LI PO AND TU FU

Li Po (or Li T'ai-Po) and Tu Fu are seen by the Chinese as the two greatest poets of an age that to them, like our Renaissance, links the ancient with the modern world. The two poets were contemporaries and friends and shared a deep love of the poetry of the past, but were widely different in their own character and work. Yet they complemented one another so well that they came often to be spoken of as one, 'Li-Tu'; who, more than any single poet, covered the whole range of human nature.

Li Po (A.D. 701–62) was born in the far west of China, and probably had some knowledge of Central Asian languages and cultures. But to his contemporaries his talent was almost supernatural, so that he hardly seemed of earthly origin at all; his verses seemed to originate in something other than human consciousness, yet speak directly and simply to the human mind.

Tu Fu (A.D. 712–70) was born near the capital, of a family distinguished for service to the state. While Li Po seems to the Chinese to be a poet of the night and of man as a solitary animal in his dreams, Tu Fu is rather a poet of the day and of man in his other nature as a social animal. Tu Fu's poems chronicle his life and times with social conscience and compassion, but also present a convincing, unselfconscious portrait of the man himself.

Arthur Cooper began exploring foreign languages and poetry with Icelandic, as a boy, and later turned to Japanese and Chinese. He joined the civil service in 1938 and served in Hong Kong and Singapore 1939–42, and for several years under the British High Commission in Australia. He retired in 1968, when he was able to return to his early interests. He is now working on a new dictionary of Chinese characters.

Shui Chien-tung, artist and scholar, who has contributed calligraphy to this book, was, like Li Po, born in the far west of China. He is co-author with Bernard Martin of *Makers of China* (1972).