The mid-T'ang society as manifested in the "New Music Bureau Poems" of Po chu-i

Mid-T'ang society was predominantly an agrarian society in spite of the rapid expansion of trade and industry. The land remained the major means of production and thus the chief source of revenue.

The outbreak of An lu-shan's rebellion began an entirely new phase of the land problem. It led to a total breakdown of the registration system on which the whole complex of land tenure and taxation had depended. The rebellion led to the depopulation of large agricultural areas, and further accelerated the population movements from the north to the south.

Politically, there was a manifestation of a deep tension in the ruling class between the old aristocracy and the new class of bureaucratic officials who had risen to power during the latter half of the seventh century through the imperial examination system. Also, the eunuch officials were interfering into the political affairs and formed themselves into cliques scrambling for political power. The mid-T'ang emperors thus lost their power of ruling the country. The people suffered under the internal conflicts among the ruling class.

The society witnessed the devastations of the barbarians from North China. Wars occurred frequently. In order to match with the defensive wars, the peasants were encouraged to join in the army. Heavy taxes and many
surcharges were levied on the people of lower classes.

Po Chu-i, a famous poet (772 - 846), holding a position of censor in the T'ang government, saw the significance and importance of reflecting the society's weaknesses and deterioration. Although he was from a middle class landlord family, he chose to manifest the hardship of the people and draw the attention of the ruling class to the necessity of taking remedial action in his "New Music Bureau Poems".

In this academic exercise, the writer attempts to divide these poems into five categories: political, economic, social, military, and religious, and tries to examine the Mid-T'ang society through the view point of Po Chu-i.