranged to suggest a narrative progression: beginning with Du Fu's exhortations to the local governors before their arrival at court, moving to his celebration of their presence as a symbol of long-awaited imperial unity, followed by eulogies of the emperor, and concluding with praise for the achievements of two prominent generals, Li Guangbi and Guo Ziyi. Interwoven throughout this narrative is Du Fu's lament over his own exile. The third poem is particularly worth quoting, partly because it specifies the source from which Du Fu obtained the news.

承聞河北諸道節度入朝歡喜口號絕句十二首[280]

Upon Hearing that the Military Commissioners of the Various Circuits of Hebei Had Entered the Court, I Was Overjoyed and Orally Composed Twelve Quatrains

III

[280] *DFQJJZ*, 15.4511. For a discussion of oral compositions in the Tang, see Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper*, Chapter 3, 126-176.

喧喧道路多歌謠，The noisy roads are filled with songs and ditties,

河北將軍盡入朝。Saying that the generals of Hebei have all entered the court.

始是乾坤王室正，Only now have the whole realm and imperial house been restored to order,

卻交江漢客魂銷。Yet this causes the traveler by the Yangtze and Han rivers to waste away in grief.

Two points in particular are worth noting in this poem. The first is the identification of street gossip and children's ditties as sources of news (lines 1-2), suggesting an informal, often unverified form of news transmission that takes place in public spaces. While lacking the precision of institutional channels, these songs and ditties circulating in informal spaces reveal the collective desires and popular sentiments of a community. The second point is the juxtaposition between a propitious moment for the Tang state and Du Fu's grief over his own exile. This contrast is particularly striking to Du Fu's commentators, as it does not align with their image of him as the most public-minded poet, whose sole concern is the fate of the state and for whom any self-centered concerns would be deemed unacceptable.

Wang Hao 汪灝 (1658-?), for instance, interprets the final line as speaking about the sudden relief of Du Fu's melancholy: "Upon hearing that the various former rebels have all submitted, his sorrow as a displaced sojourner was instantly assuaged" 聞群叛歸命，客愁頓減.[281] This interpretation involves a highly unusual reading of the phrase *xiaohun* 銷魂, which typically denotes a state of being beside oneself—either overwhelmed by grief or, in later usage, ecstatic,

[281] *DFQJJZ*, 15.4512.

particularly in contexts associated with sensual pleasure. Chen Shi 陳式 (1613-?), on the other hand, takes the ending as speaking about the past, before the former rebel leaders' purported submission to the Tang court. He says, "To 'waster away in grief' refers to previous times. It means that it has been a long time since he [Du Fu] has been looking forward to the restoration of the Tang state" 銷是銷在從前，謂望王室之正已非一日.[282] However, both Chen Shi's and Wang Hao's interpretations fail to take serious account of the transitional word, *que* 卻, which clearly suggests a contrastive turn from the preceding line. Moreover, with the temporal frame set by line 3—"only now"—there is no indication in line 4 that suggests a change of time frame.

For these commentators, the problem is not whether Du Fu's lament over his estrangement is appropriate in itself; rather, what troubles them is that he does so in such a special context—a festive and promising occasion for the Tang state. For Du Fu, however, even as he shares in the joy and excitement stirred by the encouraging news, the event symbolizing the restoration of Tang imperial rule does not ultimately console him, given his displaced condition. Indeed, this poem most clearly dramatizes the connection between Du Fu's poetic engagement with public affairs and his reflection on his own isolated exile: two closely interwoven themes that underpin many of his poetic responses to contemporary events, including those discussed in this chapter. For instance, in "Block the Luzi Pass," Du Fu proposes a preemptive military strategy, followed by an appeal for someone to "shout to the emperor's gatekeeper"—a poignant gesture that underscores his lack of access to the center of power. In "Establishing a Capital," he admonishes the throne while recalling his past remonstration and subsequent exile. And in "Ba's Mountains," he voices concern for the displaced emperor even as he himself sojourns in the remote Shu region. Du Fu's eagerness to respond to unfolding events through poetry and his acute awareness

[282] *DFQJJZ*, 15.4512.

of his own displacement are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. His poetic engagement with a disrupted and fragmented information network was driven by his isolation; in turn, poetry became the space through which he sought to participate in public life and remain "connected"—both literally and symbolically—to a world from which he had been cut off.

For an event as significant as the visit of the governors of Hebei prefectures to the imperial court—an event that, if it had really happened, would have been sensational at the time—Du Fu would very likely have had the chance to later learn that the information he initially acquired was inaccurate. Although Du Fu often spoke of his continual editing of his own works—revising, copying, and compiling—he did not remove poems later revealed to be based on misinformation, nor did he revise them retrospectively to reflect updated knowledge, just as he did not feel compelled to justify or reconcile the contradictory positions he took regarding the establishment of Jiangling as the southern capital. This suggests that the significance of Du Fu's poetic responses to contemporary events extends beyond their factual accuracy or the coherence of his political stance, pointing instead to more complex modes of political engagement and poetic creation.

The poems discussed in this chapter not only attest to Du Fu's steadfast devotion to the state but also reflect his effort to sustain his sense of self and cope with an identity crisis during his extended exile on the empire's margins. At a time when regular communication channels were cut off or fragmented, Du Fu transformed poetry into a space where he could perform his identity as a member of the literate elite and participate in a virtual community he hoped to be a part of—by adopting the roles of a scholar-official, court poet, or exiled minister. For Du Fu, public and private concerns were closely intertwined. He saw no problem in writing eulogistic pieces as a form of self-promotion while simultaneously offering remonstration, or in lamenting his own

exile while celebrating favorable situations in the state. Indeed, unlike his late imperial commentators and critics, Du Fu lived in a time when the identity of the cultural elites was inextricably tied to office-holding, with no clear dividing line between public and private concerns. Thus, it is not surprising that the desire to find a place for himself and sustain his identity as a literatus—underlying much of Du Fu's work—is not in opposition to the public good but is often expressed through engagement with public affairs.

Conclusion

Aiming to recover another crucial aspect of the historical context that shaped Du Fu's writing, this chapter has focused on his poetic engagement with news—particularly his response to a disrupted information network. While his poems responding to public affairs are often cited as evidence of his concern for the fate of the state and his political acumen, I emphasize their performative dimension, arguing instead that they arise from his efforts to assert his cultural identity and seek belonging during a period of isolated exile. The poems discussed in this chapter reveal a wide range of attitudes and a multiplicity of roles that Du Fu adopts—far more complex than the traditional view of him as the "poet-historian." Yet it is precisely his situational, contingent, and urgent responses to the uncertain flux of information that signal a deep desire to participate in the social world of the cultural elite from which he had become estranged.

While previous chapters have focused largely on space and place as potential anchorages for Du Fu's life of wandering, this chapter has revealed the temporal framework underlying many of his poems. At the same time, the discussions here demonstrate that Du Fu's poetic responses to news are fundamentally about his engagement with imagined or symbolic "communities"—a

different kind of "place" within the broader social structure, one essential to maintaining social standing and his sense of self. The poems discussed in this chapter are not addressed to specific recipients but instead target a broader audience: those in power, such as potential political patrons; his fellow literati; future readers; and, most significantly, Du Fu himself. Indeed, during his exile, with limited social and material resources, poetry became a vital means of wielding and displaying the cultural capital he still possessed—and thus an act through which he grappled with an ongoing identity crisis. Ultimately, Du Fu's poetic engagement with news reshapes the poetic medium itself, prompting him to move beyond established occasions, transgress formal conventions, and transform classical verse from self-contained units into responsive acts of expression—open to and deeply entangled with the broader world of information circulation.

Chapter Four

Gazes from Kuizhou:

Disappeared Vantage Point, Fantasized Center, and Poetry as a Surrogate Homeland

One day in the autumn of 767, Du Fu took a walk near his dwelling in Kuizhou. Upon reaching the base of the hill north of his garden, he composed a poem that begins not with the present moment, but with a recollection of a past ascent of Mount Tai in his younger days. The juxtaposition of two ascents—one from the past and one from the present—highlights their contrasting visions, revealing broader shifts in Du Fu's perception and conception of the empire as he moved deeper into its peripheries.

又上後園山腳 Once Again Climbing the Base of the Hill by My Rear Garden[283]

昔我游山東，In the past, I roamed East of the Mountains,[284]

憶戲東嶽陽。I recall amusing myself south of the Eastern Marchmount.

窮秋立日觀，Late in autumn, I stood on top of the Sunrise Viewing Peak,

矯首望八荒。Raising my head, I gazed toward the eight expanses.

朱崖著毫髮，The Vermilion Cliff was attached like a fine hair,[285]

碧海吹衣裳。The wind from the bluish-green sea blew my robe.

蓐收困用事，Rushou struggled in managing affairs,[286]

[283] *DFQJJZ*, 16.4659.
[284] *Shandong* 山東 in Tang dynasty refers to the large area east of Mount Taihang 太行山, including modern Shandong, Hebei, and part of Henan provinces.
[285] The Vermilion Cliff refers to Hainan Island.
[286] Rushou is the god of autumn.

玄冥蔚強梁。Xuanming, with increasing vigor, displayed his brutal strength.[287]

逝水自朝宗，The flowing rivers naturally pay respect to their lord,[288]

鎮石各其方。The quelling stones each reside in their respective quarters.[289]

平原獨憔悴，The central plain alone was ravaged,

農力廢耕桑。Farmers abandoned tilling the soil and growing mulberries.

非關風露凋，This was not due to damage from wind or dew,

曾是戍役傷。But from the harm of frontier duty.

於時國用富，At that time, the state's wealth was abundant,

足以守邊疆。Enough to defend its borders.

朝廷任猛將，The imperial court appointed fierce generals,

遠奪戎虜場。Who conquered distant regions of *rong* and *lu*.[290]

到今事反覆，Now, things have turned upside-down,

故老淚萬行。Elders shed tears in countless streams.

龜蒙不復見，Mount Gui and Mount Meng are no longer seen,[291]

況乃懷舊鄉。How much more, then, my longing for hometown.

肺萎屬久戰，My lungs wither while I suffer from prolonged trembling,

骨出熱中腸。My bones jut out, my innards burn with heat.

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[287] Xuanming is the god of winter. This couplet denotes the change of season, which also bears political significance, as the world of nature and the world of men are thought to be correlated. Winter is often associated with punishment and warfare.
[288] I.e., the rivers all flow into the sea.
[289] "Quelling stones" 鎮石 are also known as "quelling mountains" 鎮山, mountains that were thought to protect a certain region.
[290] *Rong* and *lu* are derogatory terms used for non-Han tribal groups located to the west and north, respectively.
[291] Mount Gui and Mount Meng are two mountains near Mount Tai.

憂來杖匣劍，As sorrow comes, I grip my cased sword,

更上林北岡。And climb once more the hill north of the grove.

瘴毒猿鳥落，Noxious miasma—gibbons and birds fall,

峽乾南日黃。The gorge is dry, and the southern sun has grown dim.

秋風亦已起，The autumn wind has once again risen,

江漢始如湯。The Yangtze and Han rivers begin to boil like hot water.

登高欲有往，Ascending high, I wish to depart,

蕩析川無梁。The world is in upheaval, and the rivers have no bridges.

哀彼遠征人，I mourn for the men who travel far on military service,

去家死路旁。Leaving home, they die by the roadside.

不及父祖塋，They do not make it to their ancestral tombs,

累累塚相當。Their graves pile up one after another.

The first half of the poem, in which Du Fu reminisces a past ascent to Mount Tai when he was young, stages a panoramic view typical of ascending-high (*denggao* 登高) poetry, evoking his "Gazing the Marchmount" 望嶽, an early poem on the same trip to Mount Tai, where he expresses his wish that "One day I will climb up to its unsurpassed summit, In a single glance the numerous mountains will dwindle" 會當凌絕頂，一覽眾山小.[292] The high-spiritedness and the expanded vision that characterize "Gazing the Marchmount" are reproduced in Du Fu's recollection during an ascent in Kuizhou. As he gazes out into the "eight expanses" 八荒 (line

[292] This couplet echoes a passage from the *Mengzi* about Confucius: "When he ascended Mount Tai, the whole realm seemed small" 登太山而小天下. *Mengzi* 7A:24.

4)—a term that calls to mind the ambition of Duke Xiao of Qin to "gather in all within the four seas, annex and swallow up the eight expanses,"[293]—surveys all four directions (lines 5-8), and observes both the center and the peripheries, his vision affirms the vision of imperial space as coterminous with "civilization."

However, this all-encompassing vision of the imperial space is soon shattered as the poem shifts from Du Fu's memory to the present. The expanded perspective afforded by the ascent to Mount Tai prompts reflections on the issues facing the Tang regime at the time—particularly military aggression in the frontier regions. Du Fu begins to perceive signs of impending disorder, which will later fully manifest and strike a devastating blow to the empire. Since the outbreak of the An Lushan rebellion, Mount Tai and its surrounding region can no longer be seen (line 21) as they fell under rebel control and remained under the authority of semi-independent military governors even after the rebellion was quelled. Similarly, Du Fu's hometown, which he longs to return to, remains out of reach (line 22). As Du Fu tours his garden and selects a much humbler spot for an ascent, his vision is one of blockage and confinement: toxic vapors pervading the deep gorges, birds and gibbons sick from the miasma, and the setting sun, which contrasts with the "Sunrise Viewing Peak" in line 3—one of the peaks of Mount Tai and a vantage point for watching the sunrise—perhaps still vivid in his memory. Unlike the refreshing autumn wind on Mount Tai, the autumn wind here in Kuizhou neither dispels the lingering heat nor clears the toxic air. Whereas from Mount Tai Du Fu could once see as far south as the Vermilion Cliff—that is, Hainan Island—all he sees now are the Yangtze and Han Rivers, their violent surging through the fiery southern region seeming to mirror the chaos of the world.

[293] According to Jia Yi's essay "Discoursing on the Faults of Qin" 過秦論: "Duke Xiao of Qin harbored the ambition to gather in all within the four seas and the desire to annex and swallow up the eight expanses" 秦孝公……有囊括四海之意，并吞八荒之心. See Jia Yi, *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校註, commentary by Yan Zhenyi 閻振益 and Zhong Xia 鍾夏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 1.1.

Hence, the interest of this poem lies in Du Fu's self-conscious play with the conventions of ascending-high poetry. The humor deriving from the contrast between the "unsurpassed summit" 絕頂 in "Gazing at the Marchmount" that Du Fu aspires to climb someday and the "foot of the hill" 山腳 where the poet finds himself now is hard to miss. Du Fu refers to his tour to the foot of the hill by his rear garden as "ascending high" *deng gao* 登高 (line 31), invoking the poetic tradition associated with that very term. Nevertheless, the act of invoking and commemorating a previous ascent of a sacred mountain now in a homely setting—as well as the expected failure to reproduce the same vision—make the poem as much a reenactment of this poetic subgenre as a parody of it. The term *dang xi* 蕩析, which appears in the parallel position to *deng gao*, literally meaning "swept apart," calls to mind disturbance and displacement that were taking place on a grand scale at the time. Yet this term is not only Du Fu's diagnosis of his age, but also a characterization of his vision of imperial space which takes on an unstable and fragmented quality.

More broadly, I argue that "Once Again Climbing the Base of the Hill by My Rear Garden" epitomizes Du Fu's evolving vision of the empire—particularly the breakdown of an all-encompassing view of the imperial realm. This shift should be understood in relation to his displacement, migration, and experiences with the peripheries. In Chapter One, I demonstrated how Du Fu departs from traditional travel and excursion poetry as he navigates the unfamiliar territory of the western frontiers. Rather than focusing on sites already recognized as historically and culturally significant, Du Fu emphasizes an unfolding landscape and places of geographical and transportational importance. This marks part of a broader shift from a vertical perspective of the empire—typically from an elevated vantage point that provides an expansive, top-down view—to a horizontal one, where Du Fu engages with the local sphere, traces its connections to

other regions, and allows local topography to mediate his vision of the empire. This transformation, as I will further explore in this chapter, takes shape over the course of Du Fu's prolonged exile and culminates in the poetry he composed in Kuizhou.

I argue that Du Fu's time in Kuizhou, a place even more distant from the heart of Chinese civilization than the Shu region, represents another significant shift in his relationship to the empire—both its center and peripheries—as well as in his evolving conceptions of home. Building on the preceding discussions of "Once Again Climbing the Base of the Hill by My Rear Garden," this chapter examines Du Fu's renegotiation of the center and periphery from his Kuizhou period onward, showing how he complicates or undermines a top-down, all-inclusive spatial vision, turning instead to a horizontal spatiality, manifested in juxtaposition and fragmentation as prominent structural features of his late works. This development, which became most evident in his poetry beginning with his time in Kuizhou, is connected to Kuizhou's unique status in the Tang—a strange combination of cultural isolation and transportational connectivity. However, I argue that the breakdown of a panoramic, organized view does not signify a turn away from the imperial center. On the contrary, Du Fu's attachment to the center not only deepened but even reshaped his sense of home. Accordingly, this chapter will also explore his reconfiguration of various forms of home and belonging: his lost homeland, which became politicized and idealized; his temporary dwellings, where he rarely felt at home; and poetry itself as an alternative, transcendental realm of identity and belonging.

Reframing Imperial Space: The Turn to Local Perspective and Horizontal Spatiality

The argument that, while in Du Fu's early poems, famed sites of cultural or historical significance often provide vantage points for an expansive, organized view of the empire, his post-rebellion works complicate this established pattern is not intended to draw a sharp dividing line between Du Fu's early and late works, nor to imply that he simply abandoned traditional ascending-high poems after the rebellion. During the unsettled years of his displacement, Du Fu continued to visit both renowned sites and obscure places on the margins of the empire, performing ascents and commemorating the occasions through poetry. However, these later works often complicate the conventions of ascending-high poetry rather than merely adhering to them, presenting a vision of the imperial space that is often opaque, ambiguous, or problematic.

In the Chinese literary tradition, poetic vision is rarely—if ever—a direct representation of what the physical eyes perceive. Instead, perception is always mediated by imagination, desire, and textual memory, shaped both by the poet's mentality and the political circumstances of the time.[294] This can be illustrated by an early poem of Du Fu, written in the eleventh year of the Tianbao reign (752), titled "In Response to Several Noblemen's Poems on Climbing the Pagoda of Ci'en Temple" 同諸公登慈恩寺塔. While the poems by other writers on the same occasion all articulate an expansive view, adopt Buddhist imagery and vocabularies, and, in the case of Cen Shen 岑參 (715–770) and Chu Guangxi 儲光羲 (706–760), express a wish for Buddhist enlightenment,[295] Du Fu's poem from the beginning carries a bitterness hardly appropriate for the occasion:

[294] For further discussions, see Kroll, "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High T'ang"; Owen, "The Librarian in Exile"; Tian, *Visionary Journeys*; Shang Wei 商偉, *Tixie mingsheng: cong huanghe lou dao fenghuang tai* 題寫名勝: 從黃鶴樓到鳳凰台 (Beijing: sanlian shudian, 2020).

[295] According to an original note, Gao Shi 高適 and Xue Ju 薛據 had already composed their poems at the time. While Xue Ju's piece has not survived, Gao Shi's poem, along with one by Cen Shen and another by Chu Guangxi, written on the same occasion, has been preserved. The poems of Chu Guangxi, Cen Shen, and Gao Shi are respectively collected in *juan* 138, 198, and 212 of the *QTS*.

高標跨蒼穹， The lofty apex strides across the azure vault,

烈風無時休。 Fierce wind never stops.

自非曠士懷， Not having the heart of a carefree man,

4 登茲翻百憂。 Ascending this pagoda instead brings a hundred worries.

It is not surprising, then, that after describing the ascent and the celestial realm, the poem presents a vision of the terrestrial realm that is utterly shattered:

秦山忽破碎， The Qin mountains suddenly fall apart,

涇渭不可求。 Jing and Wei rivers cannot be sought anymore.

俯視但一氣， Looking down, merely a swathe of mist,

16 焉能辨皇州。 How can I make out the royal district?[296]

迴首叫虞舜， Turning back, I call out to Shun,

蒼梧雲正愁。 The clouds over Cangwu are full of sorrow.[297]

惜哉瑤池飲， Alas, the feast at the Jade Pool—[298]

20 日晏崑崙丘。 The sun is sinking low over Mount Kunlun.

[296] The royal district refers to the capital Chang'an.
[297] Cangwu is Mount Jiuyi 九嶷山 in modern Hunan province. It is said that the sage emperor Shun died in the wilds of Cangwu while taking an inspection tour in the South. He was later buried there.
[298] The Jade Pool is traditionally believed to be the dwelling place of the Queen Mother of the West, where she is said to have once feasted with King Mu of Zhou.

Some commentators argue that Du Fu, in this poem, already perceives signs of impending riots, and that this foresight leads to his fragmented vision of the imperial domain. Others, citing Du Fu's biography, suggest that his frustrated political ambition was what caused his disillusionment. It is worth noting that the pagoda of the Ci'en temple—where biennial *jinshi* graduates inscribe their names—served as a reminder to Du Fu of his own failure in the imperial examinations and his unsuccessful attempts to obtain office. Regardless of which interpretation we favor regarding the causes of Du Fu's fragmented vision, the poem stands out among other ascending-high poems not only because it demonstrates how poetic vision is shaped by a range of factors—personal, political, or otherwise—but also because it reveals the inner workings of poetic vision by staging a moment of crisis within it.

We may thus argue that this poem prefigures the changes that will take place after the rebellion. However, it is closer to a conventional ascending-high poem than to Du Fu's late works. Despite his failed perception, the enumeration of various places—from rivers and mountains near the capital to Cangwu in the south, and finally to the mythical Mount Kunlun in the extreme west—indicates that he clearly knows what ought to be seen. By playing with the tension between presence and absence, or between what should be seen and what is perceived in reality—which has always been a hallmark of the ascending-high genre—and by presenting the breakdown of an expansive vision as a problem, the poem in effect confirms what is supposed to be the norm. In other words, we might read the poem about climbing the pagoda of the Ci'en temple as a negative articulation of the norms of ascending-high poetry—one that exposes the genre's typical vision precisely at the moment of its collapse.

The crisis of an ordered vision encompassing the entire imperial realm, as depicted from the pagoda of the Ci'en temple, differs from the constricted view of the Three Gorges in "Once

Again Climbing the Base of the Hill by My Rear Garden." Where Du Fu departs from a normative ascent in this poem, as well as in other ascending-high poems from his later years, is not just in what is perceived, but in how he perceives. The localities of the outlying regions no longer provide Du Fu unquestioned vantage points. Instead, local topography often blocks an expanded vision or mediates what is captured by it. For Du Fu, it is the vantage point itself that has become the problem.

The restricted outlook Du Fu had from the base of the hill by his rear garden has not only to do with the height of his ascent, but also with the location of Kuizhou and its cultural and political status. Unlike Mount Tai, which boasts a rich cultural history and strong ties to imperial ideology, Kuizhou, situated in the Three Gorges area and the southwestern frontier of the Tang empire, was a region on the outer edges of Han cultural influence. According to early sources, two stories associated with Kuizhou and the Three Gorges area in particular are foundational to later literary imaginations and representations of the region. One is King Xiang of Chu's 楚襄王 dream encounter with the Goddess of Mount Wu 巫山, primarily based on "*Fu* on the Gaotang Shrine" 高唐賦 and "*Fu* on the Goddess" 神女賦 attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 (fl. 298–263 BCE). This story portrays the Three Gorges area as a place of dream tryst as well as misty and protean landscape, highlighting its elusiveness and mysteriousness. The other important figure in the history of Kuizhou is Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (?-36), who, after the fall of the Western Han (202 BC–9 AD) and Wang Mang's interim (9-25), set himself up as the Emperor of Shu 蜀, with the title White Emperor 白帝, after which the White Emperor City was named. This is a story that attests to Kuizhou's long history of military autonomy and defense due to its natural barriers. The topography of the Three Gorges—steep mountains on both sides facing each other, with the

Yangtze River's perilous, rushing torrents cutting through—had made the region a military stronghold since ancient times and a heavily garrisoned area during the Tang.

Geographical isolation and remoteness further reinforce cultural isolation and marginality. Though Du Fu, following in the footsteps of his literary predecessors who wrote about the Three Gorges area, more consciously sought to establish a history for Kuizhou and put in on the literary map—commemorating legendary and historical figures with ties to the region, such as Yu the Great 大禹 and Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (180-234)[299]—this was still not enough to fundamentally alter Kuizhou's status as a cultural hinterland. Unlike Shu, where local culture was not drastically different from the central plain and had long been integrated into Chinese civilization, Kuizhou, located on the southwestern frontier, was a region where Han and non-Han peoples intermixed. The local customs and way of life were utterly foreign to someone from the capital region—a reality Du Fu strove to adapt to, but never fully mastered. On the other hand, the Three Gorges area was located in the middle reaches of the Yangzi River, a main transportation east–west corridor through China. With the advancement of water transportation in the Tang, particularly transportation between the upper and the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, as discussed in Chapter Two, Kuizhou became a major transportation center, connecting Shu in the west and Wu in the east. Thus, Kuizhou was simultaneously a cultural backwater and a transportation juncture. As Gregory Patterson points out, "Kuizhou combined isolation with the promise of connection, frustrating communication and thereby thrusting it into view as a problem and a desire."[300] As I will demonstrate, this peculiar blend of cultural isolation and transportation connectivity has played a crucial role in shaping Du Fu's vision of the empire.

[299] For a discussion of Du Fu's efforts to construct a history for Kuizhou through poetry, see Patterson's article "History Channels: Commemoration and Communication in Du Fu's Kuizhou Poems" in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, and Chapter 2 of his monograph *Elegies for Empire*.
[300] Patterson, "History Channels," in *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, 42.

If Du Fu's limited perspective from the base of the hill behind his garden reflects the humble elevation, the region's isolated topography, and Kuizhou's peripheral place in the empire, then the following poem—written after he climbs the highest tower in White Emperor City—further underscores Kuizhou's obscurity on the imperial map.

白帝城最高楼 The Highest Tower in the White Emperor City[301]

城尖徑昃旌旆愁， At the pointed top of the city wall, the path tilt, banners are sorrowful,[302]
獨立縹緲之飛樓。 I stand alone on the lofty soaring tower.
峽坼雲霾龍虎睡， The gorge splits, clouds conceal dragons and tigers sleeping,
4 江清日抱黿鼉遊。 The river is clear, the sun embraces turtles and alligators swimming.
扶桑西枝對斷石， *Fusang*'s western branches are face to face with broken rocks,[303]
弱水東影隨長流。 The Ruo River's shadow to the east pursues the endless current.[304]
杖藜歎世者誰子， Who is the one leaning on a cane and lamenting the age?
8 泣血迸空回白頭。 Weeping blood that spurts to the sky, I turn my white head.

Like "Once Again Climbing the Base of the Hill by My Rear Garden," this poem similarly plays with the conventions of ascending-high poetry, though in a different way: despite its evocation of an expanded vision that encompasses even the mythical universe, a view of the ordered space of the empire is conspicuously absent. From the outset, we are made aware of the tower's precariousness—its shakiness and indistinct nature, half-visible and half-obscured by clouds and

[301] *DFQJJZ*, 12.3564.
[302] Another possible reading of *jing ze* 徑昃 is that the path is narrow.
[303] *Fusang* is the legendary tree from which the sun is said to rise.
[304] The Ruo River is said to have its source at the base of Mount Kunlun.

hazy vapor—suggesting the unreliability of the vantage point. This unstable standpoint shapes what is seen from the tower in the middle couplets, where the vision is characterized by distorted perceptions and disorientation. As some commentators have noted, the scenes depicted in the second couplet may reflect the poet's fantasy rather than reality: the dragons and tigers are, in fact, knotted tree roots resembling ferocious beasts, while the turtles and alligators are stones in the river that appear to move with the undulating waves.[305] This dreamlike vision is further developed in the third couplet, which evokes a grander mythical universe. The *fusang* tree, typically associated with the east, is described as having "western branches"; likewise, the Ruo River—located in the west—is juxtaposed with the direction of "east." Both lines produce a disorienting effect.

Despite evoking Cao Zhi's 曹植 lines from "Wandering Immortal" 遊仙, "To the east, I behold the radiant shine of the *fusang* tree, / To the west, I overlook the currents of the Ruo River" 東觀扶桑曜，西臨弱水流,[306] Du Fu's poem does not depict a mythical world that transcends the earthly realm. Instead, as the branches of *fusang* tree meet the steep rocks of the Three Gorges and the shadow of the Ruo River falls upon the flowing Yangtze before his eyes, what is presented is a fusion of the mythical and the local landscape. Whereas the poem "In Response to Several Noblemen's Poems on Climbing the Pagoda of Ci'en Temple," discussed earlier, presents an expansive vision that moves from the royal domain to the empire's farthest reaches and into the mythical west, "The Highest Tower in the White Emperor City" links Kuizhou—a backwater region—directly to the legendary eastern and western extremities of the world. There is no representation of the imperial territory beyond Kuizhou, which suggests a

[305] This view is held by Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) and several other commentators. See *DFQJJZ*, 12.3565-6.
[306] *Cao Zhi ji jiaozhu* 曹植集校註, edited by Zhao Youwen 趙幼文 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 2.265.

certain ambivalence. In other words, the third couplet not only creates a grandiose image of the White Emperor City and its surroundings but also carries an underlying sense of unease, if not irony, alluding to the isolation of Kuizhou and its marginal, obscure position on the imperial map. The absence of a vision of the imperial territory in this poem is more than mere coincidence. It becomes even more telling when we reach the closing couplet, which hints at the imperial center to which Du Fu turns his head. Indeed, whereas from the center, an ascent provides a view that spans the entire realm, from a high point in Kuizhou, the center remains unseen and unrepresentable, only gestured toward by a longing gaze.

The problematization of a top-down, birds-eye view of the empire carried on to Du Fu's final years as he wandered in the regions of Hubei and Hunan after leaving Kuizhou. The poem "Ascending Yueyang Tower," one of Du Fu's most celebrated works from his time in Yueyang, exemplifies the shift from an all-encompassing imperial vision to one fragmented and shaped by the constraints of local topography.

登岳陽樓 Ascending Yueyang Tower[307]

昔聞洞庭水， Formerly I've heard of Lake Dongting,

今上岳陽樓。 Now I ascend the Yueyang Tower.

吳楚東南坼， Wu and Chu split apart to the east and to the south,

乾坤日夜浮。 Heaven and earth are floating day and night.

親朋無一字， From family and friends, there is not a single word,

老病有孤舟。 Old and sick, a lone boat is what I have.

[307] *DFQJJZ*, 19.5673.

戎馬關山北， Warhorses are to the north of the mountains and passes,

憑軒涕泗流。 Leaning upon the balustrade, tears stream down.

Though Du Fu had long heard of the famed Lake Dongting, he now arrives not as a traveler by choice, but as an exile driven by restlessness and displacement. For readers attuned to this context, the otherwise straightforward opening carries a quiet emotional weight. Du Fu's view from Yueyang Tower is distilled into a single couplet in lines 3–4. Line 3 portrays Lake Dongting as the dividing line between the ancient states of Wu and Chu, using language that evokes fragmentation—the verb *che* 坼, for instance, literally means "to crack" or "split apart." From the specific geography of the southeastern region, line 4 shifts to a vast and destabilizing vision in which heaven, earth, and the cosmos seem to drift with the waves of Dongting. This movement—from regional demarcation and fragmentation to complete indistinction and instability—mirrors Du Fu's emotional state. The view from Yueyang Tower gives rise to thoughts of disrupted communication with his kin amid riots and warfare, and of his solitary boat: a symbol of his itinerant life, adrift yet incapable of reaching its destination. The fragmented, destabilizing vision conveyed by the verbs *che* 坼 ("split apart") and *fu* 浮 ("floating") echoes the phrase *dang xi* 蕩析 from "Once Again Climbing Base of the Hill by My Rear Garden"—a phrase that captures both a world in upheaval and Du Fu's poetic vision of it. Moreover, just as "The Highest Tower in the White Emperor City" presents an interface between the mythical and the local, "Ascending Yueyang Tower" offers a comprehensive vision of the world, refracted and transformed by the waters of Lake Dongting.

This poem, like the others discussed thus far, bears on larger questions about ways of seeing and imagining the empire in an age of disorder and in regions away from the traditional heartland

of Chinese civilization. What underlies traditional ascending-high poetry is a top-down, hierarchical spatial vision that moves from the center to the peripheries. The division of imperial territory into concentric regions—with the Royal Domain, *wangji* 王畿, locating at the center—goes back to geographical concepts such as "Five Domains" 五服 or "Nine Domains" 九服 from ancient times. These concepts, originally delineate tax and tributary regions based on their distance from the imperial center, map out an imperial social order onto the territorial space, giving the imperial space a hierarchical structure. The failed vision articulated in Du Fu's "In Response to Several Noblemen's Poems on Climbing the Pagoda of Ci'en Temple" similarly reflects a hierarchical, organized view progressing from the capital region to the outer edges of the empire. While from the center and famed sites such as Mount Tai, one can gain a totalizing vision of the ordered imperial space, the same vision can hardly be achieved from the margins, especially in a remote place like Kuizhou. Thus, in his post-rebellion works—particularly those composed during and after his Kuizhou period—Du Fu often complicates the conventions of ascending-high poetry, presenting a vision of imperial space that is fragmented, ambiguous, and destabilized, as mediated through local topography.

Earlier I discussed Kuizhou's unique combination of isolation and connectivity. In fact, the confined, fragmented view found in some of Du Fu's Kuizhou poems represents just one aspect of his spatial imagination during this period. The other side of the story centers on connection—driven as much by isolation, both cultural and geographical, as by the possibilities offered by transportation networks. I argue that as the top-down, panoramic view of the empire breaks down, Du Fu's later works increasingly adopt a horizontal spatiality—one that emphasizes connections between disparate places through routes and waterways, the circulation of information, and even more intangible media such as memory and imagination. This horizontal

orientation is already manifested in the travel sequences from Qinzhou to Chengdu discussed in Chapter One, where geography, transportation, and imperial circulatory networks shape Du Fu's poetic map. During his Kuizhou period, this horizontal spatiality takes on new forms: the mapping structure becomes internalized and condensed. Often, multiple locations are juxtaposed within a single poem, and this spatial interplay emerges as a central structural device.

The most evident and memorable examples of Du Fu's horizontal spatiality appear in the juxtaposition of Chang'an and Kuizhou—a relationship Eva Shan Chou has analyzed as a "polarity."[308] This contrast is most famously employed in the "Autumn Meditations, Eight Poems" 秋興八首, among many other poems. It not only underscores and simultaneously collapses the geographical distance between the two locations, but also often involves a temporal leap, setting memories of Chang'an against the lived reality of Kuizhou.[309] While this opposition forms the most pervasive and recurring spatial pattern in Du Fu's work, horizontal spatiality reaches its fullest expression in poems such as the following:

黃草 Yellow Grass[310]

黃草峽西船不歸， West of the Yellow Grass Gorge, boats do not return,[311]

赤甲山下行人稀。 Below the Red Cape Mountain, travelers are sparse.[312]

[308] Chou, *Reconsidering Tu Fu*, 174-79.
[309] In his recent monograph, Patterson devotes a chapter to Du Fu's recollection of Chang'an in his Kuizhou poems. See Patterson, *Elegies for Empire*, Chapter Five, "Remembering Chang'an: Panegyric Memories in Regulated Verse," 192–239.
[310] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3743.
[311] The Yellow Grass Gorge, named for the yellow grass that covered its mountains, was located forty leagues upstream from Fuzhou 涪州, to the west of the Three Gorges region.
[312] The historical Red Cape Mountain, located north of present-day Mount Baidi 白帝山, corresponds to what is now called Mount Ziyang 子陽山. The mountain currently known as Red Cape Mountain was, in fact, Mount Baiyan 白鹽山, as referenced in Du Fu's poetry. See Jian Jinsong 簡錦松, "Du Fu Kuizhou shi xiandi yanjiu" 杜甫夔州詩現地研究, *Tangdai wenxue yanjiu* 唐代文學研究 (2002-04): 308-9.

秦中驛使無消息， From the region of Qin, envoys have brought no news,

蜀道兵戈有是非。 On the roads of Shu, armed soldiers are having conflicts.

萬里秋風吹錦水， For ten-thousand miles autumn wind blows over the Brocade River,[313]

誰家別淚濕羅衣。 Who are those whose parting tears soaked their gauze garment?

莫愁劍閣終堪據， Do not worry about Sword Pavilion that can be held in the end,[314]

聞道松州已被圍。 I have heard Songzhou has already been besieged.[315]

This poem was written during Du Fu's time in Kuizhou, in response to reports of local uprisings in Sichuan and a rumored Tibetan siege of Songzhou—though the latter is not corroborated by other historical sources. What is remarkable about the poem is that nearly every line—except for line 6—includes a place name, whether it be a specific landmark, an administrative unit, or a general term for a larger region. Collectively, these locations span from the Three Gorges to the capital region (referred to here as Qin) and as far west as Shu. The poem's broad geographical scope, compressed into such a brief form, is unusual within the Chinese poetic tradition.

Du Fu's interest in accumulating place names and situating them in spatial relation to one another evokes the experience of engaging with maps. A particularly illustrative example is found in a poem composed at Yan Wu's headquarters in Chengdu in 762: "At a Banquet in Lord Yan's Office, I Harmonize a Poem on an Illustrated Map of the Shu Circuits" 嚴公廳宴同詠蜀道畫圖. In the middle couplets, Du Fu offers a vivid account of the visual representation of Shu as depicted in the painting-map:

[313] The Brocade River is a tributary of the Min River that passes through Chengdu.
[314] Sword Pavilion was a strategic mountain pass on the main route connecting the capital region to Shu.
[315] Songzhou was a frontier city on the Tibetan border in northwestern Sichuan. Du Fu is suggesting that border crisis due to Tibetan invasion is more urgent than internal uprisings.

劍閣星橋北， Sword Pavilion is to the north of the Star Bridges,[316]

松州雪嶺東。 Songzhou, to its east is Snow Ridge.

華夷山不斷， Chinese and non-Chinese, mountains unbroken,

吳蜀水相通。 Wu and Shu, waterway connects them.[317]

The affinity between this poem and "Yellow Grass," written a few years later, is evident in two major respects. First, both poems juxtapose multiple localities. Notably, the pairing of Sword Pavilion and Songzhou—two strategic sites in Shu—reappears in "Yellow Grass" (lines 7–8), where Du Fu incorporates them into his assessment of Shu's military situation. Second, both poems reflect an expanded vision of the imperial realm beyond the immediate setting. Just as "At a Banquet in Lord Yan's Office" moves from landmarks in Shu to neighboring non-Chinese territories and southeast Wu, "Yellow Grass" shifts from the Three Gorges region to other parts of the empire, including Qin and Shu. This broader perspective is inspired by transportation networks—roads and waterways emphasized in the first two chapters—as well as by news about distant regions, the focus of Chapter Three.

Though, throughout the poem "Yellow Grass," the theme is one of disconnection—marked by the blockage of boats, travelers, and disrupted communications, all due to military conflicts—Du Fu is still able to trace events occurring in other parts of the empire and connect them within the structured space of a regulated verse. The juxtaposition of multiple places in this poem underscores both fragmentation and connection, mimicking Kuizhou's status as a transportation

[316] Star Bridges refer to seven bridges in Chengdu that are said to correspond to seven stars in the sky.
[317] *DFQJJZ*, 9.2588.

hub and making the poem an embodiment of the place itself. More broadly, this poem epitomizes Du Fu's evolving conceptualization of the empire as he moves away from a lofty vantage point, which offers an all-encompassing view, to an internalized experience with maps, which provides expanded perspectives and enables him to envision places beyond his immediate surroundings.[318]

[318] The preceding discussions of the poem "At a Banquet in Lord Yan's Office" and experience with maps have been inspired by Ao Wang's book *Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China*, where he explores the interplay between literature and geographical knowledge in the works of mid-Tang writers. While Wang emphasizes a cosmic, all-inclusive view of the imperial sphere—drawing on grand maps such as Jia Dan's 賈耽 (730-805) "Map of Chinese and Foreign Lands" 華夷圖 completed in 801—and interprets Du Fu's poem as a precursor to this mid-Tang development, I emphasize instead the horizontal relations between different places, which maps of the period tend to embody. This has to do with the kinds of maps more commonly consulted by literati writers—not expansive imperial maps, but regional cartographies such as prefectural maps 州圖 and local map-guides 圖經. As Hilde De Weerdt has observed, empire maps began to circulate more widely only in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, aided by the spread of printing technology. Furthermore, the cartographic conventions of medieval China shaped how space was visually and conceptually represented. Maps—often referred to as "painting-maps" or "illustrated maps"—were frequently drawn in oblique or mixed perspectives, making them more akin to paintings than to modern atlases. In other words, the bird's-eye view typical of modern cartography was not the dominant visual logic in medieval Chinese mapping. Hence, I propose that it is a horizontal spatiality—rather than a vertical view—shaped not only by maps but also by frequent travel and engagement with transportation, that served as a paradigm for spatial representation in Du Fu's late poetic works. Ao Wang, *Spatial Imaginaries in Mid-Tang China*; Hilde De Weerdt, "Maps and Memory: Readings of Cartography in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Song China," *Imago Mundi* 61, no.2 (2009): 145-167; Cordell D. K. Yee, "Chinese Cartography among the Arts: Objectivity, Subjectivity, Representation," in *The History of Cartography, Volume 2, Book 2: Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*, edited by J. B. Harley and David Woodward (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 128-169.

This is a shift I have described as one from a vertical perspective to a horizontal one. In this new paradigm, mental mapping of the imperial space forms the foundation, with various forms of connection—whether physical, infrastructural, or emotional, such as routes, rivers, news, information, longing, and desire—serving as new inspirations and literary resources.

Longing for the Imperial Center and the Reimagining of a Lost Homeland

The problematization of a unified, ordered view of the imperial realm from a high vantage point and the culmination of what I have termed the horizontal spatiality—focusing on a local perspective as well as structural juxtaposition—do not imply a turn away from the center. In fact, Du Fu's attachment to the imperial center deepened during his years of exile, reaching a climax during his Kuizhou period. The vision of isolation and fragmentation in Du Fu's Kuizhou poems coexists with a desire for connection or anxiety over its absence. One of the connections he frequently envisions is his bond with the capital, Chang'an. Indeed, the longing for Chang'an is such a dominant theme in Du Fu's late works that it might seem too obvious to warrant special attention. What has not been fully examined, however, is that Du Fu's yearning for Chang'an was driven not only by political ambition—his desire to return to court—or nostalgia for the fleeting glory of his official service there. More significantly, Chang'an is portrayed as his original home—a lost homeland, the place where he truly belonged and to which he always longed to return.

Du Fu's claim of Chang'an as his original home is often taken for granted without close examination, partly because the ancestral home of the Du family was in Duling 杜陵, approximately ten miles south of Chang'an, within the Capital Prefecture (*Jingzhao fu* 京兆府).

However, the branch of the Du family to which Du Fu belonged had relocated to Luoyang and had primarily resided there since the time of his great-grandfather, Du Yiyi 杜依藝, who served as the county magistrate of Gongxian 鞏縣. Having grown up in Luoyang, for the first thirty-four years of his life, Du Fu felt a closer connection to Luoyang than to the capital, Chang'an. Moreover, during his years of displacement in Shu—prior to his move to Kuizhou—Du Fu primarily regarded Luoyang as his hometown, a point I will demonstrate later. It was only during his time in Kuizhou that Chang'an began to seep into the very heart of his imagination of home and homeland.

I argue that Du Fu's Kuizhou period marks a drastic shift in both his vision of the empire and his conceptions of home. In Chapter Two, I examined competing visions of home in Du Fu's Chengdu poems—tensions between the private and the public, sedentariness and mobility, here and elsewhere. In the following two sections of this chapter, I will explore both Du Fu's reconception of his original home and his evolving relationship with the temporary homes he occupied during his displacement in Kuizhou. More outlying and alien than Chengdu, Kuizhou was a place where Du Fu was scarcely able to make his home. As I will show, Du Fu's longing for home increasingly fixated on a distant, unattainable, and idealized place: Chang'an, which he claimed as his original home. This notion of home is thoroughly politicized: no longer merely a space that mediates between the private and public spheres, as in his Chengdu poems, it becomes inseparable from the imperial center itself.

On the other hand, Du Fu never fully reconciled himself to his temporary stay in Kuizhou; unlike in Chengdu, where he sometimes embraced the rhythms of domestic life, here he struggled to imagine true settlement. His depictions of home in Kuizhou are tinged with irony and self-mockery, lacking the conviviality that surfaces in his Chengdu poems. I argue, however,

that these very failures of domestic representation are generative: Du Fu's unsuccessful attempts to construct a sense of home in Kuizhou ultimately transfer the idea of home into the poetic domain. It is through the act of poetic creation—one that ostensibly documents both place and displacement—that Du Fu transcends the immediacy of his exile and finds in poetry itself a surrogate homeland.

Du Fu's refashioning of Chang'an as his homeland, as I will demonstrate, represents the final stage of a long process of shifting visions and ideals. To trace the earlier phases of this process, we must look back at his early works and his formative years in Luoyang and Chang'an, which shed light on the constructed nature of his later claims to rootedness. These early works, along with those written during the first few years of his displacement and his residence in the Shu region, reveal Chang'an not as an original or unambiguous homeland, but as a site progressively imbued with multivalent significance—political as the locus of imperial legitimacy, cultural as the epicenter of Tang civilization, personal through Du Fu's lived experience and ambition, and ancestral through his deliberate literary self-fashioning.

Indeed, while the longing for home is a ubiquitous motif throughout the Chinese literary tradition, the referent of "home" is not always self-evident. This is partly because travel and relocation were common among office-holding elites, many of whom resided in more than one place over the course of their lives. More importantly, "home" is often not simply the physical location where one once lived. For a displaced traveler, it becomes a site of selective memory and active reconstruction—shaped as much by retrospective imagination as by lived experience. As previously noted, Du Fu's great-grandfather settled in the Luoyang area when he assumed office as the county magistrate of Gongxian. Born in Gongxian, Du Fu spent most of his teenage years and young adulthood in Luoyang, receiving his education, attending literary salons, and

associating with the elite circles there. In his writings, Du Fu mentioned two residences he had in Luoyang: his family villa in Luhun 陸渾莊 and a later built Tulou villa 土婁莊.[319] Except for his brief travels to Wu, Yue, Qi, and Zhao, Du Fu spent the majority of his time in Luoyang before moving to Chang'an in 746, when he was 34.

We know from Du Fu's biography that in his early twenties he once sat for the *jinshi* examination but did not pass. To seek for other opportunities to enter officialdom, Du Fu moved to Chang'an in 746, the fifth year of the Tianbao reign period (742-756). The next ten years in Chang'an (from 746 to 756) was for Du Fu a period of disappointment and frustration. Though he had some close friends as well as connections with high-ranking officials, none of those connections secured him a post. In 751, his presentation of his "*Fu* on the Three Grand Rites" 三大禮賦 created a sensation, and as a result he gained temporary fame. Nevertheless, he did not receive any appointment until three years later. At first, he was assigned to be a Constable which he declined. He was then reassigned as an Adjutant in the Guards Department in the capital. In the next year, the An Lushan rebellion broke out, putting an end to Du Fu's Chang'an period.

In his own poetic representations of his life in Chang'an, he was very much a sojourner, a wayfarer. Indeed, when he first came to Chang'an, he probably did not plan to settle there for long. He mentioned staying in a guest house on a couple of occasions. One was a poem written

[319] While premodern commentators and many contemporary scholars have agreed that these two names refer to the same place, there has been a different voice in the past few decades. In his articles, Hu Yongjie 胡永傑 argues persuasively that the Luhun villa, very likely located in Luhun Mountain in the southwest of Luoyang was not the same as the Tulou villa in the Yanshi 偃師 county. He further proposes that Du Fu's change of residence from Luhun villa to Tulou villa should not only be attributed to the death of his father and the subsequent mourning ritual, it also had to do with Du Fu's change of mentality as he began to pursue an official career rather than continuing his life in reclusion. The Tulou villa served this purpose better because it was closer to the Luoyang city than Du Fu's family estate in Luhun was. See Hu Yongjie, "Du Fu zai Luoyang judi de zhuanyi yu xintai de zhuanbian" 杜甫在洛陽居地的轉移與心態的轉變, *Zhongyuan wenhua yanjiu*, 2020(1): 122-8; "Du Fu Luhunzhuang ji Yanshi Shixiang Tushi (Tulou Zhuang) shuo zhiyi" 杜甫陸渾莊即偃師尸鄉土室（土婁莊）說質疑, *Xinjiang daxue xuebao* (volume of the humanities and social sciences), Nov., 2016, Vol. 44, No.6, 133-6.

on a New Year's Eve, and another was a prose account traditionally dated to the autumn of the tenth year of Tianbao (751) when Chang'an suffered from relentless rain:

今夕何夕歲云徂， What evening is this evening? The year is passing,

更長燭明不可孤。 The hours are long, candles bright, the night should not be wasted.

咸陽客舍一事無， In this Xianyang hostel, no affairs occupy the day,[320]

相與博塞為歡娛。 So together, we turn to board-games for amusement.[321]

In autumn, Master Du lies ill at a guest house in Chang'an. Excessive rain breeds silverfish; green moss creeps up to my couch.

秋，杜子臥病長安旅次，多雨生魚，青苔及榻。[322]

But years passed without any prospect of an official appointment. In 754, Du Fu finally settled at a villa in Duqu 杜曲, also known as Shaoling 少陵, about eighteen leagues south of Duling. Unfortunately, a severe drought the following year, along with the resulting food shortage, forced Du Fu to move his family to Fengxian 奉先. The An Lushan Rebellion erupted the year after.

In a number of poems written during his ten years in Chang'an, Du Fu talks about the bitterness he experienced and describes his straitened life as a guest, a sponger, depending on his friends and relatives for subsistence:

[320] In this context, Xianyang—the capital of the Qin dynasty—stands in for Chang'an.
[321] "This Evening: A Ballad" 今夕行, *DFQJJZ*, 1.144.
[322] "An Account in Autumn" 秋述, *DFQJJZ*, 22.6374.

騎驢三十載，Riding a donkey for thirty years,

旅食京華春。I dine as a guest in the springtime capital.

朝扣富兒門，In the morning I knock on the gates of the wealthy,

暮隨肥馬塵。In the evening I follow the dust of well-fed horses.

殘杯與冷炙，Leftover drinks and cold dishes,

到處潛悲辛。Sorrow and bitterness lurk everywhere.[323]

Recently I have been selling medicine in the metropolis, living off the support of my friends.

頃者賣藥都市，寄食朋友。[324]

In moments of frustration due to thwarted ambitions, he would think of the farmland he owned in Duqu or his family estate in Luoyang:

自斷此生休問天，I have foreseen the course of my life; ask no more of Heaven;

杜曲幸有桑麻田。Fortunately, in Duqu, I still have my mulberry and hemp fields.[325]

故山多藥物，My old mountain abounds in medicinal herbs,

勝概憶桃源。Its scenic beauty recalls the Peach Blossom Spring.

[323] "Respectfully Presented to the Honorable Wei, Vice Minister of the Left: Twenty-Two Rhymes" 奉贈韋左丞丈二十二韻, *DFQJJZ*, 2.277.
[324] "Memorial on Presenting the *Fu* on the Three Grand Rites" 進三大禮賦表, *DFQJJZ*, 21.6126.
[325] "Three Poems on Qu River, Each in Five Lines" 曲江三章章五句, *DFQJJZ*, 2.308.

欲整還鄉旆，I wish to raise my banner for a homeward journey,

長懷禁掖垣。Yet forever I will long for the walls of the forbidden palaces.[326]

Though the power of the Du family had been in decline when Du Fu was born, it still belonged to the landed aristocratic class for whose members living in reclusion was a viable option. Here, the first quote speaks of the farmland his family had in Duqu near Chang'an, whereas the second quote talks about Luoyang, with *gu shan* 故山 referring to the Luhun Mountain where his family villa was built.

For Du Fu and his Tang contemporaries, mere residence in the capital never sufficed to establish true belonging. The two capitals—Chang'an and Luoyang—were not homelands by birth but rather arenas for the pursuit of political ambition. Their allure lay in their potential and opportunities. Without an official position in the imperial bureaucracy, one remained an outsider—even if they owned land or maintained a residence in the capital region. This was true for Du Fu, who, despite living in the capital, never felt at home there, as his prolonged exclusion from the bureaucracy rendered him perpetually marginal. But if Chang'an was for Du Fu more like a second home, even Luoyang—where Du Fu spent most of his youth and early adulthood—was described as the place where he was a mere sojourner. The poem "Sent to Li Bai" 贈李白, for instance, begins with the lament that "For two years, a sojourner in the Eastern Capital, I have been fed up with craftiness in my encounters" 二年客東都，所歷厭機巧.[327] During his early years in Luoyang and Chang'an, "home" for Du Fu referred to specific places: his family's villas and their environs, often described as his "old mountain," Duqu, and so on. It was only

[326] "Respectfully Presented to Academicians Cui [Guofu] and Yu [Xiulie] from the Academy of Assembled Worthies upon Parting" 奉留贈集賢院崔于二學士 (國輔、休烈), *DFQJJZ*, 2.289.
[327] *DFQJJZ*, 1.76.

after he left the capital region that Luoyang and Chang'an took on the meaning of "hometown": a broader, more communal concept that encompassed the entire region and became the place he longed to return to.

To understand the sense of alienation that permeates many of Du Fu's early poems about his life in the two capitals—places he later came to identify as his home and to which he felt a deep attachment—two additional factors must be considered. The first is a literary historical factor concerning conventions that govern poetic representations and imaginations of home. In the Chinese literary tradition, poems treating home-related topoi largely fall into two groups. The first is primarily concerned with the sentiment of homesickness. Under this group, home is represented as an absence and the object of longing. The second group, which takes one's domicile as the primary subject and focuses on the here-and-now of domestic life, mostly coincides with the subgenre of "poetry of fields and gardens" (*tianyuan shi* 田園詩). In this tradition, home is usually represented as the place for idyllic life demarcated from the public world. Indeed, if we survey the history of classical Chinese poetry up to Du Fu's time, we find few, if any, examples that celebrate the capital city as a place of home. Poems about imperial capitals are numerous, but representations of the metropolis—whether as symbols of imperial power or as sites of boisterous revelry, and of intrigue and infighting—rarely overlap with the portrayals of home.

Another issue, a social-historical one, concerns the estate culture in medieval China, and in particular, the type of residences Du Fu had and the purposes they served.[328] In the Tang, it was a common practice among the official-scholars to build country villas in the environs of the two

[328] For a study of gardens and estates in the Tang dynasty, see Li Hao 李浩, *Tangdai yuanlin bieye kao lun* 唐代園林別業考論 (Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 1996). For a discussion of Tang estate poetry, see Stephen Owen, "The Formation of The Tang Estate Poem," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 55, No.1 (1995): 39-59.

capitals. Their unique location—at once near to and removed from the capital—serves a dual purpose. On one hand, their proximity to the imperial center allows for easy connection to court circles and participation in the refined life of the capital. On the other, being situated in the mountains rather than within the city walls ensures a sense of seclusion, making them ideal retreats for those seeking withdrawal from public life. Du Fu's residences in Luoyang and Chang'an—such as the Luhun villa, the Tulou villa, and his home in Duqu—all fall under the category of country estates (*bieye* 別業). The dual nature of these estates fosters conflicting emotions toward the capital: feelings of alienation during times of frustration, and deep affection and longing when exiled from them. Thus, while Du Fu often portrayed himself as a sojourner in Luoyang and Chang'an in his early writings, after leaving the capital regions and drifting toward the empire's peripheries, he came to remember the two capitals with nostalgia, casting them as places of fond memories and continual yearning.

Interestingly, although both Luoyang and Chang'an were remembered as Du Fu's "home," the attention they received in his later works was uneven. This disparity reflects the distinct roles they played in his life, their differing cultural and political significance, and the changing circumstances of Du Fu's prolonged exile. Du Fu did not always refer to a specific place when expressing homesickness; at times, he used more general terms such as "former garden" 故園 or "native land" 故國. However, when he did invoke his home with concrete references, a meaningful shift becomes apparent. Throughout his time in Shu, Du Fu's sense of home remained tied to Luoyang. However, from the Kuizhou period onward, Chang'an increasingly displaced Luoyang as the principal locus of his nostalgic imagination.

If we trace references to Luoyang in Du Fu's post-rebellion poetry, many can be found in the poems he wrote during his time in Shu.

京洛雲山外，The capital Luoyang is beyond cloudy mountains,[329]

音書靜不來。There's not the slightest hint of a letter arriving.[330]

洛城一別四千里，The Luoyang city, once parted, is four thousand leagues away,

胡騎長驅五六年。Foreign horsemen have kept galloping for five or six years.[331]

即從巴峽穿巫峽，Soon I will pass the Ba Gorge and flow across the Wu Gorge,

便下襄陽向洛陽。Going downstream to Xiangyang, I will head toward Luoyang.[332]

冬至至後日初長，After the winter solstice, the day starts to get longer,

遠在劍南思洛陽。In the faraway Jiannan, I yearn for Luoyang.[333]

九度附書向洛陽，Countless times I have sent a letter to Luoyang,

十年骨肉無消息。But for ten years, no news came from my kins.[334]

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[329] *Jing Luo* 京洛 is a term often used to refer to the capital city of Luoyang, as it served as the capital during several early dynasties, including the Eastern Zhou and Eastern Han. One of the earliest known usages of this term is found in Ban Gu's 班固 "*Fu* on the Eastern Capital" 東都賦, where he writes: "You, sir, are familiar only with the height of the E'pang Palace reaching to the sky, yet you do not know that the capital, Luoyang, has its own standards" 子徒習秦阿房之造天，而不知京洛之有制也 (*Wenxuan*, 1.39). The term can also serve as a general reference to the capitals. Thus, an alternative rendering of Du Fu's line is "The capital cities are beyond cloudy mountains."
[330] "Cloudy Mountains" 雲山, *DFQJJZ*, 7.1977.
[331] "Grief over Parting" 恨別, *DFQJJZ*, 7.2040.
[332] "Upon Hearing Imperial Troops' Retaking Henan and Hebei" 聞官軍收河南河北, *DFQJJZ*, 10.2747.
[333] "After the Solstice" 至後, *DFQJJZ*, 11.3328.
[334] "At the Ends of the Earth, A Ballad" 天邊行, *DFQJJZ*, 10.3018.

Over the years he spent in Chengdu and eastern Sichuan, Du Fu often contemplated on his distance from Luoyang, his hometown, counting the years that had passed since his departure. The first and the last quote above both mention letters, the medium to reconnect with his kins and relatives in Luoyang, the lack of which reinforced his longing. On other occasions, he would envision a return trip back to Luoyang through the water route of Yangtze, as seen in the case of the third quote.

In contrast to the prominent presence of Luoyang, poems that explicitly portray Chang'an as Du Fu's hometown are considerably fewer. One notable example is a poem written on the occasion of bidding farewell to He Yong 何邕, a former court colleague who was recalled from his post in the Shu region to return to the capital. In the closing couplet, Du Fu envisions the springtime capital that He Yong will soon witness: "Flowers at the Five Mausoleums fill the eyes, / please send word of spring in my hometown" 五陵花滿眼，傳語故鄉春.[335] Here, however, the expression of homesickness is partly shaped by the moment of parting itself—prompted by the departure of someone bound for the capital. Moreover, Du Fu does not directly name Chang'an, but instead refers to the capital region through a metonym: the Five Mausoleums. Located in the suburbs of Chang'an, the Five Mausoleums originally denoted the burial sites of five Western Han emperors, around which powerful families were later resettled. Although by the Tang dynasty the area was no longer the primary neighborhood for the wealthy elite, its associations with nobility and an extravagant lifestyle persisted in literary imaginations. In other words, Du Fu's image of Chang'an as his hometown, as suggested in this poem, is shaped less by its role as the political center and more by the culture and way of life it embodies.

[335] "Presented to He Yong Upon Parting" 贈別何邕, *DFQJJZ*, 8.2488.

We can also find poems that directly mention Chang'an without referring to it as Du Fu's hometown. One such example is "Early Flowers," written after the Tibetan capture of Chang'an in 763, as discussed in the previous chapter. The poem opens with the couplet: "Is the Western Capital at peace yet? / Not a single person has come from there" 西京安穩未？不見一人來.[336] Here, referring to Chang'an as the "Western Capital"—an official, administrative designation—carries a slight sense of distance, especially when compared to the more personal and evocative terms he would increasingly favor during his Kuizhou period, such as "old capital" 舊京, a literary expression that implies emotional attachment and evokes nostalgic feelings. Overall, what we gather from the very few poems that express a longing for Chang'an during Du Fu's time in Shu is that, although Chang'an was also considered his hometown, it did not carry the same emotional weight as Luoyang. Moreover, Chang'an as his hometown had not yet become fully politicized in his poetic imagination.

Following Du Fu's move to Kuizhou, however, direct references to Luoyang as the focus of his nostalgia grew noticeably scarce.[337] Instead of Luoyang, Du Fu was preoccupied with thoughts about the capital Chang'an. Poems in which Du Fu expresses his longing for Chang'an are too numerous to list exhaustively, but this sentiment reaches a powerful culmination in his well-known poetic sequence, "Autumn Meditations, Eight Poems."[338] In this poetic sequence, as in other poems from his Kuizhou period and beyond, Du Fu's representation of Chang'an intertwines its roles as both his hometown and the political center. In the first poem of "Autumn

[336] "Early Flowers" 早花, *DFQJJZ*, 10.3014.
[337] A poem in this regard is one with a very specific agenda, as its title suggests: "Begging Mr. Meng from the Granaries Section to Bring a Letter and Look for My Old Villa in Tulou" 憑孟倉曹將書覓土婁舊莊. *DFQJJZ*, 17.5052.
[338] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3789-3830. For a comprehensive study of the "Autumn Meditations" see Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩, *Du Fu "Qiuxing ba shou" jishuo* 杜甫《秋興八首》集說 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014); for a structural analysis of this poetic sequence, see Joseph R. Allen, *The Chinese Lyric Sequence: Poems, Paintings, Anthologies* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2020), "Du Fu's Metapoem," 221-61.

Meditations," having described a forlorn autumn scene in the Kuizhou area, Du Fu speaks out the main purport and emotional thrust of this poem, "Clustered chrysanthemums twice bloomed—the tears from a previous day, / A lone boat is fastened—the heart for my former garden" 叢菊兩開他日淚，孤舟一繫故園心.[339] This can be read as a framing statement for the entire series, much of which is devoted to Du Fu's yearning for and reminiscence about Chang'an.

Chang'an, for Du Fu, was not only the site of his "old garden," but also the seat of the imperial court and a locus of political aspiration, past glory, and unfulfilled dreams. In the second poem of "Autumn Meditations," for instance, Du Fu expresses his longing for Chang'an at sunset: "Each day I follow the Big Dipper, gazing toward the capital city" 每依北斗望京華.[340] The Big Dipper has long been associated with kingship, underscoring Chang'an's role as the seat of political authority. In the same poem, Du Fu laments his removal from the "incense burners of the painted bureau" 畫省香爐 at the imperial court, alluding to his unrealized ambitions and failed career—one of the recurring themes in "Autumn Meditations." Moreover, Du Fu's image of Chang'an is also shaped by his memories of his past service at court. In the fifth poem, for example, he recalls the splendor of the imperial palaces and court gatherings from memory, only to "awake" in the final couplet to his present reality: lying beside the Yangtze River as the year comes to a close.

Du Fu's yearning for Chang'an as a prominent theme continued after his time in Kuizhou until the final years of his life while drifting in Hubei and Hunan:

[339] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3790.
[340] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3796.

雲白山青萬餘里，Clouds are white and mountains green for ten thousand leagues,

愁看直北是長安。In deep grief I look straight north where Chang'an lies.[341]

漠漠舊京遠，Vague and vast, the old capital is far away.

遲遲歸路賒。Marching on and on, the road to return is long.[342]

As Du Fu repeatedly identified Chang'an—rather than Luoyang—as the place where he belonged and hoped to return to, clearly, something has changed in his conception of his lost home.

The identification of Chang'an as his homeland is further achieved through and reinforced by Du Fu's drawing upon his ancestry in his identity building. During his time in Kuizhou, at the same time as Chang'an loomed larger in his thinking about home, Duling or Duqu—the Du clan's region of origin—began to appear with a remarkable frequency in his poetry. Although Du Fu descended from a branch of the Du clan that had relocated to Xiangyang during the Jin–Song dynasties (317-420 & 420-479), he—like some of his forebears—traced his lineage further back and continued to refer to himself as "Jingzhao Du Fu."[343] This was partly because, during the Tang dynasty, the branch of the Du clan based in the capital region was more prominent than the one in Xiangyang. A simple search for "Duling" and "Duqu" shows that these choronyms are not

[341] "Written in a Boat on the Next Day of the Cold Food Festival" 小寒食舟中作, *DFQJJZ*, 20.6003.
[342] "Entering Qiaokou" 入喬口, *DFQJJZ*, 19.5722.
[343] While Du Fu's biography in the *JTS* describes him as "a native of Xiangyang" 襄陽人, he referred to himself as "Jingzhao Du Fu" 京兆杜甫 in his memorials and other formal writings, such as "Funerary Oration for My Maternal Grandfather and Grandmother" 祭外祖祖母文 and "Funerary Oration for the Late Prime Minister, Lord Fang of Qinghe" 祭故相國清河房公文. Du Fu was not the first in his lineage to trace their ancestral origin to Duling in the capital region. For example, an excavated funerary inscription for Du Bing 杜並, a paternal uncle of Du Fu, states that he "was a man from Duling in Jingzhao" 京兆杜陵人也. See *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓志彙編, edited by Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 994-5.

distributed evenly across Du Fu's corpus. He referred to himself as an "old guest of Duling" 杜陵野客 or an "old rustic of Duling" 杜陵野老 a couple of times during his stay in Chang'an in his early years. Since his flight from the capital and throughout his years in Shu, however, Duling no longer appeared in his poetry. As previously discussed, this was a period when he primarily regarded Luoyang as his original home. Nevertheless, beginning with his relocation to Kuizhou, Duling reemerged as the native place he evoked most frequently, invested with deep affection and intense longing. This connection to Duling became central to Du Fu's poetic self-representation and self-fashioning:

杜陵斜晚照，In Duling, the setting sun casts a slanting light,

漪水帶寒淤。The Jue River girdles a chilly islet.[344]

弔影夔州僻，I condole with my own shadow in the remote Kuizhou,

回腸杜曲煎。My twisting guts burn with pain at the thought of Duqu.[345]

巫峽寒江那對眼，The cold river in the Wu Gorge—an unbearable sight to behold,

杜陵遠客不勝悲。A distant traveler from Duling can hardly endure his sorrow.[346]

夔子之國杜陵翁，In Lord Kui's kingdom dwells the old man from Duling,

[344] "Presented to Librarian Li upon Parting, in Thirty Rhymes" 贈李八秘書別三十韻, *DFQJJZ*, 16.4726. The Jue River 漪水 originates in the Zhongnan Mountains of Shaanxi Province, flows northward through Chang'an, and empties into the Wei River 渭水. It is one of the Eight Rivers of the Guanzhong region 關中八川.
[345] "On an Autumn Day, I Sing Out My Cares in Kuizhou Headquarter and Respectfully I Send It to Inspector Zheng and Honored Retainer Li, in a Hundred Rhymes" 秋日夔府詠懷奉寄鄭監李賓客一百韻, *DFQJJZ*, 16.4835.
[346] "Beginning of Spring" 立春, *DFQJJZ*, 15.4361.

牙齒半落左耳聾。With half his teeth gone and his left ear deaf.[347]

In medieval China, choronyms—known as *junwang* 郡望 (literally, "ancestral prefecture" of prestigious clans)—were commonly used to address individuals, typically in the form of a choronym-surname combination. Due to migration over time, many people no longer resided in their ancestral prefectures—some may never have even visited their family's place of origin—yet they continued to identify themselves by their choronym, as it functioned as a marker of social status. The many references to Duling in Du Fu's works from his Kuizhou period onward—like the increasingly prominent presence of Chang'an—were far from accidental. It reveals that the further he drifted into the peripheries of the empire, the more he yearned for the center, and the more urgently he needed an anchorage to sustain both his sense of self and his identity as a member of the cultural elite. While Luoyang had once served as his hometown in both fact and feeling, it was ultimately Chang'an that offered a stronger anchorage in his later poetry. Isolated in the remote backwaters of Kuizhou, far removed from the heart of Chinese civilization, Du Fu was virtually forgotten by the imperial court. It was precisely this profound sense of isolation—and the crisis of identity it provoked—that led him, time and again, to invoke his illustrious ancestry and to claim Chang'an, the imperial center, as both his place of origin and his true home.

Du Fu's particular attachment to Chang'an was part of a broader phenomenon rooted in the city's unique status within the cultural and political world of the Tang dynasty. Although auxiliary capitals were set up throughout the Tang, the status of Chang'an as the imperial center

[347] "Getting Cloudy Again" 復陰, *DFQJJZ*, 18.5372.

was unrivaled.[348] As the imperial capital, Chang'an exerted a powerful centripetal force on Tang literati. For those with bureaucratic aspirations, it was a place of opportunity and transformation; for those exiled from its bounds, it became an object of perpetual longing. Many Tang scholar-officials viewed provincial appointments as tantamount to exile. Though the An Lushan Rebellion and subsequent unrest began a process of decentralization, in Du Fu's time, Chang'an remained the undisputed center of the Tang world—a place literati yearned for. Laments over separation from the capital permeate Tang poetry and prose, and it is against this shared mentality that Du Fu's deep attachment to Chang'an—and his transformation of the city into an idealized home—can best be understood.

In fact, Du Fu was not alone in identifying the capital Chang'an as his home, even though it was only his second home. Like Du Fu, Li Bai (701-762) was neither born nor raised in the capital. Despite scholarly debate over his birthplace, it is widely accepted that he spent his youth in Sichuan. He visited Chang'an only twice in his lifetime, each time staying fewer than three years. Yet, after his second departure, he wrote melancholically: "Since I was banished to Changsha, / Gazing west toward Chang'an—I cannot see my home" 一為遷客去長沙，西望長安不見家.[349] Here, Chang'an is unmistakably declared his home. Yet while Li Bai frequently reminisced about the capital in his later verse, a seamless fusion of Chang'an and the idea of

[348] Among the auxiliary capitals, the eastern capital Luoyang was the most significant. Although several emperors of the Sui and Tang dynasties visited Luoyang and stayed there for extended periods—for purposes such as military preparation, ritual ceremonies, and food supply—its political status remained secondary to that of Chang'an. During the early years of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, the court temporarily relocated to Luoyang on several occasions. However, after his return to Chang'an in the twenty-fifth year of the Kaiyuan era (737), he no longer held court in Luoyang. From that point on, Luoyang's political importance began to decline. It was not until the Five Dynasties and Song period that the shift of the political center eastward—from Chang'an to Luoyang and Kaifeng—was fully realized.

[349] Here, Li Bai compares himself to the Han dynasty scholar and statesman Jia Yi, who was slandered and banished to Changsha. The couplet is from his "Listen to the Playing of Flute up on the Yellow Crane Tower with Director Shi Qin" 與史郎中欽聽黃鶴樓上吹笛, dated to the first year of Qianyuan 乾元 (758). *Li Bai quanji biannian jianzhu* 李白全集編年箋註, edited by An Qi 安旗 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 13.1368.

home never fully crystallized into a sustained poetic motif. This is precisely what makes Du Fu's case distinctive: his oeuvre reveals an enduring, almost obsessive, literary forging of Chang'an as his home.

In a poem written in Kuizhou, Du Fu describes his situation as such: "In the two capitals, I still hold but meager property, / Across the four seas, I am cut off from true companions" 兩京猶薄產，四海絕隨肩.[350] The property he still had in the two capitals very likely referred to the residences and land he owned. Indeed, both Luoyang and Chang'an were places where he lived and with which he had close relationships. But they were retrospectively invested with different significance in different periods of his life. For the first ten years since he left the capitals, Luoyang—the place where he grew up and where his family and kinsmen lived together—was the object of his homeward gaze. As time passed and following his relocation to Kuizhou, a gradual shift took place. By then, Du Fu's early life in Luoyang had become a fading memory; many of his relatives and friends had been displaced or scattered across distant regions; and he may have been uncertain whether his Tulou villa had survived the turmoil—or what had become of his family estate in Luhun.[351] As a result, the notion of "home," once grounded in physicality and functionality, gradually gave way to longing, fantasy, and subjective projection. In the end, Chang'an eclipsed Luoyang as Du Fu's primary home, taking on added layers of symbolic meaning.

The preceding discussions demonstrate that during Du Fu's years of wandering, his attempts to settle into new homes and to establish connections with places on the margins of the empire

[350] "On an Autumn Day at Kuizhou Headquarter, I Sing My Thoughts in a Hundred Couplets, Respectfully Sent to Inspector Zheng and Honored Retainer Li" 秋日夔府詠懷奉寄鄭監李賓客一百韻. *DFQJJZ*, 16.4835.
[351] In "Dreaming in the Day" 晝夢, "Gates and alleys in my hometown are beneath thorns and brambles, the lord and ministers in the central plain are by the side of wild dogs and tigers" 故鄉門巷荊棘底，中原君臣豺虎邊. *DFQJJZ*, 15.4393.

did not lead to a growing sense of alienation from the imperial center. On the contrary, they reinforced his yearning for it. At the same time, our analysis has aimed to show that the idea of "home" for Du Fu was not fixed but gradually formed and continually reformulated throughout his frequent relocations on the empire's periphery. Chang'an was not, from the outset, an inherent or unequivocal home. Rather, the idealized union of personal home, ancestral homeland, and imperial center emerged as a later construct. Ultimately, Chang'an, as Du Fu's home, came to represent not merely a physical location but a convergence of idealized visions and layered projections.

The idealized nature of Chang'an—as both Du Fu's home and the political center—is also reflected in the ways he envisions connections to it. To elaborate on this point, I propose a two-fold argument. First, despite Du Fu's frequent longing gazes, Chang'an remained beyond the horizon—irreducibly distant and invisible from Kuizhou—rendering these gazes more symbolic than physical. Second, Du Fu often fantasizes imagined connections to Chang'an, spatially and textually juxtaposing it with Kuizhou, which reflects the horizontal spatiality that characterizes many of his late works. Yet what distinguishes Chang'an from other places is the medium through which these connections are imagined. While rivers, roads, and infrastructural networks typically enable Du Fu's sense of connection to other locations, Chang'an is reached through more ethereal means—via the celestial sphere.

The poetic trope of gazing toward the capital—whether in times of political turmoil or personal exile—has a long-standing tradition in Chinese literature. It originates with "Lament over the Capital Ying" 哀郢 in the *Chuci*, continues through the works of early medieval writers, and extends into the Tang dynasty. Although Du Fu consciously evokes the capital-gazing theme, his Kuizhou exile renders this gesture profoundly ambiguous and paradoxical. For earlier

poets, such as Wang Can 王粲 (177-217), Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300), and Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–499), who literally looked toward the capital from a distance and from an elevated point, the capital was a visible or potentially visible geographical anchor.[352] From the top of Mount Three 三山, for instance, Xie Tiao was able to see the palaces of Jiankang 建康, the capital of the Southern Dynasties.[353] In the case of Li Bai's "Ascending the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling" 登金陵鳳凰臺, although the capital city, Jiankang, here referred to as Chang'an, is beyond sight—"It's all because the floating clouds can block the sun, / Chang'an is unseen—that's what brings me grief" 總為浮雲能蔽日，長安不見使人愁—it is theoretically visible, if not for the cloudy weather.[354] In other words, for Du Fu's predecessors, their poetic gazing was framed by a logic of potential visibility: even when the capital was not literally in sight, the act of gazing affirmed its concrete and stable existence as the political center.

For Du Fu, however, the capital city and his home, Chang'an, was always out of sight, and this invisibility was of a more profound and structural kind. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that the problematization of the vantage point in Du Fu's spatial imaginations culminated in his Kuizhou poems, which was connected to Kuizhou's geographical isolation as well as cultural and political marginality. Indeed, isolated in the Yangtze gorges that blocked all physical line of sight, without an appropriate elevated point that could afford an expanded vision, Chang'an existed

[352] See "Poem on Seven Griefs" 七哀詩 by Wang Can, "Two Poems Composed in Heyang County" 河陽縣作二首 by Pan Yue, and "Climbing Mount San at Dusk and Gazing Back at the Capital" 晚登三山還望京邑 by Xie Tiao. *Wenxuan*, 23.1087, 26.1223; *Xie Xuancheng ji jiaozhu*, 3.278.

[353] The opening stanza of this poem reads:
灞涘望長安，By Ba's shore, one gazes toward Chang'an,
河陽視京縣。From Heyang, the capital comes into view.
白日麗飛甍，The bright sun gleams upon the soaring roofs,
參差皆可見。Their uneven tiers are clearly revealed.

[354] This couplet may carry a political metaphor: in classical Chinese literature, floating clouds often symbolize slanderous men, while the sun typically represents the emperor. *Li Bai quanji biannian jianzhu*, 8.757.

only beyond the horizon. As the closing couplet of "River Plums" 江梅 poignantly expresses, "My old garden cannot be seen, / The Wu Mountains, densely massed, are jutting and jagging" 故園不可見，巫岫鬱嵯峨.[355]

This inevitable and fundamental invisibility of Chang'an is also tied to the distinct mode of gazing Du Fu performs. Unlike his predecessors, who often ascended to great heights to look outward and downward across vast distances, Du Fu's gazes toward Chang'an are frequently directed upward—through the celestial realm. This upward gaze underscores the symbolic nature of the act and reveals the otherworldly, illusory, and fantasized quality of the object he longs for. A clear example of this can be found in the second poem of his "Autumn Meditations":

秋興八首 Autumn Meditations, Eight Poems[356]

II

夔府孤城落日斜，The solitary city of Kuizhou, bathed in the setting sun's glow,

每依北斗望京華。Each day I follow the Big Dipper, gazing toward the capital city.

聽猿實下三聲淚，Listening to the gibbons cry thrice indeed brings me to tears,[357]

4 奉使虛隨八月槎。Serving as an envoy, I fall short of following the raft in the eighth month.[358]

[355] "River Plums" 江梅, *DFQJJZ*, 15.4367.
[356] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3796.
[357] Li Daoyuan's *Commentary on the River Classic* records a fisherman's song that says: "Of the Three Gorges, the Wu Gorge in Badong is the longest; three cries of the gibbon will leave one's clothes soaked with tears" 巴東三峽巫峽長，猿鳴三聲淚沾裳. *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng*, 34.790.
[358] Zhang Hua's 張華 *Bowu zhi* 博物志 includes a tale of a man who rides a legendary raft to the Milky Way. See Zhang Hua, *Bowu zhi*, edited by Zheng Xiaofeng 鄭曉峰 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 10.321. Du Fu's line fuses this folklore with the westward journey of Zhang Qian, the Han-dynasty envoy who traveled to the source of the Yellow River.

畫省香爐違伏枕，Lying in illness, I’m cut off from the incense burners of the painted halls,[359]

山樓粉堞隱悲笳。White parapets on the mountain tower fade in the mournful sound of flute.

請看石上藤蘿月，Please look at the moon through the rock-clinging vines,

8 已映洲前蘆荻花。Its light already cast on the reed blossoms by the isle.

Crucial to our discussion is a pair of verbs that appear to be near synonyms but carry different connotations within the context of this poem: “gaze” 望 in the second line and “look at” 看 in the second to last line. The contrast between these two terms highlights a core polarity the entire poem is built upon, between the capital city, Chang’an, and Du Fu’s present location in Kuizhou. We are told that each day at the moment of twilight, Du Fu gazes toward Chang’an, guided by the Dipper. The Big Dipper not only marks the actual direction of Chang’an—due north of Kuizhou—but has also long been regarded as a symbol of kingship. This gazing—not directly toward its object, Chang’an, as a concrete, definable place, but through its corresponding constellation—is more of a symbolic and performative gesture without the promise of “seeing.” It is as if only an upward gaze through the heavenly realm can transcend the confines of steep mountains in Kuizhou. Isolated in Kuizhou, Du Fu is only able to turn to the direction marked by the Big Dipper and imagine the capital city below. This is why the gaze in line 2 does not generate a sight, as the third line soon shifts back to Du Fu’s experience in Kuizhou—the sorrowful gibbon cries, emblems of exile—which perfectly aligns with his textual knowledge of

[359] In the Han dynasty, the walls of the Imperial Secretariat 尚書省 were painted with images of sages and exemplary women. As a result, the Painted Bureau came to refer to the Secretariat. In this context, Du Fu uses the term to refer to the Chancellery 門下省, where he served as Reminder of the Left.

the place. Line 4, however, highlights another aspect of Du Fu's experience that falls short of following historical precedent: his failure to ride on a legendary celestial raft said to journey to the Milky Way during the eighth lunar month. This oblique reference to Du Fu's unsuccessful attempt to return to the capital and the imperial court, continues the heavenly images in the second line, reinforcing the ethereal existence of Chang'an and its associations with the celestial realm.

The adverbs in the second couplet—*shi* 實 and *xu* 虛—is another important binary in this poem, with the former referring to the real and the substantial while the latter evokes the insubstantial and undefinable. This binary corresponds to the two locations juxtaposed in this poem, Kuizhou and Chang'an, respectively. The white parapets on the mountain tower and the mournful sound of reed pipes (line 6), for instance, fall under the category of *shi*, whereas the incense burners in the painted halls (line 5)—likely imagined or reconstructed from memory and textual sources—are more appropriately classified as *xu*. In a similar vein, the gaze toward Chang'an—given its symbolic character—is an instance of *xu*, whereas the act of "looking at" the scenery of Kuizhou in the vivid present moment constitutes *shi*. Unlike the "gazing" in line 2, the "looking at" in the final couplet is a physical and immediate act, reinforced by the concreteness of its object: moonlight filtering through vines on the rocks and illuminating the reed blossoms. Despite this contrast, the objects of both "gazing" and "looking at" share a common trait: each resists poetic representation, albeit in different ways. Chang'an can only be conjured through absence, imagination, or memory, whereas Kuizhou—as the imperative phrase "please look at" 請看 suggests—demands to be seen and experienced on the spot. The poem thus stages a striking contrast: Chang'an, absent and elusive, yet all the more potent through its very invisibility, while Kuizhou appears with stark, even painful, immediacy.

Our analysis of this poem not only reveals that Du Fu's "gazing" toward Chang'an—unlike that of his predecessors—is more symbolic than physical, but also illuminates the second half of my earlier argument regarding the fantasized nature of Chang'an: namely, that connections to the imperial center are often mediated through the heavenly domain. In a poem about the full moon, Du Fu envisions that "Pine trees and cinnamon trees in my old garden are sprouting forth, / Across ten thousand leagues they share the same gleaming light" 故園松桂發，萬里共清輝.[360] In the sixth poem of "Autumn Meditations," he seeks solace in the wind and mist that connect the Qutang Gorge in Kuizhou and the Qu River in Chang'an, conjuring up a picture of affinity to counter distance and isolation: "The narrows of the Qutang Gorge and the banks of the Qu River, / Are connected by ten thousand leagues of wind and dust in the austere autumn" 瞿塘峽口曲江頭，萬里風煙接素秋.[361] Wind and mist are once again images associated with the sky, often envisioned in poetry as the realm through which birds travel.[362] Another example that adopts astral imagery is a couplet from Du Fu's "The Night" 夜, which reads: "Pacing the porch, leaning on my staff, I gaze at the Ox and the Dipper, / The Milky Way must reach all the way to the distant Phoenix City" 步簷倚杖看牛斗，銀漢遙應接鳳城.[363] Here, the Phoenix City is a poetic metaphor for the capital city, Chang'an.

In the previous section of this chapter, I discussed the disappearance of an all-encompassing imperial vision and the emergence of a horizontal spatiality in Du Fu's late works. In these poems, he often maps connections to other places through geographical, infrastructural, and

[360] "Full Moon" 月圓, *DFQJJZ*, 14.3904.
[361] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3819.
[362] For example, a couplet by Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰 (ca. 634-ca. 686) reads: "In forests and ravines, human affairs are few, / Amid wind and mist, the birds' path stretches far" 林壑人事少，風煙鳥路長. *QTS* 42.527. Similarly, Xie Tiao wrote, "Amid wind and clouds, there are paths for birds" 風雲有鳥路, associating "wind and clouds" 風雲—a near synonym of "wind and mist"—with the birds' path. *Wenxuan* 26.1212.
[363] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3786.

social media such as rivers, travel routes, and the circulation of information. While the juxtaposition of Chang'an and Kuizhou is a recurring spatial trope in his Kuizhou poems, the preceding discussions have highlighted the distinctive ways in which he imagines connections to Chang'an—the capital city and his home. During his years in the Shu region, Du Fu often envisions a return to his "former garden" through a mental map of the empire, imagining journeys along imperial waterways or combined land and water routes. In contrast, in his Kuizhou period, he rarely imagines a return to Chang'an through these transportation networks. This absence is all the more telling when we consider that Kuizhou—despite its cultural isolation—was not only a transportation hub, but also closer to Chang'an than Chengdu, both in terms of straight-line distance and actual travel routes. In fact, if Du Fu were to travel from Chengdu to the capitals by way of the Yangtze River, Kuizhou would lie approximately at the midpoint of that journey. Yet, despite Kuizhou's relative proximity to Chang'an compared to Chengdu, as well as its advantageous position within the transportation network, lines such as "Soon I will pass the Ba Gorge and flow across the Wu Gorge, / Going downstream to Xiangyang, I will head toward Luoyang" 即從巴峽穿巫峽，便下襄陽向洛陽[364] are rare in Du Fu's Kuizhou poems and beyond. Instead, what becomes notable are his recurring visions of reaching Chang'an not by terrestrial routes, but through the celestial realm. Cloud and mist, the moon and its radiance, stars and constellations, and the Milky Way come to overshadow rivers and roads as the primary media of connection. These cosmic elements link the isolated Kuizhou and Du Fu's "former garden" in Chang'an, which by now has been transformed from a tangible location to a fantasized site of longing and desire.

[364] "Upon Hearing Imperial Troops' Retaking Henan and Hebei" 聞官軍收河南河北, *DFQJJZ*, 10.2747.

The Transference of "Home" into the Poetic Domain

As the "home" Du Fu left behind in the Central Plain becomes increasingly transformed into an idealized locus of longing and belonging, we may begin to ask: what, then, were the implications for the homes he inhabited in Kuizhou? Unlike in Chengdu, where he occasionally found moments of contentment and a sense of temporary settlement, his sojourn in Kuizhou was marked by a persistent and irreducible estrangement. In contrast to Chang'an—a site where personal, ancestral, and political forms of belonging converge—Du Fu's temporary dwellings in Kuizhou seem to possess only a shadowy existence. They also lack the vivid emotional and descriptive presence of his Thatched Cottage in Chengdu. In Chapter Two, I discussed the competing impulses in Du Fu's conception of home during his years in Shu, where efforts to establish a sense of dwelling amid displacement were often undercut by a vision of movement, mobility, and the possibility of returning to his hometown. During his time in Kuizhou, the contending forces in his thinking about home grew even more pronounced: between a compulsive longing for a remote, inaccessible, lost paradise and an inescapable struggle with a place that persistently reminded him of its foreignness. As this section will reveal, Du Fu's inability to emotionally "settle" in Kuizhou not only led him to project his longing onto an idealized Chang'an—which had ceased to be a physical location he could literally return to—but also transported the notion of home into the poetic domain. I argue that in Du Fu's Kuizhou and post-Kuizhou verse, ideas of home and belonging became increasingly bound to the act of writing itself. During his final years, writing was no longer a means of constructing or commemorating a home—as it had been with his Thatched Cottage—but rather a way to transcend and ultimately replace it.

Kuizhou was, for Du Fu, more of a temporary stop than a destination—let alone a place to establish a permanent home. During his roughly two-year sojourn there, he moved four times: beginning in a Guest Hall 客堂, then relocating to the West Tower 西閣 where he stayed for about half a year, followed by a brief stay in Red Armor 赤甲, before renting a residence in Rangxi 瀼西. His final move was to a dwelling in the Eastern Garrison 東屯, where he oversaw some rice fields.[365] Despite the transient nature of these lodgings, Du Fu did remain for relatively extended periods in both the West Tower and the thatched hut he rented in Rangxi—around half a year each. He even purchased an orange orchard, suggesting that he might have entertained longer-term plans for settlement. Nevertheless, throughout his time in Kuizhou, Du Fu struggles to depict domestic life in a convivial or settled manner. In contrast to his Chengdu period—when poems celebrating the joys of family life were more frequent, as in the lines, "My old wife draws on paper to make a chessboard, / My young children hammer needles into fishing hooks" 老妻畫紙為棋局，稚子敲針作釣鉤[366]—such scenes became notably rare in his Kuizhou poetry. When domestic themes do appear, they are often laced with irony, absurdity, or self-mockery, underscoring the persistent dislocation and estrangement that marked his life in exile.

Indeed, Du Fu consistently portrays himself as a guest and sojourner in Kuizhou, where having physical shelter does not equate to having a true home. In a poem composed during his residence in the West Tower, he reflects poignantly on his state of homelessness: "Neglecting his studies, I have left my dull-witted son to his own fate, / With no home to return to, I surrender to my aging body" 失學從愚子，無家任老身.[367] As this couplet suggests, his temporary dwellings

[365] Du Fu's time in Rangxi overlapped with his residence at the Eastern Garrison, as he continued to visit or briefly stay at his Rangxi home even after relocating to the Eastern Garrison.
[366] "River Village" 江村, *DFQJJZ*, 7.1965.
[367] "Not Leaving the West Tower, Two Poems (I)" 不離西閣二首, *DFQJJZ*, 15.4282-3.

are not considered "home" in any meaningful sense. If home must be a lasting place—one that offers security, stability, and rootedness—the absence of such a place in Kuizhou is compounded by a parallel anxiety: the erosion of his family's social standing, a different kind of "place," as betrayed by his son's failure to pursue learning.

In contrast to his earlier periods, Du Fu's time in Kuizhou marks the moment when the concept of home most starkly emerges as a problem. More than attempting to build a home, he is increasingly preoccupied with grappling over what home means—and whether it can exist at all in exile. Even in poems that initially raise expectations of depicting a sense of home and dwelling, Du Fu ultimately reveals the persistence of displacement and homelessness. This is exemplified by the two poems composed under the title "West Tower" 西閣, where his temporary shelter does not assuage his sense of dislocation, but instead becomes the very site that must be transcended.

西閣二首 West Tower, Two Poems[368]

I

巫山小搖落，The Wu Mountains see a gentle autumn fall,
碧色見松林。Emerald hues emerge in the pine groves.
百鳥各相命，Hundreds of birds call out to one another,
孤雲無自心。A lone cloud drifts, without a will of its own.
層軒俯江壁，Layered roofs overlook the river cliffs,
要路亦高深。The main road stretches through height and depth.

[368] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3873-5.

朱紱猶紗帽，In vermilion gowns, yet wearing a gauze cap,[369]

新詩近玉琴。My new verses rest close to the jade zither.

功名不早立，I failed to earn merit and fame in early years,

衰疾謝知音。Now weak and ill, I blush before true friends.

哀世非王粲，I grieve for the age, though I am no Wang Can,[370]

終然學越吟。In the end, I will only imitate the sound of Yue.

Some commentators and critics have noted that although titled "West Tower," this poem—along with the second one—is not primarily concerned with the physical location named in its title. For instance, Pu Qilong remarks, "Although the two poems bear the title 'West Tower,' they are in fact compositions in the genre of 'Expressing My Thoughts,' without being bound to the subject of the West Tower" 二詩雖以西閣命題，乃是寫懷之什，不黏西閣.[371] Yet, as I will demonstrate, the tenuous connection between the title and the main body of the poems is far from incidental; rather, it reflects Du Fu's deeper struggle to represent a sense of home in Kuizhou.

Two points are particularly worth noting about this poem. First, although it is titled after Du Fu's dwelling in Kuizhou, the poem is bookended by two couplets that foreground displacement rather than settlement. The opening couplet conveys this indirectly by referencing the southern region's warmer climate, in contrast to that of the Central Plain and the capital. A similar idea

[369] The vermilion gowns 朱紱 refer to official court robes, while the gauze cap 紗帽 is traditionally associated with recluses.
[370] Wang Can composed his "Poem on Seven Griefs" 七哀詩 during his flight from war-ravaged Chang'an to Jingzhou, depicting the chaos of the late Han dynasty.
[371] Pu Qilong, *Du Du xinjie*, 5.758.

appears in another poem composed in Kuizhou, which reads: "Each year, a gentle autumn fall—/ This is not the same as my old garden" 年年小搖落，不與故園同.[372] This sentiment of displacement is made more explicit in the closing couplet through a literary allusion to Zhuang Xi 莊舃, a native of Yue who, despite attaining high office in the state of Chu, was observed moaning in his native speech when gravely ill—an act that attests to his enduring attachment to his homeland of Yue.[373]

Second, the interior setting of the West Tower is distilled into a single couplet—the fourth—which portrays Du Fu's official accoutrements alongside objects that symbolize creative activity and self-expression. The contrast between the vermilion robe of his rank and the simple gauze cap associated with reclusion (line 7) subtly reveals his liminal status: he holds a title, yet lacks real power or responsibility. This sense of stasis and frustrated ambition is already intimated in the previous couplet, which depicts the inaccessible "main road"—a familiar metaphor for high office or influential paths. By contrast, the image in line 8—his freshly composed verses resting near the jade zither—suggests a quiet withdrawal into poetic solitude. It is as if his only true companion is his poetry, the "one who knows the tune" 知音. This retreat into poetry has been foreshadowed by the earlier image of the lone cloud (line 4), drifting freely, unattached—mirroring the poet's sense of quiet estrangement. In this poem, poetry appears as a potential source of solace. Yet, it is an image evoked but not fully developed, soon eclipsed by the deeper melancholy of displacement that emerges in the final couplet. This closure is more than a lament over Du Fu's current state of dislocation; it carries a foreboding sense of dying as a guest in a foreign land. Thus, by attending to both the interior of the West Tower and its external

[372] "On the Thirtieth Day of the Ninth Month, Second Year of Dali (766-779)" 大曆二年九月三十日, *DFQJJZ*, 17.5205.
[373] *Shiji*, 70.2301.

surroundings, and by bridging the human and natural realms, the poem is fundamentally framed by the theme of dislocation. Du Fu's dwelling becomes a space marked by solitude, alienation, and estrangement.

The second poem, in many ways, continues the themes introduced in the first. While the first poem thematizes displacement under the guise of recording a place of habitation, the second expresses a longing to be transported to a legendary realm of reclusion and detachment—a desire to transcend the immediacy of the poet's dislocation.

II

懶心似江水，My idle heart is like the river's flowing water,

日夜向滄洲。Day and night it rushes toward the Blue-Gray Isle.

不道含香賤，Say not that holding clove in the mouth is lowly—[374]

4 其如鑷白休。What can be done, now that I no longer pluck my white hairs?[375]

經過凋碧柳，Since I passed through here, the green willows have withered,

蕭索倚朱樓。Desolate, I lean alone on the vermilion tower.

畢娶何時竟，When will I at last be done marrying off my children,[376]

8 消中得自由。So that, with this wasting illness, I might find freedom?[377]

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[374] In the Han dynasty, Imperial Secretaries 尚書郎 held cloves in their mouths when presenting memorials. Du Fu uses the phrase "holding clove in the mouth" as a metonym for his official title as a secretary.

[375] This alludes to a story about Xiao Daocheng 蕭道成 (427-482), the future Emperor Gao of Southern Qi. While serving as Chancellor during the Liu-Song dynasty, he was once reminded of his advanced age when his grandson mistakenly addressed him as "great-grandfather." At that moment, he had been plucking his white hairs. Upon hearing his grandson's words, he put aside his mirror and tweezers. *Nanshi* 南史, compiled by Li Yanshou 李延壽 (active 7th century) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 5.133.

[376] Xiang Chang 向長, after arranging his children's marriages, severed all family ties and wandered into famous mountains with a friend, never to return. *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 83.2758-9.

[377] The wasting illness *xiaozhong* 消中, also known as *xiaoke* 消渴, refers to what is now understood as diabetes.

豪華看古往，Splendor and grandeur—so much has passed in ages long gone,

服食寄冥搜。For taking cinnabar and elixir, I entrust myself to hidden realms.

詩盡人間興，In poetry, I have exhausted the inspirations of the human world,

12 兼須入海求。So now, I must seek across the seas.

In this poem, a desire for elsewhere is conveyed from the very beginning, as the poet's mind follows the course of the river toward the Blue-Gray Isle, an imaginary locale associated with reclusion. In a poem written in Chengdu, discussed in Chapter Two, Du Fu evokes a similar image, transforming the creek by his residence into a symbol of retreat: "The water of Hundred-Flower Pond is exactly my Blue-Gray Waves" 百花潭水即滄浪.[378] Now, however—situated in a place he can scarcely call home—the Yangtze River ceases to mark a space of seclusion in the here-and-now; instead, it becomes a channel for imagined escape, leading to a legendary realm beyond the imperial domain.

The impulse to withdraw is further elaborated in the following couplets, through references to old age, prolonged illness, and Du Fu's forlorn state in the West Tower. Compared to the first poem, the second conveys a deeper sense of resignation: Du Fu appears more willing to accept both his fate and the inevitabilities of life (lines 3-4). Yet despite this greater acceptance, he remains far from at ease in the West Tower. The term *jing guo* 經過 (line 5) underscores the temporary nature of Du Fu's residence, while the following line conveys his cheerless and desolate state. Taken together, the third couplet reinforces the sense of estrangement that

[378] *DFQJJZ*, 7.1955.

permeates the first poem, leading to a wish for a life of free wandering once his parental responsibilities have been fulfilled (lines 7-8).

What is particularly striking about the poem is its final stanza, which transitions from themes of illness and old age to a meditation on the vanity of worldly glory and the pursuit of Daoist immortality. While Du Fu draws on conventional tropes and imagery, he seeks the immortal realms not merely for elixirs and herbs but, as the final couplet reveals, ultimately for poetic inspiration. The image of the sea—where the legendary mountains of the immortals are said to lie—echoes the Blue-Gray Isle in the opening couplet, bringing the poem full circle. Yet there is also progression: by the end, the sea, or the Blue-Gray Isle, no longer signifies a conventional realm of reclusion or immortality, but instead becomes a space for poetic creativity and companionship. The commonality, however, is that—like the immortal realms—poetry itself is also a space of transcendence, allowing the displaced poet to rise above the immediacy of his dislocation. In these two poems about the West Tower, poetry emerges as the central image. The scroll of Du Fu's new verses—an object prominently placed in his dwelling in the first poem—proves to possess a more potent presence, one that ultimately eclipses the tower itself by offering an alternative space of belonging and inner anchoring. In the end, the "West Tower" poems are not only, and ironically, about displacement, but also about poetry as a surrogate homeland.

References to poetry writing are abundant in Du Fu's extensive corpus, reflecting his acute self-awareness as a poet. They appear with particular frequency in his Kuizhou works and later compositions. Notably, a recurring pattern emerges—as demonstrated by the two "West Tower" poems—in which meditations on home and dwelling ultimately give way to reflections on poetic creation. Another poem, titled "Wicker Gate" 柴門, offers a further example of this tendency. Composed in 767, the poem's title metonymically refers to Du Fu's residence in Rangxi. Like

the “West Tower” poems, “Wicker Gate” reveals Du Fu’s struggle to feel at home in the remote region of Kuizhou. However, rather than evoking a transcendental realm for poetic creation, this poem underscores how the act of writing itself offers solace and a sense of transcendence within the here-and-now.

柴門 Wicker Gate[379]

泛舟登瀼西，Drifting by boat, I come ashore west of Rang,

迴首望兩崖。Turning back, I gaze at cliffs on both sides.

東城乾旱天，At the Eastern City, the skies are parched,[380]

其氣如焚柴。The air sears like burning firewood.

長影沒窈窕，Long shadows sink into the hidden depths,

餘光散啥呀。The lingering light disperses into the vast emptiness.

大江蟠嵌根，The great river coils at the cliffs’ deep roots,

歸海成一家。Flowing home to the sea, where all becomes one.

下衝割坤軸，It plunges down, cleaving the axis of the earth,

竦壁攢鏌鋣。Steep walls thrust upward, cluster like Moye blades.[381]

蕭颯灑秋色，Rustling winds cast autumn’s colors,

氣昏霾日車。The air dimmed, the sun’s carriage obscured in haze.

峽門自此始，The gorge’s gate begins from here,

[379] *DFQJJZ*, 16.4566.
[380] The Eastern City refers to Kuizhou, because it was located to the east of the Shu region.
[381] Moye was the name of a famous sword owned by King Helü of Wu during the Spring and Autumn Period.

最窄容浮查。At its narrowest, it barely admits a floating raft.

禹功翊造化，The labor of Yu assisted Heaven’s design,

疏鑿就欹斜。Dredging and carving along the slanted terrain.

巨渠決太古，This vast channel was cleft from primeval times,

眾水為長蛇。The myriad streams converged, forming a long serpent.

風煙渺吳蜀，Winds and mists spread over Wu and Shu,

舟楫通鹽麻。Boats come and go, transporting salt and hemp.

我今遠遊子，I, now, am but a traveler far from home,

飄轉混泥沙。Tossed and turned amidst mud and sand.

萬物附本性，All things cleave to their inborn nature,

約身不願奢。I restrain myself, desiring no excess.

茅棟蓋一床，A thatched roof shelters just one bed,

清池有餘花。In the clear pond, a few blossoms still remain.

濁醪與脫粟，Unstrained wine and rough husked grain—

在眼無咨嗟。So long as I see them, I have no complaint.

山荒人民少，The mountains are wild, and people are few,

地僻日夕佳。The land is remote, yet the dusk is fair.[382]

貧病固其常，Poverty and illness have long been my norm,

富貴任生涯。Wealth and rank—I leave to the course of life.

[382] This couplet reworks a line by Tao Yuanming from one of his “Drinking Wine” poems: “The mountain air is fine at dusk” 山氣日夕佳. *Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian*, 3.220.

老於干戈際，I have grown old amidst the clash of arms,

宅幸蓬藁遮。Yet I’m fortunate to have a hut screened by tumbleweed and vine.

石亂上雲氣，From scattered rocks, cloud-like mist arises,

杉清延月華。The firs stand clear, extending the moon’s glow.

賞妍又分外，To delight in this fine sight is already beyond my share,

理愜夫何誇。If the truth gratifies my heart, what is there to boast about?

足了垂白年，This is enough to carry me through my white-haired years,

敢居高士差。How dare I place myself among lofty-minded men?

書此豁平昔，Having written this, I am released from my long-held cares,

迴首猶暮霞。Turning my head—still, the evening auroras remain.

This poem stands out not only for its exploration of the connection between home and writing, but also for the way it dramatizes how a deeper acceptance of exile, or a more profound sense of settlement, is attained through the act of writing itself. Though titled “Wicker Gate,” the poem devotes its entire first half to an extended depiction of the surrounding region of Kuizhou, delaying any mention of Du Fu’s humble shelter—the supposed focal point. The first half of the poem (lines 1–20) offers a sweeping vision of the perilous, awe-inspiring landscape of the Three Gorges region, marked by a harsh climate, treacherous terrain, and dangerous passageways. Through imagery that evokes geological, mythical, and cosmic scales, the area is portrayed as one of profound instability—where even the earth’s axis seems broken (line 9) and the sun’s radiance dimmed (line 12). It is the last place one would expect to find security, let alone establish a home. Thus, when Du Fu shifts his focus to himself and his dwelling in the second

half of the poem, a stark contrast emerges between the vast, unsettled world and his humble, rustic shelter. The poem's bipartite structure and the contrast it stages already suggest the difficulty—if not the futility—of making a home in a landscape so deeply uninhabitable.

If the overall structure of the poem foregrounds not the fact of settlement but the struggle toward it, the same is true of its second half, which opens by casting Du Fu's situation in terms of movement and transience—he is a "far traveler," drifting in "mud and sand." What follows suggests that Du Fu is not reflecting from a place of calm; rather, he is talking himself into feeling at home. This inner struggle is revealed through the poem's justificatory and self-effacing tone, marked by frequent uses of negation and rhetorical humility. Du Fu does not simply record contentment—he asserts it repeatedly: stating, for example, that he "desires no excess" 不願奢 and "has no complaint" 無咨嗟. Such declarations transform absence into sufficiency, and poverty into virtue—a well-established rhetorical move in the Chinese poetic tradition, especially among reclusive writers. Yet Du Fu's version of this gesture feels more uneasy, more psychologically exposed. The very urge to assert "no complaint" reveals a latent tension beneath the surface. Moreover, his claim that "poverty and illness have long been my norm," or his rhetorical question—"how dare I place myself among lofty-minded men"—carries a bitter undertone, suggesting not full resignation, but an ongoing effort to justify and accept his condition. Thus, the second half of the poem performs a process of internal reconciliation, one that reaches toward acceptance in the final stanza: "This is enough to carry me through my white-haired years."

The closing couplet, drawing on the trope of writing as emotional catharsis, captures precisely what the poem enacts: it is through writing about his psychological negotiation with exile that Du Fu ultimately releases his long-held cares and inner turbulence. The final image—the

lingering evening auroras—evokes the abiding presence of something fleeting. At once unsettling and consoling, this image encapsulates the poem's central idea: that contentment lies not in permanence, but in accepting the transitory and provisional. And if Du Fu's temporary, humble shelter is not enough to provide lasting security or a sense of belonging, then writing about it—the act of articulation, whether of material simplicity or of a deeper acceptance of mortality and fate—serves as a way to reclaim a sense of home. Here, writing is not merely reflective but transformative: through it, Du Fu comes to terms with his displacement and finds solace in a more enduring form of habitation.

The profound connection between home—or its shadowy counterpart, homelessness—and the act of writing is a recurring theme in Du Fu's late works. In a poem titled "Return" 歸, composed upon his return to his residence in Rangxi, possibly from his orchard across the Rang river, he concludes:

他鄉悅遲暮，In this foreign land, to find joy in my twilight years,

不敢廢詩篇。I dare not abandon the writing of verse.[383]

This couplet suggests that poetry serves as a steadfast companion for Du Fu, offering solace amid his existence as a displaced sojourner, burdened by the passage of time and the weight of old age. In this way, the "return" to his temporary dwelling in Kuizhou also signifies a retreat into the poetic realm. In another poem about the orchard he purchased, Du Fu similarly reveals how the quest for settlement is intimately bound up with the act of writing poetry:

[383] *DFQJJZ*, 16.4543.

問俗營寒事，I ask of local ways to prepare for the coming cold,

將詩待物華。And with my verses, await the return of spring's splendor.[384]

This couplet juxtaposes the practical demands of managing household affairs—providing material sustenance and physical comfort—with the emotional and spiritual fulfillment found in poetry. The first line highlights the need to learn and adapt to local customs for survival, while the second elevates the role of poetry as a means of transcending the limitations of place. Through verse, the poet aligns himself with the rhythms of the natural world and finds joy in its unfolding beauty, even amid displacement.

The potential of writing to provide an alternative space of anchoring is closely tied to the idea of writing as emotional purging—an idea encountered in "Wicker Gate." This is a recurring trope in Du Fu's late works. A notable example from his Chengdu period appears in the poem "River Pavilion" 江亭, which concludes:

故林歸未得，I have yet to return to my old grove,

排悶強裁詩。To ease my gloom, I press myself to trim a poem.[385]

Here, poetry becomes an emotional outlet—a tool for coping with the psychological toll of displacement. Yet the tone suggests strain: the act of writing is a conscious effort, a forced diversion from melancholy rather than a natural flow of inspiration. In contrast, another poem presents poetry as a spontaneous, almost involuntary response to the pain of exile. "Beginning of

[384] "Little Orchard" 小園, *DFQJJZ*, 17.5126.
[385] *DFQJJZ*, 8.2186.

Spring” 立春, dated to 767 during Du Fu’s time in Kuizhou, opens with a vivid encounter with spring vegetables that triggers a flood of memory, transporting the poet to past experiences in the two capitals. The final stanza grounds this nostalgic reverie in the bitter reality of the present:

巫峽寒江那對眼，The cold river in the Wu Gorge—an unbearable sight to behold,
杜陵遠客不勝悲。A distant traveler from Duling can hardly endure his sorrow.
此身未知歸定處，I still do not know where this life will come to rest,
呼兒覓紙一題詩。So I call my son to fetch some paper, and dash off a poem.[386]

This is one of the most striking instances that dramatizes the connection between displacement and the act of writing. The immediacy of calling out for paper and the quick composition of a poem suggest a seamless continuity between dislocation and poetic expression. Here, poetry becomes not only a response to exile but a surrogate home on the page.

Compared to the line in “River Pavilion”—“I have yet to return to my old grove”—the second-to-last line of “Beginning of Spring”—“I still do not know where this life will come to rest”—conveys an even deeper sense of homelessness. Whereas the former implies a specific home that remains out of reach, the latter suggests that Du Fu lacks even a clear conception of where home might be. As explored throughout this chapter, Chang’an, for Du Fu, had transcended its physical reality to become a palimpsest of belonging—an idealized, irretrievable locale that he could no longer return to in any literal sense. This symbolic transformation of his original home, combined with his inability to find lasting settlement in exile, left Du Fu in a state

[386] “Beginning of Spring” 立春, *DFQJJZ*, 15.4361.

of profound displacement. Yet it is this absence of a permanent home that fundamentally reshaped Du Fu's relationship to poetry, which became a site of longing—a reaching toward a home rendered all the more potent precisely because of its absence and elusiveness.

For Du Fu, home and poetry exist in a reciprocal and interdependent relationship. As the preceding discussions have shown, his evolving conception of home is both negotiated and constructed through poetry. At the same time, the longing for an idealized, ultimate home serves as the driving force behind much of his poetic output. While poetry provides Du Fu with diversion and solace during exile, it cannot fully resolve the unbearable pain of his dislocation. This tension is poignantly expressed in a couplet from "After the Solstice" 至後: "In extreme sorrow, I meant to rely on poetry to dispel my feelings, / But once the poem was complete, reciting it brought only greater desolation" 愁極本憑詩遣興，詩成吟詠轉淒涼.[387] Du Fu's desperate yearning for home cannot be resolved once and for all; instead, it must be continually coped with through the ongoing act of writing.

On the other hand, although Du Fu cannot recover or reinhabit his idealized home—a paradise lost—through poetry, the act of writing offers him a different form of belonging. Writing becomes a means of connecting to his cultural roots, wielding the cultural capital he possesses as a member of the literary elite, and preserving his identity as a literatus while participating in the transmission of a shared cultural tradition. In an age when poetry—or literature more broadly—was far more encompassing than the modern notion of "art for art's sake," writing was not merely a form of personal self-expression. It was also a way of inheriting, transforming, and reproducing the cultural forms that defined the core of the Chinese tradition. While Du Fu at times speaks of poetry as a craft—a specific genre with its own formal particularities—he also

[387] *DFQJJZ*, 11.3328.

describes it in terms that suggest an affinity with the classics, histories, and the broader textual tradition, thereby situating his own work within a continuum of textual genres.

For instance, Du Fu characterizes his writings as the product of adversity—a condition that has given rise to many canonical works: "This writing is what remains after sorrow and suffering, / Just as the sages bequeathed the *Judgments* and the *Xici* after adversity" 斯文憂患餘，聖哲垂彖繫.[388] Here, *siwen* 斯文 refers both to Du Fu's own writings and, more broadly, to "this culture." With this statement, Du Fu aligns his poetry with the long-standing textual legacy that traces back to the sages. Another example is his recurring analogy between himself and Sima Tan 司馬談 (c. 165–110 BCE), the grand historian, who was detained in Zhounan when Emperor Wu of Han conducted the *fengshan* sacrifice at Taishan, and who died in grief shortly thereafter. Du Fu invokes this story to underscore his alienation from the court and imperial circles. At the same time, he identifies with Sima Tan through their shared commitment to learning and writing. The historiographical masterpiece that Sima Tan and his son, Sima Qian, co-authored—the *Shiji*—became a cornerstone of the Chinese canon, securing their enduring legacy. While Du Fu's poetry does not address the same historical scope, he likewise documents the passage of time and the rhythms of daily life, both personal and public: "Left behind, an old man / records the seasons and marks each dawn and dusk" 留滯一老翁，書時記朝夕.[389] Ultimately, through his writing, Du Fu not only gave meaning to his life as a displaced poet but also sought a place for himself within the lineage of writers who established their legacy through words.

[388] The *Tuan*, or *Judgments*, are statements in the *Yijing* that explain the names of the 64 hexagrams. The *Xici*, or *Appended Remarks*, is a commentary in the *Yijing* traditionally attributed to Confucius. "Spending the Night at Carved Rock Shore" 宿鑿石浦, *DFQJJZ*, 19.5760-1.
[389] "Two Poems on Rain" 雨二首, *DFQJJZ*, 13.3702.

For Du Fu, the continuity of *wen*—culture, literature, and moral order—and his participation in the received cultural tradition found a more immediate realization through familial transmission. "Poetry is an endeavor of our family" 詩是吾家事, he wrote in a birthday poem to his son Zongwu 宗武.[390] This sense of pride stemmed from Du Fu's lineage: his grandfather, Du Shenyan 杜審言, was a prominent poet and statesman at the court of Empress Wu. In the same poem, following the line above, Du Fu urges his son to commit himself to classical learning and to seek deeper literary truth: "Master well the principles of the *Wenxuan*, / Seek not the frivolity of colorful robes" 熟精文選理，休覓綵衣輕.[391] In this familial and pedagogical context, the mastery of literary texts is portrayed as a higher moral and intellectual pursuit—and, more significantly, as a deeper and more enduring expression of filial piety—than superficial acts such as donning multicolored garments to amuse one's parents, a reference to the well-known story of Lao Laizi 老萊子 traditionally associated with filial devotion.[392] The idea that poetry was a familial legacy instilled in Du Fu a strong sense of mission and confidence, reinforcing his lifelong dedication to the literary arts. Conversely, this deep investment helps explain Du Fu's frustration and anxiety over his son's neglect of learning during the years of their displacement: "Neglecting his studies, I have left my dull-witted son to his own fate, / With no home to return to, I surrender to my aging body."[393] Such failure threatened not only the continuation of literary cultivation but also the prestige and standing of the family lineage.

[390] "Zongwu's Birthday" 宗武生日, *DFQJJZ*, 9.2647.
[391] "Zongwu's Birthday," *DFQJJZ*, 9.2647.
[392] According to the *Yiwen Leiju* 藝文類聚, which quotes the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (*Biographies of Exemplary Women*), Lao Laizi served his parents with filial piety. At the age of seventy, he still amused them by behaving like an infant, wearing clothes of five colors. *Yiwen leiju*, edited by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641) et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 20.369.
[393] *DFQJJZ*, 15.4282-3.

Thus, for Du Fu, participation in the shared cultural tradition and the transmission of family legacy converge in writing, which becomes a different kind of "home"—a space of anchoring amid an unsettled life. This is why he continued to write even in isolation, when many of his poems were neither prompted by social occasions nor widely circulated. In fact, it was precisely his isolation that compelled him to write. The drive to construct meaning and to seek alternative forms of belonging pushed him to move beyond conventional poetic contexts. Yet this departure from tradition does not render Du Fu an iconoclast or a subverter; rather, he emerges as a transformative transmitter of the tradition—one whose writing stems more from a constructive than a deconstructive impulse. Writing from the margins of a crumbling empire and in a condition of rootlessness, Du Fu's poetry exceeded its traditional function as a refined art composed in response to established social or literary expectations. It became, instead, an existential act: a ceaseless search for home in the deepest sense. As the Hungarian philosopher György Lukács, quoting Novalis, once said, "Philosophy is really homesickness—it is the urge to be at home everywhere."[394] The same could be said of poetry for Du Fu. Though he never reached the home he longed for, it was this very displacement that became the wellspring of his poetic power: poetry continued, as life continued.

Conclusion

The main title of this chapter, "Gazes from Kuizhou," is intended to evoke a famous line from Du Fu's "Autumn Meditations" discussed earlier: "Each day I follow the Big Dipper, gazing toward the capital city." Du Fu's longing gaze toward Chang'an—the center of the Tang

[394] György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, translated by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 29.

empire—is perhaps an all-too-familiar trope in his poetry, one that has become deeply ingrained in the poetic image of him. Yet this is not something we should take for granted. In this chapter, I have attempted to reexamine Du Fu's gazes from Kuizhou by unpacking the complexities surrounding both the act of gazing and the object of his gaze.

Specifically, I have demonstrated how the mechanism of gazing in Du Fu's late verse has been reshaped by his engagement with the local sphere from the empire's margins. This is reflected in the problematization of the vantage point, the fragmentation of a panoramic view of the empire, and a shift toward a horizontal spatiality characterized by juxtaposition and mental mapping. What emerges—and appears unique—from this reformulated vision is Du Fu's longing gaze toward the capital city, Chang'an, which, I argue, becomes an idealized site of belonging: a perfect union of personal home, ancestral homeland, and the symbolic center of the Tang empire and Chinese civilization.

At the same time, set against this reimagined homeland is Du Fu's complex relationship to his temporary homes in Kuizhou—a shadowy counterpart to Chang'an, a foil, and a space to be transcended. I have shown that in the final years of Du Fu's life, in a region that constantly reminds him of his displacement, ideas of home become increasingly bound to the act of poetic creation. Ultimately, poetry itself becomes an alternative space of meaning and belonging—a different form of "home" for Du Fu amid his restless life of wandering.

Conclusion

"In Verse I Have Exhausted the Human World's Inspirations"

In this dissertation, I have sought to demonstrate how Du Fu's visions of home and empire evolved as he was displaced to the peripheries. I argue that poetry played a central role in his negotiation of various forms of anchoring and belonging—through his transformation of alien landscapes, construction of homes and dwellings, engagement with the flux of news to remain connected to a broader community, and reimagination of a lost yet idealized homeland that merged personal and political identities. Throughout this process, I emphasize both the rootedness of his poetry in his concrete experiences on the empire's margins and his belief in the power of writing to reorganize—or even transcend—those immediate realities.

Although the themes explored in the preceding chapters persist throughout Du Fu's life and are not confined to specific periods, the roughly chronological structure of this study allows us to trace shifts and transformations during his prolonged exile. A key development is Du Fu's gradual turn toward more abstract, symbolic, and idealized forms of belonging in his later years, with poetry itself increasingly becoming the central force in his life. This deepening investment in poetry—as both a medium for meaning-making and an alternative space of home—further prompted his expansion of traditional themes and poetic occasions. This evolution is encapsulated in the line that serves as the title of this Conclusion—"In Verse I Have Exhausted the Human World's Inspirations" 詩盡人間興.[395] Taken from the second of his "West Tower" poems, discussed in Chapter Four, this line typifies Du Fu's turn to poetry as an ultimate home in contexts that might otherwise be expected to express a sense of settlement in Kuizhou. It

[395] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3875.

suggests that poetry, as a space of meaning and anchoring, has attained a kind of completeness and finality—one in which all the interests and stirrings of the human world can be transported, transformed, and transcended.

Perhaps few poems better exemplify the breadth of Du Fu's subject matter than those focused on humble topics and everyday activities—removing a trellis, clearing weeds, repairing a broken deck, or planting lettuce. While such poems appeared as early as his Qinzhou period, they became more prominent in his Kuizhou years. These works have attracted scholarly attention not only for their novelty, but also for what they reveal about Du Fu's role as a transitional figure in Chinese literary history. In this Conclusion, I return to these poems, situating them within the broader discussions of writing, home, and empire developed throughout this dissertation. I demonstrate that the trajectory of Du Fu's experimentation with humble domestic topics is closely intertwined with—and serves as a microcosm of—his evolving visions of home and empire during his exile. The deepening of his formal experimentation culminates in the Kuizhou poems: highly performative works that dramatize the act of writing in ways previously unseen in the tradition. I argue that these poems arise from the convergence of Du Fu's layered conceptions of home during his stay in Kuizhou: his sense of alienation in his temporary residences there, his longing for the cultural and political center, and his vision of poetry as a space of ultimate meaning and belonging. This final discussion thus synthesizes the major themes and arguments of the study while reflecting on broader questions of literary and cultural history.

Du Fu's poems on humble, domestic topics have often been discussed in relation to the emergence of the private sphere—the shift from an era in which imperial values governed the representation of all aspects of domestic and personal life to one that increasingly celebrates private subjectivity and its distinctive modes of expression. The idea of a private sphere in

classical Chinese poetry was first articulated by Stephen Owen, who credits Du Fu as the first poet to carve out such a space in his writing—while also noting his underlying unease with this innovation. Nevertheless, as Owen further observes, Du Fu stands as a precursor to the Mid-Tang generation, which would more boldly and unapologetically celebrate private life through superfluous interpretations of personal constructs and possessions.[396] Building on Owen's insights, Gregory Patterson, in his 2013 dissertation, extends the discussion to Du Fu's Kuizhou poems, showing how Du Fu applies classical language to domestic tasks, thereby imbuing the routines of everyday life with poetic and cultural significance.[397] To complicate the public/private dichotomy, Lucas Bender's article "Ironic Empires" draws attention to an emotional and psychological complexity that underlies Du Fu's engagement with humble subjects. Bender argues that Du Fu is often torn between a comic ironizing of imperial values and a tragic awareness of his continued dependence on the empire. In the end, Bender suggests, "Du Fu can neither locate himself securely within the public world nor escape into a securely private sphere."[398]

These discussions not only complicate the received image of Du Fu by revealing the personal, unconventional, and less solemn aspects of his work, but also offer a perspective on a key transitional period in Chinese cultural history. As Xiaofei Tian observes, Du Fu "was on the threshold of a profound cultural sea change. Before Du Fu, the court and the capital were still the center of cultural accomplishments and cultural production, and in that world poems complaining about bad vegetables, thanking one's servants for domestic labor, or instructing

[396] Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 89-94. For discussions of the private sphere in premodern China, see also Xiaoshan Yang, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[397] Patterson, "Elegies for Empire: The Poetics of Memory in the Late Work of Du Fu (712– 770)" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), "Interlude: Private Investments," 126-148.
[398] Bender, "Ironic Empires," 72.

one's son to build a chicken coop were simply unthinkable; but, after Du Fu, that old order crumbled even as the capital Chang'an still stood."[399] Building on existing scholarship and the preceding chapters of this dissertation, I aim to further unpack Du Fu's role in this moment of transition in Chinese literati identity. Specifically, I contextualize his turn to domestic themes in relation to his longing for home, his desire to reconnect with the empire, and his belief in writing as an ultimate space of settlement—a means of anchoring the self amid personal displacement and national crisis. Using the intermediary concept of home as an interpretive lens, I seek to further complicate the binary between private and public, personal and imperial, revealing that crucial shifts in literary and cultural history are often not the result of a linear process, but are instead prompted by the convergence of multifarious—and often contingent or competing—forces.

Du Fu's interest in everyday domestic activities—like many aspects of his poetic innovation—was shaped by his effort to create meaning in the face of displacement and isolation. Indeed, tracing his treatment of these themes across different phases of his exile reveals how his shifting approaches reflect and coincide with his evolving visions of home and empire. In the Chinese poetic tradition, a subgenre known as *yongwu* poetry shares Du Fu's interest in trivial subjects. Just as Du Fu's poems on modest, domestic matters exhibit what Stephen Owen calls an "interpretive excess"—"imposing an overlarge interpretation on something small"[400]—*yongwu* poetry presupposes the triviality of its subject matter and centers on questions of value and valuation. Du Fu's exploration of such topics, first appearing in his Qinzhou poems, stems precisely from his engagement with—and reworking of—the *yongwu* tradition. Early examples

[399] Tian, *Reading Du Fu: Nine Views*, 5.
[400] Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages": Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 89-94.

such as “Removing the Trellis” 除架, “Wasted Vegetable Patches” 廢畦, and “Empty Purse” 空囊 belong to a group of a dozen or so poems composed during his stay in Qinzhou that may best be categorized as *yongwu* works.[401] Written uniformly in regulated verse, these poems—while expanding the traditional stock of *yongwu* subjects—are clearly indebted to the genre in their evocative treatment of everyday objects and in their display of the poet’s sensibility and sentimentality toward the mundane. At times, this is inflected with a sense of humor and playfulness distinctive of Du Fu, though not typically associated with *yongwu* poetry. It is through this simultaneous indebtedness to and transformation of the *yongwu* tradition that Du Fu’s early poetic explorations of the trivial and domestic take shape.

Following these early experiments, Du Fu continued to incorporate everyday activities into his poetry, further expanding its thematic range. At the same time, however, he gradually moved away from the *yongwu* tradition to explore new approaches and styles. During his residence in Chengdu, Du Fu engaged with trivial, domestic themes not only to construct a sense of “home,” but also to commemorate his Thatched Cottage. As discussed in Chapter Two, amid recurring political turmoil, the state could no longer provide a stable foundation, and Du Fu was unable to fully demarcate a private space as a secure home. Hence, he sought to supplement his immediate experience with a vision of his residence as a site that might endure through poetry—a lasting “home” to preserve his memory and legacy after death. The group of poems he dedicated to familiar objects in his cottage—including “Deck by the Water,” “Broken Boat,” “Four Pine Trees,” “On Peach Trees,” and “Thatched Cottage”—reflects his desire to transform the Thatched Cottage into a poetic site and to endow its objects with enduring significance. To

[401] Other poems belonging to this group include: “New Moon” 初月, “Returning Swallows” 歸雁, “Fireflies” 螢火, “Bitter Bamboos” 苦竹, “Sick Horse” 病馬, and so forth.

achieve this, Du Fu crafts complex narratives around these ordinary domestic items, drawing on their entanglement with his own restless life and the broader public world.

During Du Fu's Kuizhou period, poems on humble topics reached a new peak, acquiring stylistic innovations shaped by his reconceptions of home and empire from a location even deeper in the imperial periphery. In these works—such as "Urging Zongwen to Make Haste Setting Up a Chicken Coop" 催宗文樹雞柵, "Supervising the Cutting of Trees" 課伐木, and "Planting Lettuce, with Preface" 種萵苣并序—Du Fu further dramatizes the contrast between the modest subject matter and the elevated language used to depict it, often employing archaic terms and images laden with allegorical meaning—many of which are closely associated with classical texts such as the *Shijing* and the *Chuci*. Several of these poems are prefaced by short introductions modeled on the Minor Prefaces of the *Shijing* tradition. This deliberate archaism lends the poems a performative quality unprecedented in the tradition, infusing them with a built-in irony that distinguishes them from his earlier treatments of trivial subjects.[402] The following poem, "Planting Lettuce," is a typical example of Du Fu's poems on similar subject matter from his Kuizhou period:

種萵苣並序 Planting Lettuce, with Preface[403]

After the rains, autumn arrived. I tended a small patch of earth in front of the hall, where I planted a row or two of lettuce in separated beds. Nearly twenty days have passed, yet the lettuce has not sprouted. Only the wild amaranth grows lush and green. I grieve for the gentlemen of our

[402] A poem written in Chengdu, titled "Getting Rid of Weeds" 除草, in many ways anticipates Du Fu's Kuizhou poems dealing with modest, household activities.
[403] *DFQJJZ*, 13.3686.

times: some, having secured a modest stipend late in life, still face setbacks and find no path forward. And so, I composed this poem.

既雨已秋，堂下理小畦，隔種一兩席許萵苣，向二旬矣，而苣不甲拆，獨野莧青青。傷時君子，或晚得微祿，轗軻不進，因作此詩。

陰陽一錯亂， *Yin* and *yang* are cast into sudden disarray,

驕蹇不復理。 Arrogant and obstinate, they no longer abide by the natural order.

枯旱於其中， Drought has taken hold within,

4 炎方慘如燬。 And the fiery southern lands burn in cruel devastation.

植物半蹉跎， Half the plants have missed their season,

嘉生將已矣。 And fine crops are on the verge of ruin.

雲雷欻奔命， Clouds and thunder rush forth at sudden command,

8 師伯集所使。 The Lords of Rain and Wind gather to fulfill their mission.

指麾赤白日， At their signal, the white sun turns red,

浟洞青光起。 From the vast void, blue gleams arise.

雨聲先已風， The wind arrives before the sound of rain,

12 散足盡西靡。 Scattering its drops, all driven westward.

山泉落滄江， Mountain springs descend into the gray-blue river,

霹靂猶在耳。 With thunderclaps still ringing in my ears.

終朝紆颯沓， All morning long, the winds whirl and surge,

16 信宿罷瀟灑。 Not until the second night does the storm subside.

堂下可以畦， In front of the hall, the ground can be turned into garden plots,

呼童對經始。 I call my servant boys to begin the work.[404]

苣兮蔬之常， Lettuce—such a common vegetable—

隨事蓺其子。 Taking the opportunity, I plant their seeds.

破塊數席間， Breaking clods within the span of a few mats,

荷鋤功易止。 With hoe on shoulder, the task is easily done.

兩旬不甲坼， For twenty days, not a single sprout has cracked the shell,

空惜埋泥滓。 I vainly regret their burial in mud and muck.

野莧迷汝來， Wild amaranths—your arrival bewilders me,

宗生實於此。 You've sprung up in dense clusters, filling the whole space.

此輩豈無秋， But can their kind truly escape the coming of autumn?

亦蒙寒露委。 They too will wither beneath the cold dew.

翻然出地速， Suddenly, they burst from the ground in haste,

滋蔓戶庭毀。 Spreading wildly till the courtyard is overwhelmed.

因知邪干正， Thus one sees that the treacherous obstruct the upright,

掩抑至沒齒。 Suppressing them unto the end of their days.

賢良雖得祿， Even when worthy men receive their stipend,

守道不封己。 They keep to the Way, enrich not themselves.

擁塞敗芝蘭， Clustered and crowded, ruining angelica and eupatorium

[404] The phrase *jing shi* 經始 originates from the *Shijing* poem "Divine Terrace" 靈台, which opens with the lines: "When he (King Wen of Zhou) began the construction of the Divine Terrace, he laid out its plan and had it built" 經始靈臺，經之營之. *Mao* 242.

眾多盛荊杞。 are thorns and wolfberries, numerous and growing lushly.

中園陷蕭艾， The central garden is overrun with averoyne and mugwort,

老圃永為恥。 And the old gardener is left in lasting shame.[405]

登于白玉盤， Served on top of white jade plates,

藉以如霞綺。 They are laid upon brocade gleaming like rosy clouds.

莧也無所施， Yet amaranths serve no purpose,

胡顏入筐篚。 What shame they bear, to enter the bamboo basket?

Poems like this one reveal how far Du Fu had moved from the compact, regulated verse composed in Qinzhou—marked by lucid language and an evocative quality reminiscent of yongwu poetry—as well as from the longer narrative poems written in Chengdu, which express his sentimental attachment to domestic objects and surroundings. As scholars such as Stephen Owen and Lucas Bender have noted, Du Fu's poems on humble topics highlight rather than close the gap between the high cultural forms they adopt and the trivial activities they portray. "Planting Lettuce," along with other works from his Kuizhou period, pushes this tension to an extreme by playing with divergent modes of reading and writing—one allegorical, the other grounded in immediacy and transparency.

The opening section, with cosmic terms and images describing climatic abnormalities, invites an allegorical mode of reading associated with exegeses of the *Shijing* and the *Chuci*, as it has been a long-established tradition that cosmic disorder is regarded as the consequence of human misbehavior or as signs foreboding social and political turmoil. The opening thus sets up a

[405] The phrase "old gardener" 老圃 recalls a passage from the *Analects* (13:4), in which Confucius, when asked about gardening, replied, "I am not as good as an old gardener" 吾不如老圃.

cosmic framework for the topsy-turviness of the human world—possibly including noble men's thwarted ambitions suggested by the preface. Yet, as the poem progresses, it transitions from the cosmic and celestial sphere to human perception with a temporal-spatial specificity (lines 13-16), and then to the immediate experience of the poet in the here-and-now beginning with line 17. In the middle section (lines 17-30), the reference to the lettuce as a "common vegetable," the casual, offhand manner in which the seeds were sown—suggested by the term *sui shi* 隨事 (line 20) which literally means to do something in a way easy for the occasion—and the specific details of the planting process (lines 21-22) all point to the realm of direct, concrete, and unruly experience, breaking the allegorical mode established at the beginning. In the final section, the poem shifts back to the allegorical mode as the poet sees in his immediate surrounding metaphors long established in the tradition: evil plants standing for treacherous men, blocking the way of men of moral excellence. The succession of plant images—angelica and eupatorium, thorns and wolfberries, averoyne and mugwort—are not what Du Fu sees in front of his eyes, but preestablished images with symbolic meanings. It is not until the final couplet that the amaranths are again referred to as amaranths instead of in terms of something else.

Du Fu's play with two opposing modes of reading and writing—allegorical and immediate—heightens the tension between the high cultural forms he inherited and his lived experience in the remote region of Kuizhou, drawing attention to the act of writing itself. In other words, through self-consciousness, playfulness, and irony in his use of allegorical language and imagery, the poem is not merely about planting lettuce—more importantly, it is also about writing a poem *about* planting lettuce. In this and other works on humble subjects from Du Fu's Kuizhou period, he pushes the boundaries of classical poetry by tapping into its performative dimension. By "performative," I refer to a heightened awareness of the poetic medium—a marked distance

between ordinary life and the lyrical realm, or between the everyday self and the writerly self—as well as the foregrounding, even dramatization, of the act of composition. Ultimately, "Planting Lettuce" transcends any particular message it conveys (including the core idea articulated in its preface) and reveals itself as a performative utterance, fundamentally concerned with the act of writing itself.

I suggest that the performative nature of Du Fu's poems on humble topics—and their dramatization of the act of writing—should be understood in relation to his displacement and his conception of writing as a surrogate homeland, a conception explored in greater detail in Chapter Four. Specifically, I argue that poems like "Planting Lettuce" serve as poetic enactments of his alienation from "home"—in personal, political, and cultural senses—and of his longing for it. With the representation of domestic life founded on irony, self-mockery, and wry humor, these poems are embodiment of Du Fu's sense of alienation in Kuizhou and his inability to truly make himself at home there. The pronounced contrast between their exalted literary forms and humble subject matter mirrors that between a fantasized Chang'an—where "home" and the imperial center are conflated—and the stark reality of Kuizhou, a recurring spatial juxtaposition in Du Fu's poems from this period. Just as his longing for the imperial center intensified the further he drifted into the peripheries, it was in the cultural backwater of Kuizhou that Du Fu adopted his most elevated diction and archaic forms. Thus, regardless of their specific subjects or themes, his poems on domestic tasks collectively stage—through verse—his growing distance from the imperial center and the cultural ideals it embodies: the objects of his perpetual yearning.

At the same time, the composition of these poems—transforming ordinary activities through poetic language and transporting them into the poetic realm—reflects Du Fu's effort to transcend the harsh realities of his exile in Kuizhou, as writing itself becomes a form of emotional release,

an idea that recurs throughout his late verse (see Chapter Four). Unlike the commemorative poems composed in Chengdu that invest objects from his Thatched Cottage with nostalgic significance, the Kuizhou poems do not merely aim to celebrate the trivial tasks by investing them with deeper meaning—an interpretation that cannot fully explain Du Fu's deliberate irony and playfulness. Instead, these domestic scenes are rendered as moments to be surpassed: they serve as a foil against which the act of writing acquires its fullest resonance. In this way, these poems crystallize Du Fu's fraught relationship to the idea of "home" in Kuizhou, as developed in Chapter Four: he writes not to construct a home, but to transcend—and ultimately replace—it with writing itself, which enables him to reclaim a sense of belonging to the cultural world from which he has been estranged.

Thus, the poems on humble, domestic themes are at once literary exercises through which Du Fu entertained himself and a serious effort to cope with personal crisis through writing. The evolution of these themes—from their initial emergence in Qinzhou to the new purposes they serve in the Chengdu poems, and further to Du Fu's later experimentation after his relocation to Kuizhou—is closely tied to broader shifts in his thinking about home, belonging, empire, and the function of poetry. As I have sought to demonstrate, these poems centered on everyday domestic tasks serve as miniature expressions of a larger transformation in Du Fu's poetics: from using poetry as a tool for making meaning and building a sense of home, to envisioning it as a surrogate homeland in itself and a transcendental empire, where, as the line chosen for the title of this Conclusion suggests, all the affairs of the human realm are encompassed. For Du Fu, the expansion of traditional poetic themes and occasions, and his investment in poetry as an ultimate space of meaning and belonging, are two complementary dimensions of the same process. These modestly themed poems offer the clearest—and most striking—evidence of Du Fu's claim that

"In poetry I have exhausted the human world's inspirations," and they most vividly reflect his deepening commitment to writing as an alternative space for identity and meaning.

These poems reveal more about Du Fu's relationship to writing during a time of personal and national crisis than about a direct engagement with the empire itself. Or, more precisely, his attempt to reconnect with the empire is mediated through the lens of home and literary writing. Just as the unified, all-encompassing vision of the empire—an established and normative one within the tradition of ascending-high poetry—fractured with his displacement to the peripheries, a point elaborated in Chapter Four, so too did his relationship to the empire come to be shaped by more intimate and concrete forms. These include not only regional landscapes and imperial infrastructures, as discussed in previous chapters, but also the intertwined notions of home and literary writing. Poetry, as a mode of participating in *wen*—the shared cultural tradition that sustains and reflects imperial authority while remaining irreducible to it—became for Du Fu a vital means of reconstructing meaning and connection, even as the empire itself faced crises that threatened its very foundation.

It has often been recognized that Du Fu stands as a pivotal transitional figure in Chinese literary history. Before him, poetry was centered around the capital and the polite society, with poems composed for set "occasions"—such as parting, banquets, and excursions—according to established conventions. After Du Fu, poets began to look beyond these traditional occasions and themes, investing instead in aspects of everyday life that had rarely been treated in the literary tradition. Du Fu's expansion of classical poetry's subject matter—later inherited and transformed by mid-Tang writers—played a crucial role in this shift. Yet while Du Fu's successors embraced his themes, the unique historical circumstances he endured, the emotional and psychological urgency that drove his work, and his unconventional mode of writing were never fully replicated.

Some aspects of his innovations were developed further and imbued with new functions; others survived only as minor streams, while still others were irretrievably lost in the shifting currents of literary history. It is sometimes forgotten that the mid-Tang celebration of private life originated with someone cast adrift in far-flung regions—someone less concerned with delineating a private space than with the urgent need to overcome the anguish of complete isolation. Indeed, as this dissertation has demonstrated, Du Fu's negotiation of various forms of home and belonging emerges from a deep desire—and an ongoing struggle—to remain connected to larger forces: the state, social communities, historical continuity, and the cultural tradition. This reveals a paradox in literary history: what retrospectively appears as a progressive development may, in fact, be built on moments of rupture and discontinuity.

Du Fu's expansion of poetic themes and occasions reflects his broader literary experimentation characterized by unconventional approaches and modes of writing, driven by his efforts to cope with an unsettled life as a refugee on the periphery of a crumbling empire. This dissertation highlights two major developments in Du Fu's post-rebellion poetry. First, a significant part of Du Fu's unconventionality lies in his poetry's deep-rootedness in the material world and contemporary experience. His later poems increasingly resist the filtering and molding of immediate experience through preestablished occasions and conventions. Instead, they display an openness to being shaped by the unstable and shifting world around him—elements such as unfamiliar landscapes, rivers and transportation routes, compromised communication, and disrupted circulation of information—phenomena that often precede or evade contemplative reflection. Second, I argue that we must take seriously Du Fu's self-consciousness as a poet and his conviction in the power of writing to both reorganize his experience and reconstitute his relationship to home and empire. More than any poet before him, Du Fu explores the

constructive and performative potential of poetry, seeking meaning and refuge in it as an art of order capable of transcending the immediacy of his exile.

Thus, in many ways, our examination of Du Fu's post-rebellion poetry also brings to light the multifaceted assumptions and ideals that have long guided literary practice. The literary world, as it has always been, is more diverse, complex, and full of tensions than the dominant expressivist view encapsulated by the phrase "poetry articulates what is on the mind" 詩言志, a statement from the "Great Preface" to the *Odes*—a canonical text often regarded as offering foundational claims about the origins and functions of poetry. If this foundational statement about poetry presupposes spontaneity, authenticity, and the transparency of the poetic medium, Du Fu's post-rebellion works reveal, alongside it, a set of often-unspoken beliefs and undertheorized ideals that constitute minor but persistent strands within the tradition: the agency of the material world in shaping individual and collective consciousness; the view of poetry not as a transparent medium but as a form of mediation; and the conception of poetry as an art of order—not continuous with ordinary life, but one that transcends it. None of these assumptions or beliefs originate with Du Fu. Rather, his distinctive place in Chinese literary history—and the cultural transition he both participated in and helped shape—should be attributed to his ability to draw upon various existing forces within the tradition, to push them to their limits, and to recombine them in unconventional ways. This was not a linear development, but one in which contradictions need not be resolved and competing visions could coexist. Ultimately, Du Fu transformed the tradition from within the tradition.

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Abbreviations

DFQJJZ Du Fu quanji jiaozhu 杜甫全集校註.

DSXZ Du shi xiangzhu 杜詩詳註.

QTS Quan Tang shi 全唐詩.

JTS Jiu Tang shu 舊唐書.

XTS Xin Tang shu 新唐書.

ZZTJ Zizhi tongjian 資治通鑒.

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