

CHAPTER ONE

A Bureaucratized Aristocratic Lineage

Lu Chih was born in the thirteenth year of the T'ien-pao era (754 C.E.), the second reign period of emperor Hsüan-tsung, just before the An Lu-shan rebellion shattered the unity of the empire and reduced the "golden age" of the T'ang to the status of a bygone memory. We do not know exactly how Lu Chih was brought up in this turbulent age, but it is possible to establish a reasonably complete and reliable account of his family history, an account that also illustrates a significant aspect of T'ang social and political history—the bureaucratization of aristocratic lineages.¹

The Lu Lineage and T'ang Social Hierarchy

It is well understood that early and middle T'ang society, like the previous Six Dynasties and the Sui, was marked by clearly observed social segregation and stratification. An enormous gap existed between commoners (*shu-min*) and the elite class (*shih ta-fu*),² but within the elite class there were different categorizations to define the place of a lineage or a clan in that social hierarchy.³ Most members of the T'ang elite class belonged to the category of illustrious provincial lineages, but at the top of this class, a very small number of lineages made up what some modern historians call the "aristocratic families." What made these families aristocratic was their "hereditary high social status, independent of full court control."⁴ They were a super elite with national recognition.⁵ Most of

them began to emerge from the early fourth century on when north China was taken over by non-Chinese rulers.

Education and culture, economic wealth, local power based upon accumulated landed property and clan solidarity, the practice of marriage exclusivity, and ingrained social respect for birth all amounted to valuable assets for the rise of these aristocratic lineages. Local property ownership seems to have been the most important of these assets for ensuring their survival during dynastic changes.⁶ Such lineages enjoyed high esteem and great influence in society; this enormous social prestige usually guaranteed them high ranks in the nine-tiered system of official recruitment, thus allowing successive members of these great families to dominate most top government positions during the Six Dynasties.⁷ Their participation in government further perpetuated their overall socio-economic power, and they survived into the T'ang despite the rise and fall of dynasties.⁸

Liu Fang (fl. ca. 740–765), a mid-eighth-century historian and genealogist, singled out four regionally based groups of aristocratic lineages as the most eminent families in T'ang China.⁹ Two of these groups were in the north and two were in the south. In the north were the Shan-tung aristocratic families (*east of the mountains*, included modern Hopei, Honan, and central Shansi), the most prestigious group among the four elite groups, and the so-called Kuan-lung block to which the T'ang ruling house belonged. The Kuan-lung group was formed by an alliance of Kuan-chung (modern southern Shansi and modern Shensi) and Tai-pei (modern northern Shansi) aristocratic families. The two groups holding local power in southeast China were defined as the southern aristocracy. One of them consisted of emigré clans, and the other constituted a native aristocracy. The native aristocracy in the south seems to be culturally closer to the northern aristocracy than to the southern emigré clans. They paid serious attention to Confucian classical education as did the northern aristocratic families, while belles lettres and Buddhism occupied a much more important place in the cultural consciousness of their aristocratic neighbors.¹⁰

Lu Chih's family belonged to the Wu *chün* Lu lineage (the Lu lineage of Wu commandery), one of the four most prestigious representatives of the native southeast aristocracy.¹¹ This makes his family culturally more in line with the tradition of support for Confucian classical education than that of literary writing. Of course, it does not follow that literary pursuits would have had no place in the education of the Lu lineage, and although Lu Chih considered

himself primarily a follower of the Confucian teaching, he also excelled in literary composition.

Comparatively speaking, due to the suffering and losses inflicted on the southern aristocracy by repeated military uprisings in the sixth century, their power and prestige could not rival that of the northern aristocratic groups. Ch'ang-an being the T'ang capital and the center of cultural and political activities also put the southern aristocratic families in an inferior position vis-à-vis the northern aristocracy. Nevertheless, in Liu Fang's view, this did not alter their superior social position in the T'ang elite class as a whole. In short, though Lu Chih's southeastern lineage held a less prominent position than the northern aristocratic families, it still occupied the highest levels of T'ang social structure.

The presence of powerful aristocratic clans was one of the main characteristics of T'ang social structure, but, ironically, it was precisely during this era that the bureaucratization of the aristocracy began to take place through the examination system (*k'o-chü chih-tu*). In the process of being bureaucratized, a process that was not complete until near the very end of the dynasty, members of the aristocratic clans always had a better chance to enter and advance in the T'ang bureaucracy.¹² Before the collapse of the T'ang, no matter how the aristocracy was transformed, the standing in social and political life of a person like Lu Chih was always closely related to his family background.

A Profile of the Lu Lineage

Wu *chün*, home region of the Lu lineage, was an administrative district that included the southeast and the northeast areas of modern Kiangsu and Chekiang provinces. In 758 the T'ang court replaced the old Han name of Wu *chün* with Su-chou,¹³ but both names were used interchangeably throughout the later half of the dynasty. Altogether there were seven counties included in Su-chou or Wu *chün* under T'ang rule.¹⁴ Situated in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, it constituted one of the most important economic areas of the T'ang state, especially after the An Lu-shan rebellion.

Both the *New T'ang History* genealogy (HTS *tsai-hsiang shih-hsi piao*) and a preface to the recompiled genealogy of the forty-nine branches written in 812 by Lu Shu¹⁵ agree that one Lu Lieh initiated the history of the Lu lineage in Wu county (Wu *hsien*) of Wu *chün*.¹⁶ We do not know when this took place, but it seems

certain that before the Eastern Han (25–220), the Lu lineage was already firmly established in that area. The *History of the Eastern Han* (*Hou Han shu*) unmistakably refers to the Lus of Wu *chün* as “a prominent surname for generations” (*shih wei tsu-hsing*).¹⁷ Early in 634, the Lu family already appeared in an imperially approved list of “notable clans” (*wang-shih*).¹⁸ Even in the late tenth century it was still recognized as one of the illustrious “four surnames” in the southeast.¹⁹ Apparently, the Lu family developed into a very large kinship organization several centuries before the T'ang.

Up to the Eastern Chin dynasty (317–420) the Lu clan contained at least eight branch groups.²⁰ By the mid-T'ang, the clan became so large that it expanded to forty-nine branches which were acknowledged by the imperial ruling house. Lu Shu's 812 Preface advises each subgroup of the Lu clan to establish a separate genealogy; otherwise, he warns, the lineage history might be lost due to demographic expansion.²¹

Despite this proliferation of Lu subgroups, only three branches are mentioned in the *New T'ang History*, presumably because they produced six chief ministers during the T'ang. These three subgroups included the Tan-t'u branch, the T'ai-wei (Defender in Chief) branch and the Shih-lang (Vice Director) branch, which Lu Chih's immediate family belonged to.²² Tan-t'u was the name of a county (modern Chen-kiang in Kiangsu); the other two clan names referred to the official titles assumed by their branch ancestors.

Of these three subgroups, only the activities of the T'ai-wei branch is continuously documented in pre-T'ang dynastic histories.²³ Only the T'ai-wei branch, with its regional base in Wu *hsien* of Wu *chün*, was considered one of the four prominent aristocratic lineages in the southeast area. This is largely due to its enormous social prestige and its members' powerful positions in government.²⁴ Compared with the T'ai-wei branch, information about members of the pre-T'ang Tan-t'u and Shih-lang branches is quite limited.²⁵ It was only in the T'ang that members of the Tan-t'u and Shih-lang families began to make their lineages well known.

Its accumulated social esteem and powerful influence and its geographically concentrated local base sustained the Lu lineage during the military rebellions and political chaos at the end of the Six Dynasties. But how did it maintain power and continue its reputation for being a member of the national elite in the T'ang, an era when the social and political stage was mainly dominated by the northern aristocracy, and the imperial rulers attempted to build

a strong and effective bureaucracy? Tracing the emergence of members of the three major Lu branches in T'ang history reveals how the Lu lineage acquired its super elite position in the T'ang social hierarchy, and demonstrates the process of radical transformation of a prominent T'ang aristocratic clan.

The Tan-t'u Branch

Lu Te-ming (original name: Yüan-lang, ca. 560–630) carried the line of the Tan-t'u subgroup into the T'ang. His erudition won him respect and office in both the Ch'en (557–589) and Sui (581–617) dynasties. When T'ai-tsung, then Prince of Ch'in, recruited him to be an Academician of the Institute of Education (or Academy of Literary Study, *Ch'in-fu wen-hsüeh-kuan hsüeh-shih*) in his palace, Te-ming had already achieved a reputation as a renowned classical scholar. He was also known for his loyalty because he refused to serve the rebel general Wang Shih-ch'ung.²⁶ In 624, Lu Te-ming greatly enhanced his reputation as a Confucian scholar in a debate on Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.²⁷ He was subsequently promoted to the rank of Erudite of the National University (*Kuo-tzu po-shih*), and ennobled as Baron of Wu-hsien (*Wu-hsien nan*).²⁸ Te-ming's erudition confirms the general consensus that the native southern aristocracy had an intense interest in Confucian classical education. Te-ming was one of only two members of the entire Lu lineage to serve in the governments of the first two T'ang emperors,²⁹ and his rise in T'ang officialdom depended not so much on his family background as on his prestige as a learned Confucian scholar.³⁰ Lu Te-ming himself never seems to have acquired substantial political power, but it is significant that one of his two sons, Lu Tun-hsin, rose to be chief minister from 665 to 666 under Emperor Kao-tsung (r. 649–683).³¹

By the late months of 660, Kao-tsung's court was firmly controlled by his favorite consort, Empress Wu Tse-t'ien.³² In spite of her recent victory in liquidating all her enemies in the top echelons of government, Empress Wu continued to amass all the support she could within the bureaucracy to pave the way for a future takeover of the imperial throne.³³ To promote someone from a southern aristocratic lineage whose immediate family had become more recognizable under T'ang rule would both maintain the previous policy of balancing the power of regional aristocratic groups and cultivate

her own power base.³⁴ It is very likely that the elevation of Lu Tun-hsin to the post of chief minister was engineered by Empress Wu for just those reasons.

Descendants of the Tan-t'u branch continued to serve in the T'ang bureaucracy until the end of the dynasty. Most of them occupied either high- or middle-rank positions.³⁵ In all, there were twenty-one male members in the Tan-t'u branch during the T'ang era. Fifteen of them served in the government; most of their appointments seem to have been concentrated in the metropolitan area far away from Wu chün.³⁶ While their active participation in the bureaucracy apparently helped them sustain their branch's elite status in society, it simultaneously increased their dependence on the T'ang state.

The T'ai-wei Branch

The T'ai-wei branch was the largest subgroup of the Lu lineage. During the T'ang period alone, it produced one hundred and fourteen male offspring, eighty-one of whom served in the government, three of them as chief minister.³⁷ The earliest T'ang member of this branch was Lu Shan- jen who served as a local official early in the dynasty.³⁸ We do not know how Shan- jen became an official, but his eldest son, Lu Chien- chih, was famous for calligraphy, and this talent most certainly earned him access to the bureaucracy.³⁹ Still, the T'ai-wei branch does not seem to have regained its powerful pre-T'ang position in the government until Chien Chih's nephew, Lu Yüan- fang (639-701), rose to be chief minister during Empress Wu's reign (690-705).⁴⁰

Lu Yüan- fang entered the bureaucracy through the doctoral examination system. He passed the *ming-ching* (enlightening the classics) examination and special decree examinations, probably around 659.⁴¹ At this time, the *ming-ching*, with its emphasis on classical scholarship, still had much greater prestige than the *chin-shih* (advanced scholar) examination. This situation was reversed after 681 when Kao- tsung, under the influence of Empress Wu, made literary composition a required subject in the *chin-shih* examination, and made it much more difficult than the *ming-ching*. From then on, the *chin-shih* examination gradually became the most prestigious and important channel for acquiring official status.⁴²

Another early member of the T'ai-wei branch who also entered the civil service by means of the doctoral examination was Yüan- fang's uncle, Lu Yü- ch'ing. He did not take the *ming-ching* examination, but rather obtained the *chin-shih* degree sometime during

Kao-tsung's reign.⁴³ If this was after 681, it would be apparent that he chose the more difficult and more highly regarded route to enter the bureaucracy just as Yüan-fang had done by taking the *ming-ching* examination before 681.

Lu Yüan-fang and Lu Yü-ch'ing had similar careers. They were the first two T'ai-wei Lus to pass the doctoral examinations to acquire a nominal official status. This shows that their classical scholarship and writing ability reached a certain recognizable standard, and it implies that their decisions to take the examinations could have been influenced by Kao-tsung's new, 659, emphasis on the importance of the examination system.⁴⁴ The examination system was not the only access to nominal official status,⁴⁵ but it gradually became a necessary route for officials who had ambitions for the highest positions in the court.⁴⁶ It was then no coincidence that both Yüan-fang and Yü-ch'ing chose to join the bureaucracy through the doctoral examinations. They must have realized that passing the most prestigious doctoral examination in their time was the surest way to enter and advance in the bureaucracy. What is more important, they must also have believed that it was the safest channel to preserve their families' traditional power. It would perhaps not be far-fetched to assume that the increasingly close relationship between the *chin-shih* examination and bureaucratic advancement gave some of the Lus a great incentive to strive for literary excellence.

Both Yüan-fang and Yü-ch'ing's promotions to high-ranking posts were conferred by Empress Wu as rewards for their accomplishments in the border regions.⁴⁷ This again demonstrates that to consolidate her own power, Empress Wu apparently preferred to promote men who were not likely to get involved in factional intrigues and whose immediate families had just begun to participate in the government.⁴⁸

The power and prestige of the T'ai-wei branch was reassured by Yüan-fang and Yü-ch'ing's performance in government and was continued by that of their descendants. Their official accomplishments even allowed some of their sons to enter the bureaucracy through the protective *yin* privilege.⁴⁹ As far as we know, at least six members of the T'ai-wei branch occupied different official posts during Hsüan-tsung's reign (712-756). Their achievement must have helped to establish a powerful position in the bureaucracy. Ironically, the bureaucratic success of the T'ai-wei Lus loosened their ties with their local property base in Wu *chün*. Thus, either in the late eighth or the ninth century, the descendants of Lu Yüan-fang began gradually to sell off their local property.⁵⁰

This sale of local property seems to have been a logical result of their success in the T'ang bureaucracy. Living a bureaucratic life at court and in different parts of the T'ang empire must have made it difficult for the T'ai-wei Lus to care for their local holdings in Wu *chün*. In the late ninth century, Lu Yüan-fang's seventh-generation grandson, Lu Kuei-meng (d. ca. 881), considered himself impoverished even though he is said to have owned several hundred Chinese acres (*mou*) of farm land and thirty houses in the southeast.⁵¹ If this was the case, then their property holdings in the eighth century must have been even larger. Maintaining such a large amount of landed property far from Ch'ang-an would become a burden for the Lus if they wanted to succeed in a government that increasingly tended toward the bureaucratization of pretentious aristocratic families.

Once the T'ai-wei Lus sold their local property, they could always buy land near the capital or in the popular Lo-yang region. This was exactly what many other aristocratic families did during the T'ang. In so doing, these aristocratic families became more and more centralized as a metropolitan elite and gradually lost their local ties.⁵² As a result, the power base supporting their aristocratic cachet was also in danger. From the point of view of the aristocratic families as a whole, the sale of property by the T'ai-wei Lus testifies to the ever accelerating trend toward bureaucratic transformation of the aristocracy.

There were also some members of the T'ai-wei branch who stayed in Wu *chün* and gained fame through scholarship or a Taoistic lifestyle without entering the bureaucracy. One was the above mentioned Lu Kuei-meng, a late T'ang *chin-shih* and a renowned classical scholar.⁵³ On the other hand, Lu Kuei-meng's uncle, Lu Hsi-sheng (d. ca. 895) and his descendants do not seem to have given up the pursuit of official appointments. Lu Hsi-sheng was even appointed to the position of chief minister in 895, though he only served for a short while.⁵⁴ Compared with the bureaucratic path taken by the majority of the T'ai-wei Lus, or for that matter the Tan-t'u Lus, Lu Kuei-meng's case is an exception to the general trend of Lu clan development during the T'ang.

The Shih-lang Branch and Lu Chih's Immediate Family

This general trend of active government service applied equally to the evolution of the Shih-lang branch. Because there is some confusion about this branch, and because this is the branch to which

Lu Chih's immediate family belonged, I offer here a revised picture of the Shih-lang branch.

Unlike the T'ai-wei and Tan-t'u Lus whose sub-choronym was always represented by Wu *hsien* of Wu *chün*, the geographic base of the Shih-lang branch was in Chia-hsing county of Wu *chün*.⁵⁵ It is not clear when the Shih-lang group became established in Chia-hsing but, like the Tan-t'u branch, it could not match the T'ai-wei branch for prestige and power either before or during the T'ang.⁵⁶

The founder of the Shih-lang branch was Lu Kuan. The only information we have about him is that he occupied the post of vice director of the secretariat (*Chung-shu shih-lang*) in the Eastern Chin dynasty. Lu Kuan's seventh-generation grandson, Lu Hsün, acquired an important position in the southern Ch'en dynasty.⁵⁷ From the Ch'en dynasty to the early T'ang, the Shih-lang Lus do not seem to have obtained any position in the bureaucracy. It is only during the K'ai-yüan era (713-741) that we find Lu Hsün's ninth-generation grandson, Lu Ch'i-wang, serving as director of the Palace Library (*Pi-shu-chien*).⁵⁸ This position was usually conferred upon officials who had outstanding literary talents,⁵⁹ and it is most probable that Lu Ch'i-wang also relied upon such gifts to enter the bureaucracy. The *New T'ang History* genealogy records that Ch'i-wang had eight sons, and all of them received official appointment. The same source states that one of his sons, Lu Pa, was Lu Chih's father, thus making Lu Ch'i-wang Lu Chih's grandfather.⁶⁰

This genealogical attribution for the Shih-lang branch has created a certain amount of confusion, especially in relation to Lu Chih's direct family. Instead of eight sons as listed in the *New T'ang History* genealogy, Lu Ch'i-wang had only six sons. The eldest son named in this genealogy was Lu Mi, and he really belonged to a Lu clan in Honan that was of foreign origin. This explains why Lu Mi was not included as Lu Ch'i-wang's son in the *Yüan-ho hsing-tsuán*.⁶¹ The two Lu Ch'ans listed in the genealogy refer to the same person, two different characters for Ch'an being used interchangeably during the T'ang.⁶² From a contemporary essay, we know that Ch'i-wang's six sons should very likely be listed in the following order of seniority: Lu Wei, Lu Feng (or Lu Li), Lu Pa, Lu Jun (or Lu Chien), Lu Huai, and Lu Ch'an.⁶³ Meanwhile, contrary to the *New T'ang History* genealogy, it seems that among Lu Ch'i-wang's six sons only Lu Feng's (or Lu Li's), not Lu Ch'an's, family line extended into the last years of the T'ang.⁶⁴

Lu Pa, Ch'i-wang's third son, was not Lu Chih's father. Lu Chih's father was named Lu K'an.⁶⁵ The name provided by Ch'üan

Te-yü (759–818) in his preface to Lu Chih's collected works is Lu K'an-ju,⁶⁶ but it is quite certain that these two names refer to the same person, and that Lu Chih's father was Lu K'an or Lu K'an-ju.⁶⁷ Were Lu Pa and Lu K'an also the same person? The answer is no. Ch'üan Te-yü was Lu Pa's friend. He once composed a rhapsody (*fu*) to see Lu Pa off for Ching-chou (modern Hupei).⁶⁸ If Lu Pa were indeed Lu Chih's father, or if Lu Pa and Lu K'an were the same person, it would seem very unreasonable for Ch'üan Te-yü not to have mentioned any of these "facts" in his preface to Lu's extant works. Furthermore, since Lu Chih's father died long before Lu reached adulthood, and since Ch'üan Te-yü was five years younger than Lu Chih, it would have been virtually impossible for Ch'üan Te-yü to have befriended Lu Pa if Lu Pa were Lu Chih's father. Evidently, Lu Pa and Lu K'an were two different people; Lu Pa was Lu Ch'i-wang's third son and definitely not Lu Chih's father. Lu Chih belonged to another family under the Shih-lang branch.

As listed in the *Yüan-ho hsing-tsuán*, Lu Chih's grandfather was Lu Ch'i-cheng, Ch'i-wang's cousin. He served as a district magistrate, probably during the K'ai-yüan era when Ch'i-wang was a director in the Palace Library. Lu Ch'i-cheng had only one son whose name, as mentioned above, was Lu K'an or Lu K'an-ju. Like his father, Lu K'an's only official position was also as magistrate, either of Li-yang or Li-shui county (near modern Nanking).⁶⁹ We don't have the slightest idea how Lu K'an and his father started their careers, but their descendant, Lu Chih, certainly acquired his official status through the *chin-shih* examination.

The *Yüan-ho hsing-tsuán* says that Lu K'an had two other sons besides Lu Chih: Lu Shang and Lu Keng.⁷⁰ This contradicts the *New Tang History* genealogy which lists Lu Wei as Lu Shang's father and says nothing about Lu Keng.⁷¹ Since this genealogy is often mistaken,⁷² as has already been shown by its incorrect identification of Lu Pa as Lu Chih's father, it seems more reasonable to believe that Lu Shang and Lu Keng were Lu Chih's brothers, even though we have no way to prove it. In any event, as far as we know, their family line seems to have been transmitted only by Lu Chih's son Lu Chien-li. Aside from knowing that Chien-li obtained his *chin-shih* degree no earlier than 816, his life remains a complete blank.⁷³

Having established a more accurate genealogy of the Shih-lang branch, and gained a better understanding of the connection between Lu Chih's immediate family and Lu Ch'i-wang's family, I can

now discuss the most important characteristics the Shih-lang branch shared with the other two subgroups within the Lu lineage.

Most Important Shared Characteristics

The first distinct feature of the Shih-lang branch, also enjoyed by members of the Tan-t'u and T'ai-wei branches, is their cultivated background. One of their contemporaries once described Lu Ch'i-wang's sons in this way: "Lu Feng and his younger brothers Lu Pa, Lu Jun, and Lu Huai were all famous for their literary abilities and virtuous conduct (*wen-hsing*)."⁷⁴ This was the image of the Lu brothers, Lu Chih's uncles, among their contemporaries. The Lu brothers' circle of friends also included many illustrious literary figures of the time. Lu Wei, the eldest or second eldest of the six sons, was highly regarded by the notable prose stylist Hsiao Ying-shih (717-759).⁷⁵ His younger or elder brother, Lu Feng (or Lu Li), was a close friend of another literary talent, Hsiao Ts'un (739-800), Hsiao Ying-shih's son.⁷⁶ He had many other famous literati friends besides Hsiao Ts'un. They ranged from poets like Lu Lun and Ch'ien Ch'i, members of the Ten Literary Talents of the Ta-li Era (766-779, *Ta-li shih ts'ai-tzu*) to the renowned Buddhist monk Chiao-jan. The poems exchanged between Lu Feng and his literati friends confirm his own reputation for poesy.⁷⁷ This literary tradition of the Lu brothers was continued by Lu Feng's great grandson, Lu I, in the late-T'ang.⁷⁸

The next characteristic of the Shih-lang branch which constituted a common denominator of the Lu lineage is their active participation in the T'ang bureaucracy. Like the other two major subgroups, the great majority of the Shih-lang branch members also engaged in government service. So far as we know, Lu Ch'i-wang's six sons all served in the government, as did all the male members of Lu Chih's immediate family.

We cannot be certain about the exact means through which some of the Shih-lang Lus entered the bureaucracy, but their literary skills were clearly a facilitating factor. In other words, education and culture, two of the most important attributes of the aristocracy, still served as stepping stones to their official careers. For example, we do not know Lu Wei's exact official position,⁷⁹ but he seems to have attained it with Hsiao Ying-shih's recommendation due to Hsiao's high regard for his literary accomplishments.⁸⁰ Lu Feng, who was still at court in 800, also seems to have relied

upon his literary reputation to acquire official appointment.⁸¹ His service in the government was contemporaneous with Lu Chih's career as was that of all of Lu Ch'i-wang's sons. Lu Huai's literary abilities may have won him a good grade in the examination system and led to an appointment as editor in the Palace Library (*Pi-shu sheng chiao-shu-lang*) in 790.⁸² At the very beginning of the T'ang bureaucratic system, this position was considered by T'ang scholars a good starting point for a promising career.⁸³ Since Lu Chih enjoyed tremendous imperial favor in 790, it is possible that he helped Lu Huai obtain this starting position. Both Lu Chih and his son also acquired official rank through their literary talent. The manner in which the Shih-lang Lus entered and rose in the T'ang bureaucracy clearly demonstrates that literary excellence was crucial in their pursuit of a bureaucratic career.

The final characteristic shared by the Shih-lang branch and the other two Lu subgroups is that their willingness to participate in bureaucratic life also led to gradual alienation from their local base. This can be seen in the careers of Lu Feng's descendants and in Lu Chih's own official life. Lu Chih's political life will soon be explored in detail; one example is sufficient to illustrate this point here.

Lu Feng's great grandson, Lu I, passed the *chin-shih* examination in 886. Inheriting his family's chief traits, Lu I's talent for literature also won high praise from his contemporaries; largely on that account he soon rose to be chief minister in 896 under Emperor Chao-tsung (888-904). Lu I was considered a native of Shan-chou (northwest of Lo-yang, in modern Honan) instead of Wu *chün* because his family moved there from Wu *chün*, presumably when his father acquired an official position in Shan-chou. Their bureaucratic service entailed closer ties with the state. As a result, when the T'ang central government was on the verge of collapse, Lu I also had to spend his political life in the shadow of imminent chaos. He met a tragic death at the end of Chao-tsung's reign.⁸⁴

Since all of these three main characteristics will be equally reflected in Lu Chih's political life, it is time to determine what status Lu Chih's immediate family assumed within the Shih-lang branch.

The Status of Lu Chih's Immediate Family

Most of Lu Chih's uncles, Lu Ch'i-wang's six sons, served at court when he did, but the exact relationship between Lu Chih and them

remains quite unclear. We do know that the two well-known poets Lu Lun and Ch'ien Ch'i,⁸⁵ authors of the only poems to Lu Chih now extant, were good friends of Lu Feng. Because of the early death of Lu Chih's father, his older uncles probably introduced him to the literary world during his childhood. Moreover, in 791, when Lu Ch'i-wang's wife (*née* either Cheng or Ho-lan) died, Lu Chih composed her tomb inscription.⁸⁶ There must have been other similar instances to demonstrate the relationship between Lu Chih and his uncles, but the available sources do not permit speculation.

Lu Chih shared some experiences with his uncles' families, but his immediate family's status seems to have been inferior to that of Lu Ch'i-wang's, at least before Lu Chih became chief minister in 792. Lu Chih himself once said "my family has been very poor."⁸⁷ He might have been exaggerating, but his statement does imply that they were probably not very affluent. Of course, lack of wealth was never the only factor determining the inferior status of a family. The comparatively low-ranking official positions occupied by Lu Chih's grandfather and father, the early death of his father, and the small number of male offspring from his family participating in the government would all have contributed to his family's status. It is true that Lu Chih's mother was a member of the prominent Wei clan from the Kuan-chung aristocracy, but how high his mother's immediate family stood within the Wei clan, and to what extent the influence of his mother's family could have reached to the Shih-lang branch remain unknown. The aristocratic background of Lu Chih's mother could certainly have made it easier for her to provide her children with education and culture, absolutely necessary accomplishments for members of a prominent lineage and key prerequisites for a bureaucratic career.

To put it plainly, the status of Lu Chih's immediate family does not seem to have matched that of his uncles, and the Shih-lang branch in turn was not as powerful as the T'ai-wei branch, though it might have enjoyed equal status with the Tan-t'u subgroup. In other words, Lu Chih's own family occupied a secondary position within the Shih-lang branch, and, at most, a third-class standing within the three major Lu branches.

In the process of reconstructing Lu Chih's immediate family background, and examining the overall development of the three major Lu branches, two important points emerge. First, although family background was not the exact basis upon which Lu Chih and the other Lus entered the T'ang bureaucracy, their aristocratic

family upbringing provided them with all the skills needed to join the bureaucratic competition. Admittedly, Lu Chih's immediate family ranked only third within the three major Lu subgroups, but being a member of the Wu *chün* Lu lineage would have already given Lu Chih's family assured status among the illustrious aristocratic families of the T'ang. In short, the relatively inferior position of Lu Chih's immediate family within the Lu clan did not change the overall superior status of his larger family in T'ang society, nor did it alter his status as an aristocratic member of that society.

Second, the development of the Wu *chün* Lu lineage unequivocally demonstrates that a southern aristocratic lineage, though surviving dynastic changes in the pre-T'ang period, could no longer preserve its previous independence in a unified T'ang empire. The emphasis on the examination system as the major channel for entrance into the bureaucracy and especially for rising to the highest official positions, definitely led many Lus to take the examinations. Their willingness to seek official positions and their settlement in the metropolitan area to preserve those positions played an even more significant role in their bureaucratization. Since their bureaucratic success entailed the gradual loss of their local power to sustain themselves during times of violent dynastic change, it seems unavoidable that when the collapse of the T'ang state grew imminent, their fate as the medieval aristocracy was also sealed.

The sad future of the Wu *chün* Lu lineage is outside the scope of this study, and so I now turn to Lu Chih's own life.