

仲

昭



Sikong Tu 司空图

Sikong Tu's ancestors lived in eastern China, in Sizhou (mod. Xuyi, Jiangsu), not too far away from the eastern coast on the southern bank of Hongze Lake, the fourth largest in China. That's why his family was often called by his contemporaries the Sikongs from Sizhou. Yet his family for at least two generations had lived in the north, on the northern bank of the Yellow River, in what is now Yongji County, Shanxi Province.

This tradition of respecting one's ancestral origin (*zuji* 祖籍), together with the often conflicting concepts of *junwang* 郡望 (the locale where the family had first made itself known) and place of registration (*zhanji* 占籍, the place the family actually lived), complicate the sense of place, origin, and identity for Chinese people and their poetic imagination. Back in the Tang, quite a few poets and scholars could trace their ancestry and original homeland back up to ten generations, especially if a forebear had served a previous dynasty. This was an effective way for power to maintain itself: you have to serve the state, although you may not like it, if you want to keep your family reputation (*junwang*), or add to it. It is in your own and your family's interest to serve the status quo. The tension involved is seen in many poems in this collection. Sikong Tu did this in an almost legendary way.

His father, Sikong Yu 司空舆, had excelled as government manager of two important salt lakes in Anyi, now Xia County in southern Shanxi Province, on the northern bank of the Yellow River. In the process he turned his temporary residence into his family's formal place of residence, its *zhanji* 占籍. Pleased with the success of new rules drawn up by Sikong Yu curbing bribe-taking by government officials, the court promoted him, which provided the father funds to buy property in the nearby Zhongtiao 中条 Mountains. For the son, Sikong Tu, this became home, the place he could feel most comfortable to live and die in, as he went on to show in his own life, and death.

Sikong Tu was born in July, 837, on the northern bank of the Yellow River in the southwestern tip of what is now Shanxi Province. He passed the imperial examination in 869 as one of the top four of his class. He appreciated support from a powerful friend and worked in his staff. When the imperial appointment came to call him to the position of Imperial Inspector, he could not bear to leave such a caring supporter and failed to report to duty in the court in a hundred days as required by law. Though reprimanded severely, he was still allowed to stay in the service of his friend, whom he followed in demotion as well as in promotion. Sikong Tu worked diligently and gradually climbed up the ladder in officialdom to the position of vice minister of the Ministry of Rituals. When Huang Chao, the rebel who killed poet Pi Rixiu, occupied Chang'an, Sikong Tu managed to escape and hide in the family's country house in the Zhongtiao Mountains. In 886, after the emperor had returned to the capital, he was called back to court to a less powerful position. Then already in his fifties he was apparently not in best health. When later restored to a post of the rank he had had before the rebellion, he asked for sick leave. The emperor granted him leave yet called him back again in 897, this time to the vital position of vice minister of the Defense Ministry; he again declined on the basis of poor health. He was now allowed to return to Wanguan Valley in the Zhongtiao Mountains, where his father had bought the land and houses decades before.

Sikong Tu's health was not as bad as he claimed. Once back home, he enjoyed a creative life writing poetry, talking with Buddhists and Daoists, drinking, hiking, and painting portraits of famous courtiers – his moral exemplars – on the walls of the hall his father had built. In 908, hearing of the execution of the last emperor of Tang, he refused to eat. He died within a few days, at the age of seventy-two.

《退居漫题七首 其四》
(《全唐诗》卷 632)

身外都无事，
山中久避喧。
破巢看乳燕，
留果待啼猿。

On Retirement

Avoiding the noisy world,
I have retired into the
mountains
for years.

Free from all obligations I
peek
at the nursing swallows and
leave
some fruits and nuts on the
trees
for the howling monkeys.

《秋景》(《全唐诗》卷 632)

景物皆难驻，
伤春复怨秋。
旋书红叶落，
拟画碧云收。

An Autumnal Scene

Knowing I can't keep things
and scenes
from sliding away day by day,

I weep at fading flowers in
spring,
mourn fallen autumn leaves.

Before I finish my poem of
burning foliage,
I start a painting of the azure
clouds.

《放龟二首》(《全唐诗》卷 633)

却为多知自不灵，今朝教汝卜长生。
若求深处无深处，只有依人会有情。

Releasing a Turtle

Celebrated for spirit,
respected for knowledge,
you at this moment ought to take
advice from me –
live out your natural long life.
The depth of water is not deep enough to protect you,
yet meeting more and more men may run
into one with sympathy.

Nie Yizhong 聂夷中

Nie Yizhong was from an obscure family in Zhongdu (mod. Qinyang, Henan), on the northern bank of the Yellow River, in the foothills of the Taihang Mountains. Knowing both poverty and the real life of peasants, he introduced a harsh realism to the pastoral tradition of Chinese poetry. It is unknown when he was born or when he died, but the official record shows that he passed the examination in 871, during the upheavals of the uprising led by Pang Xun, the same rebellion that had made it impossible for the poet Lu Guimeng to travel from the lower Yangtze up to Chang'an (see note on Lu Guimeng). In short, the once powerful empire was built on an unsustainable system. Pressed to the limit, the deeply oppressed and exploited peasantry had through their uprisings proved a simple truth: nothing unsustainable will be sustained. Nie Yizhong's poetry reflects this historical moment in a way so powerful that the emperor of the dying empire had to pay it special attention (Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 4, pp. 11-12). During the upheaval, he was not assigned a job until his coat was worn out and his money ran out. When finally assigned the position of county sheriff in Huazhou, at the foot of Mount Huashan, all he brought with him were a few books and a harp.

《赠农（一作孟郊诗）》
（《全唐诗》卷 636）

劝尔勤耕田，盈尔仓中粟。
劝尔无伐桑，减尔身上服。
清霜一委地，万草色不绿。
狂风一飘林，万叶不着木。
青春如不耕，何以自拘束。

Written to a Farmer Friend

Work hard on your fields,
let grain fill your silos.
Don't chop down mulberry trees.
Be frugal with your clothes.

When frost falls on the earth
no grass can keep its blades green.
When cold wind combs through the woods
all leaves must fall.

If you don't till the field when young,
how can you discipline yourself
for the rest of your life?

《公子家（一作长安花，一作公子行）》
（《全唐诗》卷 636）

种花满西园，花发青楼道。
花下一禾生，去之为恶草。

Garden of a Rich Boy

He's had flowers planted
all over the western garden,
along the road to the pleasure house.

Below one flower grew a rice-sprout.
The boy pulled it out – what
a nuisance weed!

《田家二首 其一》（《全唐诗》卷 636）

父耕原上田，子劬山下荒。六月禾未秀，官家已修仓。

A Peasant's Family Song

Father tills the fields on the terrace,
sons the rocky valley floor.
June – the rice has not grown ears.
The government has readied the silo
to take in the tax grain.

Zhang Qiao 张乔

Zhang Qiao was a resident of Chizhou, on the southern bank of the Yangtze, among the Jiuhua Mountains. After twelve centuries, his home town is still called Chizhou, though it has developed into a city of one and a half million residents, looming large in southwestern Anhui Province.

It is unknown when Zhang Qiao was born or when he died, but we know that he took and failed an imperial examination in 870. He returned to his home in the “old mountain” – one of the Jiuhua Mountains 九华山 – where he lived as a recluse for ten years. Jiuhua literally means “nine flowers.” These mountains had originally had a different name, but during the Tianbao reign period of Emperor Xuanzong (742–756), the poet Li Bai visited the area and thought the nine highest peaks of the mountains looked like nine lotus flowers. So, in one of his poems, he said “Exquisite is the scheme of Yin and Yang, / That brings forth nine inspirited rock flowers” (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 788, poem #1. Translation mine). In this way Li Bai, together with two other versifiers – Wei Quanyu and Gao Ji – changed the name of the mountain into Jiuhua, the Nine Flower Mountains. Decades later, the poet Liu Yuxi exclaimed: “one glance at the exquisite peaks, one shock on my amazed soul” (*Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 756, poem #4).

Li Bai and Liu Yuxi were travelers, who in their brief encounter with the Jiuhua Mountains found them impressive, but abstract. Zhang Qiao, on the other hand, was a permanent resident. From his “Winter Night in the Mountains” we get a lower-key, sobering, and even slightly depressing picture both of mountain life and of life in the larger world of a dying empire. This difference is especially interesting for ecocritics who hold physical accuracy and specificity as important standards in the evaluation of literary works.

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《题小松》（《全唐诗》卷 638）

松子落何年，纤枝长水边。
斫开深涧雪，移出远林烟。
带月栖幽鸟，兼花灌冷泉。
微风动清韵，闲听罢琴眠。

Written on the Trunk of a Pine Sapling

In what year, by what chance
did this pine seed fall here?

Its tiny twig somehow emerged
by the side of the creek

through the snow of the deep ravine –
a puff of green smoke in distant woods.

The quiet birds love it,
sleep on it in the moonshine.

The lonely hermit loves it,
waters it as his flowers.

The pure breeze loves it,
stirs its needles as strings of a harp.

I love its music so much –
I let my harp rest, listen, until I sleep.

《猿（一作长安赠猿）》
（《全唐诗》卷 639）

挂月栖云向楚林，
取来全是为清音。
谁知系在黄金索，
翻畏侯家不敢吟。

Written to a Monkey

They capture you from the
forest
of the southern State of Chu
where you used to reach for
the moon
and sleep among the clouds.

They capture you for your
pure voice
but they lock you up with a
gold chain.
You're afraid of the mighty
lord –
you lose the courage to howl
again.

《渔者》（《全唐诗》卷 639）

首戴圆荷发不梳，
叶舟为宅水为居。
沙头聚看人如市，
钓得澄江一丈鱼。

The Fisherman

You never comb your hair,
your hat a round lotus leaf.
You live in your boat,
on mighty floods.

On the head of a sand bar
people gather as if in a
market –
to see the ten-foot fish
that you caught in the clear
stream.

《山中冬夜》（《全唐诗》卷 639）

寒叶风摇尽，空林鸟宿稀。
涧冰妨鹿饮，山雪阻僧归。
夜坐坐心定，长吟语力微。
人间去多事，何处梦柴扉。

Winter Night in the Mountains

The wind has sent cold leaves to the ground.
The woods are empty with few birds sleeping.
The creek is frozen – hard for deer to drink.
The snow fills the mountain –
what an impediment to the traveling monk!

I sit through the night, all worldly thoughts gone,
and chant a long time, the power of my language weak.
In the world of messy upheavals, where is the place
for me to dream of a peaceful wattle gate?

Zheng Gu 郑谷

Zheng Gu was born in 851 in Yichun, in what is now Jiangxi Province. A child prodigy who started his education in Chang'an, at the age of five, he soon started writing poems. When he turned seven, he went to Hunan with his father, who had been sent to serve as governor of Yongzhou. On their way, the seven-year-old wrote a poem on the wall of the famous Yueyang Tower, which was praised highly by the poets Ma Dai (included in this selection) and Li Peng. They believed the child had a bright future as scholar and poet. Yet, life turned out to be ironic. Our genius started taking examinations in 872 but didn't pass until 887. During the long years of the repeated intervening failures, he lived in reclusion near Jingmen, on the west bank of the Han River, now a city of three million people. Humiliated by his own failures, he also had to face tumultuous larger events, such as the burning of the nearby city of Jiangling in 879 by the rebel Wang Xianzhi, or the occupation of Chang'an in the next year by Huang Chao, which made it impossible for him to even try to take the exams that year. "For ten springs my tears have sped up my aging," wrote Zheng Gu in that year, "ashamed, I can't face my graying hair in the clear stream" (quoted in Fu Xuancong, ed., *Tang Caizi Zhuan Jiaojian*. Beijing, Zhonghua Press, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 157. Translation mine). Zheng Gu subsequently fled to Sichuan where he would remain for six years, spending most of his days there with monks in Buddhist temples. When Emperor Xizong was finally able to return to Chang'an, Zheng Gu returned, too, and as a frustrated, middle-aged man finally passed the examination there in 887. First placed in the post of county sheriff of Hu County, in the Chang'an suburbs, he gradually climbed up the ladder of an officialdom deeply shaken by the many uprisings, eventually becoming department head of a minor ministry. He begged the emperor to allow him to retire in the year 902 and died in the place where he was born, Yichun, in 910.

Although Zheng Gu made himself a reputation at the age of seven, the last poem translated here is what he is best known for. It brought him the nick-name Zheng the Partridge Poet. The Chinese poets believed that the chucks of the partridge sounds like a piece of advice for the travelers: "Don't go, Brother. Don't Go."

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《鹭鸶》（《全唐诗》卷 675）

闲立春塘烟淡淡，静眠寒苇雨飕飕。
渔翁归后汀沙晚，飞下滩头更自由。

To A Snowy Egret

Standing alone in the misty pond of spring
you exemplify leisurely grace.

Sleeping quietly among the reeds
you seem oblivious to the cold rain.

The fisherman leaves the sandbar
late in the night.
You land on the beach perfectly free.

《失鹭鹭》（《全唐诗》卷 675）

野格由来倦小池，
惊飞却下碧江涯。
月昏风急何处宿，
秋岸萧萧黄苇枝。

On Losing My Snowy Egret

A wild character of course
you're tired of my small pond.

Frightened in flight
you land by the green river bank.

Where are you going to sleep,
in the windy night of a dim moon?

Everywhere I look, I see and hear
yellowing leaves, rustling reeds.

《鹧鸪（谷以此诗得名，时号为郑鹧鸪）》
（《全唐诗》卷 675）

暖戏烟芜锦翼齐，品流应得近山鸡。
雨昏青草湖边过，花落黄陵庙里啼。
游子乍闻征袖湿，佳人才唱翠眉低。
相呼相应湘江阔，苦竹丛深春日西。

The Partridge

On the warm and misty marsh you play
to display wings of embroidered silk.

They say your character must be similar
to that of a mountain pheasant.

You pass the drizzling Lake of Green Grass,
chuck-chucking at the fallen flowers
by the Temple of Emperor Huang.

Upon hearing your homecoming call,
travelers wet their sleeves with homesick tears.
Singing girls knit their brows
stopping in mid-song.

In pairs you call and respond to each other over the broad
River Xiang, and land in groves of bitter bamboo.
The spring sun sets behind western hills.

Wu Rong 吴融

Wu Rong was a native of Shanyin, now Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, the same place that the poet He Zhizhang had called home. It is unknown when he was born, but he passed the imperial examination in 889 after two decades of trying and failing, already in his forties. During those frustrating two decades, he lived on the west slope of Mount Maoshan in what is now Jiangsu Province, about two hundred kilometers northwest of his hometown. As he turned thirty, his future in officialdom still uncertain, he bought a seven-acre farm on the lower Yangtze, in a region that is now a district of Shanghai.

It was an embarrassment for Wu that his livelihood and retirement depended on landholding, and after he finally passed the imperial examination he joined the army and went to western Sichuan. Two years later, he was involved in some trouble and demoted to Jiangling, in the mid-reach of the Yangtze, much closer to home. Showing loyalty and ability during the upheavals that would soon end the Tang Empire, he was promoted to the position of vice-minister of the Ministry of Defense. He died in 903. The Tang dynasty had its final death four years later.

From his poems and the brief biography provided here we can see that Wu Rong lived mostly south of the Yangtze, except for the months he spent traveling to and taking the exams in the capital city. Rivers, lakes, and swamps are the familiar landscape for him.

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《溪边》（《全唐诗》卷 685）

溪边花满枝，百鸟带香飞。
下有一白鹭，日斜翘石矶。

By the River

By the river flowers bloom on every twig.
Through flowers birds fly and scatter sweet
petals like festoons behind them.
In sweetness, under the blooms
a snowy egret stands on a single foot
until the sun slants towards the rock in the stream.

《水鸟》（《全唐诗》卷 685）

烟为行止水为家，两两三三睡暖沙。
为谢离鸾兼别鹄，如何禁得向天涯。

The Water Fowl

In mist you fly, on waves you bob, and on bars
of warm sand you sleep neck by neck.

You gently decline the company of swans,
the mystical phoenix who flies aloof and high.

They're lofty and graceful, yet how can they stand
the journey to the edge of the sky?

《鸳鸯》（《全唐诗》卷 686）

翠翘红颈覆金衣，
滩上双双去又归。
长短死生无两处，
可怜黄鹄爱分飞。

The Wood Ducks

A green crown here,
a glimpse of red cape there,
brilliant feathers everywhere –
wood-ducks fly back and forth
all over the sand beach in pairs.

Life or death,
may it be short or long,
you couples always stay together,
pitying the yellow crane who flies alone.

《忆猿》（《全唐诗》卷 687）

翠微云敛日沈空，叫彻青冥怨不穷。
连臂影垂溪色里，断肠声尽月明中。
静含烟峡凄凄雨，高弄霜天袅袅风。
犹有北山归意在，少惊佳树近房栊。

Remembering the Monkeys

The sun sets
The clouds disperse
The blue mists diminish
in the disheartening howls
that pierce the sky.

You form a chain
hanging hand-in-hand
from an elegant tree
reflected by the colorful creek.

Echoed again
and again
your howls finally vanish
as the bright moon rises
from behind the North Mountain.

The gorges hold between them
a silent, misty drizzle,
and in the chilly autumn sky
blows a high, frosty wind.

Remembering you
I too want to return to the mountain home.
Please refrain from howling at me here
near my house for you may scare
these fine trees that I recently planted.

《池上双凫二首》（《全唐诗》卷 687）

碧池悠漾小凫雏，两两依依只自娱。
钓艇忽移还散去，寒鸥有意即相呼。
可怜翡翠归云髻，莫羡鸳鸯入画图。
幸是羽毛无取处，一生安稳老菰蒲。

To the Young Teals on the Pond

Two teals, very young,
bob up and down on the jade-green pond.
They seem happy
to entertain each other
like a grown couple.

They separate and fly away
as the fishing boat approaches.
They call and warn each other
when they sense the chilling presence of the hawk.

They don't have to fly high,
as the kingfishers do,
to find home beyond the clouds.
Nor do they need to admire
the brilliant wood-ducks –
favorite of the painter's brush.

It's their good fortune
to have feathers so plain:
they live a simple and peaceful life
among reeds and sweet bulrushes.

Du Xunhe 杜荀鹤

There has long been a widespread rumor that Du Xunhe was the illegitimate son of the famous poet Du Mu, though the efforts of many scholars over many ages to prove or disprove the claim have proved inconclusive. But an unexpected result of their studies has been that now we know for sure he was born on the tenth day of the first lunar calendar month of 846 in the same place where an earlier poet, Zhang Qiao, was born: on the southern bank of the mid-Yangtze, by the Jiuhua Mountains, in Chizhou, Anhui Province. He long lived in obscurity in the mountains, for two decades trying and failing to pass the imperial examination. Of this time, ten years were spent on Mount Lushan, reading, preparing for the next exam, and writing poetry. He finally passed in 891, a saddened if not embittered middle-aged man. But by this time the once-powerful Tang Empire was dying and had no position for this miserable scholar who “owns not an inch of land among the four seas but bitterly chants his poems all his life” (Du Xunhe, *Quan Tang Shi*. Vol. 691, poem #104. Translation mine).

Du Xunhe’s “opportunity” came from an unorthodox direction. In the midst of the rebellion of Huang Chao (d. 884) – the one who killed the poet Pi Rixiu – one of the rebel commanders, Zhu Wen, betrayed Huang, surrendering to Tang and assisting in putting down the rebellion. In return, the court made him a “prince,” with control over a large chunk of central China. Du was recommended to Zhu Wen and won his trust with an impromptu poem written at Zhu’s command about rain drops that fell on a sunny day. In his poem, Du said something to this effect: if the days are always regular, how can heaven show the role that Prince Zhu plays in the process of creation? With his ego tickled, Zhu Wen recommended Du Xunhe to a fairly important office in the last days of the Tang Empire. Du Xunhe died a few days after he accepted the offer.

Before his death, Du Xunhe did have the opportunity to write ten other poems for Zhu Wen, advising him to lower the taxes and let people and land have a chance to recover from the wars that had rendered more than half of China wasteland.

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《溪居叟》（《全唐诗》卷 691）

溪翁居静处，溪鸟入门飞。
早起钓鱼去，夜深乘月归。
见君无事老，觉我有求非。
不说风霜苦，三冬一草衣。

The Old Man on the Creek

The creek man lives in perfect peace.
The creek birds fly in and out of his hut.

At dawn he goes to fish
midnight he returns in brilliant moonshine.

I must be wrong to pursue fame and power,
especially when I see him so naturally age.

I never wonder how he’s braved
the bitter wind and cold frost
in the long winter, in a shabby straw cape.

《春日山居寄友人》（《全唐诗》卷 692）

野吟何处最相宜，春景暄和好入诗。
高下麦苗新雨后，浅深山色晚晴时。
半岩云脚风牵断，平野花枝鸟踏垂。
倒载干戈是何日，近来麋鹿欲相随。

**In Spring, Sent from My
Mountain Dwelling to a Friend**

Where's the best place
for the wild chant
of a wild poet?

It's the sunny spring scenes
of my home mountain:
fresh after the rain wheat seedlings wave
up and down in green ripples.

In glorious sunset the mountains change
colors –
blue and purple in various shades.

Half-way around the rocky cliff
the clouds hang like a ribbon.

Over the flat fields the birds
land on the boughs of the few lone trees.

Lately the deer and elk seem to like me,
following me around, making me wonder
when will people lay down their weapons
and begin to live in peace like this.

《溪岸秋思》（《全唐诗》卷 693）

桑柘穷头三四家，挂罾垂钓是生涯。
秋风忽起溪滩白，零落岸边芦荻花。

Autumn Thoughts on the Creek

At the very end of the mulberry grove
three or four families live
by means of old nets and broken rods.

The autumnal wind suddenly stirs up
catkins on the creek banks
scattering snow-flakes over the stream.

《田翁》（《全唐诗》卷 693）

白发星星筋力衰，
种田犹自伴孙儿。
官苗若不平平纳，
任是丰年也受饥。

Old Peasant

Grey-templed, weak-limbed,
you still work hard in the fields
beside your sons and grandsons.

If the Emperor doesn't lower taxes,
you'll be hungry through the year
despite the best of harvests.

《鸬鹚》（《全唐诗》卷 693）

一般毛羽结群飞，雨岸烟汀好景时。深水有鱼衔得出，看来却是鹭鸶饥。

To the Cormorants

In green mists, by the waterside,
birds of same feather circle in congenial groups.*

They dive into the depth and bring fish to the surface.
In this beautiful scenery I see hungry egrets.

*Unfortunately, this is a literal translation of the Chinese original. Although in English it sounds like a cliché, I can't find any way to work around it.