

The Image of Du Fu in the West and China

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By

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ABSTRACT

Du Fu is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest Chinese poets, and he is recognized by the western world as the only writer comparable to Shakespeare and Dante. Professor Stephen Owen, a world-famous sinologist authority from Harvard University, thinks these writers have jointly created the criterion for great poems.

The image of Du Fu is a symbol of Chinese culture and has condensed the ideals of numerous people. Its similarities and differences under Chinese and Western perspectives are a significant issue of global culture which concerns not only how the West views Chinese culture, but also how Chinese people thoroughly perceive the essence of their culture, and in which dimension the cultural core is inherited. A deep exploration of cultural differences through a comparison of Du Fu's image in Chinese and Western ideological systems can significantly promote the blending and communication of Chinese-Western cultures. It can provide highly meaningful interactive inferences for people to seek commonalities from differences, for the West to understand time-honored spiritual values of the Chinese culture, and for China to know the international recognition of Chinese culture. Therefore, the study of Chinese-Western knowledge on Du Fu's image bears unusually important values.

In spite of the fact that overall cognition of Du Fu's image is essential in understanding his poems and the spirit of Chinese Confucian culture, there was hardly any Chinese ancient work that comprehensively probed into his image. Only after the 20th century, did there appear some modern biographies of Du Fu that placed his spiritual heritage, that had lasted for centuries, under new eras and new language environments for discovery, shaping and communication. Some biographies have been published such as *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi, *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin, and *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng. By depicting an ancient scholar as an example for the generations, these works have provided endless moral contemplation and spiritual pursuit.

This book tries to take these three classic biographies as its foundation to comprehensively summarize Du Fu's writing backgrounds, writing motives, writing paths and creative points, and reach the common characteristics of his image under the Chinese literary context. The book has also selected works by three famous western sinologists that are most representative on Du Fu's biographies or academic achievements – *Tu Fu: The Greatest Poet in China* by William Hung, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High Tang* and *The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography* by Stephen Owen, and *Recollection without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State* by David McMullen. In this way, the book has summed up a different image of Du Fu in the eyes of foreign sinologists. It then compared Du Fu's images in Chinese and Western perspectives and studied Chinese-Western differences of the images and their causes.

The exploration of Du Fu's image can't be separated from the knowledge and interpretation of texts, so it is critical to break through language obstacles in Chinese-Western cultural communications. The outstanding English versions of Du Fu's poems have demonstrated a true, full and lively literary image of Chinese classic literature, and have presented a vast and profound perspective for western readers to know Chinese culture. Therefore, this book will also compare Du Fu's representative poems on seasons, mountain-climbing, flowers and birds translated into English by famous translators – Stephen Owen, William Hung and Xu Yuanchong for words, grammar and rhetoric to study how English versions of Du Fu's poems restore and represent his image under historical contexts, and to explore observation and value points of his image in Chinese-English transformation.

In a nutshell, there was almost no overall description of Du Fu's image before Feng Zhi's writing, but it is unusually important. The overall knowledge of Du Fu's image is very important for promoting the global impact of excellent Chinese traditional culture, facilitating Chinese-Western cultural blending, and exploring global values of cultural giants from different countries. Biographies of Du Fu after the founding of the People's Republic of China, by combining historical facts with texts, can maximally restore Du Fu's image in various dimensions, and are significant references for a full appreciation of his image. The knowledge of western

sinologists of Du Fu's image has provided us with new perspectives, which are supplementary and referential for us to deeply explore his true image. The different analyses of Du Fu's image in Chinese-Western perspectives can clearly demonstrate how we should regard this cultural model. It's helpful for deeply analyzing western viewpoints on Chinese traditional culture in multicultural perspectives, promoting mutual reference and communication of Chinese-Western traditional academic methods, and multidimensionally understanding how Du Fu became the greatest poet in China and provided fantastic spiritual values for generations around the world. As a result, it is a valuable study that crosses national borders and cultures. Since the beginning of 2020, COVID-19 has brought unprecedented and severe challenges to the world. We hope the towering image of Du Fu can bring encouraging power and spiritual nourishment to people.

Keywords: biographies of Du Fu; image; overseas sinology;
English version of Du Fu's poems

INTRODUCTION

I. Study summary in China and abroad

Du Fu is one of the greatest Chinese poets universally esteemed at home and abroad as his powerful benevolence and beautiful model-setting poems have been deeply admired by generations. The study works on Du Fu's poems are numerous, but the ones on his image are scarce. Before 1949, few works made a careful description about Du Fu's life activities; after Feng Zhi wrote about the biography of Du Fu, modern biographies of Du Fu gradually emerged in China. Important study works and biographies on Du Fu's image include: *Annals of Shaoling Xiansheng* by Wen Yiduo (《少陵先生年谱会笺》, 闻一多), which has collected and commented on scores of previous annals of Du Fu by focusing on the music, painting and reference materials of his age, and has studied his annals under macroscopic cultural backgrounds; *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi (《杜甫传》, 冯至), which is the first biography of an ancient scholar written after 1949, has studied the life experiences of Du Fu to vividly reflect the social features of his times; *Study of Du Fu* by Xiao Difei (《杜甫研究》, 萧涤非), which has observed his image as the people's poet in the perspective of Marxism Thoughts; *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Zhu Dongrun (《杜甫叙论》, 朱东润), which has deeply probed into ethnic relations and focused on the development stages of Du Fu's poetry; Chen Yixin's *Comment Biography of Du Fu* (《杜甫评传》, 陈贻焮) adopts the form of comment biography, which comprehensively explores Du Fu's personality and poetic achievements and the social spirit of the Tang Dynasty; *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng (《杜甫评传》, 莫砺锋) which has mainly discussed Du Fu's merits and thoughts, and

classified his achievements for deep exploration; *Poet Sage: Du Fu in a Concerning World* by Han Chengwu (《诗圣：忧患世界中的杜甫》, 韩成武), which has combined poetry interpretation and his life, and has especially studied his life experiences and interpreted his poetry meanings. For works on Du Fu's image in China, this book aims to formulate his image through biographies, and find the common characteristics of Du Fu's image from the selected biographies.

The domestic biographies of Du Fu that this book focuses on can be summarized as follows: the study on *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi is “Blaze Mountain Trails with Shabby Cart and Ragged Clothes – On Du Fu Study by Feng Zhi” written by Zhao Ruicai, which has explored the creative values of Feng Zhi's work from his holistic view, academic perspective, literary history and study methods; “Comment on Feng Zhi and His Du Fu Study” by Dai Jiayuan, which has given a panoramic view of Feng Zhi's study of Du Fu, and supplemented the study backgrounds of Du Fu at that time. For Chen Yixin's *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, the foreword by Fu Xuancong and the epilogue by Ge Xiaoyin have profoundly dug into the artistry and ideology of the whole book; while Liu Ning's “A Benevolent Scholar with Cordial Words – Comment on *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin” has meticulously analyzed the work's characteristics; she believes that the Du Fu Biography reflects such spiritual aspirations for Confucian benevolence in its cognitive completeness and richness. For *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng, this book has studied “The Thinking of Reading *Comment Biography of Du Fu*” by Ge Xiaoyin, which has provided a comprehensive and profound discussion on the Comment Biography's content, structure, emphases, and study methods. The book has also studied “A Model Work of Ancient Writers – Impression of Mo Lifeng's *Comment Biography of Du Fu*” by Jin Danni, “Comments on *Comment Biography of Du Fu*” by Wang Tongshu, and “The World in Du Fu's Poetry Collection – Comments on *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng” written by

Tong Qiang. All these works have comprehensively studied the *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, and believe that the book is very important in the field of Du Fu study.

Du Fu also enjoys great fame overseas, and is generally recognized as a classic poet who can be compared with Dante and Shakespeare. The opinions of overseas scholars about Du Fu's image under different cultural backgrounds have inspired us in evaluating his true image and understanding his poems, and have provided some useful references for us to further promote Chinese traditional culture worldwide. The important overseas works on Du Fu: Florence Ayscough, *Tu Fu, the Autobiography of a Chinese Poet*, London: J. Cape; Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929; and Florence Ayscough, *The Travels of a Chinese Poet: Tu Fu, Guest of Rivers and Lakes*, London: J. Cape; Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934, which, on the basis of the English version of Du Fu's poems, narrate and interpret Du Fu; William Hung, *Tu Fu: The Greatest Poet in China*, Harvard University Press, 1952, which records the life of Du Fu in a time sequence and in a traditional perspective and is quite insightful on chronicles of Du Fu's poems; David McMullen, "Recollection without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State", *Asia Major*, Volume 14, Issue 3, 2001, which analyzes plant images in Du Fu's poems by combining systems, culture and history, and reviews the image of Du Fu as a eulogist of the orderliness of the Tang Empire. Stephen Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High Tang*, Yale University Press, 1981, in which Stephen discusses the inner logics of Du Fu's poems and summarizes his image from his poetry texts and structures; Stephen Owen, *The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography, The Vitality of the Lyric Voice Shih Poetry from the Late Han to the T'ang*, edited by Shuen-fu Lin and Stephen Owen, Princeton University Press, 1987. In China, this book was translated by Chen Yuehong and Liu Xuehui and published in *Selected Works of Famous Chinese Classical Writers in North America in the Past Ten Years*,

compiled by Yue Daiyun and Chen Jue, and published by Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 1996. These have respectively analyzed the biographic poems of Tao Yuanming and Du Fu, and painted Du Fu in the image of a wise man by comparing the inner emotional intentions of the two poets.

For study works on Du Fu's image of overseas scholars, the ones about *Tu Fu: The Greatest Poet in China* by William Hung include “The Complex Publishing Course of *Tu Fu: The Greatest Poet in China* by William Hung” which introduced the twists and turns of its pre-publication and its huge impact afterwards, and expounded its authoritative status. “*Tu Fu: The Greatest Poet in China*, an English Masterpiece by William Hung” written by Zhao Hua has analyzed the study methods of William Hung, and hoped to supply reference to researchers on Du Fu's poetry. For David McMullen's “Recollection without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State”, the article by Wang Ying, “The Probe of David McMullen into Du Fu's Ecological Metaphors”, has studied Du Fu's image in three academic aspects – the recognition of Du Fu's loyalty; the dual identity of Du Fu, the imperial gardens and the emperor; and the value renewal of the lotus and chrysanthemum in the Tang Dynasty, which are quite creative. For Stephen Owen's study on Du Fu, “Stephen Owen's Interpretation and Reflection” on Du Fu written by Liu Zhenyan and Liu Jirong has adopted new analysis perspectives on the basis of the author, texts and contexts, and has to some degree decomposed the classic image of Du Fu and developed new narrative patterns. “Classic Variation: Intensive Text Reading Under Cultural Filtration – Take as an Example the Interpretation of Stephen Owen on the Classic Poet Du Fu” by Yin Xiaoyan has made a multidimensional analysis on the basis of Stephen Owen's discussion, and found his study has experienced classic variation under the filtration of different cultivation. “The Contradictory Analysis of Self Perfect Mirror in Others' Eyes – Autobiographical poems of Tao Qian and Du Fu as Cases” by Yin Xiaoyan thinks that Stephen Owen has interpreted the

autobiographical poems with “intensive semantic reading” which he is good at, and has thus understood the writing style of Du Fu. “The Tang Poetry Study and His Poetry Thoughts Construction of Stephen Owen” (Chapter 4), a doctoral thesis of Gao Chao from Tianjin Normal University, has adopted the foreign image theory for literary interpretation and study texts in the imagology of contemporary comparative literature and taken Du Fu's poetry as its study object to analyze the “double self” image of Du Fu.

The studies of the English version of Du Fu's poetry can be classified into individual and comprehensive studies. Studies on Stephen Owen's translation include “A Study on the Translation Degree of Chinese Classic Poetry from the English Versions of Du Fu's Poems Translated by Stephen Owen”, which has analyzed the three major contributions of Stephen Owen, and has discussed his “three translations” and “three non-translations”, so it is helpful for understanding the degree of poetry translation and to promote the communication of Tang poetry around the world. “The Study of World-Going Tang Poetry English Versions by Stephen Owen” has respectively studied commensurability, internationalization, canonization and international influence to explore the construction process of Tang poetry in world literature.

For studies of William Hung's translated versions, “The Communication of Du Fu's Poetry in the English World – Study on Major English Versions and Monographs of Du Fu's Poems in the 20th Century” has introduced the basic characteristics and influences of Hung's translation; “Perfect Person, Perfect Articles and Perfect Emotions – William Hung and His Study on Du Fu” by Hao Ji has pointed out the contributions of Hung to the translation of Du Fu's poetry, and has analyzed his translation strategies, and concluded that his study has promoted the study of Du Fu in the world.

Studies on Xu Yuanchong's translation include “Contribution of Xu Yuanchong's Translation Thoughts to the Construction of the Discourse System of Foreign Literature and Its Inspirations” by Li Zhengshuan and Yan Yunxia which has analyzed the translation opinions, principles, concepts and thoughts of Xu Yuanchong, and concluded that he has contributed positively to the discourse system of foreign literature. The “Study on English Versions of Du Fu's poems Translated by Xu Yuanchong” has stated that the strategy of Xu Yuanchong is “from passage to sentence groups and to words with a combination of literal translation (formal similarity) and paraphrasing translation (spiritual similarity), variation of content and assimilation of words”, using “three beauty rhymed translation”, a “beautifying art”, to pursue three beauties of the translation versions – “form beauty”, “sound beauty” and “sense beauty.”

Comprehensive comparison studies include “A Comparative Study of Tang Poetry English Translations by Xu Yuanchong and Stephen Owen Under the Subjective Perspectives of the Translators”, the master's thesis of Lin Yueyue from Beijing University of Foreign Studies, which starts with the translators' subjective perspectives to compare and analyze particular translation works, and illustrate the characteristics and differences of the two translators in sense, sound and forms, and reveal the influences of their purposes, identities and language and cultural backgrounds on their translation strategies and effects. “The comparative analysis of English translations of Gazing on Mount Tai“ by Lu Xiaoqian and Chen Lian – centering on the translation outlooks of William Hung, Xu Yuanchong and Stephen Owen has compared the translation texts of the three translators to discover their different translation characteristics and advantages.

II. Theoretical meanings and contemporary values of topic selection

Du Fu's image has condensed the ideals of many people, and is also the symbol of Chinese culture. The perspectives of overseas sinologists on his image can to some extent reveal how the western world sees Chinese culture, and these are very important for us to know their thought veins. Comparing Du Fu's image under the two thought systems can review the cultural differences of the two systems, and can supply valuable references for the western world to understand Chinese spiritual values and for Chinese to understand the international acceptance of Chinese culture by the western world. Therefore, the study of Du Fu's image is very important.

With the development of Chinese biographical literature, Chinese biographers viewed Du Fu's image on a more modern cultural foundation. For Du Fu's biographies of this age, there were many thorough studies on a particular work, but few comprehensive studies, and almost no comparative study of a comprehensive analysis of Du Fu's image in the eyes of different scholars. This book will compare Du Fu's images from the perspectives of writers by cross reference, and finally sum up aspects of Du Fu's image under different writers' pens onto Du Fu himself, which is very valuable for us to fully understand Du Fu's image.

The overseas image of Du Fu and the opinions of overseas scholars of the Chinese poetry sage are important references for Chinese to understand the acceptance of Du Fu in western countries. Du Fu's image in the perspectives of overseas sinologists has been filtrated culturally, the study perspectives and methods of which can supply significant references for the local study of Chinese scholars. Furthermore, overall studies on Du Fu's image are conducted almost simultaneously and are studies of the same age. The comparison of Du Fu's image at home and abroad can help us to intuitively understand the differences in his image, and to study perspectives and methods, and this is very important for a comprehensive

understanding of Du Fu's image in the new age.

III. Study methods and paths

This book mainly uses literature analysis and comparative research approaches. As an overall analysis of creation backgrounds, creation motives, writing veins and creative points of three representative Du Fu biographies in the new age of China – *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi, *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin, and *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng – this book has summarized common characteristics of Du Fu's image in the three works, and illustrated Du Fu's image in the eyes of Chinese scholars and their study paths. For the Du Fu study of overseas sinologists, this book has selected the three most representative writers and their works – *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* by William Hung, *Recollection without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State* by David McMullen, and *Poetry: The High Tang and The Complete Self Image – Biographical Poems* by Stephen Owen, and outlined Du Fu's image in the eyes of overseas sinologists that is further compared with that in the eyes of Chinese scholars, and reveals the differences of Du Fu's image, study methods and study ideas at home and abroad. Finally, by comparing the English versions of “Spring View”, “On a Height”, and “One of Four Quatrains (Two Orioles Chirping in Green Willows)” by three famous translators, Stephen Owen, William Hung and Xu Yuanchong, the book reveals the differences in understanding of Chinese traditional poetry by Chinese and foreign scholars, and provides references for communicating Chinese culture.

This book has four chapters. Chapter one is a domestic study on the Du Fu biographies in two parts. The first part is a profound analytical study of domestic scholars on Du Fu biographies mainly in three aspects – creation motives, study methods and creative points. It is further divided into three sections – Section one studies *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi; Section

two studies *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin; and Section three studies *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng. The second part summarizes the common points of the Du Fu image in the eyes of Chinese scholars.

Chapter two is a study of overseas Du Fu biographies in two parts. The first part summarizes an overseas Du Fu study in three sections from the perspectives of creation motives, study methods and creation points. Section one studies *Tu Fu: The Greatest Poet in China* by William Hung; Section two studies *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High Tang* and *The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography* by Stephen Owen; and Section three studies *Recollection without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial Gardens and the State* by David McMullen. The second part summarizes Du Fu's image in the eyes of overseas sinologists.

Chapter three studies the differences between the Du Fu image studies at home and abroad in two parts. First, it compares differences of the image; second, it compares differences of study methods.

Chapter four studies and compares the English versions of Du Fu's poems by Stephen Owen, William Hung and Xu Yuanchong. It focuses on the translation of the Chinese traditional image and analyzes grammar and syntax. It can reveal differences of understanding of Chinese traditional culture by Chinese and western scholars in the course of comparing "Spring View", "On a Height", and "One of Four Quatrains (Two Orioles Chirping in Green Willows)."

CHAPTER ONE

IMAGE CONSTRUCTION IN CHINESE BIOGRAPHIES OF DU FU AFTER 1949

As the social environment became modernized after the New Culture Movement, Chinese modern biography writers absorbed some useful experiences of foreign biographies, particularly in the scope of the expansion of biographic subjects, the widening of expression, and the development of diversification and complication. Mr. Han Zhaoqi once said, “the ancient Chinese biographies have some distinct features such as lively character personalities and brisk story plots, striking emotional characteristics, short space and easy reading, concise text and elegant words.”¹ The most representative of the Du Fu biographies in ancient China – the two works in *Tang Annals* and *Biographies for Tang Talents* – both displayed characteristics of Chinese ancient biographies, and only selected the most representative incidents in Du Fu's life for lively and succinct narration in order to emphasize the loyal and upright image of Du Fu. The “Biography of Du Fu” in *Old Book of Tang* listed the traveling experiences in his life, and highlighted his relations with Yan Wu and Fang Guan. The “Biography of Du Fu” in *New Book of Tang*, in addition to introducing his relations with Yan Wu and Fang Guan, recorded his ode-presenting episode, but didn't tell of his family background and life experiences. The *Biography of Du Fu* in *Biographies for Tang Talents* had similar content to the ones in *Two Books of Tang*, but underlined his loyalty to the imperial court. Unfortunately, these three

¹ Zhaoqi Han, “Discussion on ancient Chinese biographical literature,” *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Science Edition)* No. 4, (1997): 13.

biographies about Du Fu didn't pay enough attention to his poetic accomplishment and spiritual quality. By contrast, modern biographies about Du Fu in China have portrayed his image more completely and exhaustively, paying particular attention to his life experiences. For biographies of Chinese poets, it is most appropriate to blend the works into their biographies. Chinese ancient poets were deeply influenced by Confucianism in terms of active involvement in politics, profound emotion towards the nation, and eager devotion to national development. Therefore, works by great Chinese ancient poets expressed their true mental ideas and faithful exhibition of their living conditions, and were the most real and authentic biographical materials. Chinese scholars have learned from the way in which western biographies comprehensively observe the persons to be portrayed, and have combined this with Chinese biographical traditions so that biographies will be more incisive and literarily rich. Therefore, they have reshaped great images of famous Chinese ancient poets and helped readers to thoroughly understand their life. Zhu Dongrun, a famous Chinese modern biographer, says, "The object of a biographer is not a certain period or occasion of the person to be biographized, but his whole life. In this long journey, the person's life has numerous developments and endless changes. The duty of a biographer lies in narrating all facts and supply[ing] reasonable explanations. Therefore, he is not only responsible for art, but also for historical facts."²

As a symbol of the Chinese national spirit, Du Fu has become an object that has been widely discussed. Highly influential biographies about Du Fu in the new age include *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi in 1951, *Study of Du Fu* by Xiao Difei in 1956, *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Zhu Dongrun in 1981, *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin in 1982, *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng in 1993, and *Poetry Sage: Du Fu in a Concerning World* by Han Chengwu in 2000. This book

² Zhu Dongrun, "Biography Literature and Personality," in *Zhu Dongrun Corpus* (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2014), 520.

has selected three classics as study objects – *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi, *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin, and *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Mo Lifeng to analyze their creation perspectives, ideas and content. Then, it summarizes Du Fu's extracted image, concludes their commonality, and outlines Du Fu's image in the eyes of domestic scholars.

Section 1

***Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi: conscience of the time howling for the public**

Feng Zhi (1905-1993), a famous Chinese modern lyricist and translator with such representative works as *Collection of Sonnets* and *Song of Yesterday*, advocated the study concept of “localization of foreign culture”, and suggested Chinese writers should absorb western nutrition and consider Chinese practical needs for academic creation. Meanwhile, Feng Zhi pursued the “rigorous and truth-seeking” study principle, insisting that article content should conform to reality as much as possible and be scientific. *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi completely embodies his study thoughts, and describes the life of Du Fu with profound literary proficiency, advanced concepts, beautiful writing styles and a rigorous study attitude.

Biography of Du Fu by Feng Zhi is the first biography about an ancient scholar published after 1949, which illustrated Du Fu's whole life in a strict historical perspective. During the Anti-Japanese War, Du Fu's poems gave him great spiritual nutrition as he once wrote, “tramping with my family, I began to trust what Du Fu said.”³ Feng Zhi wanted to fully know Du Fu behind his poems, but there were no complete biographical or study

³ Feng Zhi, “Four Quatrains in Jiang Xi,” in *The Shape of Sorrow and Joy*, ed. Feng Yaoping (Beijing: Xinxing Press, 2017), 57.

works for his reference. Therefore, before writing *Biography of Du Fu*, Feng Zhi wrote a novel, *New Black Hair on a White Head* with Du Fu's life as its subject, and created a sonnet to explore the unfolding of Du Fu's image. Before writing *Biography of Du Fu*, Feng Zhi studied relevant historical materials. After comparing Du Fu's poems and biographies in *Biography of Literary Circles in Old Book of Tang* and *New Book of Tang*, Feng Zhi discovered more than ten mistakes about Du Fu's life in these two books. Other descriptions of Du Fu's image scattered in various poetry talks are fragmented. Although the research on Du Fu's poems is fairly comprehensive and thorough, no book has made a complete restoration of his life experiences, and the exploration into Du Fu's life needs a prediction of his poems. In the meantime, biographical literature in Europe had matured, and its eyes had been moved to the poet himself for overall image demonstration. Deeply touched, Feng Zhi thought the development time, creation methods and writing experience of overseas biographies had advanced to some extent. In addition, biographies of a lot of second- or third-rate European writers had been published, and European modern biographies had developed to an advanced level. Inspired and encouraged by the creation experience of European biographies, together with his deep interest in Du Fu, Feng Zhi began to write *Biography of Du Fu*. The creation of *Biography of Du Fu* went beyond traditional study methods and initiated a new approach to character study. In the course of writing, the first problem Feng Zhi encountered was the insufficiency of historical materials, which were not given the proper attention when Du Fu was alive. As a result, there weren't enough historical materials about Du Fu, and many collections compiled when Du Fu was alive, such as *Collection of Great Poets across the Country* by Yin Fan (殷璠《河岳英灵集》) and *Collection of National Poets* by Rui Tingzhang (芮挺章《国秀集》), didn't even collect Du Fu's poems. Due to the shortage of historical materials, Feng Zhi decided to "understand Du Fu from his poems" – and he used over 1400 poems by Du Fu as an organic whole and historical

facts at that time to fully predict Du Fu's thoughts, feelings and life experiences, from which he tried to restore the real and spiritual world of Du Fu. If the facts and poems were different, Feng Zhi chose Du Fu's poems as the correct versions to completely represent the world in the poet's eyes. Except for the two chapters relating to “Childhood” and “Family Background and Origin”, the materials for *Biography of Du Fu* were his poems. Feng Zhi stressed the representativeness in material selection, and only selected those that could most reveal Du Fu's thoughts and statuses as writing references.

The environments that Du Fu and Feng Zhi lived in were quite similar, and the Anti-Japanese War was the exact time when Du Fu's poems touched him most – China faced troubles from inside and outside, and the whole nation approached a life-and-death crossroads. Du Fu was born during the Anshi Rebellion when the country was thrown into bloody wars and acute national conflicts. Witnessing the sufferings of the people, Feng Zhi could deeply understand Du Fu's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, his book showed Du Fu's utter sympathy for the ordinary people. For example, during the Anshi Rebellion, Du Fu drifted from place to place, and witnessed the miserable circumstances of ordinary people which he recorded with “Three Farewells”. Feng Zhi thought, in “Three Farewells”, that “Du Fu wrote three poems for three people to narrate their sufferings in their own words. When the narration was extremely touching, thinking of the national disaster, the poet changed to a passionate voice.”⁴

Feng Zhi wrote the *Biography of Du Fu* when the PRC was established. As the people being the masters of the country became the main theme of the time, a resonance was triggered between Feng Zhi who exceptionally cared about people and Du Fu who voiced people's appeals. Du Fu created a lot of poems revealing people's sufferings, while Feng Zhi portrayed Du

⁴ Feng Zhi, *Biography of Du Fu* (Beijing:Zhonghua Book Company, 2014), 103. The following quotation also comes from this book.

Fu as a spokesman for the people and a great poet among the people. He attributed all of the activities of Du Fu to his love for the people. In the chapter “Ten Years in Chang’an”, Feng Zhi wrote, “He could have been like Li Bai to travel around the country and enjoy natural scenery, but he was concerned about people. He hoped the government could take care of people, and placed all of this hope in the emperor. Therefore, he would not leave Chang’an.”⁶ He thought, during the continuation of war period, that Du Fu traveled around and submitted poetry works to noble and high officials, hoping to be promoted. Meanwhile, he established deep relations with the common people. During this time, he composed the Chariots March, “Their fathers, mothers, wives and children come in haste. To see them off; the bridge is shrouded in dust they’ve raised;”⁷ “The elder bound their young heads when they went away; Just home, they’re sent to the frontier though their hair’s gray.”⁸ One of Nine Frontier Songs, “Escorted by officers, are young soldiers. Fearlessly we march, without being reproached. Deliver a home letter, seeing an acquaintance on road. Sad to say farewell, no pain together forever,”⁹ Five Hundred Words Expressing Feelings from the Capital to Fengxian, “Red gates exude [a] bad smell of wine and meat, roads are scattered with corpses.”¹⁰ These poems were full of sympathy for the common people, and revealed the sufferings that the wars and decisions of rulers had brought to them. The poems of “Three Officials” and “Three Farewells” are model works that reflected people's pain, promoted the Confucian spirit, and embodied allegorical traditions. Bai Juyi thought these poems had practiced the

⁶ Feng, *Biography of Du Fu*, 65.

⁷ Du Fu, “Song of the Conscripts”, in *Detailed Note of Du Fu’s Poems 杜诗详注*, noted by Qiu Zhao’ao (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1979), 113. The following quotation also comes from this book.

⁸ Du, “Song of the Conscripts”, 113-114.

⁹ Du, “Song of the Conscripts”, 121.

¹⁰ Du, “Five Hundred Words Expressing Feelings from the Capital to Fengxian”, 270.

tradition of Feng, Ya, Bi and Xing with profound realistic meanings, so they produced far-reaching impacts on his creation later.

The period divisions of Du Fu's poems in *Biography of Du Fu* by Feng Zhi have left valuable references for later generations. *Biography of Du Fu* has divided Du Fu's life into four periods – the roving period, Chang'an period, Anshi Rebellion, and in Sichuan. However, he didn't divide it until he wrote Du Fu for the Chinese Literature Encyclopedia of China. The meaning of this division is that the ten years when Du Fu lived in Chang'an prior to the Anshi Rebellion were separately listed. In these ten years, “what he gained was not official positions, but knowledge of reality, so he explored a new territory for Tang poetry.”¹¹ During this period, Du Fu failed the imperial examination, and his three odes didn't garner attention. He lived on relief, and was jostled by the dark society. Under the general social environment, generals on borders started wars but met with continuous failures. The royal family led extravagant lives, and people were tortured with heavy taxes and military services. Involved in this, Du Fu felt tremendous pain for the country and its people, during which he composed lots of works with intense emotions and bitterness. Therefore, these ten years were substantial for Du Fu's creation. This four-period division was ground-breaking and universally accepted for future study of Du Fu's poems.

One of the striking characteristics of *Biography of Du Fu* is that its words are elegant and beautiful. As a lyricist, Feng Zhi adopted a romantic style to record Du Fu's life, “In red evening glow, the sun is setting and some birds are chirping when Du Fu returned to the Qiang village.”¹² Some narrations of Du Fu's life were actually Du Fu's poems translated into prose in a tranquil tone by Feng Zhi, which vividly brings readers into Du Fu's life with an aesthetic treat.

When he created *Biography of Du Fu*, Feng Zhi emphasized Du Fu's

¹¹ Feng, *Biography of Du Fu*, 46.

¹² Feng, *Biography of Du Fu*, 84.

deep love for people – all of the activities of Du Fu started from people's interests, and all of his thoughts and feelings were closely tied to common people. This study perspective was unavoidably stamped with a time brand, but it also restored the greatness of Du Fu, and unveiled the touching characteristics of Du Fu's spirit. *Biography of Du Fu* blazed a broad trail for the creation of later biographies, and made a pioneering contribution to the all-round exhibition of Du Fu's image.

Section 2

Comment Biography of Du Fu by Chen Yixin: the sage of poetry was both ordinary and perfect

Chen Yixin (1924-2000), styled Yixin (一新), was a professor from the Chinese Department, Peking University, with such representative works as *Discussion Series of Tang Poetry* and *Anthology of Meng Haoran*. He advocated the study attitude of “understanding people and discussing the world.” He once suggested that “Writers should rely on their own experiences, thoughts and feelings, and put themselves into the positions of ancient people to restore them into real characters of societies where they lived. They should completely display time backgrounds and social styles of ancient writers like craftsmen repairing antique vases. This is just my study principle.”¹³ This study conception enabled Chen Yixin to deeply explore the life of ancient writers, and he effectively restored the real features of their thoughts and thoroughly understood the real meanings of their works. This is exactly the right approach to understand Du Fu and his poems. As Mr. Lin Geng says, “Chen Yixin’s biographical works come from poetic notes, but are enlivened by imitating chapter

¹³ Xiaoqin Du, “A Poet-type Scholar, a Spiritual Poet – a Study and Creation of Classical Chinese Poetry by Chen Yixin,” *Social Science Review* No.1, (Jan. 2004): 126.

novels.”¹⁴

Comment biography is a new type of academic biography originating from overseas. Besides fully restoring the life course of the subject, a biographic writer also comments on the life experiences of the subject. Sun Li said in his *Discuss Biographies with Friends, Dan Ding Collection*, “Foreign countries have a kind of Comment Biography, in which writers narrate historical facts of subjects and express their opinions on the subject – this is rare in Chinese historical books.”¹⁵ Britain and France were the first countries to have long comment biographies. As early as the 18th century, biographies similar to academic works appeared in Britain. Since modern times, Chinese comment biographies have developed vigorously, and some representative biographical works include *Wang Jinggong Biography* by Liang Qichao (1936), *Personality and Style of Sima Qian* by Li Changzhi (1948), and *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Zhu Dongrun (1981). *Comment Biography of Du Fu* is a representative work for Chinese comment biographies, in which Zhu Dongrun creatively presented a new pattern for Chinese biography composition. Mr. Zhu believes that a biography should not only completely record the life of the biographee, but also make thorough comments on his times, works and personality. *Comment Biography of Du Fu* develops in a time sequence, and relevant materials are masterfully inserted into the text to form a complex linear narration. By balancing literality and history, it has artfully and closely integrated historical facts with Du Fu's life experiences. The biographic theory of Zhu Dongrun has had a profound influence on the creation of later comment biographies, and *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin is no exception. However, this work further develops in structure, content and writing style, and becomes an imposing peak in the Chinese

¹⁴ Lin Geng, “Prologue”, in *Comment Biography of Du Fu* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁵ Fu Xuancong, “Prologue”, in *Comment Biography of Du Fu* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2003), 5.

history of biographic creation. *Comment Biography of Du Fu* by Chen Yixin is a peak in the creation of Chinese comment biographies.

Comment Biography of Du Fu by Chen Yixin is an iconic work for Du Fu study, and an encyclopedia of Du Fu's image. After reading *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, there is no-one who doesn't admire its profound argumentation, fine text analysis and rich knowledge storage. Professor Ge Xiaoyin wrote in the epilogue of *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, “*Comment Biography of Du Fu* has collected a lot of study fruits of past and contemporary scholars on Du Fu, and described in detail the historical scrolls before and after the Anshi Rebellion by referring to the author's rich knowledge of politics, economy, religion, philosophy, painting, architecture, music, dance, customs, and etiquette of official circles. He wove scores of poets into a large social net, and referred to many writers from Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties to Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing. By a comprehensive study and horizontal comparison, he portrayed the true image and complex character of Du Fu. It can be said that this book has centrally revealed his study characteristics.”¹⁶ Mr. Chen had always been admiring of Du Fu, and even carried a book of Du Fu's poems in his pocket during the Anti-Japanese War. When he was young, he once planned to write *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, but he felt his resources were insufficient. He began to write when he was middle-aged and knowledgeable, and finished it within five years. His *Comment Biography of Du Fu* has blended the writing style of novelists and the precise textual research of *littérateurs* with his acute aesthetic sight and profound academic capability to create a new style of Comment Biography. Fu Xuancong said in the prologue of *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, “The Comment Biography mainly adopted viewpoints of several annotators in Qing Dynasty – *Notes to Du Fu's Poems* by Qian Qianyi, *Appraisal of Du Fu's Poems* by Yang Lun, *Understanding of Du Fu's Poems* by Pu Qilong,

¹⁶ Ge Xiaoyin, “Epilogue”, in *Comment Biography of Du Fu* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2003), 1178.

and *Detailed Notes to Du Fu's Poems* by Qiu Zhao'ao. Among many annotations of Du Fu's poems, these books are outstanding. The *Comment Biography* quoted their comments, and analyzed them in today's perspective, together with Du Fu's life and social conditions at that time.”¹⁷ While discussing poems in *Comment Biography of Du Fu*, Mr. Chen interpreted the poems with elegant words, and fully analyzed them by referring to famous annotators. Therefore, with the help of classic interpretations of ancient scholars, he could understand the poem meanings for a full and deep understanding in the graceful perspectives of modern people. However, Mr. Chen didn't accept all of the statements of ancient scholars, but expressed his different opinions in a dialectical way. Chen Yixin made a very complete interpretation of Du Fu's poems. Du Fu's poems are profound in meaning, so sometimes people have to read them again and again to understand their implications and restore the true psychological statuses of Du Fu. When interpreting “As spring water lies south and north to the house, flocks of gulls come day after day,”¹⁸ Chen Yixin felt that Du Fu was still hospitable in heart, and not so indifferent as shown in “Guests Come”, “Glad to have no friends and trips, unnecessary to use my name in seclusion.”¹⁹ This shows that Du Fu's indifference was used to balance the reality of situations with relaxed feelings. Sometimes, Du Fu's poems are supplemental to historical materials. While interpreting “Reply to Sheren Jia Zhi's Morning Audience in Da Ming Palace”, by referring to the historical background at that time, Chen Yixin found, from this seemingly Prosperity-Singing Poem, a blind optimism among the poetry circle. He also appraised that age, stating that Su Zong was near-sighted.

Chen Yixin tried his best to fully restore the life course of Du Fu.

¹⁷ Fu Xuancong, “Prologue”, in *Comment Biography of Du Fu* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2003), 5.

¹⁸ Du, “For a Guest”, 793.

¹⁹ Du, “Two Poems for Pastime”, 794.