

■ Reception of Du Fu in the Anglophone World and the Issue of Poetic Transparency¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of reception of Du Fu in the Anglophone world, with particular emphasis on the issue of “poetic transparency.” Along with significant improvement in both Du Fu studies and the translation of his poems in the middle of the twentieth century, scholars such as William Hung began to touch on this influential mode of reading poetry in traditional China. Since the 1980s, the issue of “poetic transparency” has become more controversial with further incorporation of comparative and theoretical approaches into Du Fu studies. Stephen Owen’s comparative reading of Du Fu and Wordsworth highlights “poetic transparency” and the non-fictionality in traditional Chinese poetry as opposed to one dominant conception of poetry as a fictional product in Western tradition. Although Owen skillfully skirts certain interpretive dangers through a mode of paradoxical and complex reading, other scholars still identify the potential threat of cultural relativism in the practice of using poetic transparency to distinguish Chinese and European poetic assumptions. This paper initiates a cross-cultural dialogue on “poetic transparency” in the case of reading Du Fu and exposes the dynamics of this approach implied by the hermeneutics of Du Fu in traditional China. It argues that we should neither confirm poetic transparency merely as a historically true phenomenon in traditional China

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nor dismiss it as a defective interpretive practice. Instead, in order to do full justice to the complexity of “poetic transparency,” we should situate it into the specific historical and cultural context and explore various functions of such a mode of reading poetry in traditional China.

Keywords: Du Fu, traditional Chinese poetry, reception in the Anglo-phone world, poetic transparency, cross-cultural interpretations

Since the eleventh century, many scholars have claimed Du Fu (712-770) as China's greatest poet. However, by no means should the word "greatest" be taken as a given. Current existing materials suggest that Du Fu might have been less known during his life time and that there is a gap of several centuries between his death and his elevation to China's greatest poet during the Song (960-1279) dynasty. In addition, the main purport of the "greatest" (i.e. what makes people consider Du Fu as the greatest poet in China) seems to change in different historical contexts. For example, in Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779-831) epitaph written for Du Fu's grave in 813, what constitutes Du Fu's greatness is his stylistic comprehensiveness in poetic composition. However, when it comes to the Song dynasty, Du Fu's greatness expands from his unparalleled poetic craft to his paradigmatic morality and especially political loyalty. As Charles Hartman has demonstrated, Song literati responded sympathetically to different portions of and different voices in Du Fu's corpus during three major periods: the image of Du Fu as a social reformer is emphasized in the first period; the second period highlights Du Fu's political loyalty to his sovereign; what makes Du Fu great in the third period gradually shifts to his ability to provide Song people with personal and moral salvation through his poems.² The historicity of the "greatest" directs our attention to the millennium-long reception of Du Fu: Du Fu is a single individual poet who has received the most extensive commentaries in premodern China. The construction of Du Fu as China's greatest poet to a large extent is inseparable from various readings of Du Fu in later generations and especially a unique commentarial tradition of his poetry accumulated over a millennium after his death.

Since Du Fu began to be introduced to the Anglophone world as early as the eighteenth century, translators and scholars have been involved in confronting this commentarial tradition in their effort to understand Du Fu's poems and how his poems had been read in traditional China. The mode(s) of reading suggested by multiple translations and scholarly studies in the West has been simultaneously engaged in and disengaged from the mode(s) in the aforementioned tradition. This paper will focus on the reception of Du Fu in the Anglophone world and explore different responses to the hermeneutic concept "poetic transparency" which is central to the reception of Du Fu's poems in both Chinese commentarial tradition and the cross-cultural background.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint when Du Fu was first introduced to the Anglophone world, from the second half of the nineteenth century interest

² Hartman 43-74. Eva Shan Chou also deals with Song literati's appropriation of Du Fu in her discussion of Du Fu's cultural legacy. See Chou 11-42.

in Du Fu began to emerge in a noticeable manner. Nevertheless, early Du Fu studies suffer many errors and inaccuracies in their representations of Du Fu. It was not until 1952 when William Hung published his monumental monograph *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet* that Du Fu studies began to enter into a new age. Hung completed his manuscript on Du Fu in 1950 and divided it into two volumes when it was published two years later. While the first volume introduces Du Fu's life and poems to the general audience in the English world, the second volume intends to serve as an important resource for scholars who have an interest in Du Fu studies. Hung's monograph occupies a significant position in the history of Du Fu studies in the Anglophone world: not only does it correct various mistakes in early Du Fu studies, it also highlights a kind of "poetic transparency" which strongly resonates with one major mode of reading lyric poetry in traditional China and at the same time gives rise to many controversies in later Du Fu studies in the Anglophone world.

"Poetic transparency" refers to a common belief within the Chinese tradition that *shi* poetry is often considered by traditional literati as a transparent medium which grants the reader a seemingly "unmediated" access to the historical past and the poet's mind. William Hung largely embraces such transparency in his historical construction of Du Fu's life through Du Fu's poems. Hung indicates that Du Fu as a man and as a poet are inseparable in the elevation of Du Fu since the eleventh century:

Three centuries after his death, scholars began in earnest to collect his works, to edit them, and to provide them with commentaries. They began to study the incidents of his life in the light of his poetry and to understand his poetry in terms of his life and time. Thus the admiration of the man came from the fascination of his poetry, and the admiration of the poetry was further strengthened by the more detailed knowledge of the poet's life. (*China's Greatest Poet* 1)

For Hung, the traditional Chinese way of reading Du Fu is intriguing. He compares the task of reconstructing Du Fu's chronology as a game like a jigsaw puzzle and gladly joins his Chinese predecessors such as Lü Dafang 呂大防 (1027-1097) and another Song Huang He 黃鶴 who began to play this game in the Song dynasty. As Hung clearly points out, the general theme of his monograph is "Tu Fu's life and time, interpreted according to my understanding and appreciation and illustrated with my translation of 374 of his poems" (*China's Greatest Poet* 12). Through examination of Du Fu's poems, Huang reconstructed Du Fu's life and time and depicted Du Fu as "a filial son, an affectionate father, a generous brother, a faithful husband, a loyal friend, a dutiful official, and a patriotic subject" (*China's Greatest Poet* 282).

The next major monograph on Du Fu in English was published by A. R.

Davis in 1971. Davis's monograph *Tu Fu* was based on Hung's studies and yet adopted a different approach to Du Fu: an examination of themes and forms of Du Fu's poetry to emphasize its literary qualities, which had received little critical attention in previous English scholarship. In his review of *Tu Fu* by A. R. Davis, Hung also offered his reflections on the major difference between these two books.

My work is a reconstruction of the life and times of Du Fu through a study of his poems, in which the emphasis is on history rather than poetry. Professor Davis says that his own effort has been "to set the emphasis on Du Fu as a poet without suspending my judgment of him as a man."³ (Review of *Tu Fu* 266)

Since the 1980s, theoretical and comparative stances have been further highlighted in Du Fu studies, and the issue of poetic transparency has received more critical attention and debates in the Anglophone world. Scholarship on Du Fu demonstrates a new tendency which is characterized by the challenge it poses upon earlier Du Fu studies. Such challenge can be found in two major ways: one is to "deconstruct" Du Fu in the context of traditional China, highlight historicity of his reputation, and provide a new understanding of Du Fu and his poems. The relationship between Du Fu as a man and as a poet certainly draws Eva Shan Chou's attention in her re-examination of Du Fu. In her monograph *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context*, she takes a step further than A. R. Davis and decides to separate Du Fu as a poet and Du Fu as man by "distinguishing between poetic and cultural factors in the legacy of Du Fu" (12).⁴ Such separation, according to Chou, will make our readings of Du Fu's poems not interfere with our understanding of Du Fu as a cultural icon.

"Tu Fu's 'Autumn Meditations': An Exercise in Linguistic Criticism" by Tsu-lin Mei and Yu-kung Kao is also worthy of mention here for its attention to the "intrinsic criterion" as opposed to a wide variety of external criteria employed in previous Du Fu studies.

In the past, it has been said that his greatness lies in his encyclopedic erudition, his vivid depiction of events of his time, his steadfast loyalty to the emperor and his fervent patriotism, and more recently, his moving compassion for the suffering masses. The scholarly energy spent in defending these theses is so stupendous and the evidence collected so overwhelming that, once again, it would be futile to disagree. The only caveat we wish to enter is that the criteria presupposed by these theses are, without exception, peripheral to the central concern of poetry, which is, after all, to make excellent verbal artifact. (Mei and Kao 73)

³ I change the Romanization from Wade-Giles to pinyin.

⁴ I change the Romanization from Wade-Giles to pinyin.

The tendency of distinguishing Du Fu as a poet and Du Fu as a man in modern English scholarship represents an effort of seeking new ways to understand Du Fu and greatly challenges the mode of transparent reading in traditional China.

The other challenge can be perceived from new readings of Du Fu in a cross-cultural context. Among English works which adopt the comparative approach to Du Fu, Stephen Owen's discussion on Du Fu and Wordsworth in *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* is worth our attention here since it is influential in studying both traditional Chinese poetry and world literature. Through comparison of Du Fu's poem "Writes of What He Feels, Traveling by Night" 旅夜書懷 and Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," Owen's discussion highlights the difference between Western poetry and traditional Chinese poetry. In Owen's opinion of Wordsworth's poem, "It does not matter whether Wordsworth saw the scene, vaguely remembered it, or constructed it from his imagination. The words of the poem are not directed to a historical London in its infinite particularity. . ." (*Traditional* 13). By contrast, Du Fu's poem in traditional China was commonly understood as a factual account of Du Fu's personal experience at a particular historical moment. According to Owen, his words might serve as "a special kind of diary entry, differing from common diary in their intensity and immediacy, in their presentation of an experience occurring at the very moment" (*Traditional* 13). Therefore, Owen reminds English readers that traditional Chinese poetry, unlike Western poetry, is distinguished by the quality of non-fictionality and points to the historical world from which it supposedly emerges.

Interestingly, such a difference between traditional Chinese poetry and Western poetry is also indicated by Pauline Yu through her historical investigation of imagery in the Chinese poetic tradition. In her discussion of metaphor in Western poetic tradition, Yu points out:

As classical mimetic theories yielded to romantic emphases on the individuality and inward state of the poet, metaphor moved from its status as illustrative ornament to the very soul of the poem. Yet a fundamental Aristotelian assumption behind mimesis was never abandoned—the notion of the poet as maker and of the poem as something made, existing in relation to reality (however defined) yet ontologically distinct from it. (14)

By contrast, traditional Chinese poetry and poetics, as Yu argues, differ from its Western counterpart and do not operate under this dualistic cosmology. Therefore readers in traditional China have a different understanding of poetry and its relationship with the poet:

They are not making the poems refer to something *fundamentally* other—belonging to another plane of existence—than what they say, but are revealing them to be specifically referential. The process is one of *contextualization*, not allegorization, and one that proved to be the dominant tradition in later criticism as well, which preferred to read a poet's works as literal records of actual experience, from which a biography could be constructed. (76)

Both Owen and Yu put great emphasis on the quality of non-fictionality in traditional Chinese methods of reading lyric poetry (as opposed to the Western presumption of poetry as fictional artifact), which foregrounds the poetic transparency as historically true nature of traditional Chinese poetry and poetics. Through his comparison between Du Fu and Wordsworth, Owen tries to encourage the western audience to read differently and hear the voices in traditional Chinese poems.

We have two different ways of reading poetry. For the reader of Wordsworth, all is metaphor and fiction; the referential instructions to regard place and moment are an embarrassment, an unwanted intrusion. . . . For Tu Fu's reader the poem is not a fiction: it is a unique, factual account of an experience in historical time, a human consciousness encountering, interpreting, and responding to the world. And in his own turn the reader, at some later historical moment, encounters, interprets, and responds to the poem. (*Traditional* 15)

Nevertheless, the distinction between Chinese method of reading and Western method of reading made by Owen and Yu creates a seeming dichotomy between Chinese poetry and Western poetry, which turns such a poetic transparency into a controversial topic. Zhang Longxi considers such a contrast between Western poetry as fictional creation and Chinese poetry as factual document to be misleading. Zhang believes that Owen later makes a subtle revision of such cultural dichotomy in another article "Poetry and Its Historical Ground" by clearly pointing out: "there is a world of difference between a poem's generic claim to be historically true and actually being historically true" (107-08).⁵ Zhang acknowledges the significance of history in Chinese poetic tradition, but at the same time he indicates that "Chinese poets are not alone in writing on the occasion of a specific moment in their lived experience, for Goethe also called his own works 'occasional poems'" and "whatever difference we may find between Goethe's occasional poems and say, Du Fu's, we cannot claim that the connection of poetry with history and lived experience is uniquely Chinese" (69-70).

Owen's discussion on Du Fu and Wordsworth also draws another scholar

⁵ Also see Zhang 76.

David Damrosch's attention from the perspective of world literature. Damrosch redefines the difference between Chinese poetry and Western poetry:

Like the Sanskrit tradition, Chinese poetry presents a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind from the Western literary tradition. Du Fu's readers knew that poets never simply transcribed whatever caught their eye; classical Chinese poems are elaborate constructions, in which the poet very selectively weaves elements from the world around him into poetic forms that employ long-cherished images, metaphors, and historical references. Equally, despite all the emphasis on counterfeiting and artifice, Western writers have rarely gone as far as Archibald MacLeish in asserting that their works have no cognitive meaning—a paradoxical stance even for MacLeish, after all, since his poem is making a meaningful statement when it asserts that poems should not mean but be. (15)

Damrosch further explores the possible historical reference of Wordsworth's poem "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," (especially Wordsworth's romantic entanglement) and argues that "Wordsworth, then can be read like Du Fu as conveying his personal experiences and observations, rather than as representing the imaginary thoughts of an invented persona" (20).⁶ Through the case of Du Fu and Wordsworth, Damrosch articulates the difference between traditional Chinese poetry and Western poetry: "Du Fu's poems are inseparable from his life, whereas to read Wordsworth's sonnets against his biography is to make a choice that the poems sometimes hint at but never openly invite" (20).

From the debate above, one can perceive an interesting intellectual trajectory concerning the assumption of poetic transparency in Du Fu studies under the cross-cultural background: it is first used to present a dichotomy between a Du Fu poem and a Wordsworth poem in Owen's work; then it is modified to be a "generic claim" of traditional Chinese poetry which forms a sharp contrast with its Western counterpart; finally such a generic formulation is redefined in an influential study of world literature by Damrosch. Central to this trajectory is the problem of cultural relativism which is intimately associated with the distinction between fictionality and non-fictionality made between traditional Chinese poetry and its Western counterpart. Both Zhang and Damrosch try to draw our attention to similarities between Western poems and Chinese poems and thus disarm the potential threat of cultural relativism. Haun Saussy also discusses the issue of cultural relativism and Owen's proposition on the

⁶ Interestingly, A. R. Davis also connects Du Fu to Wordsworth at the very end of his monograph: ". . . and in a hundred other situations, for he [Du Fu] was in Wordsworth's definition 'a man pleased with his own passion and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him.'"

presumed non-fictionality of a poem in the Chinese literary tradition.⁷ As Paul Rouzer observes, “Saussy does not believe that Owen and Yu actually accept such a belief themselves, but rather that they paradoxically place themselves within the position of academic cultural relativists, asserting that within the historically proscribed boundaries of premodern China something was possible that is not possible here and now” (5).

Such a paradoxical academic gesture deserves further examination since it highlights the tension between the engagement in the historical past (in another culture and language) and self-reflection of such engagement. On the one hand, it is necessary for a Western reader to know the rules of reading in traditional China in order to learn to hear the voices in traditional Chinese poetry. As Owen reminds his readers: “A great art does not exist to confirm a world in which we feel at home and comfortable; instead, it asks that we give ourselves for a time to another world” (*Traditional* 5). On the other hand, such historical engagement reveals its own problem of historicity—one can never cross the historical barrier without serious reflections on the very act of crossing. Owen acknowledges both necessity and failure of following the rules of reading the Chinese poem in traditional China and further indicates: “between the impassable barrier and the insistent imperative to cross it there is recourse only to play—an educated, speculative play, by inference and guess recreating those lost worlds” (*Traditional* 4).

Such an intellectual play reveals Owen’s complex attitude toward poetic transparency: confirm it as a mode of reading different from the West and at the same time challenge its un-mediated quality in the act of such confirmation (especially through his close and fresh readings of Du Fu’s poems). Poetic transparency highlights the intimacy between greatness of poetry and greatness of poet, on which Owen argues:

Poetic greatness becomes allied to purely human greatness: to admit this alliance is not the foolish equation of a “good person” and a “good poem,” that confusion of easy ethics and weak aesthetics; rather, those complex qualities that we find interesting in people are also to be found in the voices of poems. (*Traditional* 121)

Here the interesting fact is that Owen deliberately employs the rhetoric of transparency to challenge it. He confirms the alliance between greatness of poetry and greatness of poet and yet at the same time distinguishes it from the simple equation of a “good person” and a “good poem.” It echoes Owen’s

⁷ See Saussy, *The Problem of A Chinese Aesthetic*, especially the chapter “The Question of Chinese Allegory.” Also see Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China*, especially his discussion in the part of “All Chinese Poems Are True,” 58-61.

strategy of re-reading Du Fu: on the one hand he asks readers to patiently listen to the voice in the poem and on the other hand the voice revealed by him becomes more complicated in the process of listening. As Rouzer points out, “For Owen, Du Fu is the ultimate poet because he possesses the greatest potential for creating a complex, internally contradictory voice that embodies everything that makes reading Chinese poetry a worthwhile experience” (34).⁸ It is this strategy of reading that reminds us of the similar interpretive impulse that traditional Chinese readers demonstrate in their readings of Du Fu.

As students of traditional Chinese poetry might already know, the mode of transparent/nonfictional reading has been both embraced and questioned in traditional China. Du Fu once wrote a poem dedicated to another major Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) after the Tang capital Chang’an was recovered by Tang troops. As one of Du Fu’s contemporaries who experienced the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), Wang was forced (?) to accept an official post at the court of An Lushan at the time when the rebels occupied Chang’an. After the rebels were suppressed and the capital was recovered, Wang was going to be punished along with other officials who had surrendered to the rebels. Nevertheless, Wang was saved by a poem he wrote when he was detained at the Puti Temple by the rebels.

Ten thousand families grieve as smoke in the wilderness rises;	萬戶傷心生野煙，
When will all the officials come to the emperor's court again?	百官何日再朝天？
The leaves of the autumn pagoda trees fall in the empty palace,	秋槐葉落空宮裡，
While pipes and strings are played by the Ningbi Pool. ⁹	凝碧池頭奏管絃。

The title of this poem is unusually long, and as is the case with many other occasional poems, the title explains the historical situation which gives rise to this poem and thus promotes its transparent reading.¹⁰ The title tells readers that while being detained by the rebels in the Puti Temple, Wang was moved to compose the poem after his friend Pei Di told him that the rebels asked Tang court musicians to perform by the Ningbi Pool and those musicians wept as soon as they began to play. The title, then, asks us to read Wang’s poem through the lens of the transparent reading, and the poem becomes a manifestation of his inner sincerity and serves as legitimate evidence for Wang’s political loyalty to Tang court. This kind of non-fictionality embedded in his poem seems to be

⁸ Rouzer 34. This doesn’t mean that Owen’s readings of Du Fu is mere subjectivism, but it rather acknowledges a distinction between a modern reader’s voice and the poem’s own voice. See Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics* 10-11.

⁹ Wang Wei 王維, *Wang Youcheng ji jianzhu* 王右丞集箋注 265.

¹⁰ The original Chinese title of the poem is 菩提寺禁裝迪來相看說逆賊等凝碧池上做音樂供奉人等舉聲便一時淚下私成口號誦示裝迪。

approved by many of Wang's contemporaries including the emperor Suzong 肅宗 (711-762) who granted him a special pardon. The aforementioned poem "Respectfully Presented to Wang Wei" written by Du Fu also approves this mode of reading.

The Companion's fame has endured long,	中允聲名久，
But lately he has been far separated from us.	如今契闊深。
We all have heard that Yu Xin has recovered;	共傳收庾信，
Not the same as what Chen Lin has obtained.	不比得陳琳。
Ill the whole time due to your enlightened lord;	一病緣明主，
For three years maintaining this heart alone.	三年獨此心。
In the fullness of grief you must have composed verse --	窮愁應有作，
Please chant us your "Song of White Hair"! ¹¹	試誦白頭吟。

The poem is laden with historical allusions concerning other earlier historical figures such as Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581) and Chen Lin 陳琳 (?-217) whose life experiences, in the eyes of Du Fu, might be similar to or different from Wang's. A long elaboration on them will help us better understand the whole poem as well as how it connects to Wang Wei's own experience in the An Lushan rebellion, but due to space limitations, it suffices to mention here that through such comparison with earlier historical figures the poem highlights Wang Wei's loyalty to the Tang and even interestingly points to poetic transparency—the last line suggests that poetry can serve as an unmediated medium to Wang's inner sincerity and "Song of White Hair" might possibly refer to Wang's poem we discussed earlier.¹²

Nevertheless, not all people perceive such poetic transparency in the case of Wang Wei. For example, in his well-known work *Rizhi lu* 日知錄 (*Notes of Daily Accumulated Knowledge*), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682) indicates under one entry that Wang Wei merely uses poetry to disguise his loss of integrity in real life during the An Lushan Rebellion. The entry is entitled *Wen ci qi ren* 文辭欺人 ("Words that deceive people") which seems to highlight the deception which might be possibly caused by poetic transparency. However, upon closer examination, one can infer that Gu might not necessarily oppose poetic transparency in reading traditional Chinese poetry. What upsets Gu is, in his own words, that Wang "stained [his] reputation through affiliation with illegitimate

¹¹ *Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注 454. The Companion refers to Wang Wei.

¹² "Song of White Hair" is a title in *Yuefu* 樂府 and its origin is traditionally attributed to Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 who is said to have composed the song to express her grievance of being abandoned by her lover Sima Xiangru 司馬相如. As the story goes, Zhou regained her lover's favor through the "Song of White Hair." See Ge Hong 葛洪, *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 3:7a, in *Siku quanshu*. Here I think it is well applied to Wang Wei's situation in which he regained the emperor's favor through his poem presumably composed at the Puti Temple.

authority and yet relies on his ‘loyal’ heart [through poetry]” ‘名污僞籍而自托乃心’ (1904). In other words, for Gu, the problem is not that poetic transparency is erroneous but that such transparency could be misused to cover up one’s disgraceful behavior in real life. His condemnation of Wang Wei can be understood as approval of the presumed transparency between the poet’s life experience and poems, which should be maintained and yet collapsed in the case of Wang Wei.

Recognition of poetic transparency as one influential mode of reading *shi* poetry in traditional China doesn’t necessarily lead us to cultural relativism when it is juxtaposed with certain strands of Western poetic tradition (for example, conception of poetry as a fictional craft). Although Saussy points out “the shift of value that takes place when a distinction among Chinese poetic genres (*shi* versus *ci*, *yuefu*, *qu*, etc.) becomes the basis of a distinction between Chinese and European poetic assumptions,” he also admits historical groundings of poetic transparency as a mode of reading in traditional China—“the dominant position of *shi* poetry vis-à-vis genres considered artificial, unserious, or convention-ridden and the exaltation of certain *shi* poets above others for their sincerity and stylistic naturalism was the handiwork of several centuries of Chinese critics, and the scholars I mention acknowledge this inheritance” (213).¹³ Clearly, it is not wrong to acknowledge the existence of this inheritance in the history of traditional Chinese poetry. However, to merely confirm it as a historically true phenomenon in traditional China fails to do full justice to complexity of poetic transparency in the very historical context it relies on.

For example, Gu Yanwu was also one of numerous readers of Du Fu during the Ming-Qing dynastic transition in the seventeenth century. After the collapse of the Ming dynasty, many Han intellectuals participated in the movement of political resistance against the new regime established by the Manchu. As I mentioned earlier, Gu’s criticism of Wang Wei doesn’t mean to completely deny or abandon the mode of poetic transparency. On the contrary, Gu himself participates in this mode of reading through alliance between his poetic practice and his own life experience during the Ming-Qing transition. Many of Gu’s poems are concerned with contemporary dynastic changes and his loyalty to the fallen Ming, which is reminiscent of Du Fu’s own poetic practice. Modern scholars often point out the poetic influence of Du Fu upon Gu Yanwu: not only does Gu imitate Du Fu in terms of poetic style, but he also follows his

¹³ Saussy’s emphasis is put on the shift of the value in some comparative studies on Chinese *shi* poetry and Western poetry. My quote here shifts in emphasis to highlight the historicity of poetic transparency.

predecessor Du Fu's (also called "poet-historian") step to highlight intimacy between poetry and history. Furthermore, Gu also participates in many anti-Manchu activities (including military activities) and rejects cooperation with the Qing dynasty throughout his life. The consistency Gu seeks to maintain between his poems and his life experiences pays homage to the mode of poetic transparency and corrects the problem he has perceived in the case of Wang Wei.

Nevertheless, Gu's reading of Du Fu demonstrates more complexities than it seems on the surface level. What poetic transparency highlights is the idealized quality of a poem as a medium to the poet: a reader in later generations can rely on a poem to understand particular historical situations and, more importantly, what it was on a poet's mind at that moment. However, for many readers in traditional China, such an assumption does not guarantee an immediate happy encounter between a reader and a poet who are separated by time and space. Poetic transparency has its own complexity: on the one hand, such a mode of reading promises a "truth" lying behind the poem—one can get access to historical particularities (including the poet's "deeper" thoughts and "real" feelings) through the poem; on the other hand, poetic transparency also involves an interpretive danger—one might be (in other readers' eyes) misled in such an hermeneutic movement and that equals "misunderstandings" with the "authentic" authorial intention.

A seventeenth-century commentator Huang Sheng 黃生 (1622-?) employs a vivid metaphor to illustrate why other commentators have an "incorrect" understanding of Du Fu. Huang believes that the process of reading Du Fu's poetry is like a host (i.e. reader) who leaves his house to greet the guest (i.e. Du Fu, or more exactly, the authorial intention embodied in the poem) from afar. If a host doesn't know where the guest comes from, he will not be able to follow the correct path to greet his guest (5:335-36).¹⁴ In Huang's metaphor, a happy encounter between the reader and Du Fu is based on the "correct" path a reader chooses, and the reader's choice should be based on the knowledge of the way from which the guest comes. Such a metaphor highlights the thickness of poetic transparency in traditional China: whereas poetry is considered a medium which gives readers in later generations a promise to what happens in the historical past, it simultaneously creates an obstacle in its promise by asking the reader to know "the way from which the guest comes." Huang's metaphor dismisses all

¹⁴ The original text is: 「余以為說詩者譬如出戶而迎遠客。彼從大道而來，我趨小徑以迎之，不得也。彼從中道而來，我出其左右以迎之，不可也... 故必知其所由之道，然後從而迎之，則賓主歡然把臂，欣然促膝矣」。

other ways of reading Du Fu and believes that there is only one “correct” way to greet Du Fu (to understand the poet’s intention in his poem). It might significantly reduce the potentiality in reading Du Fu’s poem, but such a reduction is meaningful to the mechanism of poetic transparency which many traditional Du Fu readers embrace: it is through consensus on the existence of an authentic authorial intention (intimately associated with historical particularities) as well as the existence of a “correct” path to understand such an intention that traditional readers constitute a collective field in which they can constantly negotiate with each other on what Du Fu intends to mean in his poems and how a reader in later generations can get access to it.

For example, since the Song dynasty, there have been many controversies about Du Fu’s poem *You Longmen Fengxian shi* 遊龍門奉先寺 (“I visit Fengxian Monastery at Longmen”). Whereas all traditional commentators seem to believe that this poem serves as a record of Du Fu’s experience when he visited Fengxian Monastery at a particular historical time, they compete with each other for how to arrive at the correct understanding of the poem. The historical imperatives associated with poetic transparency urge Du Fu commentators to first find out where Longmen in the poem is located. However, there are two major places which share the same name of Longmen. Based on the “Yu Gong” chapter in *Shang shu* 尚書 (*Book of Documents*), some Song commentators argue that Longmen is in the Hedong in contemporary Shanxi province. On the contrary, other readers believe that Longmen is located in the Hedong in contemporary Henan province. Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664) cites earlier accounts such as *Taiping huanyu ji* 太平寰宇記 (*Record of the World from the Era of Great Peace*) and *Yuanhe junguo zhi* 元和郡國志 (*Treatise on All Districts from the Era of Yuanhe*) to show that the Longmen in Du Fu’s poem refers to the one in contemporary Henan province. What is worthy of our attention here is how poetic transparency allows traditional readers to play out their own knowledge to reconstruct what the historical Du Fu supposedly experienced in his life.

In addition, such reconstruction also draws on the access granted by poetic transparency to the historical past and the poet’s mind. Another commentator Jin Shengtang 金聖嘆 (1608-1661) offers us a different reading of this poem by Du Fu.

The title is “I visit Fengxian Monastery at Longmen,” and yet when one reads the first two lines of the poem, it says, surprisingly: “I have *already* finished my visit to the Buddhist monastery, / And have *further* spent a night in the Buddhist realm (*jing* 境).” The words *yi* 已 [already] and *geng* 更 [further] are methods for creating a transition from one passage to another. Now since he uses his brush in this way, could it be that this poem was composed to describe events that occurred after the

visit? If so, were there two poems under this title at that time and the first one has been lost? I thought this over at great length but couldn't arrive at a reason. One day, as I sat idly with nothing to do, suddenly I knew the reason—it is because Du Fu is using this poem to warn people not to write a poem too hastily. On that day, as Du Fu was visiting the monastery, if he had wanted to write a poem on the spur of the moment, how could he not have produced something? But then, the realm of phrases like “the dark ravine” and “moonlit woods” could never have been attained. And once such a realm becomes unattainable, the poem becomes irrelevant, just as if it had never been made. Thus the Master lingered there instead of leaving, and devoted himself to understanding thoroughly its significance. Du Fu himself wrote the word “visit” in the title, but the poem must have been finished after he had spent the night at the monastery. In this way, he was able to get rid of all the vulgar, familiar, and rustic phrases normally used by shallow people when they visit mountains [and write poems about it]; only then in a unique manner did he use his hand and eye and make this piece anew. The assertion that Du Fu's poetry is the greatest verse of the past millennium is true indeed.¹⁵ (2:613)

題是遊龍門奉先寺，及讀其詩起二句，卻云「已從招提遊，更宿招提境」。「已」字「更」字，是結過上文再起下文之法。今用筆如此，豈此詩乃是補寫遊以後事耶？然則當時此題，豈本有二詩，而忘其第一首耶？我反覆思之，不得其故。一日無事閑坐，而忽然知之。蓋此篇乃先生叫人作詩不得輕易下筆也。即如是日於正遊時，若欲信手便作，豈便無詩一首，然而「陰壑」「月林」之境必不及矣。夫此境若不及，便是沒交涉；夫作詩沒交涉，便如不曾作。先生是以徘徊不去，務盡其理。題中自標「遊」字，詩必成於宿後。如是，便將淺人游山一切皮語，熟語、村語、掀剝略盡，然後另出手眼，成此新裁。杜詩為千古絕唱，詢不誣也。

Different from other commentators, Jin's focus here shifts from debates on the historical location of Longmen to what was on the poet's mind at the time of composition. At first, Jin was greatly confused by the inconsistency between the title and the first couplet: the title suggests that the poem is about Du Fu's experience of visiting Fengxian Monastery, but the first couplet declares that Du Fu has already finished such a visit and is now moving on to the topic of spending the night at the monastery. Jin's solution of this puzzle further confirms the poem as an unmediated access to the historical past and the poet's mind—Du Fu is believed to deliberately delay his composition during his visit in order to capture the true beauty, which is perceived by Jin exactly from the discrepancy between the title and the first couplet. Not only does such a confirmation acknowledge the poetic authority of Du Fu, it also reveals Jin's creativity in reading Du Fu through his seeming self-effacement.

In other words, the rhetoric of poetic transparency provides an opportunity for a traditional Chinese reader to actively engage himself in a deeper dialogue with the historical Du Fu (as well as historically constructed Du Fu

¹⁵ For an English discussion on Jin Shengtian's reading of Du Fu's poetry, see Hao 63-95.

in other earlier or contemporary readings) by identifying his *own* path to the poet. In the case of Gu Yanwu, his negotiations with the historical past and the hermeneutic past of Du Fu is revealed through his evidential examination of Du Fu's poems. Although Gu Yanwu did not systematically write commentaries on Du Fu's poems, there are dozens of entries on Du Fu in his well-known work *Rizhi lu*. Gu also acknowledges the authorial intention and considers it as the touchstone for the understanding of Du Fu's poems. At the same time, however, Gu's commentaries demonstrate his own path to the historical Du Fu, which distinguishes himself from one major tendency in reading Du Fu's poems during the late Ming period. The late Ming period witnesses the rise of a highly subjective understanding characterized by its efficiency and yet elusiveness. Such a method of reading tends to free a reader from concrete knowledge of different kinds of information in Du Fu's poems and instead grant one an "immediate" appreciation of the assumed most essential parts, though such appreciation often relies heavily on a reader's intuition and even in many cases borders on the mystical.¹⁶ By contrast, Gu seeks to build his interpretations of Du Fu's poems on concrete historical details by drawing on a wide variety of relevant historical resources such as biographies of people mentioned in Du Fu's poems and specific geographical information in the Tang dynasty.

Such a practice helps bring readers to the perceived historical Du Fu, which has much broader implications than a simple correction to what Gu perceives to be the erroneous understanding of Du Fu aforementioned. Gu's approach resonates with his reflections on the collapse of the Ming dynasty. In his *Rizhi lu*, Gu relates the collapse of the Ming to the defect of *kongshu* 空疏 (being empty and shallow) in the intellectual practice during the late Ming period:

Empty words "enlightening the mind and perceiving the nature" are used to replace the practical studies of cultivating the self and governing others. [It makes] counselors indolent and all things ruined, martial power lost and the world chaotic. The country is shaken and turned topsy-turvy, and ancestral temples fall into ruins. (402)
以明心見性之空言，代修己治人之實學，股肱惰而萬事荒，爪牙亡而四國亂。神州蕩覆，宗社丘墟。

As Thomas Bartlett indicates, ". . . *Rizi lu* is, as Gu himself said, the refined and original product of assiduous effort, applied to selection of quoted sources and to articulation of insightful commentary, in order to document and refine

¹⁶ One good example is the Du Fu commentary produced by Zhong Xing 鍾惺 and Tan Yuanchun 譚元春 in their *Shi gui* 詩歸, an influential poetic collection in the late Ming period. Such a method of reading also resonates with the Du Fu commentary by a well-known critic Li Chenweng 劉辰翁 in the thirteenth century.

his critiques of important issues in the intellectual, moral, social, political and cultural life of the late Ming period” (184). The “empty words” that Gu attacks refer to the intellectual movement of *Xinxue* 心學 (learning of the heart) which proposes searching for knowledge in the internal world through an intuitionist method as opposed to objective investigation of the objects in the external world. While during the late Ming period debates regarding *Xinxue* center on approaches to Confucian canons, Du Fu’s poetry (often considered as a continuity of Six Confucian Cannons or Six Confucian Canons in poetry at that time) also carries the weight of such intellectual concerns. Gu’s readings of Du Fu also endorse poetic transparency and yet at the same time his encounter with the poet highlights the thickness of such transparency: the contextualization of Gu’s approach to Du Fu during the chaotic Ming-Qing transition reveals that his evidential approach to Du Fu allows Gu to respond to the intellectual development and political/social changes especially the collapse of Ming as well as the hermeneutic past of Du Fu.

To sum up, modern readers should not adopt uncritically the continuous insistence within the Chinese tradition itself on the idea of transparency. Neither should we simply dismiss it as cultural relativism. In an age of world literature, the boundary between the Chinese mode of reading and Western mode of reading is frequently contested. Nevertheless, without denying existence of the similar practice in poetic composition and reading in the West, we can’t help asking why people in traditional China have demonstrated a strong fascination with a mode of transparent reading in *shi* poetry. When we begin to examine the mode of reading as a historically and culturally specific phenomenon (not as the “other” on the surface level), the “transparent” reading in traditional China might become more significant since it not only relates to how traditional Chinese poetry (as well as the rules of reading it) is understood in modern scholarship, but also asks us to reconsider the dynamics and functions of such transparency in reading poetry in traditional China. This paper initiates a cross-cultural dialogue on poetic transparency in the case of reading Du Fu and exposes the dynamics of self-conscious “transparency” implied by the hermeneutics of Du Fu in traditional China. One tendency of postmodern scholarship is to question the narrative of “continuity” and to investigate the complexities that are often suppressed by such continuity. However, it is my hope that our discussion of Du Fu here not only demonstrates the complexities beneath poetic transparency but also reminds us of the function of “continuity” itself (the ideal of “transparency”) in traditional China—how it creates a field which allows different participants to simultaneously engage with the historical/hermeneutic past and various concerns at their own times.

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英語世界的杜甫接受以及詩之透明

摘要

本文審視了英語世界中杜甫接受的歷史，並專就「詩之透明」這一問題進行了討論。隨著二十世紀中期杜甫研究及其詩歌翻譯的顯著提升，以洪業為代表的學者們開始觸及這一在傳統中國中頗具影響力的詩歌閱讀模式。二十世紀八十年代以來，杜甫研究中比較及理論方法的進一步引入使得「詩之透明」這一問題更具爭議。宇文所安對於杜甫和華茲華斯的比較閱讀凸顯了中國傳統詩歌閱讀中的透明與非虛構性，並將其與西方傳統中視詩歌為虛構產物的重要理念進行對比。儘管宇文所安借助充滿矛盾和複雜性的閱讀模式巧妙地規避了特定的闡釋危險，仍有一些學者指出在運用「詩之透明」來區分中西方詩學假設的實踐中潛在的文化相對主義威脅。本文以閱讀杜甫為例，在「詩之透明」的閱讀模式上構建一場跨文化的對話，進而展現這一閱讀方式在傳統中國杜甫闡釋中的活力。文章認為我們既不應當將這一閱讀模式單純地視為傳統中國中存在的真實歷史現象，也不應當將其視為一種有缺陷的閱讀模式而予以排斥。為了能夠公正地對待「詩之透明」所具有的複雜性，我們應當將其置於特定的歷史文化語境中，探索這一閱讀模式在傳統中國中的不同功用。

關鍵字：杜甫，中國傳統詩歌，英語世界的接受，詩之透明，跨文化闡釋