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# NOTES ON TUAN CH'ENG-SHIH AND HIS WRITING

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## I

The ninth century scholar, poet, writer of short stories, and Buddhist, Tuan Ch'eng-shih, is nowadays known chiefly for his book *Yu yang tsa tsu* "Assorted Meats from Yu-yang", a miscellany of topical writings of the greatest variety and interest. Three of the major sections of this book have been translated: one, a guide to the Buddhist temples of Ch'ang-an and their art, by Alexander Soper<sup>1</sup>; a second, a catalogue of miracles directly attributable to the Diamond Sutra, by Bruno Belpaire<sup>2</sup>; a third, a treatise on the art of falconry, by myself<sup>3</sup>. What little else survives of his writings has been virtually ignored. I do not now propose to treat these writings in any but the most superficial way. I propose only to sketch out something of the author's life and character, and to append a few remarks on his writing as a kind of prologue to more serious attention to the style and thought of this extraordinary yet typical man of the medieval world of late T'ang.

Soper's elegant but in my view rather captious treatment of Tuan, in the biographical remarks which precede his "Vacation Glimpse of the T'ang Temples of Ch'ang-an", is not very flattering. There the writer appears a rather credulous and superstitious person, whose education has served to make him a pedantic simpleton rather than a man of taste,

1. Alexander C. Soper, "A Vacation Glimpse of the T'ang Temples of Ch'ang-an. *The Ssu-t'a chi* by Tuan Ch'eng-shih," *Artibus Asiae*, 23 (1960), 15-40. The translation is not complete, omitting "literary effusions," "memorable sayings by the priests," etc.

2. Bruno Belpaire, *T'ang kien wen tse* (*Florilège de littérature des T'ang*, 2<sup>e</sup> série, Paris, 1959), pp. 225-245.

3. E. H. Schafer, "Falconry in T'ang Times" *T'oung Pao*, 46 (1959), 293-338.

though Soper does allow merit to the *contents* of his book, especially when it describes the *trompe l'œil* realism of ninth century temple murals, which was virtually ignored, or rather despised, by later Chinese critics. The same evidence makes him for me a lover of conversation, anecdote, fables, wit, words, strangers, and all sorts of oddities of fact and language. In short, I see him as a man of great erudition, but unique in his empiricism, fed by curiosity; less bound than most of his learned contemporaries by tradition, especially bookish tradition, though he was a great lover of books; above all, a man who wanted to know the world as it really was, in all its fascinating complexity and richness. It was a world in which he participated as deeply as he could, lest he overlook some rare facet, and die the poorer for it.

Unhappily we do not know the year of Tuan's birth. Unhappily – because we are barred from guessing how his experiences, ideas, and language are related to the changing mental and emotional conditions of his career through the Seven Ages of Man. It is most likely that he was born a little before 800<sup>4</sup>. His registered “birthplace” was Lin-tzu in Ch'i-chou<sup>5</sup>, in Shantung. But neither he nor his father seem to have passed any time there. The family identified itself mostly with the river cities of Central China: Yang-chou, where the Grand Canal met the Yangtze, Chiang-chou, up the Yangtze at modern Kiukiang, Ching-chou (modern Chiang-ling in Hupei), and Ch'eng-tu in Szechwan. As for Tuan Ch'eng-shih himself, he later worked in Chi-chou (modern Chi-an) on the Kan River in Kiangsi, and retired to Hsiang-yang on the Han River in Hupei. Like his father, he also spent some time in the two capitals in the north, Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang.

The most important fact about his early life was his closeness to his father, Tuan Wen-ch'ang, a man of high rank, who ultimately became a

4. He relates many anecdotes about events which occurred late in the eighth century, but he may well have learned these from his father and other relatives.

5. His birthplace is not mentioned in his biographies in *T'ang shu*, 89, 3896a (hereafter cited as “TS Biography”) and *Chiu T'ang shu*, 167, 3515a (hereafter “CTS Biography”), both in the *K'ai ming* edition. But see Soper, 1960, 20, note 21.

great minister and privy councillor – indeed the official historians devote much more space to the older Tuan than the younger, whose biographies in the T'ang histories are a mere appendage to those of his father. Tuan Wen-ch'ang was a cultivated man, and it is clear that Ch'eng-shih's love of books was due in large part to his father's influence. More importantly, perhaps, the older man was a devout Buddhist. His son writes of him that he recited from the Diamond Sutra several times daily during a period of five or six years, after they moved to Szechwan from Ching-chou in 801<sup>6</sup>, when Ch'eng-shih must have been a very young boy. But the lad must have been impressed by his father's piety, because he wrote about it often in later years, and his stories about the Diamond Sutra miracles are a kind of memorial to his father's faith. Indeed, whether through devotion, or through scholarly interest, or simply out of curiosity, Ch'eng-shih retained a strong attachment to Buddhism all through his life. But Chinese biography, like Muslim biography, is abstract and formal, and chary of describing character and "private" interests, preferring to stress significant dates in a man's career, the titles of public offices he held, and those of important books he published. Therefore the official biographies of Tuan Wen-ch'ang say nothing of his Buddhism. We may regard this as partly due to the anti-Buddhist prejudices of the clerkly Sung biographers and to the "Confucian" requirements of the dynastic histories. But partly it was the result of the prevalent attitude that religion, other than formal observances connected with the state cult, was a private matter. In any case, we would know nothing of Wen-ch'ang's piety if it were not for his son's book. Other men of T'ang left behind no such garrulous sons to reveal what the Sung historians chose to omit. If we relied entirely on the respectable work of these last, we might easily forget that Buddhism permeated T'ang life and thought – even the life and thought of honorable iconoclasts like Han Yü. It was a fact of civilized life, as Christianity was in medieval Europe.

6. *Yu yang tsa tsu* (hereafter cited as YYTT), hsü 7, 229. Pagination is according to the *Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng* edition, but the *Szu pu ts'ung k'an* was also consulted as a check.



Through the early part of his life, Ch'eng-shih owed his positions in government service to his father's influence. His first important post was as "Gentleman-Collator of Texts,"<sup>7</sup> in the "Sanctum of Secret Texts,"<sup>8</sup> that is, as a textual critic in the imperial library, which was a subdivision of the great Secretariat in the capital city. He obtained this position by nepotism.<sup>9</sup> But we cannot tell exactly when this was. Some time after 806,<sup>10</sup> Ch'eng-shih, and presumably the whole family, had moved from Ch'eng-tu to Ch'ang-an, and was living in the Ch'ang-hsing Quarter of that metropolis. In 816, his father, then forty-three years old, was given a post in the "Division of Worship"<sup>11</sup> of the central government, and the concurrent title of "Learned Gentleman of the Forest of Quills." Then, in 819, the older man became "Cognizor of Restraints and Patents,"<sup>12</sup> that is, a Han-lin Gentleman deputed to draft state papers. Finally, in 820, he became "Gentleman in Attendance for Texts of the Penetralia,"<sup>13</sup> and concurrently a privy counsellor to the Son Heaven.<sup>14</sup> It was during these years, from 816 to 820, when he was in the central administration, that the older Tuan could most easily have brought his talented son into the hierarchy "under his shadow," as the cliché was. If so, the younger Tuan, now presumably about twenty years of age, found this an excellent opportunity to enliven his days by digging into the rare and beautiful scrolls so magically, as it must have seemed, placed at his disposal. "There," says his meagre official biography, "he ground after seminal things in painful study, unrolling and perusing the texts and registers of the Secret Gallery, and ranging through them all."<sup>15</sup>

7. *Chiao shu lang*. [For Chinese characters see p. 34]

8. *Pi shu sheng*.

9. CTS Biography.

10. *Ch'eng fang k'ao chiao pu chi*, in Takeo Hiraoka, *Chōan to Rakuyō* (Kyoto, 1956), p. 6b.

11. *Tz'u pu yüan wai lang*.

12. *Chih chih kao*.

13. *Chung shu shih lang*.

14. *P'ing chang shih*, something like "Equalizer and Illustrator of Affairs."

15. CTS Biography.

In 821, Tuan Wen-ch'ang went to Szechwan again, this time as overall military governor, while retaining his ministerial status.<sup>16</sup> He had a very successful career here, being regarded as temperamentally congenial to the Szechwanese; moreover he was feared and respected by the troublesome aborigines for his rectitude and severity.<sup>17</sup> It seems likely that this was the period when Ch'eng-shih "served his father in Shu," and when he was so much engaged in the sport of hunting.<sup>18</sup> But we shall see this side of his character later. At this time we are concerned only with the closeness of father and son. I assume that he was between twenty and twenty-five years old in 821.

A few years later, in 827, the family moved again, this time to prosperous Yang-chou, the Venice of T'ang, full of rich merchants, canals, pleasure-boats, music and dancing. The move was made because the elder Tuan, loaded with the highest titles, was ordered to that city to take over the governorship of Huai-nan Province. Almost immediately, it seems, the son took service under the great Li Te-yü, who at this time held a civil governorship in Chekiang, not so very far away.<sup>19</sup> His duties could not have been very onerous, for we find him back in Yang-chou in 828,<sup>20</sup> and in any event Li Te-yü left Chekiang in 829.

But it was not long before the family moved again, this time to Ching-chou,<sup>21</sup> far up the Yangtze, a river town noted for its fine figured damasks, citrus fruits of all kinds, and camellias.<sup>22</sup> Such was its prominence that once in the eighth century it had been called the "Southern Capital." Here again father Tuan was high military governor of the province,<sup>23</sup> a position he held only two years. He devoted this short period to pious

16. *Hsi ch'uan Chieh tu shih*, and *P'ing chang shih*.

17. CTS Biography.

18. TS Biography.

19. YYTT, hsü 4, 201.

20. YYTT, hsü 7, 229. Elsewhere in YYTT he tells of interviewing a wonderworker in Yang-chou during this period. See note 88.

21. CTS and TS Biographies.

22. *T'ang shu*, 40, 3725b.

23. *Ching nan Chieh tu shih*.

works. He bought the former houses of his ancestors here and in Ch'eng-tu, and converted them into Buddhist temples, and also erected buildings at their tombs, where he held lavish services in their memory and honor, with music and dancing, "as if they were alive."<sup>24</sup> We are not surprised to learn that Ch'eng-shih was still with him.<sup>25</sup>

In 832, the year of the great pestilence in the Yangtze Valley, Wen-ch'ang was sent back to govern Szechwan, which was also suffering from the plague.<sup>26</sup> We do not know if Ch'eng-shih was with him at this time, but in view of their solidarity up to then, it seems likely that he was. The father died there in 835, Wen Tsung reigning, at the age of 62 (Chinese style 63).<sup>27</sup> We can imagine that it was a shock to the son. So ended a great chapter in the young man's life. Presumably he was between thirty-five and forty years old.

The following year Ch'eng-shih settled in the capital, where he found employment in the imperial library's "Close of Assembled Worthies,"<sup>28</sup> where a staff of scholars, calligraphers and bookmakers were engaged in copying, editing and publishing rare and valuable manuscripts. It was an ideal situation. Here he was able to satisfy his voracious appetite for literary curiosities and rare nuggets of knowledge. He also lived the life of a gentleman of culture in a pleasant home in the Hsiu-hsing Quarter near the Serpentine River, the public lake-garden in the southeast corner of the city.<sup>29</sup> Ch'eng-shih tells us of the fine garden he kept here in

24. CTS Biography.

25. YYTT, hsü 7, 229, says that Ch'eng-shih was in Ching-chou in 832, presumably shortly before they moved to Szechwan again.

26. *T'ang shu*, 36, 3719b.

27. CTS Biography.

28. *Chi hsien yüan*. The beginnings of this institution went back to 717, but it was formally established by Hsüan Tsung in 725, in the Basilica of Assembled Sylphs (*Chi hsien tien*), whose name was then changed. Its functions had originally been part of the duties of the *Pi shu sheng*, but it was now made independent. See *T'ang liu tien*, 9, 27b. For Tuan's presence here, see YYTT, hsü 4, 201, and hsü 7, 229.

29. Hsü Sung, *T'ang liang ching ch'eng k'ao*, in T. Hiraoka, *Chōan to Rakuyō* (Kyoto, 1956), 3, 26a. The name of this quarter (also called Hsiu-hsing li), is corrupted in various texts into Hsiu-chu, giving a plausible and pleasant name by an easy wobble of the brush. The *Ch'eng*

several passages of his book – for instance, he writes of the decayed red-bud<sup>30</sup> in front of his private library, which he cut down in 836,<sup>31</sup> and of the two great five-needle pines which stood before “the great hall.”<sup>32</sup> This garden has been described in the poetry of friends and visitors. One of these was Liu Te-jen,<sup>33</sup> who wrote verses telling of its winding water, its many trees, its hills and rocks, the monkish visitors who came to stay the night, and its suitability for meditation.

These years in Ch’ang-an must have been rich ones for Ch’eng-shih, years full of exciting books, fascinating strangers, and every kind of rare experience. The Japanese monk Ennin arrived in the capital from Yang-chou in 838. With his deep interest in Buddhism and in foreigners, it seems certain that Ch’eng-shih would have interviewed him, though there is no record that he did so. From this period, however, we have his invaluable account of the temples in the eastern part of the capital, which he visited with two friends and colleagues. This ten-day tour was made in 843, only two years before the dreadful persecution of Buddhism which forcibly returned thousands of monks to lay life, and destroyed innumerable holy books and images. During that vacation, feeling the inadequacy of the standard sight-seers’ guides, he took copious notes on the mural paintings, sculpture and other treasures in these wealthy establishments. Some years later, after the persecution, he

*fang k’ao chiao pu chi*, p. 11 b, also refers to Ch’eng-shih’s “separate villa south of the wall, with water which endures the winter” (i. e. does not freeze; presumably a swift stream). But the “wall” may well be the wall of the palace, not of the city, in which case this too refers to the home in Hsiu-hsing.

30. *Tzu ching*, *Cercis chinensis*, closely related to the familiar redbuds (*Cercis* sp.) of western Asia, southeastern Europe, and North America.

31. YTTT, 19, 158.

32. YTTT, 18, 145. The trees, unless rare exotics, would be either *Pinus koraiensis* of Manchuria or *Pinus armandi* of Central China.

33. “Ch’u hsia t’i Tuan Lang-chung Hsiu-hsing-li Nan yüan,” *Ch’üan T’ang shih*, han 8, ts’e 10, chüan 1, 3a–3b. Liu Te-jen’s floruit is ca. 838. There is a poem of about the same date by Ku Fei-hsiung (fl. 836), in *Ch’üan T’ang shih*, han 8, ts’e 4, 2b, which tells of a visit to the home of “Army Commander Tuan” in this quarter, but we do not know that Tuan Ch’eng-shih ever held such a title.

found a large part of his records lost or destroyed, but made a consecutive text of what was left, calling it "Record of Temple-offices and Pagodas," which became finally a part of his *Yu yang tsa tsu*.<sup>34</sup>

After what appear to have been ten pleasant years in Ch'ang-an, and some visits to Lo-yang, the Eastern Capital, Ch'eng-shih left his gardened mansion for a six-year tour of duty as "Inciting Notary," that is, civil governor, of Chi-chou, a linen- and paper-producing township on the Kan River in what is now Kiangsi.<sup>35</sup>

In 853, Ch'eng-shih returned to Ch'ang-an, with ten more years of life ahead of him. Presumably within the first five of these, before he left the capital again, he gained the highest ranks of his career, first "Junior Minister of the Grand Ordinaries," that is, a kind of under-secretary for state rituals,<sup>36</sup> and "Gentleman of Preferred Texts," that is, a consultant for the great imperial secretariat.<sup>37</sup> Judging from a reference to him under the latter title by the poet Liu Te-jen, he returned to his old house and garden near the Serpentine River at this time.

In 860, the first year of the reign of I Tsung, he was appointed to another county governorship, this time at Chiang-chou (modern Kiu-kiang) on the Long River, a place noted for its paper industry, its orchids, its malachite mines, and the illustrious fact that Po Chü-i had lived there fifty years or so ago.<sup>38</sup> Very soon however, perhaps in the

34. YYTT, hsü 5, 213. See Soper, 1960, *passim*.

35. TS Biography; YYTT, hsü 5, 213. The latter source has "'incited' An-ch'eng," using an older name for Chi-chou. For the economic products, see *T'ang shu*, 41, 3729a. Tuan Ch'eng-shih's book *Lu-ling kuan hsia chi*, now lost, recorded his experiences here. Lu-ling is another name for Chi-chou. Ch'eng-shih held the same post in other townships, but we lack details for some of them. The brief biography in *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, 1a, states that he governed Chin-yün, that is, Ch'u-chou in Chekiang, but I have not found an old reference to this. Yü-ch'ih Shu, *Nan Ch'u hsün wen* (in *T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 5, 57b), refers to his ghost as "Pastor of Ching-chou," but maybe he has been confused with his father in this tale.

36. *T'ai ch'ang shao ch'ing*. TS Biography; Lu Hsün, "T'ang hsiao-shuo shih-lüeh" (in Wang Pi-chiang, *T'ang-jen hsiao-shuo*), p. 464.

37. *Shang shu lang*. TS and CTS Biographies. *Lang* is short for *lang-chung*, a title he is given in the poem of Liu Te-jen; see note 33.

38. CTS Biography; *T'ang shu*, 41, 3729a; *Yü ti chi sheng*, 30, 16a.



same year, he "untied his seal," and retired to lodgings in Hsiang-yang, up the Han River, the native place of Sung Yü and Meng Hao-jan, governed not long before by the cartographer Chia Tan and the storyteller Niu Seng-ju, and famous for its fine lacquer wares, its sugar cane, and its tangerines.<sup>39</sup> Here he spent the last three or four years of his life "suiting himself in idleness and freedom."<sup>40</sup> He died in the summer of 863.<sup>41</sup> He survived in his books, in a ghostly letter sent on the following winter solstice to his dear friend the poet Wen T'ing-yün,<sup>42</sup> and in his son, Tuan An-chieh.

Although his writings refer frequently to his father, his uncles, cousins, and other male relatives, they never tell of Ch'eng-shih's wife or offspring. It is likely that this has nothing to do with prejudice against women or children. If we learn anything of his character from his work, it is that he did not share ordinary biases about class, filial piety, foreigners, and the like. He enjoyed talking to everyone. But it does not matter. His son earned a reputation for himself by his own ability as a musician and musicologist. He had a solid theoretical foundation in music, and a good ear, being adept at improvising melodies;<sup>43</sup> above all, he regretted the passing of the old popular melodies of Hsüan Tsung's time in the first half of the eighth century, and tried to recapture what he could of the vanishing music of that era.<sup>44</sup> He published a study of lute music, the *P'i-p'a lu*;<sup>45</sup> the *Yüeh fu ku t'i*,<sup>46</sup> seemingly a book on old tunes, but now lost; and the *Yüeh fu tsa lu*, a valuable record of mid-T'ang court orchestras, dancing, miming, musical instruments, song-tunes, and modes.<sup>47</sup>

39. CTS Biography; *T'ang shu*, 40, 3725c. 40. CTS Biography.

41. *Nan Ch'u hsin wen* (*T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 5, 57b-58a; and in *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*, 351, 5b-6a).

42. *Nan Ch'u hsin wen*, *loc. cit.*

43. TS Biography.

44. Preface to his *Yüeh fu tsa lu* in *Ch'üan T'ang wen*, 820, 1a.

45. Preserved in part in the Han fen lou *Shuo fu* (1927).

46. *Sung shih*, 202, 4987c.

47. Text of *Yüeh fu tsa lu* in *T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 11, 2a-21a.



## II

Such was the career of the man whose "mental equipment" Soper found to be limited,<sup>48</sup> and whose judgment of esthetic values he called "naive," since he was enthusiastic about the kind of naturalism in vogue in religious painting in the ninth century, but scorned by the Sung critics.<sup>49</sup> As for his chief book, the *Yu yang tsa tsu*, it is, according to Soper, "... for the most part a collection of odd facts and old wives' tales, recounting strange or supernatural events with every mark of total credulity."<sup>50</sup>

After reading everything I could find written by Tuan Ch'eng-shih, and everything contemporary written about him, my own belief is that he was an intelligent non-conformist, dissatisfied with the conventional sources of knowledge which held most of his learned contemporaries in bondage. Perhaps he was no art critic, since his taste was not that of Kuo Hsi – perhaps the mode two hundred years later would have outraged him – and credulous only in that he was insatiably curious, and in being a Buddhist, as were most sensitive men of his time – but then, Newton was a Christian. To describe him in more positive terms, he had, first of all, a prodigious memory, and was deeply learned in almost every subject; in particular he was an authority on the traditions and beliefs of the "Three Doctrines," Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.<sup>51</sup> These traits, attested to by both official and unofficial accounts of his character, might give the impression of a merely bookish person, with exclusively pedantic interests. But, though it is true that he loved books, his most notable qualities, as we can readily determine by reading his own writings, were his love of nature, and his interest in the most humble human affairs. I shall have more to say about these wider interests later. Now let us look at him more closely as a person.

48. Soper, 1960, 15. 49. Soper, 1960, 18. 50. Soper, 1960, 16.

51. TS Biography; *Nan Ch'u hsin wen* (*T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 5, 55b; and in *T'ai p'ing kuang chi*, 197, 6a). An example of the way he remembered everything he had read is given in the latter source, which tells how he instantly identified an ancient and strange artifact dug up in his garden.

What did he care for other than unorthodox books and rare knowledge? He cared for words, for one thing, and it appears that he was a romantic linguist and philologist. We have the example of a party he arranged which was devoted, it appears, to the problem of discussing the meaning of a strange new expression, and its current popular etymology.<sup>52</sup> But that is a related interest, even though it is not an everyday one.

He had (is it surprising?) some practical skills as well. Our knowledge of these is scanty, because of the fragmentary nature of the sources – we may easily imagine that there were many of which we know nothing, because he was the sort of man who liked to know how things were actually done. His preface to a poem tells of a note-paper he made, which he styled “Cloudy Indigo Paper,” and sent to his friend, the poet Wen T’ing-yün.<sup>53</sup> He manufactured this paper during the last years of his life, while he was governor of Chiang-chou, a center of the paper industry. We may suppose that he learned the art in the factories – a learned magistrate apprenticed to ordinary artisans. Or again, his treatise on falconry, “The Section on Raptors of Flesh,” which became a chapter in the book *Yu yang tsa tsu*, was based on his study of actual practice, not copied out of books. He had been an ardent and successful hawker of pheasants and rabbits in Szechwan, until reprimanded by his father.<sup>54</sup> Apparently the paternal objection was made on religious grounds – the wanton taking of life would have been abhorrent to the pious chanter of the Diamond Sutra. What is interesting to us is that the young man was not just another empty-minded chaser of pheasants and rabbits, but an avid learner, preoccupied with good craftsmanship, practical methods, and (a concession to philology) the *names* of birds and apparatus alike, which he registered in close detail.

But his life did have a frivolous side. Perhaps it is regrettable that this

52. YTTT, hsü 8, 241. The term was *lang chin* “gentleman’s kerchief,” popularly explained as “wolf’s sinew.”

53. “Shou Wen Fei-ch’ing chien chin,” *Ch’üan T’ang shih*, han 9, ts’e 5, 2 b.

54. TS Biography.

side did not escape the brush and ink which awaited his inevitable return to his studio. Ch'eng-shih was, in short, a flower-gazer, a player of trivial games, a drinker, and a consorter with courtesans. He frequently tells us about these pastimes. Apparently he participated in them gaily, but all the while his restless curiosity was at work, even at his gayest, noting strange words, ideas, beliefs, names, and customs. In consequence, he gives us a sharper, more three-dimensional picture of life in ninth century China than more conventional and sober records do. An example: he duly records for us the names of the geisha who entertained him: "Jade Pot," "Mount P'eng," and "Goldling."<sup>55</sup> He interrogated these girls closely about their private likes and dislikes, and finding that two of them were afraid of rats and lice respectively, devoted an evening with his guests to catching and destroying these pests. In memory of the affair, he wrote a booklet called "Register of Smashed Lice,"<sup>56</sup> not an edifying topic, perhaps, but typical of the uncommon blend of inquisitiveness about everything in the world with scholarly zeal.

We have observed how close Ch'eng-shih was to his father. It was also characteristic of him that he was close, in some sense, to a considerable number of relatives. At least, he was always seeking information from cousins and uncles and relatives by marriage about every conceivable question, but especially about bizarre experiences.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, since Ch'eng-shih viewed all men, low or high, stranger or fellow citizen, as sources of rare information, perhaps we should not make too much of his use of relatives as informants. Perhaps they regarded him as a nuisance.

Indeed, it cannot be said with confidence that Tuan Ch'eng-shih had a wide circle of friends, despite his repeated allusions to conversations with all sorts of people. He had friends among the poets, however. Some

55. *Yü hu, P'eng shan, Chin tzu.*

56. *P'o shih lu.* See YYTT, 12, 95.

57. Among these relatives was a certain P'ei Yüan-yü, the husband of his elder sister. YYTT, 8, 65. It is possible that this P'ei was related to the great minister P'ei Chi, who had helped Ch'eng-shih's father in his early career.

of his own poems are dedicated to Chou Yu,<sup>58</sup> to Li Ch'ün-yü,<sup>59</sup> and above all, to Wen T'ing-yün, whose reputation now stands high above that of these others. Tuan and Wen frequently allude to each other in their poems, to private jokes between them, to exchanges of gifts, and to other evidences of intimacy.<sup>60</sup> Some modern critics even have difficulty distinguishing the style of the two. A poem entitled "Watching a Game of Go" appears, with slight variations, under both Wen T'ing-yün and Tuan Ch'eng-shih in the "Complete T'ang Poetry"; the editors were unable to decide which of the two was actually the author.<sup>61</sup> Or again, we have poems with the same title by both Tuan and Wen which were obviously inspired by the same event and idea.<sup>62</sup> Though Wen T'ing-yün is now thought of as a first-rate poet, and Tuan Ch'eng-shih as a collector of curiosa, they apparently regarded each *other* as soul-mates. In any case, both were preoccupied with rare, exquisite, exotic, cunning, intricate and fantastic images. T'ing-yün expressed them primarily in verse; Ch'eng-shih usually displayed them in prose.

Tuan Ch'eng-shih's interest in Buddhism is the thing which is best known about him. Further comment does not seem to be necessary, except to point out the importance of some of his surviving writings for the study of some aspects of Buddhist faith, practice, and iconography in the ninth century. Two are outstanding, his "Record of Temple-offices and Pagodas,"<sup>63</sup> about some of the temples of Ch'ang-an and his "Assemblage of Singularities (due to) the *Vajra-sūtra*,"<sup>64</sup> about miracles

58. E. g. "Ho Chou Yu chien tiao," *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, 8a; to be compared with Wen T'ing-yün, "Ho Chou Yu," *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, 9, 11a. Both apparently relate to the same episode.

59. Two poems entitled "K'u Li Ch'ün-yü," *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, 2a and 7a.

60. See for instance Wen T'ing-yün's writings in *Ch'üan T'ang wen*, 786, 2b-3a and 3a-5b; *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, chüan 7, 6a, and 9, 8a.

61. "Kuan ch,'i" in *Chü'an T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, chüan 9, 12a (for Wen), and 3a (for Tuan).

62. "T'i shih ch'üan lan jo."

63. *Szu t'a chi*, translated by Soper.

64. *Chin-kang ching chiu i*, in YYTT, hsü 7, 229-237. One of these tales appears in an English version as "The Judgement-Seat" in E. D. Edwards, *The Dragon Book* (London and Edinburgh, 1938), pp. 241-242.

on behalf of faithful reciters of the Diamond Sutra. A few lesser things also survive in the "Complete T'ang Texts," such as his "Record of a Clay Image,"<sup>65</sup> and "Stele for the Lonely and Shining Upādhyāya."<sup>66</sup> Nor can we doubt that Ch'eng-shih was, like his father, a believing Buddhist of some sort, since he tells of himself "reciting the sutras."<sup>67</sup> But his religious interests were by no means confined to Buddhism. *Yu yang tsa tsu* contains much evidence about the character of contemporary Taoism, most of it in the form of esoteric lore gathered together in the chapter of that book named "Jade Frame."<sup>68</sup> There he guides us through the grotto-heavens of the Taoists just as he describes elsewhere the infernal geography of the Buddhists.

Perhaps as a legacy from his hawking days, Ch'eng-shih was attracted to the natural world – not just in the vaguely appreciative way characteristic of a well-bred gentleman with a garden, but in the manner of a "naturalist" (to use an old-fashioned word), in this instance a naturalist well trained in bibliography and philology. What is particularly worth noting about his descriptions of plants and animals is that he is not, like most encyclopedists, content merely to cite illustrative passages from approved books, but relies also on unorthodox sources, such as Buddhist books, and above all on his own experience.<sup>69</sup> In the introduction to the section on plants and animals in *Yu yang tsa tsu*<sup>70</sup> he writes, inter alia:

In consequence, I have retrieved what earlier pedagogues have composed about herbs, trees, fowl and fish, but is not set forth in the canonical and historical books; and some things which are carried in the canons and histories, but not comprehensively; and some things which have met my ears and eyes, but exist neither in leaflets nor in bound books ...

This reliance on experience is very characteristic of all his writing, even the most fantastic.

65. "Su hsiang chi," *Ch'üan T'ang wen*, 787, 5a-7a.

66. "Chi chao ho-shang pei." 67. *YYTT*, 19, 158. 68. *Yü ko* (ch. 2).

69. For example, the remarks on a certain insect, in *YYTT*, 17, 144.

70. *Kuang tung chih* (chs. 16 to 19).



Ch'eng-shih was an omnivorous reader. He fully exploited the imperial library where he was employed, and also developed a rich private library,<sup>71</sup> where, in the words of his official biographer, he "had many singular folios and secret registers."<sup>72</sup> To understand the man better, however, we could wish that we knew precisely what books he liked best, and which, accordingly, informed his mind most thoroughly. He tells of reading the *San kuo tien lüeh* when he was first employed in the *Chi hsien yüan*, that is, in 836 or 837.<sup>73</sup> But that is not too illuminating. During this same year he read Wang Ch'ung's *Lun heng* for the first time.<sup>74</sup> This is rather better. I expect that he mentions the fact particularly because he found that explorer of uncanonical byways of eight hundred years before very congenial to his own taste and temperament. Ch'eng-shih also reports that he read *Chuang tzu*.<sup>75</sup> But aside from these few, we have nothing specific. We do have some illuminating generalities, however. He was "deep in Buddhist writings,"<sup>76</sup> but that is of course. From this, and from his repeated interrogations of foreigners, his interest in strange words (*Yu yang tsa tsu* is rich in Indic names for all sorts of natural phenomena, from the astronomical to the botanical), and his familiarity with exotic scripts, especially those of the Iranian nations of the West,<sup>77</sup> we may easily suppose that he was acquainted with languages other than Chinese, though the degree of his acquaintanceship remains in doubt. But there can be no doubt that he was more truly a catholic gentleman than were most of his contemporaries, just because of this international element in his culture.

### III

But with this slight introduction to the mind and character of Tuan Ch'eng-shih, we leave the man and the *content* of his writing, and turn to look briefly at the manner of his writing. Let us first consider his poetry.

71. CTS Biography. 72. TS Biography.

73. YYTT, hsü 4, 203. The book was written by Ch'iu Yüeh (? - ca. 714).

74. YYTT, hsü 4, 201. 75. YYTT, hsü 4, 210.

76. CTS Biography. 77. He lists them in YYTT, 11, 85-86.



We do not have very much, and indeed we cannot tell how much he actually wrote. There remains only a single *chüan* in the "Complete T'ang Poetry," and a number of impromptu effusions, conjoined with those of his friends, praising the wonders of the Ch'ang-an temples they visited – for instance, the paintings of Wu Tao-tzu. These last form part of the text of his *Szu t'a chi*.<sup>78</sup> Many of his "serious" poems – by that I mean those dignified by preservation in the *Ch'üan T'ang shih* – are playful, mocking, and satirical. As to his style, we should expect it to be as Lu Hsün describes it,<sup>79</sup> "obscure, crabbed, complex, and elaborate," all the more since Ch'eng-shih was a close friend of Wen T'ing-yün, whose writing is described in much the same way by modern critics. That is to say, we should expect it to be characterized by remote allusions, original and startling metonymies, and involved retrospective analogies. I have not examined all of the remaining verse of Tuan Ch'eng-shih with care, but these qualities do not seem to me always to be present. Here is a rather coarse translation of one of his short poems, called "I Drone in my Drunkenness":<sup>80</sup>

My only love is the lees bench, and its drip-, dripping sound;  
And long is my sorrow when that sound is cut off, and I'm again sober –  
all too sober.

Among men, neither glory nor dishonour are fixed for long;  
For me, only the Southern Hills are fixed, and their old abiding blue.

There is nothing very startling in the style of this, unless perhaps the doubling of the word "sober", to give a more allusive gestalt – the cold, grey light of dawn in the soul – than the unrepeated word could give. Then there is the last verse of the poem, which is partly identical with a line in a poem by Wen T'ing-yün which goes:

Before the eaves, old abiding, the color of the blue hills.<sup>81</sup>

78. See translations in Soper, 1960. 79. Lu Hsün, p. 466.

80. "Tsui chung yin," *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, 7b.

81. Wen T'ing-yün, "T'i Ts'ui kung ch'ih t'ing chiu yu," *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, chüan 4, 8b.

Both poets evidently regarded the atmospheric chromatics of distant mountains as more satisfyingly permanent than most pleasures. Perhaps one of them took the words from the other, or perhaps they worked the phrases out together. In this case, however, the stylistic palm should go to Ch'eng-shih for his use of "blue" as a simple substantive. This fits the mood of color taken to be real and eternal, whereas T'ing-yün uses "blue" more cautiously, in the attributive way, leaving it a mere secondary quality adhering to the substantial mountains.

In saying that some of Ch'eng-shih's poetry is relatively uncomplicated, considering the dominant taste of his era, I do not mean to imply that he could not evolve original and even splendid imagery. Quite the contrary. Here now is a string of vivid and imaginative similes from the preface to his poem on a New Years' illumination at Hsiang-chou, a phantasmagoria in reds, pinks, and magentas. This poem must have been written during the last years of his life, when he was in retirement there. The words describe the appearance of hundreds of lamps displayed on the mountainside:<sup>82</sup>

Like dust glowing with fringed color,  
 Like waves decaying on whale's bristles,  
 Like auroral dappling,  
 Like coral dew,  
 Like cinnabar snakes wriggling away,  
 Like vermeil herbs thickly clustered,  
 Like bending of boletus,  
 Like lifting of lotus ...

I think this use of language proves Ch'eng-shih to have been a rather gifted poet – no mere versifier.

Ch'eng-shih's reputation in literature, however, rests mainly on his tales of wonder. A variety of these are assembled in the chapter called "Record of the Nakkau," in *Yu yang tsa tsu*.<sup>83</sup> (*Nakkau* is the esoteric

82. "Kuan shan teng hsien Hsü shang shu," *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, han 9, ts'e 5, 1a-1b.

83. *No-kao chi* (Ancient Chinese \**Nâk-kâu*), in *YYTT*, ch. 14.

name of the Moon God, invoked by Taoists for protection when they entered dark forests.)<sup>84</sup> Ch'eng-shih was obsessed with the subtle variations and transformations of nature, and like a good disciple of Chuang-tzu, believed in the illusory character of phenomena, an idea reinforced for him by the Buddhist doctrine of *maya*. It was his ambition to discover, if he could, something of the character of the unseen forces – unseen beings, perhaps – which actually produced the visible results accepted as real by the naive practical man. The “Record of the Nakkau,” is a collection of tales of magic, illusion, ghostly influences, and demonic powers. These stories represent, in part, the results of his own inquiries. He read, he says, “fantastic writings” of every age. What is much more interesting is that he listened carefully to the popular tales of the market-place and the ancient lore of the country village. He apologizes a little bit for paying attention to things generally considered unworthy of an educated man. This kind of information will not, he admits, help one “... to distinguish the forms of the Nine Tripods,” but will, perhaps, make pleasant reading in an idle hour.<sup>85</sup> One feels strongly that this disclaimer is made for public consumption, and that he had a fierce interest in these fantasies, striving boldly but uncertainly to understand what noumenal entities lay behind them. But he gives us no general theory about their nature. He was a supreme questioner and listener, and, I think, anticipated the ethnological, folkloristic, and linguistic field-worker of our own time, though impelled by very different motives – motives appropriate to a man of the ninth century, not to a man of the twentieth. To understand this is to understand how the same person could produce factual data of the greatest value for historical botany, zoology and technology (much exploited by Berthold Laufer and myself, for instance), and at the same time record a bewildering collec-

84. See *Pao p'u tzu*, “Teng she” (ch. 17), and the comments of Wu Tseng (twelfth century), in remarks appended to the *Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng* edition of YYTT, hsü 10, 252.

85. Prefatory remarks to *No-kao chi* (YYTT, 14, 103). Compare the preface to *Yu yang tsa tsu*, where he says that his “Assorted Meats” are hardly worthy of the rich soups of the classical tradition in literature.

tion of weird and wonderful tales of the supernatural. His eternal questions were, "What are the secrets of the visible world – and what are the mysteries of the invisible world?" He sought answers for both by constant reading of out-of-the-way texts, and by patient questioning of unlikely informants.

Soper found him credulous. I find him open-minded. The obvious answers were available to him in the Buddhist and Taoist books which he read so voraciously. He does not rely on them, though he mentions them. He lays his evidence from every source before his readers, whether it be evidence of divine miracles or of human cookery, without committing himself to accepted doctrines which might explain them. He gleaned his information from slaves, peasants, foreign priests, and other ill-educated or "wrongly" educated persons. "So-and-so says," he writes. Here are examples of his informants: an Indian priest, a Roman priest, an envoy from Cambodia, an envoy from Persia, a merchant, the nurse of his niece, his own secretary.<sup>86</sup> He does not believe everything he hears. He tests his informants. When a Taoist enumerated the several shadows of a man, Ch'eng-shih tried repeatedly to count his own.<sup>87</sup> He had many interviews with a miracle doctor in Yang-chou, but when he tried his medicines, they failed to work.<sup>88</sup> He acknowledges these failures without hesitation. But always he seems to say to his readers: these things appear to be so; how do they fit our hallowed traditions? Luckily he was able to set his findings down in simple but elegant Chinese, and occasionally in beautiful Chinese.

Other writings of the bizarre kind attributed to Ch'eng-shih are the "Traditions of the Yakshas,"<sup>89</sup> tales about yaksha demons, and "Treatise on Strange Sicknesses,"<sup>90</sup> which tells of odd diseases and marvellous cures. Both collections have a fictional character, and if correctly attri-

86. All in YTTT.

87. YTTT, 11, 87.

88. YTTT, 5, 45.

89. *Yeh-ch'a chuan*, in *T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 20, 64–69.

90. *I chi chih*, in *T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 11, 68–73.

buted to Ch'eng-shih, must represent his reworking of stories he heard in the shops and squares of capital and country town alike.

One important collection of tales of wonder, bravery, strength and daring, the "Traditions of Sabres and Chivalry,"<sup>91</sup> once thought to be his work, is now regarded as the composition of P'ei Hsing. It contains such familiar stories, evidently pure works of the imagination, as "Kun-lun nu" and "Nieh Yin-niang."

Other books which we may assign to Tuan Ch'eng-shih with confidence are now known only by title.<sup>92</sup> His masterpiece, despite its miscellaneous character, remains the *Yu yang tsa tsu*.<sup>93</sup>

91. *Chien hsia chuan*, in *T'ang tai ts'ung shu*, 13, 25-43.

92. For instance, the *Lu-ling kuan hsia chi* (registered in *T'ang shu*, 59, 3769b, in the *hsiao-shuo* section, along with YTTT). Fragmentary passages said to be from this book may be found in *Shuo fu* (ts'e 37, ch. 19). Some, at least, are identical with sections of our present YTTT. Either the former furnished material for the latter, or else the source was wrongly identified by the editors of *Shuo fu*. Presumably this book was written while Ch'eng-shih was in Chi-chou, from 846 to 852. The T'ang bibliography mentions a *Han shang t'i chin chi*, apparently done in collaboration with Wen T'ing-yün (*T'ang shu*, 60, 3773d), but nothing else is known of this. The *Sung shih* bibliography (206, 4998a) lists *Chin li hsien wen*; some few fragments of a book by this title may be found in *Shuo fu* v. 33, with author's name not mentioned. These bits tell of flowers, of a monk cured by a fancy tea, of a bird of Ch'eng-tu, and the like – all matters consistent with Ch'eng-shih's interests. Most likely it really represents the remains of his book.

93. For the meaning of the title of the book see Soper, 1960, 19; for the available modern versions of the text see Soper, 1960, 15, note 1. There is a shortened version of the *Szu t'a chi* in the Taishō *Tripitaka*, 51, 2093, pp. 1022-24.

[See next page for index of names and subjects with Chinese characters]



Places

Ch'ang-hsing 長興  
 Chi-chou 吉州  
 Ch'i-chou 齊州  
 Chiang-chou 江州  
 Ching-chou 荊州  
 Ch'u-chou 處州  
 Hsiang-yang 襄陽  
 Hsiu-chu 修竹  
 Hsiu-hsing 修行  
 Lin-tzu 臨淄  
 Yang-chou 揚州

Titles and Offices

Chi hsien yüan 集賢院  
 Chiao shu lang 校書郎  
 Chih chih kao 知制誥  
 Ching nan chieh tu shih 荆南節度使  
 Chung shu shih lang 中書詩郎  
 Hsi ch'uan chieh tu shih 西川節度使  
 Pi shu sheng 祕書省  
 P'ing chang shih 平章  
 Shang shu lang (chung) 尚書郎(中)  
 T'ai ch'ang shao ch'ing 太常少卿  
 Tz'u pu yüan wai lang 太常少卿外郎

Writings

Ch'eng-fang k'ao-chiao pu chi 城坊攷校  
 Chi chao ho-shang pei 寂照和尚碑  
 Chien hsia chuan 劍俠傳  
 Chin-kang ching chiu i 金剛經鳩異  
 Chin li hsin wen 錦里新聞  
 Han shang t'i chin chi 漢上題襟集  
 I chi chih 吳志  
 K'un-lun nu 崑崙奴

Lu-ling kuan hsia chi 廬陵官下記  
 Nan Ch'u hsin wen 南楚新聞  
 Nieh Yin-niang 聶隱娘  
 No-kao chi 諾曷破  
 P'o shih lu 破瑟  
 P'i-p'a lu 琵琶錄  
 San kuo tien lüeh 三國曲略  
 Su hsiang chi 塑像記  
 Szu t'a chi 寺塔記  
 T'ang liang ching ch'eng k'ao 唐兩京城考  
 Yeh-ch'a chuan 夜叉傳  
 Yu yang tsa tsu 又陽雜俎  
 Yüeh fu ku t'i 西樂府古題  
 Yüeh fu tsa lu 樂府雜錄

Persons

Chou Yu 周繇  
 Ku Fei-hsiung 顧非熊  
 Li Ch'ün-yü 李韋玉  
 Li Te-yü 李德裕  
 Liu Te-jen 劉得仁  
 P'ei Chi 裴瑁  
 P'ei Hsing 裴鉞  
 P'ei Yüan-yü 裴元裕  
 Tuan An-chieh 段安成  
 Tuan Ch'eng-shih 段文式  
 Tuan Wen-ch'ang 段文昌  
 Wen T'ing-yün 溫庭筠

Words

Chin tzu 金子植  
 Kuang tung chih 廣達山  
 P'eng shan 蓬紫荆  
 Tzu ching 紫玉壺  
 Yü hu 玉壺  
 Yü ko 玉格