

# Celebrating Sensual Indulgence: Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852), His Readers, and the Making of a New *Fengliu* 風流 Ideal

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This paper examines the construction of the poet Du Mu's libertine image to illustrate how Chinese writers and readers of the ninth and tenth centuries validated the search for sensual pleasure by associating it with literary talent, unconventional character, and political disengagement. In doing so, they added indulgence in sensual pleasures to the repertoire of *fengliu* cultural ideals, a repertoire previously associated with reclusion and drinking. Because sensual pleasure was traditionally viewed as trivial and/or disruptive to social order, ninth-century writers approached the new ideal with considerable ambivalence. Although Du Mu had fashioned a libertine poetic self-image as a young man, he attempted to shed this image later in life. I argue that it was Du Mu's readers who, by creatively reading his poems and writing anecdotes about his sexual adventures, re-imagined the poet as a figure of fascination and thus created one of the most enduring *fengliu* characters in Chinese history.

*Fengliu*, literally “wind and stream,” is an important phrase commonly used to describe the behavior and character of those possessing a natural dignity and flair, a flowing charm, style or panache, and a spontaneous, unconventional, and romantic sensibility.<sup>1</sup> During the Six Dynasties (220–589), *fengliu* was associated with the cultivated style and urbanity of the upper classes as well as with the nonconformist spirit and unrestrained demeanor of certain Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220–420) elites.<sup>2</sup> The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢) embody the *fengliu* spirit of this period: they ignore ritual propriety, drink to excess, wear no clothes, and are openly rude to those they despise.<sup>3</sup> During the ninth century, while notions of *fengliu* associated with the Wei-Jin anti-heroes continued to influence contemporary understanding, the term evolved to include erotic and amorous elements in male-female relationships. In depictions of the pleasure quarters of Chang'an, the *fengliu* ideal was “part of a discursive obsession with lyricism and sentiment that shaped the client-patron relationship in favor of an aesthetic of feeling and a kind of stylized mutual enchantment between

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1. See Paul W. Kroll, *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

2. See Richard B. Mather, tr., *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1976), 651; Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, “Lun *fengliu*” 論風流, in *Sansong tang xueshu wenji* 三松堂學術文集 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1984), 609–17. In her study of the Xie family members of the Southern Dynasties, Cynthia L. Chennault translates *fengliu* as “debonair manner” to describe the grace and urbanity associated with upper-class breeding. See her “Lofty Gates or Solitary Impoverishment? Xie Family Members of the Southern Dynasties,” *T'oung Pao* 85 (1999): 273.

3. See Audrey Spiro, *Contemplating the Ancients: Aesthetic and Social Issues in Early Chinese Portraits* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 98–101, 169–72.

courtesans and literati men.”<sup>4</sup> With a flourishing entertainment culture, the development of the civil service examination, and the rise of regional powers, ninth-century elite men often wrote poems about women and sensuality to display their literary talent to capital examiners, local patrons, and their elite peers.<sup>5</sup> The *fengliu* ideals articulated in these poems—e.g., sensitive poets expressing erotic desire for entertainers, compassionate poets lamenting a courtesan’s sad fate, poets as sentimental lovers and passionate craftsmen—were aspects of an emerging elite cultural identity associated with literary talent and sensibility.<sup>6</sup>

When we think about Du Mu, the ninth-century poet who is viewed as the embodiment of the *fengliu* ideal, his image is very much related to various affairs and frequent visits to the courtesan quarters.<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, Du Mu was regarded as a libertine whose licentious life was documented in anecdotes. To account for his libertine behavior, scholars sought answers from within his family tradition, the influence of courtesan culture, the impact of regional culture at the southern Military Commission headquarters, and frustration arising from unfulfilled political ambition.<sup>8</sup> Recent studies propose that Du Mu’s *fengliu* image has less to do with his behavior than with his self-representation and his readers’ interpretations. Stephen Owen, for example, suggests that Du Mu’s reputation as a dashing libertine evolved from his poetic self-image, and Jinghua Wangling argues that it was the product of the poet’s and his readers’ collective creations.<sup>9</sup> Wangling asserts that, while Du Mu’s *fengliu* image largely derives from his collected works, his readers participated in constructing this image by preserving poems that Du Mu had excluded from his collected works and/or by misattributing certain poems to Du Mu. Indeed, it was the accumulation of such images, created both by the poet and his readers, that formed the basis for anecdotal sources that firmly establish Du Mu’s *fengliu* reputation.

While Wangling discusses how Du Mu’s *fengliu* image was constructed, I ask why Du Mu came to embody the *fengliu* ideal, given that many other ninth-century writers also fashioned themselves as *fengliu* sensualists. I propose that Du Mu’s particular style of *fengliu* was uniquely appealing to his contemporaries because it was widely seen as idealizing what I call “sensual indulgence” as a form of political disengagement. I use “sensual indulgence” to describe a person’s behavior of giving free rein to his sensual pleasures by visiting courtesan quarters, engaging in sexual adventures, and having love affairs. In the core texts that represent Du Mu’s *fengliu* image, the search for sensual pleasures is depicted as an alternative to a life spent in service to the state. Some of the most celebrated cultural ideals within the

4. Linda R. Feng, “Unmasking *Fengliu* 風流 in Urban Chang’an: Rereading *Beili zhi* 北里志 (Anecdotes from the Northern Ward),” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 32 (2010): 4.

5. See Stephen Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear? The ‘Yan Terrace Poems’ and the Culture of Romance,” *T’ang Studies* 13 (1995): 81–118; Ping Yao, “The Status of Pleasure: Courtesan and Literati Connections in T’ang China (618–907),” *Journal of Women’s History* 14.2 (2002): 26–53; Anna M. Shields, “Defining Experiences: The ‘Poems of Seductive Allure’ (*yanshi*) of the Mid-Tang Poet Yuan Zhen (779–831),” *JAOS* 122 (2002): 61–78; Jinghua Wangling, “Singing Lips in Observation: Ninth-century Chinese Poetry on Female Entertainers” (PhD diss., Harvard Univ., 2009).

6. See Wangling, “Singing Lips,” 117–82.

7. See Jian Xiujian 簡秀絹, “Du Mu xingxiang zhi kuoqing yu huanyuan” 杜牧形象之廓清與還原 (MA thesis, National Tsing Hua Univ., 2013).

8. These views can be found in traditional poetry remarks (*shihua* 詩話) and modern studies. See, e.g., Wu Xilin’s 吳錫麟 preface to *Fanchuan shiji zhu* 樊川詩集註, in *Du Mu ziliao huibian* 杜牧資料彙編, ed. Zhang Jinhai 張金海 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 298–99; Dai Weihua 戴偉華, *Tangdai mufu yu wenxue* 唐代幕府與文學 (Beijing: Xiandai chubanshe, 1990), 45–47; Cheng Yinke 陳寅恪, *Tangdai zhengzhishi shulun gao* 唐代政治史述論稿 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1980), 240–42.

9. Stephen Owen, *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827–860)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press), 266; Wangling, “Singing Lips,” 192–205.

Chinese tradition are concerned with the ideal of political disengagement, and the emergence of these ideals is often associated with flamboyant historical figures, such as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, Tao Qian 陶潛 (365?-427), and Li Bai 李白 (701-762), to name just a few. It was Du Mu's image that added indulgence in sensual pleasures to the *fengliu* repertoire, a repertoire that had previously mainly consisted of reclusion and drinking. Traditionally, sensual pleasure had been viewed as trivial at best, and disruptive to the social order at worst. In the *fengliu* image embodied by Du Mu, however, it is viewed much more positively. Like drinking or withdrawal from public life, a life spent in search of romance and pleasure is idealized as being free from the entanglements of politics and the public sphere.

While elite associations with entertainers were viewed positively in ninth-century entertainment culture, attitudes towards indulgence in sensual pleasures remained ambiguous. This ambiguity was reflected in Du Mu's evolving attitude towards his libertine image. Although Du Mu created his libertine poetic self-image as a young man, he attempted to shed this image later in life. It was his readers, I argue, who, through reading his poems creatively and writing anecdotes about his sexual adventures, collectively made him the figure of fascination and *fengliu* ideal that we know today. In addition to the role of Du Mu's readers discussed by Wangling, I will examine three other ways in which readers and writers of the ninth and tenth centuries shaped Du Mu's *fengliu* image. First, I suggest that readers' desire to view Du Mu's sensual poems as informed by his romantic experience played a crucial role in the creation of his libertine image. To read Du Mu's sensual poems as his own romantic self-expression, readers altered the poems and their titles and linked them to specific moments in his life. Second, I examine the transmission and reception of one poem that is central to Du Mu's poetic *fengliu* self-image to illustrate the dynamic between Du Mu's wish to control his work and reputation and his readers' ability to assert their own influence over them. Despite Du Mu's effort to "censor" his libertine image, his readers' enthusiastic circulation of this image made it impossible for the poet to erase it from readers' memory. Third, I argue that in telling and writing anecdotes about Du Mu's sexual adventures, readers and writers of the ninth and tenth centuries validated indulgence in sensual pleasures. In portraying Du Mu as an admirable poet-official who neglected his official duties to pursue beautiful women, they idealized a life in search of pleasure as free from the entanglements of politics and the public sphere.

Most of the texts I discuss in this paper are sources that have traditionally been regarded as unreliable. The poem that is central to Du Mu's *fengliu* image is included in his supplementary collection, which contains poems falsely attributed to Du Mu.<sup>10</sup> The anecdotes about Du Mu's sexual adventures are unverifiable and of disputed historicity, since the incidents described in them are not found in other sources. While some scholars consider them to be factual records of true incidents, others question their credibility.<sup>11</sup> Recent studies suggest that Tang dynasty anecdotes and tales about historical figures are "part of the discourse through which writers and readers assessed public events and public figures."<sup>12</sup> Seen in this light, the value of anecdotes about Du Mu lies not in helping us to reconstruct his life or

10. Wu Qiming 吳企明, *Tangyin zhiyi lu* 唐音質疑錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), 60-74.

11. Wu Zaiqing 吳在慶 argues that Du Mu's political or literary rivals fabricated these anecdotes to damage his reputation. See Wu, *Du Mu lungao* 杜牧論稿 (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue, 1991), 286-93. Stephen Owen (*The Late Tang*, 267) suggests that these anecdotes "are more likely adduced from the tone and some claims made in his poetry than from more direct knowledge of his actual behavior."

12. Sarah M. Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2014), 76. On the relationship between gossip transmitted in anecdotes and tales and accepted public knowledge recorded in official histories, see Allen, "Oral Sources and Written

understand his character. Rather, they reflect shared views about him and the circumstances that made such views plausible. In her study of Tang anecdote collections, Anna M. Shields describes the value of the anecdotal texts as helping to “fill the gap between historiography and individual collected works, offering us the perspective of ‘this is what happened to someone’ in between ‘this is what happened’ and ‘this is what happened to me.’”<sup>13</sup> In other words, while historiography provides a political view of the events, and individual collected works give us the author’s claims, anecdotes offer insights into a communal perspective. In Du Mu’s case, the anecdotes about his sexual adventures and the poems he excluded from his literary collection tell us that while Du Mu and historians both considered male indulgence in sensual pleasures dubious or insignificant, readers and writers of the ninth and tenth centuries best loved and remembered Du Mu for it, thus making him one of the most enduring *fengliu* ideals in Chinese history.

#### READING POETRY: CREATING DU MU’S POETIC *FENGLIU* IMAGE

While Du Mu presented himself as both a scholar engaged with contemporary political life and as a melancholy sensualist resistant to political life, from the second half of the ninth century on he was best known as a *fengliu* sensualist.<sup>14</sup> The *fengliu* images associated with Du Mu during the ninth and tenth centuries were of two kinds: poetic craftsmanship and poetic personality. Some believed him to be a poet whose talent and sensibility allowed him to write effectively on sensuality and love. Others, however, believed that he was a dashing libertine who frequented the pleasure quarters and engaged in love affairs.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars have shown that Du Mu’s image as a libertine evolved from his poetic self-image.<sup>16</sup> Although the poems in which Du Mu represents himself as a libertine are few, they exerted important influence in shaping Du Mu’s reputation. I believe the influence of these poems has much to do with contemporary acclaim for Du Mu’s poems on Yangzhou (Jiangsu). By Du Mu’s time, Yangzhou, a major center of trade and commerce, had come to be associated with a repertoire of images of extravagance and sensual pleasures. Of the many Tang poems on Yangzhou, Du Mu’s are among the most memorable. Indeed, his poems were so widely admired that they contributed to the allure of the city itself.<sup>17</sup> Several of his most famous poems on Yangzhou feature a dashing young man who roams the city’s pleasure quarters or a melancholy lover who recalls a lost love, and this young man is generally understood to be Du Mu’s poetic self. Just as Du Mu’s Yangzhou poems were admired, so too was his *fengliu* identity.<sup>18</sup>

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Accounts: Authority in Tang Tales,” in *Idle Talk: Gossip and Anecdotes in Traditional China*, ed. Jack W. Chen and David Schaberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2014), 71–87.

13. Anna M. Shields, “Gossip, Anecdote, and Literary History: Representations of the Yuanhe Era in Tang Anecdote Collections,” in Chen and Schaberg, *Idle Talk*, 107.

14. Owen, *The Late Tang*, 257.

15. On Du Mu’s contemporary reputation, see Wangling, “Singing Lips,” 186–91.

16. Owen, *The Late Tang*, 266; Wangling, “Singing Lips,” 196–205.

17. Later poets who visited Yangzhou recalled Du Mu’s poems while writing their own, and phrases from his poems, such as “twenty-four bridges” 二十四橋 and “ten leagues of spring breeze” 春風十里, have been used to refer to the city ever since. See Zhu Decai 朱德才, ed., *Zengding zhushi quan Song ci* 增訂註釋全宋詞 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1997), 1.431.

18. A correlation between the popularity of Du Mu’s Yangzhou poems and that of his *fengliu* poetic self-image may be found in the five poems identified by Wangling (“Singing Lips,” 173–82) in which Du Mu portrays himself as a libertine. Of the five poems, three are set in Yangzhou and two are not. While all three poems set in Yangzhou are included in Wei Hu’s 韋縠 mid-tenth-century poetry anthology *Caidiao ji* 才調集, and one also in *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, an anthology compiled in 987, the two poems not set in Yangzhou are not included in any

While Du Mu created his libertine self-image by fashioning himself as a gallant young bravo and melancholy lover in his Yangzhou poems, his readers played a significant role in shaping this image. The two Yangzhou poems I will discuss below, each representing a different relationship between Du Mu's poetic self-presentation and his readers' interpretation, illustrate this point. The first example is a poem entitled "Sent to Judge Han Chuo in Yangzhou" 寄揚州韓綽判官.<sup>19</sup> Du Mu wrote this poem to a distant friend, and yet many readers chose to interpret it as an expression of longing for a female entertainer, a reading that reflects the contemporary tendency to view romantic poems as inspired by the poet's own romantic experience. Li Shangyin 李商隱 (812–858) once rejected this tendency in a letter declining a patron's offer of a concubine, explaining that he was far less romantic than his poems might lead readers to believe. Li writes, "when it comes to the bewitching courtesans of the southern lands and the exquisite entertainers of the Cong Terrace, although I have included them in my poems, honestly I have had no *fengliu* contacts with them" 至於南國妖姬，叢台妙妓，雖有涉於篇什，實不接於風流。<sup>20</sup> Li Shangyin's rejection of any correlation between romantic sentiments expressed in his poems and his own romantic practice suggests that contemporary readers often took such connections for granted. With such assumptions in mind, readers supplied connections between a poet's love poems and the poet's actual life whenever necessary. Du Mu's poem to Han Chuo is a case in point. To view it as an expression of Du Mu's longing for a distant lover, readers ignored the title and (mis)interpreted a number of words within the poem itself:<sup>21</sup>

寄揚州韓綽判官	"Sent to Judge Han Chuo in Yangzhou"
青山隱隱水迢迢	Green hills are half-hidden, waters stretch far and wide,
秋盡江南草木凋	autumn ends in the southland, plants and grass wither.
二十四橋明月夜	By the twenty-four bridges, on a brightly moonlit night, <sup>22</sup>
玉人何處教吹簫	at what spot do you have a jade girl play the flute? <sup>23</sup>

In the translation above, *yuren* 玉人 (lit., jade person) is assumed to be a female entertainer. However, because the word could refer to both men and women in Tang poetry, it might also be read as referring to Han Chuo, Du Mu's friend. If we follow this reading—and depending

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tenth-century poetry anthology, suggesting that Du Mu's Yangzhou poems were vastly better known than those set elsewhere.

19. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719) et al., comps., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 523.5982; *Caidiao ji*, in *Tangren xuan Tangshi xinbian* 唐人選唐詩新編, ed. Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1996), 4.788; Li Fang 李昉 et al., comps., *Wenyuan yinghua* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 261.1312b–13a; Wu Zaiqing, *Du Mu ji xianian jiaozhu* 杜牧集繫年校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008; hereafter *Jiaozhu*), 4.545.

20. Li Shangyin, "Shang Hedong gong qi" 上河東公啓, in *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu* 李商隱文編年校注, ed. Liu Xuekai 劉學凱 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 4.1902.

21. When reading Tang poems, which have been passed down from a manuscript culture, it is often impossible to determine which variants are the earliest or most authentic. I make the assumption that texts included in Du Mu's literary collection are generally more reliable than those preserved elsewhere, because his collection was compiled immediately following his death and was based on the works he had entrusted to his nephew. For a study of the material lives of poems during the Tang, the roles of memory and copying in the circulation of poetry, and readers' participation in the creation of texts, see Christopher Nugent, *Manifest in Words, Written on Paper: Producing and Circulating Poetry in Tang Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010).

22. Scholars disagree whether "*er shi si qiao*" refers to twenty-four different bridges in Yangzhou or to a single bridge called "Twenty-four Bridges."

23. I use Stephen Owen's translation with minor modifications; see "The Cultural Tang (650–1020)," in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Vol. 1: *To 1375*, ed. Kang-I Sun Chang and Stephen Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 351.



on our interpretation of the word *jiao* 教 (to teach/to bid someone to do something)—the scene Du Mu depicts is one in which his friend either teaches an entertainer how to play the flute or requests that she play for him. In either case, Du Mu is conveying the idea that he misses his friend and the pleasures of Yangzhou. Versions of this poem preserved in several tenth-century anthologies suggest that some readers interpreted this poem as being addressed to a woman. In one version, the compositional circumstances are removed from the poem's title, and a new title, "Sent to Another" 寄人, is added, suggesting that the recipient might have been a woman.<sup>24</sup> In another version, the ambiguous *yuren* is replaced by *meiren* 美人 (beautiful woman).<sup>25</sup> Given these changes, which make it far more likely that the recipient of the poem was a woman, we might choose to understand that Du Mu composed the poem for a female entertainer he met during his younger days in Yangzhou, a poem in which he wistfully inquires about her flute playing. The change in the recipient's gender may have led to further changes; namely, the word *jiao* 教 in the last line is changed to *zuo* 坐 (to sit) in some variants and to *xue* 學 (to learn) in others.<sup>26</sup> These changes may have something to do with different norms of romantic behavior for elite men and female entertainers. Ninth-century writers might have considered it romantic for a man to teach a young woman to play the flute, but less so for an entertainer to teach a man or a woman.<sup>27</sup> This being the case, she then changes from an instructor who "teaches" to a performer who "sits and plays" or a beautiful young woman who "learns to play."

The variants I discuss above suggest that many ninth- and tenth-century readers understood this poem as expressing Du Mu's feelings for a female entertainer, not a male friend. In this reading, Du Mu's poetic persona is not only that of a melancholy man who recalls the pleasures of Yangzhou but also that of a dashing young lover who laments a lost love. That is, a specific love affair between Du Mu and a female entertainer is implied. His readers' desire to view this poem, one of Du Mu's most popular, as informed by the poet's own romantic experience played a central role in the creation of the poet's *fengliu* "self-image."

The second example of the complex relationship between author and readers concerns a quatrain variously entitled "On Yangzhou" 題揚州 or "Getting Things Off My Chest" 遣懷.<sup>28</sup> Although Du Mu held the poem in low regard and possibly excluded it from his collected literary works, many readers loved this poem and considered it one of Du Mu's most important. Since the second half of the ninth century, it has been repeatedly anthologized and regarded as an exemplary illustration of Du Mu's *fengliu* character. Likewise, the protagonist of the poem, a flamboyant casual lover, has been taken to be an inseparable part of Du Mu's identity. This poem and the way it was interpreted by its readers reveal the difficulty Du Mu faced in controlling his poetic self-image. The *Caidiao ji* version of the poem reads:

落托江南載酒行	Free of restraint in the southland, I went carrying ale,
楚腰纖細掌中輕	The waists of Chu girls are slim and light in my palm.
十年一覺揚州夢	After ten years I awoke from my Yangzhou dream,
贏得青樓薄倖名	I've made a name for casual love in the blue mansions.

24. *Caidiao ji*, 4.788.

25. *Wenyuan yinghua*, 261.1312b–13a.

26. *Wenyuan yinghua*, 261.1312b–13a; Ji Yougong 計有功 (*jinshi* 1121), ed., *Tangshi jishi* 唐詩紀事 (SKQS), 56.14b.

27. Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), e.g., writes proudly of having taught officials and household entertainers to play music, sing, and dance. By contrast, few poems describe an entertainer who teaches an elite man or another entertainer.

28. *Quan Tang shi*, 524.5998; *Caidiao ji*, 4.789; *Jiaozhu (waiji)* 外集, 1214. The wide circulation of this poem outside of Du Mu's literary collection has resulted in an unusual number of variants, discussed below. Here is a list of the variants: 題揚州/遣懷; 落魄/落拓/落脫; 江湖/江南; 腸斷/纖細; 輕/情; 十年/三年; 贏得/佔得.

The protagonist of the poem, an extravagant young man fond of wine and women, is a figure developed from *yuefu* poems.<sup>29</sup> He cares little about social propriety, preferring instead to spend all his money and time in taverns and brothels. What is new here is that Du Mu places the figure in the “southland” (*jiangnan* 江南) or, in some variants, among the “rivers and lakes” (*jianghu* 江湖). In Tang poetry, “southland,” the lower Yangtze River region, is often associated with feminine beauty, wealth and pleasure, retirement and exile, and the last rulers of the Southern Dynasties, whose alleged overindulgence in sensual pleasures resulted in the demise of their states. The phrase “rivers and lakes” is a philosophical and political concept with a long history. In the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, it refers to a much larger world beyond one’s knowledge and experience, as opposed to the smaller world with which one has direct knowledge and contact. To reflect on matters within the context of “rivers and lakes” suggests that one must go beyond conventional wisdom.<sup>30</sup> The phrase also designates withdrawal from public and political life.<sup>31</sup> In Tang poetry, *jianghu* and *jiangnan* often appear in opposition to terms like *jingluo* 京洛 (capital) and *chaoting* 朝廷 (court). In the peripheral regions, people leave public and political life behind, either by choice (e.g., seclusion, *yin* 隱) or by circumstance (e.g., banishment, *zhe* 謫, or distant employment, *youhuan* 游宦). Linked to these outlying regions are such marginal figures as fishermen, woodcutters, and hermits, and private pursuits such as drinking, poetry chanting, and Chan Buddhist meditation.

Du Mu’s Yangzhou dream poem connects two poetic figures that traditionally had little to do with each other: an extravagant young man seeking pleasures in taverns and brothels and a politically disengaged man who roams the remote places. By placing his young man in the “southland” or among the “rivers and lakes,” Du Mu reinterprets indulgence in sensual pleasures as a form of political disengagement. When linked to “southland” or “rivers and lakes,” the “blue mansions” (*qinglou* 青樓) become a private space that exists in opposition to public and political space.<sup>32</sup> Although the “blue mansions” were associated with political disengagement prior to Du Mu, the Yangzhou dream poem firmly establishes the dashing young man as the symbol of this value.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, Du Mu himself came to be seen embodying this value. As early as the second half of the ninth century, this poem was understood to be a reflection of Du Mu’s youthful adventures in Yangzhou. When a ninth-century anecdote mentions the poem as representative of Du Mu’s works, it links the poem to specific moments in Du Mu’s life and interprets it as the poet’s recollection of his past.<sup>34</sup> This biographical reading may have led to a variant

29. See the Six Dynasties and Tang *yuefu* poems titled “Shaonian xing” 少年行 and “Qingbo pian” 輕薄篇 collected in *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集, ed. Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 66.948–62; 67.963–66.

30. When Huizi 惠子 complains that his gourd is too big to be of practical use, Zhuangzi recommends that Huizi sit within the gourd and “float in the rivers and lakes” 浮乎江湖. See *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注, comm. Guo Xiang 郭象 (SKQS), 1.10a.

31. E.g., when Fan Li 范蠡 (fl. 580 BCE) resigns from high office to live as a recluse—having helped Goujian 勾踐 to win wars and re-establish the state of Yue—he “moves about the three rivers and five lakes” 出三江，入五湖. See Zhao Yu 趙煜, *Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋 (SKQS), 6.16a.

32. In Tang poetry, “qinglou” may refer to Daoist settings, the boudoir, or the pleasure quarter. The latter two usually appear in *yuefu* poetry or “palace poetry” (*gongci* 宮詞).

33. See, e.g., Quan Deyu’s 權德輿 (759–818) poem “Guangling shi” 廣陵詩 (783), which asserts that enjoying “today’s pleasures” 今日歡 with courtesans of the “blue mansions” is more important than pursuing a “posthumous name/fame” 身後名 through writing. *Quan Tang shi*, 328.3669–70.

34. Two versions of this anecdote have been preserved. See Meng Qi 孟啟 (fl. 841–886), *Benshi shi* 本事詩, in Wang Meng’ou 王夢鷗, *Tangren xiaoshuo yanjiu sanji: Benshi shi jiaobu kaoshi* 唐人小說研究三集: 本事詩校補考釋 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1974), 69; Gao Yanxiu 高彥休 (b. 854), *Tang qeshi* 唐闕史, in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣紀, comp. Li Fang et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 273.2151. I discuss this anecdote below. On the correct character for Meng Qi’s name based on epitaph material, see Chen Shangjun 陳尚君, “*Benshi shi* zuozhe Meng Qi jishi shengping kao” 本事詩作者孟啟家世生平考, *Xin guoxue* 2006.6: 1–18.

concerning the number of years the protagonist spent in Yangzhou. Of the many versions of the poem included in Tang and Song collections, those found in poetry anthologies generally use “ten years,” whereas those found in collections of anecdotes typically use “three years.”<sup>35</sup> This pattern of variants suggests that readers’ preferences for one or the other version may have depended on the reading context. That is, when reading a poem in the context of Tang poetry, in which the set phrase “ten years” often refers to one’s prime years, readers find “ten years” agreeable. In the context of anecdotes about Du Mu’s life, however, readers prefer “three years” because they match Du Mu’s biography. For readers of anecdotes, the indulgent young man of the Yangzhou dream poem is Du Mu’s younger self from 833 to 835, when he worked at the headquarters of the Surveillance Commissioner of Yangzhou. This image of Du Mu roaming the pleasure quarters of Yangzhou appeared in many poems, lyrics, and plays of later periods, and came to be remembered as an essential part of Du Mu’s character.

The unique importance of the Yangzhou dream poem in shaping Du Mu’s *fengliu* reputation lies in its celebration of sensual indulgence as a form of political disengagement. In Du Mu’s other sensual poems, indulgence demonstrates the quality of a man’s romantic sentiment, while in the Yangzhou dream poem it represents a disengaged scholar’s singular spirit and unconventional thinking. Du Mu’s celebration of sensual self-indulgence must be viewed in the larger context of poetic self-presentation. Stephen Owen outlines several major poetic personalities in late Tang poetry: engagement with public and political life and its negations, including withdrawal to private life and sensual self-indulgence.<sup>36</sup> For Du Mu, a preference for sensual indulgence over political engagement is a defining quality of his self-presentation. For example, in some of his most memorable poetic recollections of the past, Du Mu presents himself as an untroubled scholar who spends his time roaming the rivers and lakes of the southland while indulging in wine and poetry. Consider the following:

念昔游 “Thoughts on Past Roaming”

十載飄然繩檢外	Ten years spent drifting about beyond ties and norms,
罇前自獻自為酬	I toasted myself with the goblet, and answered the toast myself.
秋山春雨閒吟處	Autumn hills and spring rains, places I chanted at leisure,
倚遍江南寺寺樓	I leaned the upper story of every temple in the southland. <sup>37</sup>

自宣城赴官上京 “Going from Xuanzhou to the Capital to Take Up My Post”

瀟灑江湖十過秋	Free and easy on rivers and lakes, ten times I’ve gone through autumn,
酒杯無日不遲留	Not a day went by when a cup of ale did not make me tarry. <sup>38</sup>

和州絕句 “Quatrain on Hezhou”

江湖醉渡十年春	Drunk upon rivers and lakes, for ten years I’ve passed the spring,
牛渚山邊六問津	Six times I have visited the ford next to Mount Niuzhu. <sup>39</sup>

The phrase “ten years” refers to the period during which Du Mu worked at the Military Commission headquarters (*mufu* 幕府) in the lower Yangtze River region. At the age of twenty-six, after passing the *jinshi* and the palace exams, Du Mu joined the staff of Shen Chuanshi

35. E.g., *Caidiao ji* and *waiji* use “ten years,” *Benshi shi* and *Taiping guangji* use “three years.”

36. Owen, *The Late Tang*, 257–58. Owen emphasizes that Du Mu is a poet who moves among poetic personalities in his poetry. In addition to presenting himself as a self-indulgent sensualist, he also presents himself as deeply engaged in political life.

37. *Quan Tang shi*, 521.5953; *Jiaozhu*, 2.212. I use Owen’s translation from *The Late Tang*, 312, with minor modifications.

38. *Quan Tang shi*, 522.5965; *Jiaozhu*, 3.361. I use Owen’s translation from *The Late Tang*, 286.

39. *Quan Tang shi*, 523.5981; *Jiaozhu*, 4.534.



沈傳師 (769–827), Surveillance Commissioner of Jiangxi. For the next ten years or so, he worked at the headquarters of Surveillance Commissioners in Hongzhou 洪州 (present-day Nanchang in Jiangxi), Xuanzhou 宣州 (present-day Xuancheng in Anhui), and Yangzhou. Du Mu often described this part of his life as his “ten years in *mufu*” 十年幕府. In the poems cited above, Du Mu associates his *mufu* experience with the ideal of political disengagement by situating his younger self among the “rivers and lakes” or in the “southland,” drinking wine and reciting poetry instead of pursuing public success. The phrases used to describe his disposition—“free and easy” 瀟灑 and “drifting about” 飄然—convey a sense of flamboyance and freedom from restraint, a tone often associated with the ideal of political disengagement in Du Mu’s poetic vocabulary. Such associations are best illustrated by the title of a poem Du Mu sent to a friend who had recently relinquished his official post: the first part of the title reads, “Xu the seventh, the Attendant Censor, gave up his post and returned to the east, free and easy in the southland. I hear that he is quite content with himself” 許七侍御棄官東歸瀟灑江南，頗聞自適。<sup>40</sup>

Self-indulgence as a lifestyle in opposition to political engagement is also a recurrent theme in Du Mu’s letters to patrons, in which he describes himself as an idle official whose “obsession with wine and sleep” 嗜酒好睡 causes him to neglect social propriety and ritual obligations.<sup>41</sup> In these letters, he claims that he often neglects to establish and maintain connections with powerful patrons and fails to perform basic social functions such as attending funerals, celebrations, and social gatherings. Du Mu’s attitude towards his own behavior is an ambivalent mix of contrition and swagger: he blames it on an “obstinate illness” 痼癖, while also claiming to feel no regret. Du Mu’s letters and *mufu* poems remind us of earlier counter-culture heroes such as Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), Tao Qian, and Li Bai, who also defined their unconventionality in terms of self-indulgence, defiance, or political disengagement. In emphasizing his own self-indulgence, Du Mu situates himself within this esteemed tradition.

The Yangzhou dream poem has much in common with Du Mu’s *mufu* poems and letters in that they celebrate the beauty of the southland, self-indulgence, and disengagement. Like Du Mu’s letters, the Yangzhou dream poem conveys an ambivalent view on a life devoted to private pleasure. This ambivalence is best illustrated in the double meaning of the phrase *luotuo* 落拓/托 (or 落魄, in variants).<sup>42</sup> In Tang poetry, *luotuo* possesses both positive and negative meanings. First appropriated from the *yuefu* tradition and associated with the figure of the extravagant young man, it was later adopted by Li Bai and Bai Juyi and used in the sense of “unrestrained” or “wild” (*kuang* 狂). When associated with unemployment or exile, it describes frustrated ambition and “down and out” circumstances. This double meaning makes the poet-speaker’s state of mind difficult to read. Does he celebrate his youth spent “free of restraint” in the pleasure quarters and boast that he would do it all again if he had the chance? Does he regret wasting his life on frivolous pursuits? Or does he speak with mixed feelings about his past: proud of his unconventional character, while also keenly aware of the price he had to pay for such a lifestyle choice? However we interpret it, the Yangzhou dream poem agrees with Du Mu’s self-presentation as an uninhibited and disengaged official in his *mufu* poems and letters. Given the similarities in phrases, images, and tone, Du Mu would have expected his readers to understand the Yangzhou dream poem as his self-presentation

40. *Quan Tang shi*, 521.5951–52; *Jiaozhu*, 2.186.

41. *Jiaozhu*, 12.860; 16.991.

42. The pronunciation of the character 魄 in the compound 落魄 was the same as that of 拓. See Wangling, “Singing Lips,” 217.

as a flamboyant casual lover spending his youth in the pleasure quarters. Likewise, readers familiar with Du Mu's other works would have found his *fengliu* image in the Yangzhou dream poem both convincing and revealing.

Despite its popularity and importance in forming Du Mu's image, the Yangzhou dream poem enjoys no more than marginal status in collections of Du Mu's literary works. Not included in *Fanchuan wenji* 樊川文集, which is comprised of works that Du Mu sent to his nephew Pei Yanhan 裴延翰, it is instead included in *Fanchuan waiji* 外集, a supplementary collection consisting of approximately one hundred poems compiled sometime prior to 1074.<sup>43</sup> Because *Fanchuan waiji* contains many poems falsely attributed to Du Mu, the authorship of individual poems is impossible to determine. For the Yangzhou dream poem, however, the fact that it is attributed to Du Mu in three separate collections compiled during the ninth and tenth centuries—*Benshi shi* (886), *Tang qeshi* (884), and *Caidiao ji* (mid-tenth century)—strongly suggests that Du Mu wrote it. Why then is this poem not included in the *wenji*? We know that when assembling his *wenji*, Du Mu burned at least seventy percent of his work prior to entrusting the rest to Pei.<sup>44</sup> The Yangzhou dream poem was probably one of those that Du Mu destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

Du Mu's likely exclusion of the Yangzhou dream poem from his literary collection may have had to do with contemporary views regarding male indulgence in sensual pleasures. Despite similarities in tone and claims, the Yangzhou dream poem differs from Du Mu's *mufu* poems and letters in one important aspect: the nature of the protagonist's self-indulgence. In the Yangzhou dream poem, he indulges in wine and women, in the *mufu* poems in wine and poetry, and in his letters in wine and sleep. These differences have to do with how different forms of self-indulgence were tolerated by members of the elite. As Du Mu wrote somewhat boastfully to other officials of his love of drink and sleep, we may deduce that such forms of indulgence were forgivable, perhaps even somewhat common. Sleeping does not feature as a vice in Du Mu's *mufu* poems, perhaps because it was not considered an established poetic image. Wine and poetry, on the other hand, had long since become conventional forms of self-indulgence for unconventional characters.

Contemporary elite attitudes regarding male indulgence in sensual pleasures are ambiguous. Although many ninth-century elite men enjoyed casual drinking and the company of beautiful courtesans, few openly bragged about devoting themselves to seeking out sensual pleasures at the expense of their official careers. To be sure, writers tread a fine line when writing about romantic indulgences. While it was acceptable to assert that sensual pleasures were as important as official success as an abstract idea or to celebrate the libertine extravagance of a fictional young bravo,<sup>46</sup> it would have been controversial to present oneself as a committed voluptuary who preferred the sensual pleasures to public success. This may explain why Du Mu generally limited his celebration of sensual indulgence to poems on history, place, or poetic figure and why he excluded the Yangzhou dream poem from his collection. Although he might have enjoyed representing his young self as a casual lover in the blue mansions, he did not wish to be remembered as such. One might say that Du Mu

43. In his preface to *Fanchuan bieji*, "Fangchuan bieji xu" 樊川别集序 (1074), Tian Gai 田概 notes that he had seen another collection (*waiji*) of Du Mu's poems. See *Jiaozhu (bieji)*, 1299.

44. On the compilation and transmission of Du Mu's collected works, see Wangling, "Singing Lips," 192–96.

45. While it is not impossible that the Yangzhou dream poem was selected by Du Mu for inclusion in his *wenji* and then removed by someone else later on, such a scenario is highly unlikely given that the poem has been so closely associated with Du Mu since the second half of the ninth century.

46. See the poem by Quan Deyu mentioned in n. 33 above or Du Mu's celebration of the figure of "drunken young man" 醉年少 in his poems on Yangzhou. See *Quan Tang shi*, 522.5963.

“censored” the *fengliu* self-image of the Yangzhou dream poem in favor of the “authorized” images found in the *mufu* poems and official correspondence.

The transmission and reception of the Yangzhou dream poem gives us some insight into the dynamic between an author’s wish to control his work and reputation and his readers’ ability to assert their own influence over them. Du Mu’s decision to burn many of his literary works was an example of the increasing interest of many ninth-century writers in shaping their reputations through the compilation and preservation of collected works.<sup>47</sup> An author’s decision to transmit, preserve, or destroy his own work reveals much about his literary values and the way he hoped to be remembered. Bai Juyi, for instance, placed great value on the sheer size of his collection, thus nearly everything he ever wrote was preserved.<sup>48</sup> Du Mu, on the other hand, valued quality above all else, and chose to burn three quarters of his works to ensure that the remaining works adhered to a certain standard. Even so, Du Mu’s control over his work and reputation was compromised from the very start, as Pei Yanhan, in addition to including the works that Du Mu selected for inclusion, also added works that his uncle had sent him over the previous two decades. Since it is impossible for us to distinguish between the works selected by Du Mu and those added by Pei Yanhan, it is difficult to conclude from reading his collected works how Du Mu wished to be remembered. Likewise, since Du Mu’s supplementary collections contain works excluded from his *wenji*, as well as poems falsely attributed to him, it is difficult to conclude which poems Du Mu wished to eliminate.

Due to the complicated history of the transmission of Du Mu’s works and the many problems of attributing authorship, the information we have on what happened to the Yangzhou dream poem is particularly valuable. Given its popularity at the time, its exclusion should be seen as Du Mu’s attempt to dissociate himself from his libertine image. In spite of Du Mu’s efforts to “censor” the poem, however, it continued to circulate and remained one of his best-known poems. For ninth- and tenth-century readers, Du Mu’s collected literary works (*wenji*) was not the only place to find his works. A great many readers came into contact with poetry via reader-compiled anthologies, called “minor collections” (*xiaoji* 小集). The Yangzhou dream poem very likely circulated via such anthologies prior to its inclusion in the mid-tenth century *Caidiao ji* and Du Mu’s supplementary collection of the Northern Song. In addition, it may have been transmitted alongside anecdotes on Du Mu’s sexual adventures. Wide circulation of the Yangzhou dream poem independent of Du Mu’s *wenji* is an expression of “popular taste,” by which I refer to his readers’ fascination with sensuous poems and sensational stories. Such readers were often called “fellow enthusiasts” (*haoshi zhe* 好事者), a phrase used to refer to people interested in exchanging and transmitting gossip regarding the affairs of others.<sup>49</sup> The “fellow enthusiasts” made it impossible for Du Mu to erase his Yangzhou dream poem from memory. Eventually, Du Mu lost the battle to control his work and reputation. Popular taste prevailed, and the flamboyant lover of the Yangzhou dream poem became his best-known poetic *fengliu* “self-image.”

47. Stephen Owen, “The Self’s Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography,” in *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice: Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the Tang*, ed. Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), 73.

48. Stephen Owen discusses Bai Juyi’s emphasis on numbers in the context of the accumulation of economic, political, and literary capital. Bai viewed his works as accumulated capital. See Owen, *The Late Tang*, 53–55.

49. Graham Sanders translates *haoshi zhe* as “fellow enthusiasts” to emphasize that they were members of the official class. See Sanders, *Words Well Put: Visions of Poetic Competence in the Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2006), 194.

## WRITING ANECDOTES: GIVING MEANING TO SENSUAL INDULGENCE

A dozen ninth- and tenth-century anecdotes about Du Mu are proof of his popularity as a public figure.<sup>50</sup> Of these anecdotes, three describe his amorous adventures in the pleasure quarters and romantic encounters with demimonde women. In all three anecdotes, Du Mu is depicted in a positive light as a flamboyant, talented official who neglects his official duties to pursue beautiful women. By linking Du Mu's libertine lifestyle to his literary talent, his unconventional character, and his detachment from public success, the writers of these anecdotes validated sexual adventures. Each anecdote has more than one version. While all three anecdotes are included in the "Female entertainer" section (*jiniü* 妓女) of the *Taiping guangji* as one narrative, which cites a late Tang anecdote collection as its source, each story has also been separately preserved in other ninth- and tenth-century anecdote collections. This suggests that these anecdotes circulated both separately and together. I will now discuss the individual anecdotes. Each will be referred to by its location: Yangzhou, Luoyang (Henan), and Huzhou (Zhejiang).

## 1. The Yangzhou Anecdote

The Yangzhou anecdote is included in two late ninth- and tenth-century anecdote collections. Hu Zi 胡仔 (1110–1170) includes it in *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* 苕溪漁隱叢話, and cites *Zhitian lu* 芝田錄, an anecdote collection compiled in the late ninth or early tenth century, as its source.<sup>51</sup> A much longer version has been preserved in the *Taiping guangji*, which includes all three anecdotes on Du Mu's sexual adventures as one narrative and cites *Tang qeshi* as its source.<sup>52</sup> While both versions of the story share the same sequence of the events, they differ in characterization, wording, and meaning. The *Zhitian lu* version is a brief account of the relationship between Du Mu and Niu Sengru 牛僧孺 (ca. 779–848) in Yangzhou:<sup>53</sup>

When Niu [Sengru], the Duke of Qizhang, was the head of Weiyang [i.e., Yangzhou], Muzhi [Du Mu] served as a member of the staff at the military headquarters, and he often changed clothes [to disguise his identity to allow] uninhibited roaming. Having heard about this, his lordship had several street cleaners stealthily follow Muzhi to protect him from the unexpected. Muzhi was later called on to serve as Rectifier of Omissions. Prior to his departure, his lordship warned him not to give free rein to his uninhibited behavior. At first Muzhi continued to avoid acknowledging his behavior, and not until his lordship called on someone to bring a box filled with the notes from the street cleaners, each stating that Chief Secretary Du was safe and sound, was he greatly moved and yielded to [his lordship].

50. *Tang Wudai wu shi er zhong biji xiaoshuo renming suoyin* 唐五代五十二種筆記小說人名索引 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 354–55.

51. Hu, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua houji* 後集 (CSJC chubian), 15.522. *Zhitian lu* is not extant. Its title is documented in the "Bibliography of Literature" (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) of the *Xin Tang shu* (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 59.5547. In his bibliographical work *Junzhai dushu zhi* 郡齋讀書志, Chao Gongwu 晁公武 (1105–1180) writes that the *Zhitian lu* includes six hundred stories from the Sui and Tang periods. See *Junzhai dushu zhi* (SKQS), 3b.5a.

52. *Taiping guangji* cites a certain *Tang quewen* 唐闕文 as their source. As the *Tang quewen* is not documented in any Song bibliographical sources, scholars have speculated that *Tang qeshi* should have been given as the proper source (i.e., *Tang quewen* was a mistake). The extant *Tang qeshi* only includes the Huzhou anecdote. The long version of the Yangzhou story is also included in the anecdote "Yangzhou meng" 揚州夢, attributed to Yu Ye 于鄴 (fl. 867). Some scholars believe that the *Taiping guangji* cites from "Yangzhou meng," and others argue that the "Yangzhou meng" is a Ming-dynasty forgery of Tang material because this title never appears in pre-Ming sources. For the edition and transmission of *Tang qeshi*, see Li Jianguo 李劍國, *Tang Wudai zhiguai chuanqi xulu* 唐五代志怪傳奇敘錄 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1993), 915–27. On "Yangzhou meng," see Wangling, "Singing Lips," 207.

53. Hu Zi, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua houji*, 15.522.

牛奇章帥維揚，牧之在幕中，多微服逸遊。公聞之，以街子數輩潛隨牧之，以防不虞。後牧之以拾遺召，臨別，公以縱逸為戒。牧之始猶諱之，公命取一篋，皆是街子輩報帖，云杜書記平善。乃大感服。

Most of the information concerning the two principal characters in this anecdote is consistent with that found in other written sources. Niu Sengru was given the noble title Commandery Duke of Qizhang and once appointed Military Commissioner of Huainan (between the Huai and Yangtze rivers) and stationed in Yangzhou. Likewise, between 833 and 835, Du Mu served as Chief Secretary at Niu Sengru's headquarters. The only discrepancy concerns the position—Censor, not Rectifier of Omissions—for which Du Mu left Yangzhou. The general accuracy indicates that the writer of the anecdote was familiar with the careers of both men. The particular focus of the anecdote is the thoughtfulness and forbearance of a senior official who offers protection and advice to a talented subordinate who does not always follow the rules. Du Mu's frequent visits to the courtesan quarters are clearly described as inappropriate for someone of Du Mu's position and status, as the young official feels it necessary to change clothes in order to disguise his identity during these visits. Niu Sengru's tolerance of Du Mu's furtive outings illustrates a laudable magnanimity, and the protection and advice he offers demonstrate a caring nature. The climax of the story is the parting scene, in which Du Mu is moved after learning all that Niu has done for him.

While the shorter version of the anecdote focuses on Niu Sengru's virtue, the longer version (approximately four times longer) emphasizes the mutual appreciation between the two men. Niu is good to Du because he recognizes his talent, and the grateful Du Mu repays Niu's thoughtfulness by serving him well. In this longer framework, Du Mu's visits to the pleasure quarters are portrayed as the kind of glamorous lifestyle and eccentric behavior that accompanies exceptional talent. As noted above, this narrative, included in the *Tai-ping guangji* edition of the *Tang qieshi*, contains all three anecdotes on Du Mu's sexual adventures. It begins with a depiction of Du Mu's general character, with an emphasis on his exceptional talent and unbridled nature:<sup>54</sup>

Du Mu, Secretariat Drafter of the Tang, possessed uninhibited talent when still young. As soon as he put brush to paper, a poem was completed. When he was twenty, he passed the *jinshi* examination and then succeeded at the palace exams. Mu was an exceptional talent at a young age, and he was wild and unbridled by nature. Although he exercised restraint, he could not help himself.

唐中書舍人杜牧少有逸才，下筆成詠。弱冠擢進士第，復捷制科。牧少雋，性踈野放蕩。雖為檢刻，而不能自禁。

It then continues with the first half of the Yangzhou anecdote depicting Du Mu's roaming in the pleasure quarters:

By coincidence, Grand Councilor Niu Sengru was sent to guard Yangzhou, and he appointed Du Mu as his Chief Secretary at headquarters. In addition to carrying out his official duties, Du Mu undertook feasting and roaming as his only task. Yangzhou was a place of superb beauty. Each time the walls surrounding the city were immersed in the last light of day, myriad gauze lanterns in scarlet red were hanging from the courtesan quarters, their radiant illuminated gossamer lighting up the sky. The streets of nine leagues and thirty paces were filled with pearls and bright-blue jades, which from a distance looked like a land of transcendent beings. In the midst of it was Mu, always emerging and disappearing, racing forward and chasing after, not missing a single night. And then there were also thirty foot-soldiers in plain clothes, who followed and protected him [while remaining] undercover. They were secretly instructed by Sengru. Yet Du Mu thought he

54. *Tai-ping guangji*, 273.2151.



succeeded in his scheme and that nobody knew about [his roaming]. He took pleasure in going to those places and found everything there to his liking. Several years passed like this.

會丞相牛僧孺出鎮揚州，辟節度掌書記。牧供職之外，唯以宴遊為事。揚州勝地也。每重城向夕，倡樓之上，常有絳紗燈萬數，耀羅耀烈空中。九里三十步街中，珠翠填咽，邈若仙境。牧常出沒馳逐其間，無虛夕。復有卒三十人，易服隨後，潛護之。僧孺之密教也。而牧自謂得計，人不知之。所至成歡，無不會意，如是且數年。

While the longer version of the story implicitly rejects Du Mu's frequent visits to the pleasure quarters as a violation of social norms, since Du Mu feels the need to keep his outings a secret, it also romanticizes his roaming. The sensual beauty of Yangzhou is described as stunning, and Du Mu is rendered as a gallant young man chasing after pleasure in a place that resembles a land of transcendent beings. Niu Sengru's protection of Du Mu is extravagant as well. Instead of sending a handful of street sweepers to ensure Du Mu's safety, as he does in the shorter version, he dispatches a platoon of thirty foot-soldiers to follow Du Mu. The narrative justifies Du Mu's sexual adventures by most effectively linking his libertine lifestyle to his exceptional talent at the beginning of the narrative: his unbridled nature is the source of both his genius and his uninhibited roaming.

Given the connection between Du Mu's unrestrained character and exceptional talent, Niu Sengru's tolerance of Du Mu's sexual adventures is less about a senior official's care for a member of his staff than his perception and appreciation of a talented man. Anecdotes illustrating the motif of a patron who "knows" (*zhi* 知) the value of others flourished during the ninth century, and one of the best known concerns Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756) and Li Bai. Aware that Li Bai is an eccentric genius, the emperor allows him to become drunk and behave contemptuously within the imperial palace.<sup>55</sup> In another story, Military Commissioner Zhang Jianfeng 張建封 (735–800) protects the talented literatus Cui Ying 崔膺 from being beaten by angry soldiers awoken by Cui Ying's loud cries in the middle of the night.<sup>56</sup> In each story, talent and eccentricity walk hand-in-hand. Like Li Bai's excessive drinking and Cui Ying's midnight cries, Du Mu's visits to the courtesan quarters of Yangzhou are the price of conspicuous talent.

Stories dealing with the motif of "knowing" often also include the motif of "repaying" (*bao* 報). Such stories generally discuss a subordinate who repays his superior's generosity with dedicated service. The longer version of the Yangzhou anecdote includes the motif of "repaying." Having learned that Niu has protected him and heard his admonition, Du Mu is moved to tears. He bows, expresses regret, and remains grateful to Niu all his life. "For this reason," the story ends, "after Niu Sengru passed away, Du Mu wrote an epitaph in which he spoke of Niu's excellence in the highest of terms. This was done to repay Niu, the one who knew [Du Mu's true qualities]" 故僧孺之薨，牧為之誌，而極言其美，報所知也。<sup>57</sup>

The final remark suggests that the anecdote may have been written to explain Du Mu's high praise of Niu Sengru. Why would such an explanation be needed? Is there anything unusual about Du Mu's praise of Niu? I believe the epitaph might have puzzled some readers because it suggests a sudden change in political views and allegiance. During the second quarter of the ninth century, the political rivalry between factions led by Niu Sengru and Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–849) shaped court politics. Although not an important member of either faction, for the greater part of Du Mu's life he and Li Deyu knew and respected each other. Du Mu's official biographies state that Du Mu offered his opinions on political and military

55. Wang Meng'ou, *Benshi shi jiaobu kaoshi*, 64–65.

56. *Taiping guangji*, 202.1521.

57. *Taiping guangji*, 273.2151.

matters to Li, and that Li spoke highly of Du and on occasion adopted some of his ideas.<sup>58</sup> The fact that both official biographies include this information suggests that Li Deyu's respect for Du Mu's talent was well known. For his part, Du Mu also expressed gratitude to Li in several letters.<sup>59</sup> Even so, Du Mu's opinion of Li suddenly changed around 849. In letters and epitaphs written during that year, Du Mu harshly criticizes Li.<sup>60</sup> In particular, in the epitaph written for Niu Sengru, Du Mu makes his feelings for the two men perfectly clear, lauding Niu while denouncing Li. Modern scholars offer different explanations for Du Mu's change of heart. Some believe that Du Mu is a prime example of the "agile courtier" who quickly and adeptly switches allegiances when political winds change.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Li Deyu fell from power when Xuanzong 宣宗 (r. 847–860) ascended the throne, and he died in exile in 849, the same year that Du Mu condemned Li. Other scholars argue that Du Mu condemned Li because of Li's failed policies, his abuse of power, and his mistreatment of Du Mu and others over the years.<sup>62</sup> Like modern scholars, those who wrote and transmitted the Yangzhou anecdote offered their own explanation for Du Mu's change of heart. They suggested that Du Mu's high praise of Niu was his way of repaying Niu for the kindness he showed him in Yangzhou. We cannot know if the incident described in the anecdote actually occurred, but the fact that Du Mu was known for his *fengliu* character and that he and Niu Sengru knew each other in Yangzhou made this explanation plausible to contemporary readers.

The Yangzhou anecdote was often read as the context of Du Mu's Yangzhou poems. Readers familiar with Du Mu's Yangzhou poems would likely view the anecdote as corroborating evidence of Du Mu's sexual adventures in the city. Moreover, they would also believe that his adventures in the pleasure quarters inspired him to write his Yangzhou poems. Traces of just this sort of reading are found in remarks made by the Northern Song scholar Hu Zi, who writes that the short version of the Yangzhou anecdote confirms his speculation that Du Mu's Yangzhou dream poem was inspired by actual events.<sup>63</sup> For Hu Zi and many other readers, the Yangzhou anecdote and the Yangzhou poems mutually confirm Du Mu's *fengliu* behavior.

The different portrayals of Du Mu's uninhibited roaming in the long and short versions of the Yangzhou anecdote reflect the contemporary dispute about the socially appropriate place for sexual adventure in an elite man's life. While *Tang qeshi* validates romantic dalliances by claiming that they are part and parcel of a talented man's character, *Zhitian lu* argues that they indicate a lack of respect for social propriety. This negative view is hinted at in a *Tang zhiyan* 唐摭言 anecdote, in which an official, much impressed with Du Mu's poetry, recommends him to the *jinshi* examiner for first place.<sup>64</sup> When the examiner promises to award Du Mu fifth place (because first place had already been promised to someone else), someone else objects on the grounds that Du Mu is "incautious concerning conduct of minor importance" 不拘細行.<sup>65</sup> While the objection is dismissed in the story, the underlying message is that unrestrained behavior may harm a young man's career prospects. In the previous section I

58. *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 147.3986–87; *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1981), 166.5093–97.

59. *Jiaozhu*, 11.817–25; 11.826–31; 16.987–88.

60. *Jiaozhu*, 7.705; 7.714; 14.909; 16.1005.

61. Joseph P. McDermott, *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 212.

62. Wu Zaiqing, *Du Mu lungao*, 135–52.

63. Hu Zi, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua houji*, 15.522.

64. Wang Dingbao's 王定保 (870–940), *Tang zhiyan*, in *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 唐五代筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2002), 1626.

65. In Tang writings, this phrase is used to describe a man's unrestrained drinking, frequent visits to the pleasure quarters, or other behavior not in accordance with his social relations and status.

described Du Mu's evolving attitude towards his reputation as a libertine. Given the complex nature of the issues involved, it is unsurprising that Du Mu created a libertine self-image and then tried to shed it later in life.

## 2. The Luoyang Anecdote

The Luoyang anecdote focuses on Du Mu's role as an eccentric poet. Two versions of this story have survived. One version has been preserved in the *Taiping guangji* edition of the *Tang qieshi*, and another has been preserved in the *Benshi shi*, a ninth-century anecdote collection that focuses on the circumstances of poetry composition, reading, and recitation. These two versions are nearly identical, suggesting that they either copy from one another or share the same source. In both versions, the Luoyang anecdote is followed by Du Mu's two poems on recalling past travels, suggesting that the story and the poems were often read together at the time. For this reason, I discuss the Luoyang anecdote and the two poems together as one narrative:<sup>66</sup>

Du Mu was a Censor stationed in Luoyang. At the time, Duke Li, Minister of Education, had retired from guarding areas of strategic significance and lived a life of leisure. His entertainers and performers were extravagant and luxurious; they were considered the best of the day. The respected gentlemen of the Luoyang area all paid their respects to him. When Li held a big banquet, the court officials and high-minded worthies of the time all hurriedly attended. Because Du Mu held the title of Censor, Li dared not invite him. Du Mu sent guests to convey his intentions to Li, and to tell Li that he would like to meet with him. Left with no other choice, Li sent a man on horseback to deliver his letter [of invitation] to Du. Just then Du was pouring wine alone in front of flowers and had already drunk to his heart's content. When he heard the command, he went over immediately. It happened that people had already begun to drink, with female servants numbering more than a hundred, all with superb skills and extraordinary beauty. Sitting alone in a row facing south, Du stared with his gaze focused. After summoning three full flagons of wine, he asked Li, "I heard there is someone named Ziyun. Which one is she?" Li pointed at her out to him. Du Mu gazed intently for a good long while and said, "Her fame is not won in vain. It is fitting that you grant her to me." Li lowered his head and smiled, and all the servants also turned around and broke into smiles. Du Mu drank three more cups, rose and chanted in a resonating voice:

Magnificent hall, an extravagant banquet was held today,  
Who called upon the censor of Luoyang?  
All of a sudden I broke forth wild words, startling all those present,  
Two rows of rough and powder turned around all at once.

His manners were at ease and detached, as if he was on his own.

杜為御史，分務洛陽。時李司徒罷鎮閒居，聲伎豪華，為當時第一。洛中名士，咸謁見之。李乃大開筵席，當時朝客高流，無不臻赴。以杜持憲，不敢邀置。杜遣座客達意，願與斯會，李不得已馳書。方對花獨酌，亦已酣暢，聞命遽來。時會中已飲酒，女奴百餘人，皆絕藝殊色。杜獨坐南行，瞪目注視，引滿三卮，問李云，聞有紫雲者。孰是？李指示之。杜凝睇良久，曰，名不虛得，宜以見惠。李俯而笑，諸奴亦皆迴首破顏。杜又自飲三嚼，朗吟而起，曰：華堂今日綺筵開，誰喚分司御史來。忽發狂言驚滿座，兩行紅粉一時迴。意氣閑逸，傍若無人。

66. I use the *Benshi shi* version as the base text. See Wang Meng'ou, *Benshi shi jiaobu kaoshi*, 68–69. For the version that has been preserved in the *Taiping guangji* edition of *Tang qieshi*, see *Taiping guangji*, 273.2151. For another translation of this text, see Sanders, *Words Well Put*, 254–55.

This story describes Du Mu as an unconventional poet-official who is untroubled by societal ties and norms. The most striking moment of this story is the one in which he directly, even bluntly demands that the girl be handed over to him. Although it was common during the ninth century for an elite man to express interest in a social superior's entertainers, publicly requesting an entertainer from a superior would have been viewed as an egregious violation of social propriety. The absurdity of such behavior is captured in the poem included in the anecdote, in which Du Mu describes his request as "wild words" that "startled all those present." Curiously, Du Mu's behavior results not in a reprimand but in amused laughter. The audience's reaction suggests that Du Mu's conduct is viewed as little more than an odd form of drama that may be harmlessly indulged. Indeed, the right upon which Du Mu bases his claim is the right that all eccentrics have to behave outrageously.

Prior to making his request for the entertainer, other examples of unusual behavior are described to establish Du Mu's singular character. One concerns his indifference to his official duties. As Censor, Du Mu was charged with investigating Luoyang officials suspected of criminal activity or malpractice. Appointed directly by the emperor, censors could topple powerful officials. When Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831) was censor in Luoyang in 809, he impeached the governor and his subordinates for corruption. In the Luoyang story, Duke Li "dared not invite" Du Mu to his party because, given Du's position, such an invitation would have constituted a conflict of interest. That Du Mu more or less invited himself suggests that he cared more about feasting than faithfully carrying out his official duties.

A second example of Du Mu's eccentricity/singularity is the emphasis on his "being alone." The characters *du* 獨 and *zi* 自 are used repeatedly. At home, Du Mu "pours wine alone in front of flowers" 對花獨酌. At Duke Li's banquet, rather than sit with the host and the other guests, Du Mu "sits alone" 獨坐 and "drinks alone" 自飲. This emphasis on "being alone" is a distinctive characteristic of Du Mu's self-presentation, as he often writes in his poems about "pouring alone" 獨酌, "sobering up alone" 獨醒, "roaming alone" 獨遊, "pacing alone" 獨步, "climbing alone" 獨登, and "standing alone" 獨立. In his poems and anecdotes, being alone represents Du Mu's desire to free himself from social ties and norms.<sup>67</sup> This untroubled spirit is best illustrated in a detail at the end of the Luoyang story. After demanding to be given the female entertainer, which surprises and amuses everyone present, Du Mu recites a poem with a manner described as "at ease and disengaged, as if he was on his own" 意氣閑逸，傍若無人. In this story, the emphasis on "being alone," his lack of interest in his official duties, and his blunt request to Duke Li all illustrate Du Mu's singular character.

Following the banquet scene of the Luoyang anecdote, two poems are quoted to further emphasize Du Mu's unconventional nature. Both *Benshi shi* and *Tang qeshi* versions of the narrative link the composition of these two poems to specific moments in Du Mu's life, suggesting that these poems should be read as Du Mu's recollections.<sup>68</sup> While the first poem is none other than the Yangzhou dream poem, the second poem reads:

67. The motif of "drinking alone" as a sign of indifference to social norms had a long history prior to Du Mu. Tao Qian and Li Bai, e.g., employed this motif extensively in their poetry. See Michael Fishlen, "Wine, Poetry and History: Du Mu's 'Pouring Alone in the Prefectural Residence,'" *T'oung Pao* 80 (1994): 260–97.

68. *Benshi shi* and *Tang qeshi* link the composition of the poems to different moments in Du Mu's life. While the *Benshi shi* version states that Du Mu wrote the first poem when he was young, after having passed the civil service examination, and composed the second poem later, the *Tang qeshi* version notes that Du Mu wrote both poems when he recalled his youthful travels in old age.

舫船一棹百分空 十載青春不負公 今日鬢絲禪榻畔 茶煙輕颺落花風	Once the wine pitcher boat was rowing, a full cup was empty, Ten years of youth did not turn the back on your lord. Today with grey temple hair, I am beside the Chan bed, Steam rises lightly from a teacup, petals drift in the wind.
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In these two poems, Du Mu is portrayed as a man who indulges in private enjoyments, unconcerned with the ambitions and values of public life. While the Yangzhou dream poem recalls his roaming the pleasure quarters among the “rivers and lakes,” the second poem recalls his “roaming” with the wine pitcher.<sup>70</sup> His unorthodox approach to life is closely associated with political disengagement: instead of serving the state, he indulges in wine, women, and Chan Buddhism.

Meng Qi, the compiler of the *Benshi shi*, must have considered disengagement from worldly affairs as the central theme of the Luoyang anecdote, as he includes it in the “Gaoyi” 高逸 (Lofty and Disengaged) section. *Gaoyi* is a term used to describe individuals who withdraw from public life and service, and all three entries in the *gaoyi* section of the *Benshi shi* are concerned with the theme of public and political disengagement. The first entry includes three stories about Li Bai. In the first, the court official He Zhizhang so admires Li Bai’s physical bearing and writings that he refers to him as a “banished transcendent” 謫仙. In the second, Li Bai asserts that he is the reviver of ancient style poetry, and writes a poem mocking Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) for working too hard on poetry composition. In the third, Li Bai displays his talent in front of Emperor Xuanzong by composing an excellent poem while drunk. All three stories emphasize Li Bai’s extraordinary talent and unrestrained character. The second entry in the *gaoyi* section is a short account of Du Mu’s encounter with a monk. After passing the *jinshi* and the palace exams in the same year, Du Mu visits a temple in the south of Chang’an. When he discovers that the temple monk is unaware of his family’s reputation or his own examination success, he composes a poem praising the otherworldliness of Chan Buddhism. The third entry in the *gaoyi* section is the Luoyang anecdote.

All three entries celebrate detachment from public success and social hierarchy. For Li Bai, composing poetry for the emperor while drunk defies convention. Even his choice of poetic style thumbs its nose at rules and regulations, since he favors the freer ancient style poetry over highly regulated recent style poetry. The monk in the second story demonstrates an utter lack of concern for public success. The two major paths by which Tang elites could achieve such success were through family lineage and success in the civil service exams, and Du Mu was remarkably fortunate in both. The monk’s ignorance of Du Mu’s family name and examination success underscores his detachment from worldly affairs. Finally, the third entry also asserts the value of disengagement, as Du Mu pursues sensual pleasures at the expense of official duties.

The stories in the *gaoyi* section promote various forms of disengagement. Each character believes that something else is more important than public success and official advancement. For Li Bai, it is drinking; for the monk, it is practicing Chan; and for Du Mu, it is the pursuit of beautiful women. A life of disengagement from public life was portrayed as an alternative ideal since ancient times.<sup>71</sup> Among the best-known forms of disengagement prior to the Tang

69. I am unable to find the character 舫 in dictionaries. It is written as *gong* 舫 (wine pitcher) in the *Taiping guangji* edition of the *Tang qieshi* version. See *Taping guangji*, 273.2151.

70. Although the second poem does not depict his “roaming,” the image of rowing a “wine pitcher boat” suggests a connection between drinking from and roaming in a pitcher.

71. On the cultural topos of disengaged men who prefer pursuing their personal ideals to official appointment in early and early medieval China, see Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000).



were reclusion and religious conversion. The repertoire broadened during the ninth century to include new possibilities, new forms of disengagement, one of which was the writing of poetry. Some poets viewed poetry as a serious goal worth pursuing in its own right rather than as a means to transform society or express and entertain oneself.<sup>72</sup> They focused on craftsmanship and advocated “taking pains in composition” (*kuyin* 苦吟). Another new activity added to the repertoire of disengagement during the ninth century is indulgence in sensual pleasures, as validated by the narrative that consists of the Luoyang anecdote and the two poems. By juxtaposing the pursuit of women with the pursuit of poetry, Chan, and wine, it exalts sensual indulgence as a form of disengagement.

### 3. *The Huzhou Anecdote*

The two received editions of the Huzhou anecdote—one in a Song edition of *Tang queshi* and another in *Taiping guangji* (which cites *Tang queshi* as its source)—share a sequence of events but differ in wording. I will use the Song edition of the *Tang queshi* version as the base text and discuss one plot variant of the *Taiping guangji* version. The image of Du Mu at the beginning of the anecdote resembles depictions of Du Mu in the other two anecdotes in that it emphasizes his early success, literary talent, and unrestrained nature. This introduction of character is followed by an elaborate account of Du Mu’s quest for beauty in Huzhou:<sup>73</sup>

When Du Mu heard that in Wuxing [present-day Huzhou in Zhejiang] prefecture there were those with long eyebrows and slim waists who resembled transcendents, he resigned his position as a staff member in Wanling [Xuancheng] and went to Wuxing solely to observe them. As the magistrate of the prefecture had heard much about Du Mu’s name, he welcomed him and treated him rather generously. During the ten days following Du Mu’s arrival, they continued to drink copiously. Looking intently at the official courtesans from the side, Du Mu said, “They are indeed excellent, but they do not live up to what has been said about them.” When looking over privately selected courtesans, he said, “They are indeed beautiful, but they do not satisfy my expectations.” When he was about to leave, the magistrate asked Du Mu respectfully what he desired. Du Mu replied, “If we could take out colorful boats and allow people to watch freely so that I could let my eyes dwell on them for a moment, I would have no regrets.” The magistrate was very pleased. He selected an auspicious date and, on a grand scale, he arranged the boats and entertainments, with people taking pleasure in singing and racing. By making an ostentatious display and showing off what was bright and luxurious, they attracted so many people to come watch that they formed human walls on both banks of the river. Ziwei [Du Mu] then gave free rein to his eyes to follow the people everywhere, and at last he was bedazzled by what he saw. When evening was approaching and people were about to disperse, for a brief moment he saw that at the winding bank there was a commoner woman taking along a young girl who was not yet mature. Ziwei said, “This is an extraordinary beauty.”

聞吳興郡有長眉纖腰有類神仙者，罷宛陵從事，專往觀焉。使君籍甚其名，期待頗厚。至郡旬日，繼以洪飲，睨觀官妓曰：善則善矣，未稱所傳也。覽私選曰：美則美矣，未愜所望也。將離去，使君敬請所欲。曰：願泛彩舟，許人縱視，得以寓目，愚無恨焉。使君甚悅，擇日大具戲舟謳棹較捷之樂，以鮮華誇尚，得人縱觀，兩岸如堵。紫微則循泛肆目，竟迷所得。及暮將散，俄於曲岸見里婦攜幼女，年鄰小稔。紫微曰：此奇色也。

The great effort that Du Mu is shown to invest in his quest for beauty emphasizes the seriousness with which he pursues female beauty. The significance of this portrayal must be

72. Owen, *The Late Tang*, 255–56.

73. *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, 1340. In the *Taiping guangji* edition of the *Tang queshi* account, which includes the Yangzhou, Luoyang, and Huzhou anecdotes, the introduction of Du Mu’s general character appears at the beginning of the narrative, preceding the Yangzhou story.

understood in the context of contemporary courtesan culture and its representation. While ninth-century poems and stories frequently describe elite male sexual adventures with demi-monde women as amusements that take place well to the side of official lives, they very rarely portray elite men who sacrifice much in pursuit of beautiful women. The Huzhou anecdote is unusual in that it describes Du Mu's quest as a serious endeavor requiring extraordinary effort. Rather than develop convenient passing relationships with local courtesans, he travels far and wide in search of perfection. When neither official nor commercial courtesans meet his standard, he expands the search pool to include commoners. By depicting Du Mu's quest for beauty in a positive light, the Huzhou anecdote asserts that a beautiful woman is worthy of serious pursuit.

The interaction between Du Mu and the girl (and her mother) is brief. Du Mu tells the mother that he will return in ten years and requests that her daughter wait for him: "I will go west now by boat, where I will request to be assigned to govern this prefecture. You shall wait for me for ten years; if I do not return, then you can marry her to someone else" 余今西航，祈典此郡，汝待我十年不來而後嫁。In an interesting twist of priorities that turn normative values upside down, Du Mu is depicted as resigning his post to search for a beautiful woman and resuming it to unite with her once she has been found. The pursuit of a beautiful woman is Du Mu's goal, and public office is his means of achieving it.

As a matter of historical record, Du Mu did indeed request to be appointed prefect of Huzhou, although he did so for entirely different reasons. In 850, Du Mu presented three letters to Grand Councilor Zhou Chi 周墀 (793–851) pleading to be appointed prefect of Huzhou on two grounds. First, the post's higher salary would help him support the families of his sick brother and his widowed sister. Second, he wished to take his younger brother Du Yi 杜顥 to the region to treat his eye disease. In his second letter, Du Mu describes in great detail how he had taken his brother to seek treatment for fifteen years. In 837, for example, he resigned from his post as censor in Luoyang to take his brother to Yangzhou to see a well-known doctor. Later they visited other doctors in the Yangtze River region. The appointment in Huzhou, Du Mu explains, would allow him to take his brother to see a local recluse and a Daoist adept, both of whom were famous for treating obstinate diseases. This second reason is mentioned in the grave epitaph Du Mu writes for himself and in Du Mu's official biographies.<sup>74</sup>

Du Mu's letters and the Huzhou anecdote offer different reasons for his request to be made prefect of Huzhou. Did Gao Yanxiu, compiler of *Tang qieshi*, wish to cast doubt on Du Mu's account by revealing a hidden purpose? It seems unlikely that Gao Yanxiu set out to deliberately challenge Du Mu's motives. I suspect that Gao was unaware of Du Mu's account. The person (or persons) who composed the Huzhou anecdote knew nothing about Du Mu's letters to Zhou Chi and wrote the anecdote as an act of conjecture purely in order to provide an answer where none was thought to exist. Why was such an explanation needed? Was there anything unusual about Du Mu's request for the Huzhou prefect position? Du Mu's request was unusual because it appeared as if he was requesting a less desirable post than his current one as the Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel, which was a more prestigious position, although it ranked lower and was paid less than that of Prefect of Huzhou.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, since Tang officials generally held capital positions in far higher esteem than provincial posi-

74. Du Mu, "Zizhuan muzhiming" 自撰墓誌銘, in *Jiaozhu*, 10.812–13; *Jiu Tang shu*, 147.3986; *Xin Tang shu*, 166.5093.

75. Lai Ruihe 賴瑞和 discusses the functions of *langguan* 郎官 (directors and vice directors of various bureaus and ministries in the Department of State Affairs) and *cishi* 刺史 (prefect), and how these positions were viewed during the Tang. See Lai, *Tangdai zhongceng wenguan* 唐代中層文官 (Taipei: Lianjing, 2008), 153–62.

tions, few asked to be transferred out of the capital.<sup>76</sup> It is within this context that Du Mu's transfer request may have seemed puzzling to his contemporaries. People who had access to Du Mu's letters to Zhou Chi or the epitaph he wrote for himself would have known that Du Mu requested the Huzhou position in order to help his brother, while others might have supplied their own answers, such as the Huzhou anecdote. Because Du Mu's contemporary reputation as a *fengliu* libertine was well known, it seemed plausible that he would sacrifice his promising career for a woman.

While readers without knowledge of Du Mu's letters might have found the Huzhou anecdote believable, those who did know would have found the anecdote difficult to believe. This explains why efforts were made to reconcile the conflicting narratives. The *Taiping guangji* version of the anecdote includes information about Du Mu's letters to Zhou Chi:<sup>77</sup>

Because of the girl, Mu constantly thought of Huzhou after returning to court. Since his official rank was still low, he dared not express what was on his mind. Soon after, he was appointed to govern Huangzhou, Chizhou, and then moved to Muzhou, but none of those places was where he wanted to be. Du Mu was once on good terms with Zhou Chi, so when by chance Chi became a Grand Councilor, Mu sent three imploring letters to Chi, humbly requesting to govern Huzhou. Apparently because his younger brother Yi suffered an eye disease, Du Mu hoped to treat the disease beyond the Yangtze River. Not until the third year of the Dazhong reign (849) was he appointed Prefect of Huzhou.<sup>78</sup>

故牧歸朝，頗以湖州為念，然以官秩尚卑，殊未敢發。尋拜黃州池州，又移睦州，皆非意也。牧素與周墀善，會墀為相，乃併以三牋干墀，乞守湖州，意以弟顛目疾，冀於江外療之。大中三年，始授湖州刺史。

This passage reconciles the various narratives concerning Du Mu's motives for wanting to be Prefect of Huzhou by associating the two motives with different times in his life. After his discovery of the beautiful girl in Huzhuo, Du Mu wanted to ask for the Huzhou position to reunite with her. He did not request the transfer at the time because making such a request would have been inappropriate for someone of his rank. It was not until many years and promotions later that Du Mu requested to be made Prefect of Huzhou and by then his priority was to help his brother. In this way, readers who knew of Du Mu's brother and his letters to Zhou Chi were no longer compelled to dismiss the anecdote. The anecdote ends with a lament for lost love. When Du Mu finally returned to Huzhou fourteen years later, the girl had already married and given birth to two sons. Du Mu then composed a poem on lamenting for lost love, and within a day the poem was known far and wide among "fellow enthusiasts."<sup>79</sup>

\* \* \*

During Song times, sensual indulgence was seen as an integral part of Du Mu's reputation.<sup>80</sup> While some Song writers viewed Du Mu's pursuit of pleasure as a literati leisure activity, others celebrated it as a way of life, a lifestyle that offered an alternative to public and political engagement. Song writers often paired Li Bai and Du Mu as exemplary models

76. Tang officials' general view that capital positions were more esteemed than provincial positions continued into the ninth century. Although in two ninth-century cases (Du Mu and Zheng Qi 鄭綰 [d. 899]) a *langguan* requested to be transferred to be a prefect, these cases are, as Lai Ruihe points out, rare exceptions. See Lai, *Tangdai zhongceng wenguan*, 162.

77. *Taiping guangji*, 273.2152.

78. Du Mu was appointed Prefect of Huzhou in the fourth year of the Dazhong reign (850).

79. This last statement is not included in the *Taiping guangji* edition of the *Tang qieshi* account.

80. See Wangling, "Singing Lips," 218–24.

of literati men who distinguished themselves with their “uninhibited talent” 逸才 free from the demands of serving the state, as best captured in Yang Wanli’s 楊萬里 (1127–1206) couplet:

謫仙狂飲顛吟寺	Banished transcendent drank wildly in the temple of mad chanting,
小杜倡情冶思樓	Little Du had amorous feeling for performers in the tower of coquettish thoughts. <sup>81</sup>

The juxtaposition of Li Bai’s “wild drinking” and Du Mu’s “amorous feeling for performers” reminds us of the “Lofty and Disengaged” section in the *Benshi shi*, where Li Bai’s drunkenness at court and Du Mu’s blunt demand for a female entertainer are portrayed as disregard for hierarchy and social norms. It also reminds us of the Yangzhou dream poem, in which the extravagant young man “won a name as a casual lover in the blue mansions” rather than a name for public success. In all three examples, Li Bai’s fondness for wine and Du Mu’s amorous feelings for courtesans are evidence of their talent, unconventional character, and political disengagement. As such, they are essential to their identities. Like Li Bai’s wild drinking, Du Mu’s sensual indulgence evolved to become an established form of political disengagement. It is this image of Du Mu that fascinated the literati for generations to come and became one of the most enduring *fengliu* ideals in Chinese history.

81. Yang Wanli, “Su Chizhou Qishan si ji Du Muzhi jiuri denggao chu” 宿池州齊山寺，即杜牧之九日登高處，in *Cheng zhai ji* 誠齋集 (SKQS huiyao), 33.4b. Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) describes Li Bai and Du Mu in this couplet, “Throughout their lives, they had no lofty remarks on aspirations and undertakings / In the last phase of an age, they possessed uninhibited talent in poetry” 平生志業無高論，末世篇章有逸才。See *Linchuan xiansheng wenji* 臨川先生文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 19.246.