CHAPTER THREE

THE PENTAMETRICAL REGULATED VERSE OF HE ZHU, 1076–98

The world of pentametrical Regulated Verse (wu yuán lì shī or wú lü/五言律詩) is one in which the focus is on language. The poet explores and exploits tensions of sameness and difference between the words he places in corresponding positions within parallel couplets (usually, the two middle couplets of an eight-line poem). Sameness and difference include sound as well as meaning. The canonical tone patterns for the four types of lines are defined, it will be recalled, by level and deflected tones in the second and final syllables. Fanghui’s seventy-two dated pentametrical Regulated Verses always follow the ABCD sequence of line types. This does not condemn the poems to sameness, for there are four different ways of starting the sequence. Since the choice will determine the metrical limits for what one wants to say in each line in the rest of the poem, the four ways of starting a poem are not equally favored, nor do all poets share the same predilections. Within the overall framework of line types, the poet can create some tension by slightly violating the meter of an individual line. In certain places in pentametrical Regulated Verse this is actually the norm. Violations open up another choice for the poet: to compensate or not with another violation in the same or an adjacent line.

Perhaps for these reasons, Fanghui’s pentametrical Regulated Verse is much more likely to be written in apparent solitude, either in contemplation of a scene or while stopping on a journey. Heptametrical Regulated Verse is always the first choice for a quick response to a social occasion that calls for poetry; it requires less exactitude and refinement. Pentametrical Regulated Verse is comparable quantitatively to pentametrical Ancient Verse for use in farewells and correspondence.

POEMS WRITTEN BEFORE XUZHOU

The earliest pentametrical Regulated Verse Fanghui chose to preserve is the kind of quiet, apparently solitary meditation characteristic of this form in his hands. It describes an evening scene in the fifth month of Xining 9 (1076) in or near Lincheng 臨城. Although he entered the bureaucracy in 1071 at the age of twenty sui, Fanghui’s posting to Lincheng in 1075 is the first known assignment for our poet. His job was the collection of brew taxes, but he appears to have been an
acting magistrate for a time. The single poem in this genre from that period is 

Evening Prospect in the Aftermath of Rain.

Answering one another, baby pigeons call.

Among the mulberries, sunlight comes back level.

Bright forage: a small raft crosses;

high slope: a single ox plows.

Grove and thicket: the homeward heart is hale;

dust and dirt: these sickly bones grow light.

The poet Qu's spirit is still present:

it is not allowed that only you are pure.

Notes:

160-7/ “Qu sao” could refer to Qu Yuan's Li Sao, Encountering Sorrow, but I have chosen to see sao as short for sao ren, or “poet [with the connotations associated with Qu Yuan's lonely stance against his times],” The expression “Qu sao” is virtually unknown in other writers. In a Song from the year 1091, Fanghui repeats it, saying he pursues Qu sao.”

The scenic description in the first four lines is placid in the extreme, a classic example of a “scene” (jing) waiting to be completed by “feeling” (qing). The poet skillfully takes us from the sound of the birds to the horizontal rays of the setting sun, establishing the rural setting and time of day. Then he moves from the low-lying ford to the high, sloping field; most effectively, the raft and the ox each present a tiny point of activity in the midst of vastness—and, implicitly, a daily routine by which one might mark the flow of time.

The middle couplets are of great interest in a Regulated Verse. It is there that the poet is expected to use semantic parallelism but to do so in a way that surprises us somewhat. Semantic parallelism is based on the correlation of the corre-