

Aaron Summers
Professor Helman
C&T 201
6 December 2006

Selections from Tu Fu Discussion Notes

Board Topics:

- 1) *Ballad of The War Wagons:*
 - a. What is a common person's view of war?
- 2) *Five Hundred Words About My Journey From The Capital to Feng-Hsien:*
 - a. Are there criticisms of Taoism present in this poem?
 - b. What is Tu Fu's motivation for attempting to attain a court position?
 - c. What does his grief tell us about his feelings for his son?
- 3) *Meandering River:*
 - a. What is the subject of this poem?
- 4) *Five Poems on the Autumn Fields:*
 - a. How important is music to Tu Fu and what does it reveal about his philosophy?
- 5) Is there a Taoist theme in his writings?
- 6) *Meandering River and Rain on a Spring Night:*
 - a. How does weather affect Tu Fu's moods?

Discussion:

- 1) *Ballad of The War Wagons:*
 - a. Describes a common person's feeling about war
 - b. More a description of everyday life than a revelation of feelings
 - c. Images are comparable to a World War II liberation parade
 - d. Sons vs. Daughters
 - i. Tu Fu believes it is better to have daughters
 - ii. Is honor worth sacrificing one's life?
 1. Service of sons is necessary for defense, death is an inevitable part of warfare
 2. In this case the army was the aggressor
 3. Tu Fu felt that the war was no longer necessary, therefore the sacrifice was pointless
 4. Sons spent the better years of their life on this conquest
 - iii. Sun Tzu's view
 1. Prolonged warfare leads to loss of support from the people

- iv. How does this compare to modern wars?
 1. WWII vs. Vietnam vs. Iraq
 2. Initial rage gains the support of people: Pearl Harbor, 9/11
 3. There is a difference between fighting on homeland and fighting on foreign soil. People are less likely to support a war that they are not actively involved in.
 4. Warfare should stop when purpose is fulfilled.
- 2) *Five Hundred Words About My Journey From The Capital to Feng-Hsien:*
- a. Concept of a sage well-developed
 - b. How can anyone have the qualities of a sage when they are looking at their dead son?
 - c. Tu Fu believes that a sage must limit his excesses and defects. Is this a model for his life?
 - i. No, he does not necessarily respect a sage for being able to divert his emotions. The grieving process must overtake Tao for a certain period of time.
 - d. Confucian principles
 - i. It is natural to grieve over a son. However, it should be done according to ritual.
- 3) *Meandering River:*
- a. Tu Fu wanted to separate himself from the government. In this poem he is taking the civil servant test again. What are his motives?
 - i. He wants to gain influence in the government.
 - ii. Through his influence he wants to limit war.
 - b. Tone
 - i. Tongue-in-cheek
 - ii. Poem is actually a criticism of Legalist governing techniques
 - c. Who is he describing in this poem?
 - i. Himself
 - ii. He is disillusioned by constant warfare.
 - iii. His problems are only amplified by his financial struggles.
 - iv. He enjoys certain aspects of life but is overcome by the situation in his country.
 - v. He shirks off his duty and takes on a carefree lifestyle of drunkenness and debt.
 - vi. His ideals when drunk are comparable to Taoist ideals (going with the flow, not attempting to change things, etc.)
- 4) *Five Poems on the Autumn Fields:*
- a. Why is music important to Tu Fu?
 - i. "Music and ceremony to correct my faults..."
 - ii. Harmony can be achieved through music.

- b. (5) What does this reveal about his philosophy?
 - i. His life is a mixture of Confucianism and Taoism.
 - 1. Day and night lifestyle
 - 2. Was this mixture of philosophies common during this time?
 - 3. There is also a small amount of Legalism in his writings. At certain points he strives for perfection and order.
 - 4. In *Gazing at Mt. T'ai* his imagery is Taoist.
 - a. Mountains, slopes, clouds, dark, and dawn
 - 5. At many points in his poems he stops randomly to describe nature.
 - 6. His poems take on a Taoist theme towards the end of his life. Most of them are about nature.

5) *Meandering River and Rain on a Spring Night:*

- a. How does weather affect Tu Fu's moods?
 - i. In the poems his mindset affects how he views natural processes. When he is depressed, after he has moved several times in a row, he hates the changing of the seasons. Towards the end of his life, when he is with his family, he appreciates the function of rain.