Li Po was a poetic genius of T'ang Dynasty who left for posterity a collection of poems of great beauty. The thoughts and feelings reflected in the poet's writings are complex and varied, and these in turn are closely related to the author's experiences and to his troubled mind. This essay will focus mainly on an elaboration of the social climate prevailing at Li Po's time and on how such social milieu gave rise to the conflicting thoughts of the poet and to the manifestedly different ideas he expressed at different points of time.

Li Po was born at K'ai Yiian, a time when the T'ang Dynasty was at its most prosperous. Living in an opportune era like this, Li Po was confident of his future and the desire to pursue a political career in the Imperial System was evident in the early part of his life. For a while, he lived in seclusion and followed a retired, Taoist sort of existence. He was nevertheless devoting considerable time to writing and this might in future facilitate his entry into politics.

The much-admired errantry which had set a popular social trend at this period also affected Li Po, judging from the casual view he held towards personal wealth and his fondness in seeing justice done and in rendering helping hand to underdogs.

The Confucian in him tempted Li Po to seek an active public life but the Taoist influence and the lessons of history forewarned him against meddling in worldly affairs, and caused him against to feel apprehensive about public success and fame. His abhorence of the unscrupulous pursuit of public fame was influenced
by the errant practice of dispensing aids without want of reward or recognition. Ideally, Li Po would have liked to be able to devote the productive part of life working for the good of his country and people, and then retired quietly and faded out of the scene. For a while, it appeared that Li Po's wishes would be materialized, when Emperor Hsian Tsung who had been an admirer of Li Po invited him to take up an official post. The three years spent in Ch'ang An were; however, unsatisfactory. His unwillingness to join the banal scramble for power and glory had instead, brought him slanders from the mean men. He was forced to leave the Imperial Court and return to the Seclusion and wandering life he once led.

Even after his forced department from Ch'ang An, the desire to return to the public arena had not completely extinguished. He had, however, lost some of his old confidence as was conveyed by the depressed mood that flowed from his brush.

Li Po eventually made a come-back to politics. He got involved in Prince Yung's revolt. He was jailed and then exiled. This was an unfitting end for a poetic genius.

The urge to get involved actively in public life and the repeated failures he met were the factors that give rise to the conflicts, which beset his mind during the whole of Li Po's life and which he did not manage to resolve or come to terms with.