

Remembering Du Fu

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From the top of the Big Goose Pagoda, the grey-blue band of Chong Nan Shan (Bell Southern Mountains) is just visible in the south. Between are hamlets, plotted tracts of vegetable farms, fields of wheat and sorghum, and large swathes of land cleared for development. Somewhere in the south-east is Du Ling, Du Fu's ancestral village, where he tried to settle and obtain court tenure before the An Lu Shan Rebellion broke out in 752 AD. On a hill overlooking the village is Du Chi, one of the half-dozen *citangs* (verse-halls) marking the sojourn of China's poet-saint.

From the vantage point of this pagoda, built to house the sutras that Xuan Zang had brought back from India in 631 AD you can see Xian, China's ancient gateway to the west, its decaying old tenement blocks, half-vacant office complexes and government emporia, the Drum and Bell Towers at the hub of it, all contained by walls that date from the Ming Dynasty; there is no high-rise to break the skyline. This will all change on my second visit. In ten years the city will become unrecognisable and the new Xian, all gleaming glass and steel, will rise over the ashes of the ancient city. Five-star hotels, corporate towers, shopping complexes, condominium blocks, and tangles of cranes and girders, all sprouting like a rash in the Chinese cities, will make the most drastic alterations to the city since it became the capital of China during the Qin Dynasty. Out on the main commercial artery called Dongda Jie, the Chinese will be selling and buying with a vengeance. Where now the air hums with the clinking of bicycle bells, the plangent riffs of Chinese fiddle, zither, flute and the whiny voices of Chinese opera, it will rock with Beijing and Canto pop, and the even more deafening blare of techno-rock and rap. Outside fashion shops Chinese salesgirls will recite their mechanical litany of sale offers with the aid of a loudhailer. And the masses will be shopping with almost the same zeal with which they brandished the Red Book three decades ago, as if to make up for the years of Maoist deprivation. In and out of new multi-storey shopping complexes you will see a constant stream of the *nouveaux riches*, parting the rubber flap doors like an unrelenting cavalcade of worshippers flocking to the anonymous ferro-concrete temples of a new creed. Nothing will remain of the streams of bicycles, the dusty ancient alleys and street-hawkers, the almost half-somnolent city where you can still catch a distant echo of the glorious past of the Tang Dynasty capital that was the terminus of the Silk Road. Only perhaps in the figure of the old *laobaixin*, standing as if lost in a time warp, in his well worn Mao cap and suit, beneath a large screen on the facade of a new shopping centre displaying supermodels

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selling Dior and other Western brands forbidden just a decade ago, only in his confused and pained gaze will you be able to glimpse the old Xian.

Here in the Big Goose Pagoda, it is easy to drift among the white clouds with the Tang poets. Up its creaky steps the most illustrious names in Tang poetry have clambered: Wang Wei, Du Fu, Li Bai, Po Chu Yi and many others from the Song and later eras. Poems were written, like the graffiti of later tourists, to commemorate the visit, and to engrave for posterity: *We were here*. Framed copies, calligraphed by famous artists, hanging on the walls and oak eaves, are reminders of what fervent sightseers the Tang poets were. Many were relentless travellers; the career of a poet at that time included protracted travelling. These were like the Grand Tours of the Romantic writers, the itinerary taking in the famous sights – holy mountains and temples, lakes and gardens, far-flung wildernesses, inspiring meditations on place, nature and friendship. Du Fu had himself embarked on a few long trips in his youth, inscribing visits to celebrated sights in his early poems, most of which are presumably lost; one of those that have survived commemorates the visit to the Pagoda of Mercy and Grace, as the Big Goose Pagoda was then called:

On this tower riding the sky, the wind strong and unceasing,
Far from the care-free realm, the worries weighing as I climb,
I feel the power from the sutras, the strength to seek the truth.
The steps snake round and up the dim struts and spans.
Through the north window the Dipper wheels; westward the Heavenly River
flows.
The charioteer drives the sun home, the autumn has now arrived.
The Qin range breaking in cloud, and the Ching and Wei rivers are lost to
sight.
From here it's a world of mist; who can see Changan now?
Call the great Shun back from his dusky tomb;
Pity the Empress is still feasting on the lake of jade
While the sun disappears behind the Kunlun range.
The yellow cranes are still fleeing; where is their refuge?
See the migrating geese, relentless in their search for food. (all
translations my own)

He was here with four other friends, all court officials. Perhaps they had a wine-gourd with them and after a few toasts took turns composing, in a friendly literary competition which was obligatory when poet-friends gathered. Maybe one of the officials had the wherewithal to arrange for a table to be laid out with a wine jug and porcelain cups, brush, ink and scroll. Of the five poems written that day, one has been lost. The calligraphic prints of the other four adorn the walls on the sixth level of the pagoda. It is Du Fu's poem which stands out, the sorrowful compassion already in evidence, in marked contrast to his friends' more selfish interests and clichéd styles.

When he surveyed the country around him, Du Fu felt a mounting sense of sorrow and doom. He had failed the Imperial Examinations and was wondering what to do next. Besides being a tourist ritual, it was also a custom among those who passed, the *jinshis*, at the start of their imperial careers, to sign their autographs at the

Wild Goose Pagoda. So it couldn't have been a happy visit, especially as his companions had passed the bar. He had failed his forebears, who were all illustrious scholar-officials. More importantly, how was he going to feed his growing family? Added to his personal anxieties was his concern for the plight of the country. The Emperor Xuan Zong, who had shone brilliantly in the first decade of his reign and earned the name Ming Huang (Glorious Light), was bewitched by the concubine Yang Kuei Fei, neglecting his duties. In the capital, corrupt officials fattened their coffers while peasants lived on a starvation diet. The evil minister Li Lin-fu deliberately failed men like Du Fu to keep promising talents from the court. In the northwest the barbarian general An Lu Shan, the concubine Yang's adopted son and lover, was planning a revolt. The whole capital was bracing for the moment when the alarms would be lit. Only the Emperor seemed free from care, blissfully deaf to the encroaching doom.

Hence the dark note in the poem, the allusions to the political tragedy about to engulf the land. The prophetic note is not as pronounced as in Yeats' "The Second Coming," but the sense of doom is unmistakable as Du Fu contemplates his future and the fate of his country from this sacred tower.

A month ago, after a gruelling five-day bus ride from Lhasa, I visited the Du Fu Cottage and Museum in Chengdu. It is already a popular tourist site but is to be developed into a theme park. It is good to see China in 1997, for it seems to be a year that signals the end of the old and the unstoppable tsunami tide of the new.

It was purportedly built on the site where Du Fu had set up a homestead after trekking with his wife and children from Qin Chou (now Tianshui) in the Gansu Province across the forbidding Qin Ling range into the Szechuan basin. Qin Chou had proven to be another failure at setting up home. Since the An Lu Shan Rebellion started in 756 AD, Du Fu and his family had been on the move a lot. Commentators regard these moves as an attempt to flee the civil unrest that seemed to dog him and his family wherever they went. I think there is something deeper, a restlessness that drew his wife and children in tow over ten years of relentless wandering. After the outbreak of the Rebellion, Du Fu moved his family to Feng-hsien, north of Changan, and when the situation worsened, further north to Fu Chou. He then left them to follow the Court that eventually established itself in Feng-hsiang in a bid to oust the rebels from Changan (he'd finally gained a position just before the Rebellion erupted and was now promoted to the position of a Left Reminder for his loyalty). Du Fu was separated from his family for a year and after incurring the displeasure of the new Emperor took leave to see them. It was an arduous hike through rebel-held areas to Chiang Village where they were clinging on in ragged poverty. There was relief at seeing his family of nine alive (an infant son had died from hunger at the outbreak of the Rebellion), but his sense of sorrow and guilt was acute, as can be seen in the long poem "Journey North":

After a year I return to our thatched home,
To my wife and children, their clothes patched all over.
The sound of their crying echoes the wind through the pines,

And the stream seems to sob in sympathy.
Our son, my precious child, his face
Is now whiter than snow.
He turns and cries when he sees me,
His grimy feet exposed and cold.
In front of the bed are my two girls,
Their patched skirts barely covering their knees.

The sight of his starving family shocked Du Fu, and resulted in one of the most moving poems in Chinese literature. He asks, in a moment of despair: “What can I do?”

When the Court eventually regained Changan, Du Fu resumed his official role as Left Reminder; his role was to brief the new Emperor on his duties but he proved too honest and outspoken. He was transferred to an inferior grade position as Educator in Hua Chou, east of Changan. Unhappy with his post, and apprehensive of the rebel activities still simmering further north and east, Du Fu resigned and headed west with his family to Qin Chou, where he hoped a nephew would help him settle. It didn't take long for him to realise that the move was doomed; the land was arid and inhospitable, the climate harsh. The inhabitants scabbled for a living in grinding poverty. Du Fu had to beg from his nephew and the few friends like Abbot Chan who had fled Changan earlier. In desperation the family trekked one hundred and twenty miles south-west to Tong Gu; but the landscape turned out to be even more forbidding, if sublimely beautiful. It was a long way to go for nothing.

In 761 AD the family made their most difficult journey, from Tong Gu over the Qin Lin mountains to Chengdu. They had to negotiate the narrow, towering passes, sometimes single-filing over planks nailed to the side of a sheer cliff-face. The perils were recorded in a sequence of poems that, while taking in the unearthly beauty of the mountainous landscape, reveal Du Fu's anguish and self-recrimination in exposing his family to such tribulations. Trembling with exhaustion and relief at making it over the Sword Gate Pass, so named because the passage is so narrow that it is likened to a sword's width, Du Fu finally had Chengdu in sight.

In Chengdu he set up home and spent perhaps the most peaceful five years of his life in the wake of the An Lu Shan unrest, marred only by intermittent provincial revolts and the autumn winds of 761 AD that levelled the cottage. After the death of his patron and as political unrest flared, Du Fu decided to leave and bought a boat. Down the Yangtse the family sailed, until they arrived at Kuei Chou, where Du Fu was able to find a minor official appointment through a friend. Here was plenty, the fertile soils and wet climate ensured a steady supply of crops. The Chengdu years had witnessed a tremendous output of four hundred poems. Here, the two-year sojourn produced a comparable body of work – two hundred poems, many of which are suffused with concern about the plight of his countrymen and his longing to return to Changan. Life was cozy for once, but unfathomably Du Fu gave it all up and weighed anchor. Perhaps it was the diet, or the language, or the sense of being hemmed in by the gorges, but whatever it was, Du Fu threw his family into perilous straits again.

They began life on their frail boat, drifting down the Yangtse and then turning off into the Xiang River, travelling southward past the famous Yueyang Tower to present-day Changsha. They were on their way further south to seek refuge with a relative but floods and a local insurrection forced them to flee again. It is said that the ailing Du Fu died of food poisoning after eating a meal offered by a peasant. He was buried in Leiyang; later a grandson brought his remains back to the ancestral home near Luoyang.

Everywhere that Du Fu stayed, a shrine or *citang* has been set up. This veneration of the poet-saint began in the Song Dynasty and continued in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. But while the other shrines have suffered neglect, the Du Fu Cottage in Chengdu has grown into a tourist site, like Wordsworth's cottage in the Lake District. Through the centuries it has been visited by the scholar-gentry and officials, many of whom left memorial plaques of their visit (Mao and Deng have continued the tradition, their visits commemorated by photos in the museum). Du Fu is a thriving industry. There are souvenir shops offering Du Fu editions and commentaries, and scroll prints of his poems by famous calligraphers.

Here by the side of the Meandering Stream, the poet experienced perhaps the most tranquil period of his life. With help from a friend he had known at court and a few admirers, he built a cottage and planted an orchard around it. The cottage has been reconstructed according to the specifics Du Fu gives in the Chengdu poems, sparsely furnished with basic furniture to lend an authentic feel. There is even a millstone and a loom. It is easy to place one of the few untroubled poems Du Fu wrote:

The good rain knows its season, arriving in spring.
It comes on the night breeze, soaking the earth without a sound.
In the mist you can barely see the path, only the lights from the boats.
All round the flowers have arisen, and in their midst the Silk City.

But in the autumn of AD 761, a gale all but undid his hard work. In "My Cottage Unroofed by the Autumn Wind" Du Fu confronts the wreckage:

August, the autumn wind, fierce, howling,
Ripped the thatch off our cottage,
Scattering the straws across the stream
On the opposite bank and on the trees,
And some on the pond downstream.
The southern village children took advantage
Of my decrepit age; they snatched the straws
And vanished into the bamboo grove.
I shouted at them, until hoarse, breathless,
I returned, sighing, leaning on my cane.
The wind has stopped, the clouds still heavy and dark as ink,
And the light has drained from the autumn sky.
Our coarse blankets are stiff and cold like iron,
Rent in places by the children's restless sleep.
There is not a dry spot on the bed,

So unstoppable is the rain.
Since the Rebellion I haven't slept well
And it'll be hard getting through this drenched night.
If I had a thousand-roomed mansion
To house the shivering poor and give them joy,
A refuge that no storm or flood can destroy,
O if such a mansion would appear right now,
I'd be happy to freeze to death in my broken home.

It is this movement from his personal pain to compassionate involvement in the sufferings of others that has led critics to canonize Du Fu as a poet-saint over the centuries. Nine hundred years later, Shakespeare would broach the same existential issue in *King Lear* when Lear is confronted with the image of “unaccommodated man.”

Why have I begun to be interested in Du Fu, after immersing myself for years in Keats, Eliot, Rilke, Neruda? Is it because I am now rootless, and faced with an uncertain future, having abandoned the certainties of home for an emigrant life? Du Fu's poems never struck a chord like Wang Wei, Du Mu, Tao Yuan Min or Li Bai, but I can now see why he has been worshipped as China's greatest poet. No poet before Du Fu had wrestled with the sufferings of the “old hundred names” or the common folk, and provided such unflinching records of the political and social traumas triggered by the An Lu Shan Rebellion. His is the first instance of “the poetry of witness,” a poetry that is rooted in personal circumstances but looks outward to the troubles in the public realm. Du Fu isn't just the first historical poet of China; through the large number of surviving poems, we get perhaps the first really autobiographical poetry in the world. Further, he is perhaps the first anti-war poet. He is the poet of many Firsts. It has taken me so long to see this, though he was the first Chinese poet I was introduced to.

My first encounter with Du Fu took place when I was in my third year in Poi Ching Primary School. I was in the Chinese stream, where Chinese or rather Mandarin was the first language, and all subjects were taught in it. At that time, I was thinking and dreaming half in Mandarin and half in Cantonese. Later I would be taught to regard one as a proper language and the other as a dialect, when the Speak Mandarin Campaign started in the late 70s; but to a seven-or-eight-year-old, the different sounds had a way of fusing into a babel-like sense, the dialects – Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese, and even the Malay that I heard my grandmother speak so often – forming a continuum like one language, with an Edenic closeness to the things they describe.

Chinese is a painterly language. As you follow the sequence of strokes you realise the shape of the land under the brush. Each character, each ideogrammatic composite inscribes the thingness of a thing. It is a language grounded in the earth, even if it is the Chinese middle earth, and you experience an immediacy and connectedness absent from Indo-European languages. It is also a language of memory; the characters are learned by rote, sound and stroke welded in an ideogrammatic

whole. The best way to learn Chinese is to trace the ideograms in special exercise books with gridded sheets for laying out the constituent strokes in correct proportions. I remember being taught to grind the ink slab on the stone-well, and loading the bamboo brush with water, and to trace the characters in sinuous strokes on the thin glassine paper. Often I added one drop of water too many and the brush was too laden, littering the page with blotches and making thick clumsy figures when they were supposed to be slender and willowy.

My form teacher Mrs Li was from Beijing. In our eyes she was China personified, regal, distant, her rouged rice-paper face ancient, inscrutable like the Empress Dowager we saw in a Chinese TV series about the last days of the Qing Dynasty. I could almost smell the face-powder, see the cake of it in a box decorated with pretty Chinese girls, like the one on my grandmother's antique mahogany dressing table. Mrs Li always wore a *cheongsam* with a dark flowery print, and as she walked up and down the aisles between desks, I could breathe in the old China: the *hutong*, the palaces, the Great Wall, the Tang poets, Lu Hsun, Mao Dun, all periods of China coalesced for me in this stern and remote figure.

On the blackboard she would scratch out the *chiieh-chü* (quatrains) of Du Fu, Li Bai and Meng Hao Ran. Using the duster as a metronome, she would drill them into us, training us after her lilting cadence, those largely mournful, homesick poems. Du Fu was her favourite, her tone reverential when reciting his poems. I wonder now how much of her passion for Du Fu arose from her own homesickness.

Later I found out that she had fled China after 1949 with her parents, leaving an ancestral mansion that would be later divided into *hutong* quarters. I doubt that she ever made it back; she died in 1975, before Mao. On our black-and-white TV I saw thousands file past the coffined Great Helmsman and thought of Mrs Li, how one day she had stopped coming to school and the scent of old China vanished.

By then I had devoured *The Three Kingdoms*, the illustrated version of Sima Jian's history of China, *Water Margin*, *The Wanderings of San Mao* and the illustrated Tang poets. There was the Shanghai Bookstore on Victoria Street that I steered my mother to whenever we went to the Odeon, Jubilee or Capitol cinemas for a Shaw Brothers martial arts movie. Here you smelled Chinese books, a distinctly fresh feel tinged with the odour of calligraphy ink and goat-hair bamboo-handled brushes. Here was Chinese language, culture and history, compact, alive, a tangible and coherent presence that I never felt in an English bookstore.

Just after Mrs Li's death, my father made his periodic appearance and took it on himself to transfer me to an English-language school. After unsuccessful interviews with a few Catholic schools, including his *alma mater* St Anthony's, we ended up at Monk's Hill Primary, where the pipe-smoking principal turned out to be my father's secondary school classmate. Here I was enrolled and my life forever changed. At first it was a painful struggle to adapt, trying to make sense of an utterly different system of signs, a linguistic world that seemed arbitrary and had no correspondence in the real world. After a year I ceased to read Chinese books. I was weaned away on a daily diet

of Enid Blyton, *The Three Investigators*, *Hardy Boys*, stories from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. No longer did I think or dream in Mandarin or Cantonese.

It was a road I was taken from. Now, transplanted to a new country where I have to make a trip to Chinatown to hear Chinese spoken, and digging back into Du Fu and the Tang poets, I ponder the could-have-beens if my father hadn't taken me out of the Chinese school. Would I have written poetry in Chinese? Would I have been more at home in Chinese and hence have written differently or even not felt the need to write at all? Would I have ended up an emigrant, homesick for something I never had?

My train lumbers away from the vendors on the platform. It will be a three-day journey to the Dunhuang, from whose Buddhist caves Aurel Stein carted crates of Buddhist treasures. I look back at Xian, its ancient walls fading in the dusk. In Du Fu's time, exiled officials and soldiers going on frontier duty took a painful last look at the city, saying goodbye to it and all that was familiar, before they headed into the treacherous Gansu corridor. The thought must have crossed Du Fu's mind, as the city disappeared from sight, that he might never see it again.

He had seen the city at the pinnacle of its glory. It was then the most populous city in the world, and perhaps the most cosmopolitan. It was the terminus of the Silk Road for those coming from the west and the embarkation point for those heading west. Spices, silk, porcelain, metal, fruit, all imaginable goods exchanged hands here. The streets were laid out according to a cosmic plan and lined with fruit trees. Courtesans and princes paraded up and down the broad avenues. In the inns, exotic Central Asian girls entertained with song and dance, the barbarian music in vogue for a long time. There were Arabs, Jews, Persians, Turks, Indians, and possibly even Romans. Buddhists, Taoists, Nestorian Christians, Zoroastrians, Manicheans preached their gospels. Du Fu never got into Buddhism like Wang Wei but was attracted to it. He remained Confucian at heart, attached to the ideals of state and family, but longed periodically for a hermit's existence, far from court intrigues and civil strife.

Last week I finally found the Du Fu *citang* in Xian. I had asked the tourist information and hotel staff, but nobody could tell me where the *citang* was. Then I posed Xiao Liu, a young and earnest taxi-driver, the challenge of tracking it down. He is one of the million young Chinese hopefuls. He is also an aspiring writer. A few weeks ago, a magazine had published one of his short stories and then a local radio station read it. He showed me a piece after a day trip. It was whimsical and quite endearing. I said I liked it, whereupon he asked if I could translate it. I said I would consider if he could find the *citang*. He became instantly more resourceful and drove us to a hamlet that must have been Du Ling in Du Fu's time. A villager directed us up an incline and we arrived at a temple. There a monk directed us to a cave-house in the side of the hill.

The door was open and inside was a spartan room, with just a single bed, table, chair and a corner for cooking. A woman called from behind us. She was the custodian, in the blue jacket and trousers that seemed to be the nation's uniform not so long ago. Now, you see it only in the countryside. Liu said that we were here for the Du Fu shrine but were curious about her dwelling, as it was the first time we had seen

a cave-house. On the train to Xian we had seen the loess hills honeycombed with the famous Shaanxi cave-homes. The woman was clearly embarrassed but opened the door a bit more for us before diverting us back to the *citang*.

There was a main shrine built in 1526 south of its present location. After being destroyed in a fire, it was rebuilt in 1804 during the Qing Dynasty, next to the temple. The woman said that very few visitors come here. In fact, we were the first this year. The decay contrasted with the Chengdu shrine; the pavers shifted underfoot, a pile of rubbish was stowed in one corner and the vermilion paint was faded on the main temple and the side-hall called “Listening Rain.” The woman unlocked the doors, and then picked up her brushwood broom to sweep the courtyard, the dust clouds breaking the weak shafts of winter sun. A few yellow plums were putting out a meek fragrant display, the buds and flowers accentuated by the leafless branches and greyness of the yard.

In the central hall, a gold-painted statue of Du Fu sat on the altar, beneath the title of “Poet-Saint.” He looked like the Prosperity God, holding a tablet and smiling, no trace of sorrow in his face. In front was a Ming Dynasty table, badly scratched and worn; there were no joss-sticks, no offerings. On the walls around were peeling and yellowed prints of the poems, calligraphed and illustrated by well-known artists. On the bare dusty floor a black marble tablet leaned against the wall, on which was incised the only surviving image of Du Fu and a description of his life. It dated from the Song Dynasty and I wondered why the whole place hadn’t been stripped of these ill-maintained treasures. The life depicted on the walls – the relentless wandering, the unending suffering – was incongruent with the happy sage on the altar. I traced my fingers over the cracked Song Dynasty tablet, to glean a sense of the man who showed how poetry could be an authentic witness to your life and those around you. At least I sensed him better here than in the reconstructed cottage in Chengdu.

I walked out into the courtyard; the sweeping had stopped but the place was no cleaner. Dust swirled in the winter sun. There was a room next to the central hall. The clasps were broken and the weathered wooden door was invitingly ajar. The door groaned and the sun illuminated a dusty room, bare except for a crumbling plaster figure on the flagstone floor. It was Du Fu, literally broken; perhaps the local Red Guard contingent had hacked at it in their unstoppable zeal to demolish the old. The sorrow was written in the eyes, the downward-drawn mouth, and the sagging posture. Here all the sufferings depicted in the poems had found their apotheosis.



The train travels further into the Gansu Corridor, into the scarred, gullied monotone loess landscape punctuated by brick-and-tile villages with their peeling red couplets flanking the door and stacked bundles of maize. The City of Everlasting Peace recedes, its ancient walls barely containing the new glass and steel metropolis; it is hard to reconcile its new millennium image with the ancient city, imperial palaces, the Muslim quarter, the temple where Xuan Zang spent the rest of his life translating the sutras after returning from India, the Tang poets. In the outskirts of Xian the legions of terracotta soldiers have become a clichéd image of China's inscrutable history and grandeur. I remember first reading about the city in the illustrated comics of Chinese history; the black ink illustrations of its ramparts being scaled by armoured troops on long bamboo ladders. Then in 1972, our black-and-white Sharp TV showed the moment when the buried imperial terracotta army saw daylight after two millennia of funereal darkness. It stayed in the news for the next few months, a momentous discovery that changed the way the Chinese (including the *hua qiao* or overseas Chinese) thought about themselves. I followed the reports and even urged my grandmother to take me to an exhibition of replicas of the warriors in Chinatown. But when I finally saw them in person a few days ago, I felt neither wonder nor fascination. It was staggering, the scale of it, the three aerodrome-sized pits filled length and breadth with the individualized figures, and probably more to come. But it had been too long purveyed in the tourist consciousness for me to feel any real awe. I had seen enough of them in gardens, in the souvenir factories turning them out by the thousands, in the souvenir shops in Xian, in the miniatures pressed upon one by

indefatigable grandmothers ambushing every tourist bus that pulls into the big lots outside.

Maybe the battalions failed to impress because I was still carrying the crumbling plaster image of Du Fu when I circled the pits. And it is Du Fu's image that seems to embody for me the China that is there beneath its new facade. How much of the old China will survive the postmodern onslaught? The thought worries all who love the Tao, the Tang poets, the *hutongs*, the old ways. In my mind the broken figure seems to be mourning the ravages, its eyes filled with presentiment at the woes to come.

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