

Huang T'ing-chien's Theories of Poetry

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I. *Tien-t'ieh Ch'eng-chin* or "Turning Iron into Gold"

In a letter to his friend Yuan-hsün (元勳) Huang T'ing-chien (黃庭堅, 1045-1105) offers the following comment on literary composition:

If one is to equally match the ancients, one must know of the mechanics of their writing . . . The only approach to literary writing is to be straightforward without being coarse and vulgar in expression.¹

如欲方駕古人，須識古人關捩……文章無他，但要直下道而語不粗俗耳。

This statement does not constitute the whole of Huang's poetic theory, but its emphasis on the mechanics of the approach to writing of ancient masters suggests Huang's consistent advocacy of the use of tradition, the idea, ". . . without being coarse and vulgar in expression," is probably one of the reasons that leads him to try his hand on the style of "strangeness,"² which includes the choice of obscure and strange words or allusions, and what he called *turning iron into gold* (點鐵成金) —his term for using tradition, or borrowing.

Huang's theory of using tradition is seen in one of his letters to his nephew Hung Chü-fu (洪駒父). The theory later became the major poetic tenet of a group of Sung poets known as "Chiang-hsi School" (江西派). The theory in its essentials, reads as follows:

It is most difficult to coin one's own literary expressions. In Tu Fu's poems and Han Yü's prose, there is not a single phrase that cannot be traced back to some literary provenance. Because of their own lack of knowledge in literature, recent scholars have made the assertion that Tu and Han usually created their own idioms and expressions. Those ancients who excelled in literary composition were the ones who could really utilize and blend the myriad kinds of materials into their own writings. Even when they drew on the ready-made phrases of the past, they were able to adapt them in such a manner that the phrases, as if wrought on by some magic catalyst, would turn from iron into a piece of gold. Literary creation has not been the primary task of a Confucian scholar; but since you have inquired of it and wanted to learn about it, you must be aware of its complexity. I hope you will give it some careful and thorough thought. To make a work exalted, to make it appear like the loftiness of Mount T'ai or that of the floating clouds in the sky; to make it powerful so as to look like the autumnal sea of waves of Ts'ang River that contains in it whales capable of swallowing a boat—for those, one must not be confined by the rules and held to the mere principles of simplicity and crudity.³

自作語最難，老杜作詩，退之作文，無一字無來處，蓋後人讀書少，故謂韓、杜自作此語耳。古人能為文章者，真能陶冶萬物，雖取古人之陳言，入於翰墨，如靈丹一粒，點鐵成金也。文章最為儒者末事，然索學之，又不可不知其曲折，幸熟思之。至於推之使高，如泰山之崇崛，如垂天之雲；作之使雄，如滄江八月之濤海，運吞舟之魚，又不可守繩墨，令儉陋也。

The dictum "turning iron into gold" adhered to by Huang and his followers, serves as a clue to our understanding of Huang's poetic creations. When Huang mentions that "it is most difficult to coin one's own literary expressions," he implies that one should draw on expressions of others. It is not necessary for us to argue how true this statement is; what is true is that, because of this reason, Huang advocates drawing on the works of previous writers. He believes that by effectively adopting expressions of others in one's own literary writing, one can turn the derived phrases into "a piece of gold."

What is "iron?" Obviously, it implies sources or works of the ancients that are to be used for poetic composition. The use of such materials involves either imitation, borrowing, or assimilation. Whatever the case may be, "iron" signifies the past, "gold" the present; or, simply, the former represents the

past tradition, and the latter, a new tradition. And if we are not to take “iron” and “gold” to be a comparison in value, then the statement that the new work is “gold,” suggests something better, or at least something different.

I have pointed out that Huang based his theory on the premise that “it is most difficult to coin one’s own literary expressions.” T. S. Eliot, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” has also said something similar:

When we praise a poet . . . we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.⁴

Both Huang and Eliot seem to make the assertion that “in poetry there is no such thing as complete originality owing nothing to the past.” This is generally true, if we are talking about “literary heritage.” By this I mean that a poet is related with the past either through influence, assimilation, imitation, derivation, or plagiarism. But we must not regard derivation or borrowing as a virtue simply because “it is most difficult to coin one’s own literary expressions.” It is true that a great deal of Chinese poetry is in a way derivative, but our judgment of merit of a poem that uses derived expression lies in its poetic significance. We ask: has the derived expression served to enrich the poem in terms of imagery, poetic mood, state of mind, etc.? Has it surpassed the original in poetic achievement? In short, does the poem turn out to be a piece of “gold?” If not, derivation is definitely undesirable and not to be encouraged, for it would prevent a poet from trying to be creative.

Although Huang advocates derivation and has termed the skill as “turning iron into gold,” like most of the Chinese literary figures of the past, he does not elaborate on his theory explicitly. The generally acknowledged and oft-quoted phrases in the aforementioned letter are: “even when they drew on the ready-made phrases of the past, they were able to adapt them in such a manner that the phrases, as if wrought on by some magic catalyst, would turn from iron into a piece of gold” (雖取古人之陳言，入於翰墨，如

靈丹一粒，點鐵成金也)。This is all we know about his theory of “turning iron into gold.” As to how a poet should put the theory into practice, he does not tell us. The phrase “ready-made phrases of the past” (古人之陳言) does not necessarily refer to “worn-out,” “hackneyed,” or “popular” expressions, although in Chinese “*ch'en-yen*” (陳言) does have the above meanings. To be sure, many “*ch'en-yen*” in Huang’s poetry are not “hackneyed.” But due to the very fact that the best lines or phrases by the past writers, poets or otherwise, are quoted over and over, they tend increasingly to become “hackneyed.” Yet to Huang, “*ch'en-yen*” may mean something else. In his preface to “Following Again the Rhymes of Yang Ming-shu’s Poem” (再次韻楊明叔), he writes:

I am old and lazy now, and have not written poetry for years. I have already forgotten its form and meter. Now that Ming-shu is interested in this art, I will try to show him some principles which may enable him to understand the particulars: what poetry does is to turn the vulgar into the refined, and to turn the old into the new. In this way, a poem would be as perfect as the unbeaten troops of Sun-tzu and Wu-tzu;⁵ or as the archery of Kan-yin and Fei-wei⁶ who were able to break an arrowhead with the top of a bramble. Skills as such are considered the wonder of poets.⁷

庭堅老懶衰墮，多年不作詩，已忘其體律，因明叔有意於斯文，試舉一網而張萬目：蓋以俗爲雅，以故爲新，百戰百勝，如孫、吳之兵；棘端可以破鏃，如甘蠅、飛衛之射，此詩人之奇也。

Huang has enumerated two important facts in the art of poetry: “to turn the vulgar into the refined” (以俗爲雅), and “to turn the old into the new” (以故爲新). The former involves the skill in handling the subject-matter or theme, while the latter advises that a poet must be aware of the literary heritage and utilize it. Both of them, in my opinion, coincide with his statement: “even when they drew on the ready-made phrases, as if wrought on by some magic catalyst, they would turn from iron into a piece of gold.” It is therefore reasonable to assert that Huang’s *ch'en-yen* and *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin* (點鐵成金) are similar to *i-su-wei-ya* (以俗爲雅) and *i-ku-wei-hsin* (以故爲新), for the process of “turning iron into gold” resembles the process of “turning the vulgar into the refined,” or “turning the old into the new.” All of these point toward betterment, if not perfection, in writing

poetry.

Interestingly, Su Tung-p'o (蘇東坡, 1037-1101), generally regarded as the greatest poet of the Sung dynasty, has expressed something similar:

One must have the ambition to attain great achievement when writing poetry. When allusion is employed, one is to turn the old into the new, the vulgar into the refined. Poetry becomes imperfect when it deliberately emphasizes novelty and strangeness.⁸

詩須要有爲而作，用事當以故爲新，
以俗爲雅；好奇務新，乃詩之病。

The only difference between the statements of Huang and Su is that Su confines his theory to the employment of allusion (用事) while Huang expands the category to include practically everything in poetry, that is, expression, theme, mood, allusion, etc. And although we have no concrete evidence to prove that Su wrote his theory before Huang, we have reasons to believe that Huang derived the original idea from Su, as Su was Huang's senior and teacher, and Huang was well-known for his enthusiasm for borrowing ideas and lines from others, and, in fact, advocates the art of borrowing. At least Liu Ta-chieh (劉大杰), a modern critic, is convinced that Huang drew on Su's ideas.⁹

At this point, we may recall what Eliot has said in his essay about "Tradition":

The difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show... the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.¹⁰

This consciousness of the past here is what Huang meant by the "old" (故). When a poet is aware of the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written, Eliot continues:

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.¹¹

Those who are familiar with Eliot's essay will immediately recognize that this

process of depersonalization is what he called Impersonal Poetry. But our concern here is the idea of the poet's consciousness of the past which is similar to Huang's *i-ku-wei-hsin*, or "turning the old into the new." Admittedly, to be able to "turn the old into the new," to take expressions of the past and turn them into "gold," and to "turn the vulgar into the refined," a poet is first required to plunge himself into the whole spectrum of literary tradition for inspiration and models, then undertake the process of "turning iron into gold." Neither *i-ku-wei-hsin* nor *i-su-wei-ya* means that one simply takes a phrase or line from the past master; the process demands the skill, that is, *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin*, or "turning iron into gold." This skill is, as I understand it, to blend the material (tradition) into a new combination. A poet's relation to the past is not a relation of an occasional search for an appropriate phrase when needed. It is rather a constant contact and awareness of its existence. In this way, a poet can store up many materials and is able to blend them and "retouch" (點化) them into a new compound when writing poetry. In fact Huang has repeatedly advised his admirers and friends that in order to distinguish oneself in poetry, one must be thoroughly familiar with "ten-thousand volumes of books." The works of T'ao Ch'ien (陶潛), Tu Fu (杜甫), and Han Yü (韓愈) were his favorite to pattern his poetry after.

If *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin* and *i-ku-wei-hsin* are the necessary methods to write poetry, the more a poet reads the better it is, for materials accumulated in a poet's mind would be the elements that produce poetry. A poet's mind, as Eliot remarks, is "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together."¹² The "new compound" here resembles that of Huang's *chin* (金, "gold") and *hsin* (新, "new"); whereas, the numberless feelings, phrases, images that are stored up in a poet's mind refer to the materials absorbed from the tradition, and in Huang's term, they are *ku* (故, "old"). Interestingly enough, Eliot's "particles" in the above quote is comparable to Huang's "magic catalyst" (靈丹一粒); both of them have the function of forming a new compound.

Although Huang has not elaborated on his *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin* theory, it is quite apparent that a skill is involved. The ideas of "turning the vulgar into the refined" and "turning the old into the new," it seems to me, offer an interpretation to *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin*. We know that all these theories deal with the use of tradition, which means derivation or borrowing. The

process in using tradition requires the skill of “retouching.” Since it is Huang’s belief that a poet should derive sources from the past writers for his poetic composition, what makes the new product better than the original, the process of turning “iron” into “gold” requires “retouching” whatever he draws on in order to turn it into a better work. We must not forget that the “iron” in itself is already a complete material, and to successfully transform it into a new compound, a special skill of reconstruction is needed. On the basis of the phrases “magic catalyst” and “*tien-t’ieh-ch’eng-chin*” employed by Huang — “*tien*” (點) literally means “touch” — “retouching” seems to be a preferable term to “reconstruction.”

“It is useful at this point to examine how he applies his theories (*i-su-wei-ya*, *i-ku-wei-hsin*, *tien-t’ieh-ch’eng-chin*) to his poetry. For purposes of comparison, I have translated a few of his representative poems. In order to retain as much of the original expression as possible, I have deliberately sought to remain as close to the original as possible. For the convenience of comparison, I have also provided a word for word translation to the text.

題 陽 關 圖

Inscribe Yang-kuan Painting

1. 斷 腸 聲 裏 無 形 影
Broken-intestines sound inside without form shadow,
2. 畫 出 無 聲 亦 斷 腸
Painting out no sound also broken-intestines,
3. 想 得 陽 關 更 西 路
Think of Yang-kuan farther west road,
4. 北 風 低 草 見 牛 羊
North wind lower grass loom cattle sheep.

“Inscribed on the painting of Yang Gate”,¹³

1. In the sound of a heart-broken person, no human image is shown.
2. Alas! the painting, though soundless, also makes us heart-broken.
3. Thinking of Yang Gate and the road that goes farther west,
4. Among the grasses bent by the north wind, loom the cattle and sheep.

The above poem is written in *Chieh Chü* (絕句) form. The title and the theme remind us of Wang Wei (王維, 701-761), the famous poet of the T'ang dynasty, who wrote at least three hundred years before Huang a piece in the very same form entitled "To See Yüan Erh Off as Envoy to An-hsi" (送元二使安西, also known as "The Song of Wei City" [渭城曲] and "The Song of Yang Pass" [陽關曲]) which reads:

Wei City: morning rain soaks the light dust.
 By the inn, green upon green, willow's color now new.
 You had better drink one cup more.
 West of the Yang Pass: no friend.¹⁴

渭城朝雨浥輕塵，
 客舍青青柳色新。
 勸君更盡一杯酒，
 西出陽關無故人。

This is a farewell song that later became very popular among the scholars and the general public as a sad song, sung at farewells. "Wei City refers to the region (north of Wei River) in which there was much military activity to resist the barbarians who killed the inhabitants there by the million. The Yang Pass is the last pass to the barbarous land."¹⁵ This explains the melancholic touch and the background of Huang's poem. The allusion of the third line "Thinking of Yang Gate and the road that goes farther west" (想得陽關更西路) derives its source from here. Since it has been a popular farewell song since the middle of the eighth century, the thematic aspect of Huang's poem is inevitably "old" (故) and "vulgar" (俗), or common. It is therefore a case that involves *i-su-wei-ya* (to turn the vulgar into the refined) and *i-ku-wei-hsin* (to turn the old into the new). And in lines one and two:

斷 腸 聲 裏 無 形 影
 Broken-intestines sound inside without form shadow
 (In the sound of a heart-broken person, no human
 image is shown)
 畫 出 無 聲 亦 斷 腸
 Painting out no sound also broken-intestines
 (Alas! the painting, though soundless, also makes
 us heart-broken.)

Shih Jung (史容), editor and annotator of the second collection of Huang's poetry, that is, *Shan-ku wai-chi* (山谷外集), points out that both of these lines derived from Po Chü-i's (白居易, 772-846) couplet:

一 聲 腸 一 斷
One sound intestine one break
(An intestine breaks whenever a cry is uttered)
能 有 幾 多 腸
Can have how many intestines?
(How many intestines can one have?)¹⁶

By comparing the two, it is obvious that Huang borrows the idea from Po with some skill of retouching. Now the last line of the poem:

北 風 低 草 見 牛 羊
North wind lower grass loom cattle sheep
(Among the grasses bent by the north wind,
loom the cattle and sheep)

Evidences show that this expression is taken from a ballad of the Southern and Northern dynasties (420-588). The ballad is known as the "Ch'ih-le Song" (敕勒歌) which ends with the following:

天 蒼 蒼 野 茫 茫
Sky grey-grey, wilderness boundless
(Grey and vast is the sky, boundless is the
wilderness)
風 吹 草 低 見 牛 羊
Wind blow grass low loom cattle sheep.
(Among the grasses bent by the wind, loom
the cattle and sheep)¹⁷

The striking similarity between the last line of Huang's poem and that of the "Ch'ih-le Song" can be readily recognized. Huang changes the original "wind blows" (風吹) to "north wind" (北風) and reverses "grass low" (草低) to "lower grass" (低草). The function of these alterations was perhaps "turning iron into gold." The "retouching" involved here the shifting of the main verb. In the original line the main verb is "blow" (吹) while in Huang's version it becomes "lower" (低); that is, the first portion of this line

appears to be, literally, “north wind lower grass” (北風低草) instead of “wind blow grass low” (風吹草低). The word “low” (低), which serves as an adjective in the original becomes a transitive verb in Huang’s version. As a whole, the first two lines of Huang’s poem are derived from Po Chü-i, the third from Wang Wei, and the last from “Ch’ih-le Song.” The whole poem, as we can see, constitutes derived expressions from three sources. The first three lines may be considered a reconstruction of the ideas of others, but the last line is actually a direct borrowing from an ancient ballad.

Huang’s theory of *tien-t’ieh-ch’eng-chin*, as I see it, implies both partial and total derivation. As for *i-su-wei-ya* (to turn the vulgar into the refined) and *i-ku-wei-hsin* (to turn the old into the new), they also allude to derivation but at the same time introduce the reconstruction of expressions used by previous writers. A few additional examples will help clarify and even define the bases on which his practice rests.

題 惠 崇 畫 扇
Inscribe Hui-ch’ung’s Painted Fan

- 惠 崇 筆 下 開 江 面
1. Hui-ch’ung brush tip disclose river surface,
萬 里 清 波 向
2. Ten-thousand li (mile) clear waves towards
落 暉
setting sun
梅 影 橫 斜 人 不 見
3. Plum shadow horizontally slant people not see,
鴛 鴦 相 對 浴 紅 衣
4. Mandarin-duck mutually face soak red dress.

“Inscribed on Hui-ch’ung’s Painted Fan”

1. The scene of the river is revealed under Hui-ch’ung’s brush,
2. That the luminous waves of ten-thousand li seem to rush towards the setting sun;
3. The shadow of the plum tree slants horizontally, no one is around,
4. The mandarin ducks soak their red feathers in the water.¹⁸

This poem is also in the *Chüeh Chü* form, and although it only consists of

four lines, each line, except the second, is derived from some literary source. The first line is taken from Tu Fu's "Song of Painting" (丹青引) which runs:

將軍下筆 開 生 面
General set brush disclose lively face
(After the touch of General Ts'ao's brush,
all the dead faces look lively)¹⁹

The subtitle of Tu Fu's poem is "for General Ts'ao Pa" (贈曹將軍霸) who was a famous imperial painter of the T'ang dynasty known especially for his paintings of horses and for his portraits of officials who had given meritorious service to the court. The above line refers to Ts'ao's painting of portraits, and is a compliment to and admiration of the artist. Huang borrows this line directly with no significant change except the name of the painter and a reversal of word order in the third and fourth characters. This method is identical to the method employed in the last line of the "Yang-kuan" poem mentioned earlier. In this poem Huang changes the "General" (將軍) to "Hui-ch'ung" (惠崇) just as he changed "wind blows" (風吹) to "north wind" (北風) in the "Yang-kuan" poem. The reversal in the word order from the original "set brush" (下筆) to "brush tip" (筆下), involves again the shift of the verb. In Tu's line, *hsia* (下) is a verb denoting either to start or to set (the brush), while in Huang's, *hsia* signifies "under" or the "tip" of the brush. The alteration from "General set brush" (將軍下筆) to "Hui-ch'ung's brush tip" (惠崇筆下), then is identical to his method of changing "wind blow grass low, loom cattle sheep" (風吹草低見牛羊), to "north wind lower grass, loom cattle sheep" (北風低草見牛羊). As for the second portion of this line, Huang's image, "disclose river surface" (開江面) is definitely a direct borrowing from Tu's "disclose lively face" (開生面), although the former refers to a river scene, and the latter to faces of the esteemed dead officials.

In the third line of the above poem:

梅 影 橫 斜 人 不 見
Plum shadow horizontally slant people not see,
(The shadow of the plum tree slants horizon-
tally, no one is around)

the image of plum blossoms is based on one of Lin Pu's (林逋, 967-1028)

“plum blossoms” poems. Lin, a recluse who remained single all his life, had referred to plum blossoms as his “wife” and he addressed many poems to them. One of the best known pieces is entitled “The Little Plum Tree in My Mountain Garden” (山園小梅), which contains the following famous couplet:

疏影橫斜水清淺
Sparse shadow horizontally slant stream clear shallow,
(Sparse shadows slant across the clear and shallow
stream)
暗香浮動月黃昏
Secret fragrance drift move moon dim hazy.
(Secret fragrance drifts through the dim and hazy
moonlight)²⁰

Note that Huang replaces the image “sparse shadow” (疏影), with a more direct “plum shadow” (梅影), but the meaning remains the same. As for the last line of the poem, Huang did not even bother to change a word but simply lifted a line from one of Tu Mu’s (杜牧, 803-852) *Chüeh Chü* poems.²¹

In a poem of *Chüeh Chü* form, if four out of four of its lines show some sort of borrowing, partially or totally, such as in the case of Huang’s “Yang-kuan” poem, or even three out of four as in the “Painted Fan” poem, they can hardly be called “original.” When we recall Huang’s statement: “it is most difficult to coin one’s own expressions,” “not to be original” is probably what he had in mind when writing poetry. But this practice still remains to be justified as to what extent a poet can “borrow,” and still produce a piece of “gold.”

II. *To-t'ai huan-ku* or “Snatching the Embryo” and “Changing the Bone”

Hui Hung (惠洪) in “Leng-chai Yeh-hua” (冷齋夜話) quotes Huang as saying:

Ideas for poetry are inexhaustible but human talent is

limited. To use a limited talent to chase inexhaustible ideas is a task that not even T'ao Ch'ien and Tu Fu could fulfill. "Retaining the idea while using different words" is called "Changing the Bone;" and "imitating the idea to further describe it" is called "snatching the Embryo."²²

詩意無窮，而人才有限，以有限之才，
追無窮之意，雖淵明少陵不得工也。
不易其意而造其語，謂之換骨法；
規摹其意而形容之，謂之奪胎法。

According to Hui Hung's quotation, two methods were offered by Huang, namely, *to-t'ai* (奪胎, "snatching the embryo"); and *huan-ku* (換骨, "changing the bone"). Although we have no evidence to prove that Huang actually used these terms, they have been attributed to Huang and have been widely cited by many later critics, especially in criticisms like *Shih-hua* (詩話, "Remarks on Poetry").

It seems to me that the passage concerning the idea of *to-t'ai huan-ku* is an interpretation of Huang's theory *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin* (turning iron into gold). This interpretation was most probably made by his contemporaries or scholars of the same period (Sung dynasty). The passage in question begins with a statement very similar to the one seen in Huang's *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin* passage that reads "it is most difficult to coin one's own literary expressions." This is the reason for Huang's advocating imitation. Similarly, because "ideas for poetry are inexhaustible but human talent is limited, to use a limited talent to chase inexhaustible ideas is a task not even T'ao Ch'ien and Tu Fu could fulfill," and, therefore, one should imitate when writing poetry. The methods of imitation, as we have already observed, are *to-t'ai* ("snatching the embryo") and *huan-ku* ("changing the bone"). The former is described as "imitating the idea to further describe it" (規摹其意而形容之); the latter, as "retaining the idea while using different words (不易其意而造其語). A careful examination of these methods reveals that they actually serve as illustration of Huang's view about "turning iron into gold," and "turning the old into the new," both of which Huang had failed to elucidate. But in Hui Hung's quotation, the terms *to-t'ai* ("snatching the embryo") and *huan-ku* ("changing the bone") are provided with a somewhat explicit explanation. This is why I believe that the expression *to-t'ai-huan-ku* might not be Huang's own. It is likely that they

represent interpretations of Huang's original ideas of imitation. And the expression itself may have been coined by Hui Hung.

In his *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, James J. Y. Liu has paraphrased *to-t'ai* ("snatching the embryo") as "to put new wine in an old bottle," and *huan-ku* ("changing the bone") as "to put old wine in a new bottle."²³ Actually, the phrases, "imitating the idea to further describe it" and "retaining the idea while using different words," refer to one method rather than two different ones. Indeed, we see no difference between "to develop an imitated idea by way of different description" (*to-t'ai*) and "to use different words to present the same idea" (*huan-ku*). The question involves the "degree" of imitation, not two different "methods." Hui Hung, in quoting Huang's theory, offered some examples to illustrate the "methods." The following is the so-called *to-t'ai* ("snatching the embryo") method:

醉 貌 如 霜 葉
 Drunken face like frosted leaves,
 (My drunken face resembles the frosted leaves,)
 雖 紅 不 是 春
 Though red not is spring.
 (Though it is red but not spring.)

— Po chü-i

兒 童 悞 喜 朱 顏 在
 Children mistakingly joyful red face remain
 (Children are mistaken and joyful of my youth,)
 一 笑 那 知 是 酒 紅
 One laugh how know is wine red.
 (I laugh. How do they know it is the color of
 wine?)²⁴

— Su Tung-p'o

In the above two couplets, the former is written by Po Chü-i of the T'ang dynasty (618-906), the latter, by Su Tung-p'o of the Sung (960-1279). Hui Hung indicated that Su, who imitated Po's idea, had performed the technique of "snatching the embryo" (*to-t'ai*), that is, "to imitate the idea and further describe it." Po's original idea is about a drunken face which reveals the color of youth under the effect of wine ("youth" is implied by the metaphor "red"), and in a somewhat self-ironical tone, he immediately points out that the red complexion is not "spring" — another metaphor for "youth," but "frosted leaves," an image which signifies "autumn"—a metaphor for "old

age." This idea was "snatched" by Su (*to* [奪] means to take over by force). Instead of copying the original lines, Su presented the derived idea with a different description. The result, as we can see, is that the children mistake the redness of his face to be a sign of youth while it is, like that of Po Chu-i's, the color caused by wine. Su's tone here is self-mocking, and the presentment, more direct. This is indeed a method of "using tradition," and is surely another way of achieving Huang's technique of "turning iron into gold," or "turning the old into the new."

As for the method of *huan-ku* ("changing the bone"), Hui Hung offered the following example:

青天盡處沒孤鴻
 Azure sky end place disappear lonely swan
 (A lonely swan disappears at the edge of the
 azure sky)

— Li Po

白鳥去盡青天回
 White bird gone completely azure sky return
 (When all the white birds disappear, the azure
 sky returns to its color)²⁵

— Huang T'ing-chien

The first line is by Li Po, the second, by Huang T'ing-chien; both aim at presenting us a "skyscape." According to Hui Hung, Huang's line involved the method of "retaining the idea while using different words," the "idea" being the "skyscape." In the original line, the author paints us a picture of a bird, a swan to be precise, flying towards the edge of the azure sky, probably still in sight but about to completely disappear; while in the imitated line, it is the bright and clear azure sky with the disappearance of the birds. The "bone" (words) of the original line has been changed by Huang, but the "body" (idea) remains the same. Judging by these two examples of imitation by Su and Huang, it would seem apparent that there is really no essential difference between "snatching the embryo" and "changing the bone." In fact, Yang Wan-li (楊萬里, 1127-1206) who began his career as a Chiang-hsi poet, had already regarded *to-t'ai huan-ku* as one method when he illustrated the theory in "Ch'eng-chai Shih hua" (誠齋詩話, "Ch'eng-chai's Remarks on Poetry").²⁶

Thus:

渡 河 光 不 濕
Crossing river light not wet.
(The moonlight is not wet when crossing the
river.)

— Yü Hsin (庚信, 513-581)

入 河 蟾 不 沒
Entering river toad not sink.
(The moon does not sink when entering the river.)

— Tu Fu (712-770)

* * * * *

落 月 滿 屋 梁
Setting moon fill house beams,
(The setting moon is shining on the beams,)
猶 疑 照 顏 色
Still wonder shine complexion
(I wonder if she is shining on your face too.)

— Tu Fu

落 日 映 江 波
Setting sun reflect river waves,
(The setting sun is reflecting on the waves,)
依 稀 比 顏 色
Vaguely resemble complexion.
(It vaguely resembles your face.)

— Huang T'ing-chien

In the first set of examples, Yü Hsin's "light" (光) refers to "moonlight," while in Tu Fu's line, it is changed to "toad" (蟾), which is a common allusion to the "moon" in classical poetry. Thus, from "the moonlight is not wet when crossing the river" to "the moon does not sink when entering the river," the image or idea remains the same. Both lines reveal the reflection of the moon on the water except that the specific object "moonlight" in the original is replaced by a more concrete allusion and the "moon" in the imitation piece. And the description differs: one emphasizes "crossing" and "not wet," while the other emphasizes "entering" and "does not sink." Nevertheless, the imitation of idea in the latter is evident.

In the second set of examples, Huang changes Tu's line "the setting moon is shining on the beams" (落月滿屋梁) to "the setting sun is reflecting on the waves" (落日映江波). Needless to say, Huang derives the idea from Tu, although the subject here is "setting sun" instead of "setting moon." In the second lines the main metaphor in both cases is "complexion" or "face" (顏色, literally also means color). Huang uses it as a comparison, while in Tu it is a reminiscence of his friend Li Po. Of these examples, Yang Wan-li commented that they are using the methods of "turning the old into the new" (*i-ku-wei-hsin*) and *to-t'ai-huan-ku* ("snatching the embryo and changing the bone"). It is to be noted that he did not separate *to-t'ai-huan-ku*, as Hui Hung did, into two different methods.

To conclude, we may regard all the terms mentioned in this paper, namely *tien-t'ieh-ch'eng-chin* ("turning iron into gold"), *i-ku-wei-hsin* ("turning the old into the new"), *i-su-wei-ya* ("turning the vulgar into the refined"), and *to-t'ai-huan-ku* ("snatching the embryo and changing the bone"), as one whole method of imitation, instead of taking each of them to be separate methods. The differences in terminology reflect more the emphasis on one or another aspect of the process involved in the method.

Notes

1. *Huang Shan-ku ch'ih-tu* (黄山谷尺牘), in *T'ang-sung shih-ta-chia ch'ih-tu* (唐宋十大家尺牘) (rpt. Taipei: Ch'i-yeh Book Store, 1971), p. 414.
2. The remark came from Ch'en Shih-tao when he commented on the success of the three major poets of the Sung dynasty: "Wang An-shih did it with skill, Su Tung-p'o did it with freshness, Huang T'ing-chien did it with strangeness" (王安石以工, 蘇子瞻以新, 黃魯直以奇). See *Hou-shan Chi* (后山集), SPPY, chüan 23, p. 3a.
3. "A Reply to Huang Chü-fu" (答洪駒父書) in *Yü-chang Huang Hsien-shêng Wên-chi*, (豫章黃先生文集) SPTK, chüan 19, p. 204.
4. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950) p. 4.
5. Sun-tzu and Wu-tzu were of the Chou dynasty (c. 1122-221 B.C.). They were famous for their writing of the art of war. It is believed that the military tactics contained in their writings were unbeatable in ancient times.
6. Kan-yin and Fei-wei were two excellent archers of the ancient period. The latter was the former's student. Their accounts are mentioned in *Li-tzu*.
7. *Shan-ku Ch'üan-chi* (山谷全集), in *Nei-chi* (內集), chuan 12, p. 7b., SPPY.

8. *Tung-p'o t'i-pa* (東坡題跋) in *Sung-jên t'i-pa* (宋人題跋) (rpt. Taipei: World Book Store, 1967), vol. 1, p. 37.
9. Liu Ta-chieh (劉大杰), "The Poetic Theories of Huang T'ing-chien" (黃庭堅的詩論) in *Wên-hsüeh P'ing-lun* (文學評論) (Peking, 1964, #1), pp. 64-72.
10. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 6.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
13. Shih Jung annotated, *Shan-ku Wai-chi* (山谷外集), in *Ch'üan-chi, chüan 15*, p. 12a.
14. This translation is taken from Wai-lim Yip's *Hiding the Universe* (New York: Grossman Publisher, 1972), p. 73. There are many English versions of this poem, such as in Witter Bynner's *The Jade Mountain* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1929), p. 191; James J. Y. Liu's *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 29; Cyril Birch's *Anthology of Chinese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), vol. one, p. 224.
15. Wai-lim Yip's note, p. 73.
16. See note #13.
17. Shih Jung, p. 13b.
For the original poem, see Peking University ed. *Wei-chin Nan-pei-chao wên-hsüeh-shih ts'an-k'ao chih-liao* (魏晉南北朝文學史參考資料) (rpt. Hong Kong, no date), p. 382. The line "天蒼蒼" (Grey is the sky) appears as "山蒼蒼" (Grey is the mountain) in Shih Jung's version. I adopted the Peking University version.
18. Jên Yüan (任淵) annotated, *San-ku Nei-chi* (山谷內集) in *Ch'üan-chi, chüan 7*, pp. 6b, 7a.
19. See Kao Pu-yin (高步瀛) ed., *T'ang-sung shih chü-yao* (唐宋詩舉要) (rpt. Taipei: Hung-yeh Book Store, 1973), vol. 1, p. 233.
20. Lin pu, *Ho-chin shih-chao* (和靖詩鈔) in *Sung shih chao* (宋詩鈔) (rpt. Taipei: World Book Store, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 13.
21. *Nei-chi*, 7/7b.
22. Hui Hung (1071-1128) *Leng-chai Yeh-hua, Pei-hai* (稗海) edition, chüan 1, pp. 7b-8a. This theory has been widely quoted by others after Hui Hung mentioned it, such as in the following: Hu Tzu, *Ts'ung-hua*, volume one, chüan 35, p. 232; Wei Ching-chih (魏慶之), *Shih-jên yü-hsieh* (詩人玉屑) (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1972), chüan 8, p. 157; Jüan Yüeh (阮闕), *Shih-hua tsung-kuei* (詩話總龜) SPTK, chüan 9.
My translation is adapted from James Liu's *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 78.
23. James Liu, p. 78.
24. See note #21, in Hu Tzu's, vol. 1, p. 232; Wei's, p. 157; Juan's, chüan 9.
25. Hui Hung, same pages (see note #22).
26. Yang Wan-li, "Ch'ang-chai shih-hua" (誠齋詩話), *Hsü li-tai shih-hua* (續歷代詩話) (rpt. Taipei: I-wên yin-shu kuan, 1971), p. 9a.