Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905
(review)

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Huang was a native of Jiayingzhou 嘉應州 (present-day Meizhou 梅州) in northeastern Guangdong, and a member of a Hakka (Kejia 客家) family, which, like so many Hakka families of the area, had originally moved from northern China and settled there during the Song and Yuan eras (tenth to thirteenth centuries). Huang's family had achieved local prominence by the time of his great-grandfather, and Huang's father, Huang Hongzao 黃鴻藻 (1828–1891), had a long and distinguished official career and is remembered primarily in history for his management of supplies to the Chinese army during the Sino-French War (1882–1884) in southern Guangdong and Vietnam.

Huang Zunxian's own official career began in 1877 when he became Counselor to the Imperial Chinese Legation in Tokyo, a post he filled until 1882 when he was appointed Consul General in San Francisco. He stayed in California until 1889, returned briefly to China, and 1890 found him installed as Counselor to the Chinese Legation in London. The next year Huang became Consul General in Singapore, where he remained until 1894. Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909), then Acting Governor-General of Liangjiang (Jiangsu, Anhwei, and Jiangxi), had Huang appointed in early 1895 to the staff of his Office of Foreign Affairs (Yang-wuju 洋務局) and put him in charge of cases concerning missionaries and other foreigners. In November 1896 Huang was summoned to two audiences with the
Guangxu emperor, whom he impressed both with his progressive attitudes and by his eyewitness accounts of the successful Japanese reform and modernization movement initiated and fully supported by the government of the Meiji emperor in Japan. The Guangxu emperor subsequently requested copies of Huang's *Riben zashi shi* (Poems on Japanese miscellaneous subjects), which Huang had composed during his posting to Tokyo, and *Riben guozhi* (Treatises on Japan), which he had begun in 1880 and finally published in 1890. Both seem to have contributed significantly to the Chinese emperor's appreciation of the Meiji reform movement and strengthened his own determination to embark on a similar program of reforms for China, the ill-fated reforms of 1898.

An attempt was made toward the end of 1896 to have Huang appointed ambassador to Germany, but the Germans, determined to stir up trouble because the Chinese government was resisting their demands for concessions in Shandong, rejected the appointment on the trumped-up charge that Huang had engaged in corrupt activities while serving in Singapore. However, Huang soon afterwards obtained another office, his first official domestic post in China, when he was appointed Salt Intendant (Yanfa daotai) for Hunan (1897). This involved him directly in the reform activities sponsored by the progressive governor of Hunan, Chen Baozhen (1831–1900), to which he enthusiastically contributed, along with, among others, Tan Sitong (1865–1898) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929). In June 1898, the emperor summoned Huang to an audience at which he intended to appoint him ambassador to Japan, but before Huang could reach the capital, the reform movement was crushed and the emperor rendered powerless. Although Huang himself managed to avoid arrest and execution, largely due to the intervention of the former prime minister of Japan, Ito Hirobumi (伊藤博文, 1841–1909), working through the Japanese government, and of influential members of the Western community in China, his official career was at an end. He was cashiered and ordered to return to his native place, Jiayingzhou, where he lived quietly until his death in 1905.

Schmidt's book includes a survey of Huang's life and background information in part 1 (Biography) and part 2 (Criticism) sufficient for an appreciation of how individual circumstances and general historical forces helped shape Huang's poetry. However, more detailed information and insightful analysis of Huang's life and times can be found in Noriko Kamachi, *Reform in China: Huang Tsun-hsien and the Japanese Model* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). Kamachi's work is far wider in scope than its title suggests and is actually a comprehensive study of all aspects of Huang's personal life, official career, and literary activities—not just during the time when Huang was in Japan but throughout his lifetime. As far as Huang's biography and the historical context are concerned, Kamachi covers the same ground as Schmidt, and she does it better.¹
Schmidt's part 2, focusing as it does on Huang's place in Chinese literary history and his theory and practice of poetry, of course says much more about these things than Kamachi's book, for Kamachi is primarily concerned with Huang's significance as a historical figure and uses his writings primarily as sources for intellectual, social, and political history. Schmidt's study is, at present, undeniably the best introduction in English to Huang's poetry: its interest for us lies here and in the translations of poems that follow in part 3.

However, we should also note another recent study of Huang's theory and practice of poetry: Zhang Tangqi 張堂琦, *Huang Zunxian ji qi shi yanjiu 黃遵憲及其詩研究* (A study of Huang Zunxian and his poetry) (Taipei: Wenshizhe Chubanshe 文史哲出版社, 1991). Zhang's study is also a detailed treatment of Huang's thinking on political, social, economic, and educational issues and includes a sophisticated chronological survey of Huang's writings that attempts to date important works, including many unpublished letters, poems, and prose compositions, identifying where they are preserved or published, and commenting on their critical and historical significance. Schmidt lists Zhang's work in his Bibliography (p. 348) but he refers to it only twice: (1) as one of several works that contain a biography of Huang based on Qian Esun 錢萼孫, *Huang Gongdu Xiansheng nianpu 黃公度先生年譜* (Chronological biography of Mr. Huang Gongdu) (Renjinglu shicao jianzhu 人境廬詩草箋注 edition) (see Within the Human Realm, p. 307 n. 7), and (2) as one work that stresses the importance of Huang's early poems written in imitation of Hakka folk songs (ibid., p. 321 n. 22). Zhang's study of Huang is much more important than this: it is the best comprehensive study of Huang's poetry in any language and now serves as the benchmark against which all other such studies should be measured. Therefore, a brief digression into a description of Zhang's book seems in order. A listing of the subjects treated in chapters 3-6, provided below, indicates the thoroughness with which Zhang approached this complex and fascinating thinker and writer.

Chapter 3, "Huang Zunxian's Literary Thought 黃遵憲文學思想," includes three sections: "The Issue of Spoken versus Written Language" 言語，文字問題, "Views of Classic Prose and Vernacular Fiction" 古文，小說見解, and "Conceptions of Poetry" 詩歌主張, which consists of four subsections: "Literary Evolution and Opposition to Archaism" 文學進化，反對摹古, "Reform Ideas but Preserve Old Forms" 革新精神，保存形式, "Face Reality Squarely and Reflect the Times" 正視現實，反映時代, and "Appreciate Folk Songs and Do Not Avoid Vernacular Expressions and Popular Subjects" 重視民歌，不避流俗.

Chapter 4, "Scope of Intension in Huang Zunxian's Poetry 黃遵憲詩的內涵論," is divided into two broad sections: I. "Subject Categories" 體材分類, which includes (1) "Objective Scene and Subjective Mood" 客觀景物與主觀景情 : (a) "Landscape Poetry" 写景詩, (b) "Describing Objects / Still Life Poetry" 詞物詩, (c) "Travel Poetry" 旅詩; (2) "Historical Reality and Personal Ideas" 歷史
Chapter 5, "Formal Considerations of Huang Zunxian's Poetry" is divided into four broad sections: I. "Distinctive Characteristics of Diction" 答言特性: (1) "Adopt Dialect Expressions and Popular Sayings" 採納方言、俗話, (2) "Use Vernacular Speech" 運用白話, (3) "Do Not Avoid Buddhist Expressions" 不避佛家語, and (4) "Use New Terms in Classical Verse" 以新名詞入詩。II. "Syntax and Rhetoric" 句法修辭: (1) "Reiteratives/Reduplicates" 重疊, (2) "Repetition of Expressions" 重出, (3) "Repetition of Syntax" 重疊, (4) "Parallelism" 排比, (5) "Parallel Couplets" 產生, (6) "Antithesis" 視映, (7) "Anadiplosis" 起首, (8) "Metaphor" 比擬, (9) "Tendencies to Free Verse" 散文化, and (10) "Allusions" 用典。III. "Composition" 篇章結構: (1) "High and Wide Angle of Vision" 高原的視覺角度, (2) "Flexibility of Narrative Viewpoint" 故事觀點靈活, (3) "The Use of Contrast to Create Tension" 用對比創造張力, (4) "Clarity of Unity and Coherence" 樂次分明, (5) "The Use of Syntactic Repetition to Enhance Effects 與語法重複以加強效果, and (6) "Natural Transitions in Tone of Speech" 語氣轉折自然。IV. "Characteristic Expression of Works as a Whole" 整體表現上的特色: (1) "Complexity of Imagery" 意象繁複 and (2) "Vividness of Color" 色彩鮮明。

Chapter 6, "Stylistic Considerations of Huang Zunxian's Poetry" 黃遵憲詩的風格論, is divided into two broad sections: I. "Elements that Contributed to Huang's Style" 黃鶴之風格的成因 and II. "Stylistic Types" 黃鶴的風格類型: (1) "Heroic and Powerful" 雄放勁健, (2) "Downcast and Desolate" 沉鬱蒼涼, (3) "Full of Daring Surprises" 奇變險峭, (4) "Refreshing and Tender" 清新柔婉, and (5) "Easy and Contented" 閒適恬淡。Zhang Tangqi bases his analysis of Huang's range of poetic style on his reading of Huang's own Preface to Renjinglu shicao (Draft of poems from the Hut within the Human Realm):

Huang Zunxian analyzes his own poetry in his Preface to Renjinglu shicao (Draft of poems from the Hut within the Human Realm):
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427, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 [385–443], Li Bai 李白 [701–762], Du Fu 杜甫 [712–770], Han Yu 韓愈 [768–824], and Su Shi 蘇軾 [1037–1101] and extending down to works by late lesser masters of recent times. However, I neither lay claim to any one of these as my own style (burning yige 不名一格) nor restrict myself entirely to any one form (buzhuanc yiti 不專一體), for I must not allow damage befall my ability to write poetry 'for the self' (yao bushi hu weiwo zhi shi 要不失乎為我之詩)." This passage perfectly describes the route Huang took in achieving his own poetic style: the resentment and distress that Cao Zhi felt when he fell into the deep net of unfavorable circumstances; the profound discontent that Bao Zhao felt when he was denied the opportunity to exercise his talents; Tao Qian's character, which allowed him to distance himself from the common, vulgar world and be content with a life of pristine simplicity; Xie Lingyun's sensitive observation of landscape scenery and his exquisite ability to depict it in words; Li Bai's magnanimity and romantic spirit; Du Fu's sorrow and realism; the great and wonderful way Han Yu had with words as he strove mightily to create something new; and how Su Shi broke free from the confines of prosody to write freely as he pleased. Huang took up the styles of all these past masters, studied them, and enriched himself in the process. He even nourished his style by drawing collectively on the works of late "lesser masters" of recent times—poets such as Gong Dingan 姜定盦 [Gong Zizhen 金珍 (1792–1841)], Zeng Guofan, Huang Zhongze 黃仲則 [Huang Jingren 景仁 (1749–1783)], Song Zhiwan 宋芷巖 [Song Xiang 香 (ca. 1756–1826)], Wu Meicun 吳梅村 [Wu Weiye 勝業 (1609–1672)], and Xie Gaoyu 謝高羽 [Xie Ao 炕 (1249–1295)].

Although overlap occurs, Schmidt's and Zhang's books have different approaches, emphases, and strengths: (1) Schmidt's study offers far more information about Huang's experience with the Western world and Meiji Japan (hardly mentioned in Zhang's). (2) While Zhang merely cites brief excerpts of poetry to illustrate points of literary history, critical analysis, intellectual history, or biography, Schmidt's citations are all in English translation, and, since he also provides a large selection of translated and annotated whole poems, his critical achievement is of a very different order. Translation from one language to another necessarily involves interpretation—an exacting exercise that the literary critic or historian who stays within the same language is spared. While Zhang's analyses of passages of poetry often provide helpful hints as to what they "mean" (syntax, denotations, connotations, general gist, allusions, etc.), none of the passages are translated into modern Chinese. (3) Zhang's study consists of both a more comprehensive discussion of Huang's place in Chinese literary history and a wider and deeper critical analysis of formal and stylistic elements. (4) Schmidt's notes and commentaries to the translated poems and excerpts—as well as the translated poetry itself—are especially valuable for the factual information they provide concerning late Qing history and Huang's personal life and official career. Zhang either avoids passages of poetry that require commentary or, when commentary is required, keeps it to an absolute minimum—assuming a much more informed readership than those for whom Schmidt's book is written. Although Schmidt rarely goes beyond the
notes given in Qian Esun’s annotations in Renjianlu shicao jianzhu (Draft of poems from the Hut within the Human Realm, with annotations) and material supplied in Qian’s Huang Gongdu Xiansheng nianpu 黃公度先生年譜 (Chronological biography of Mr. Huang Gongdu) (Renjinglu shicao jianzhu edition), he does make available in English an enormous amount of information about Huang and his times, and this alone constitutes a significant contribution to the study of late Qing history and literature in the West. Schmidt’s pioneering effort should also serve as a catalyst for further studies and translations of Huang and his works.

While Schmidt’s part 2 includes some of the most satisfying parts of the book, it also contains some of the most disappointing. We should single out for praise his surveys of (1) Huang’s role as a forerunner of modern vernacular Chinese literature, (2) his significant contribution to the “poetic revolution” of the late Qing (shijie geming 時界革命), (3) his accomplishments as a patriotic poet and social critic, (4) the success of his experiments in poetry about foreign lands and cultures and the scientific and technological achievements of the modern world, and (5) the development of his satirical poetry. These are all are well written and carefully documented sections. However, Schmidt’s attempt in chapter 6 (“Criticism: Traditional Themes”) to define Huang’s place in the history of traditional classical verse—including accounts of Qing-era poetry, the distinctions between Tang and Song poetry, and Huang’s special attraction to Song-era poetry—seems woefully inadequate, reductionist, and seriously misleading.

Schmidt begins chapter 6 with the following statement:

Modern Chinese critics rarely mention the large quantity of verse on traditional themes that Huang Zunxian wrote, although much of it is of exceptional quality. These critics have probably felt disinclined to study this poetry, since it does not seem relevant to their interest in Huang as a forerunner of modern Chinese literature, but their attitude is faulty for a number of reasons. . . . By ignoring Huang’s more traditional poetry, we run the risk of presenting an unfair and distorted picture of his poetic output. . . . Since his traditional verse comprises a significant portion of his collected works, it would be foolhardy to ignore it just because it does not fit our preconceived notions about Huang being a “modern poet.” . . . An examination of Huang’s more traditional poetry may reveal affiliations with earlier literature that may assist us in explaining his more original verse. (p. 78)

However, many modern Chinese studies of Huang’s poetry are, in fact, devoted at least in part to revealing “affiliations with earlier literature” and traditional elements in Huang’s verse. Some explore these aspects in great detail, with much sensitivity, and, in my opinion, achieve results far superior to Schmidt’s own efforts. Zhang Tangqi’s Huang Zunxian ji qi shiyanjiu (A study of Huang Zunxian and his poetry) is the most comprehensive of these studies, and, while critiques of Huang by other modern literary historians/critics often focus on Huang’s “modern” aspects, they also have much to say about his literary precedents and place in
the tradition of classical verse. For example: (1) Qian Esun’s 夢苕盦詩話 (Discussions of poetry from the Dreamer of Rushes Hut), quoted in Renjinglu shicao jianzhu (pp. 434–442), has a great deal to say about Huang’s debt to the tradition and his close affiliation with the poetry of Gong Zizhen, Huang Jingren, and Song Xiang; (2) Chen Yan 陳衍 (sobriquet Shi Ji 道)’s Shiyishi shihua (Discussions of poetry from Shiyi’s Lodge) (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1961), quoted in Renjinglu shicao jianzhu (pp. 416–419), traces Huang’s literary antecedents primarily to Gong Zizhen and Xie Ao; (3) the quote from Long Muxun 龍沐勳, Zhongguo yunwen shi 中國敘文史 (A history of Chinese poetry) (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan 商務印書館, 1934), in Renjinglu shicao jianzhu (p. 448), stresses Huang’s individualism and modernity, but another passage in Long’s work, quoted in Tang, Huang Zunxian ji qi shi yanjiu (A study of Huang Zunxian and his poetry) (p. 213 n. 6), emphasizes the influence of Zeng Guofan’s poetry on Huang; and (4) Qian Zhongshu 秦中書, Tanyi lu 談藝錄 (Record of discussions of literary art) (Hong Kong: Longmen Shuju 龍門書局, 1965) (pp. 29–32), disparages Huang’s verse for its superficiality and excessive derivation from the poetry of Song Xiang 宋湘, but Qian’s Yeshi ji 也是集 (The and so forth collection) (Hong Kong: Guangjiaojing Chubanshe 广角镜出版社, 1984), written many years later, includes a section on Huang (pp. 77–79) in which Qian expresses his regret at having attacked Huang earlier in Tanyi lu and now praises him—with some qualifications—as a legitimate heir to the tradition of classical Chinese verse.

Zhang Tangqi’s bibliography lists more than two dozen recent studies of Huang’s poetry, and few fail to say at least something about Huang’s traditional affiliations (see pp. 267–271). The compilation of critical remarks on Huang’s poetry appended by Qian Esun to Renjinglu shicao jianzhu: Shihua shang 詩話上 (Discussions of poetry: Part A) and Shihua xia 詩話下 (Part B) (pp. 391–452), gleaned from late-Qing through mid-twentieth-century works, contains many other observations on Huang’s traditional affiliations. Even Liang Qichao, who championed the innovative aspects of Huang’s verse, also writes extensively about Huang’s positive relation to the tradition in Yinbingshi shihua 饮冰室詩話 (Discussions of poetry from the Ice Drinker’s Lodge), extensively quoted by Qian Esun in Discussions of Poetry: Part A. Recent publications on Huang’s poetry—especially those produced in the People’s Republic of China through the early 1980s—might tend to emphasize Huang’s “modernity,” but Schmidt’s claim that Huang’s traditional aspects are “rarely” addressed by modern Chinese critics is simply not true.

According to Schmidt, of all the traditional influences on Huang, the strongest was the poetry of the Song era (960–1279)—especially that of the Southern Song (p. 79). It is necessary, therefore, for him to define the essential features of
Song verse and contrast them with those of the other major “school” of traditional verse—that of the Tang era (618–906):

Ever since the Ming dynasty, Chinese critics have tended to divide Chinese poetry from the seventh century onward into two schools, Tang poetry and Song poetry. Such a division ignores the great diversity of writing during both dynasties, but one must admit that it does possess a certain validity, and even such a prominent Japanese scholar of Chinese poetry as Yoshikawa Kōjirō 吉川幸次郎 (1904–1981) continues the division in his own work. According to Yoshikawa, the primary difference between Tang and Song poetry is that Tang poets emphasized sentiment, whereas Song poets favored intellect. Tang poetry does not lack ideas, nor are Song authors deficient in feeling, but Yoshikawa and earlier Chinese critics have based their separation of Tang from Song poetry on easily discernible differences between the approaches of authors during the two periods.

Nonetheless, in certain respects it might be better to call Song poetry a poetry of wit than a poetry of intellect, because the term “wit” embraces a wider variety of literary phenomena than the term “intellect.”

These assertions by Schmidt can be challenged on several grounds. (1) Distinctions between the Tang and Song “schools” or “styles” did not start with the Ming but originated much earlier during the Song era itself. Their first systematic presentation, in fact, appears in Yan Yu’s 晏芙 (ca. 1195–ca. 1245) Canglang shihua 漱浪詩話 (Canglang’s discussions of poetry), and, from the thirteenth century on, it became commonplace to describe, analyze, and evaluate classical verse in terms of Tang and Song stylistics—no longer conceived of merely as elements of historical period styles but as contrasting sets of criteria that constitute two distinct, trans-temporal generic styles: whereas Tang-style poetry tends to be dense, connotative, elliptical and suggestive, intense, subtle, and figurative, and where it largely avoids colloquial expressions and syntax, often expresses ideal, magnanimous states of mind, and emphasizes the expression of heightened awareness of exceptional moments in life, Song-style poetry tends to be loose, denotative, matter-of-fact, obvious, discursive, and straightforward, often using colloquialisms and often preoccupied with the vicissitudes of everyday life—portraying them at times with irony and (even coarse) humor.

(2) Yoshikawa does, indeed, contrast Tang and Song poetry but not, as Schmidt says, on the basis of “sentiment” (Tang) versus “intellect” (Song). The terms “sentiment” and “intellect” occur neither in the section cited by Schmidt in Burton Watson’s translation of Yoshikawa’s “Sōshi gaisetsu” 宋詩概説 (An introduction to Song poetry) nor in the original Japanese text. The section that Schmidt cites is titled 宋詩の哲學性理論性 in Japanese and The Philosophical and Discursive Nature of Sung Poetry in English. It is Yoshikawa’s view that Song poets tended far more than Tang poets to relate philosophical observations and employ the language of logical discourse in poetry, but he never says that Song poetry is more “intellectual” than Tang poetry nor singles out, for example, Su
Shi and Yang Wanli as more "intellectual" poets than Du Fu and Han Yu. While there is no doubt that more explicit philosophizing exists in Song poetry than in Tang poetry, one can hardly say that this makes its "intellectual" content greater than that of the Tang. Yoshikawa also never contrasts "intellectual" Song poetry with "sentimental" Tang poetry. Nothing in Watson's translation or the original Japanese text supports Schmidt's reading of An Introduction to Sung Poetry. Instead, Yoshikawa's basic distinction is that Tang poetry is pervaded by sorrow and that Song poetry attempts to transcend sorrow. However, even this view has not found wide acceptance and has often been challenged.

(3) It would have been helpful if Schmidt had attempted to define more precisely what he means when he says that "wit" generally characterizes Song poetry, for he simply says that wit is a "clever turn of phrase or humorous image," "clever conceits," or (witty) "use of personification" (p. 79). Since such elements can be found in the works of many a Chinese poet from almost any period either before or after the Song (including almost all the more important Tang masters), Schmidt's use of "wit" is useless as a defining characteristic of Song verse. Nevertheless, he goes on to say: "Interest in witty Song verse declined under Mongol rule and reached its nadir during the nearly two and a half centuries of the Ming dynasty, but the Qing dynasty witnessed a remarkable rebirth of Song-dynasty poetry" (p. 80).

The history of Chinese classical verse during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods is much more complicated than this. Despite the strength of the Tang-style-centered archaist movement (fugu yundong 復古運動), much Song-style poetry—"witty" or not—was composed throughout the Yuan and Ming eras—by such prominent poets as Fang Hui 方回 (1227–1306), Yang Weizhen 楊維禎 (1296–1379), Du Mu 杜牧 (1459–1525), the painters Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509) and Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593), the dramatist Tang Xianzu 唐先祖 (1550–1616), and, of course, Yuan Hunding 殷氏 (1568–1610) and his brothers (the so-called Gongan 公安 school of poetry), among others. Its tradition continued intact up to the time when mainstream anthologists, editors, annotators, critics, and major poets began to reject the narrow confines of archaism during the seventeenth century and include Song and Song-style poetry within the purview of their interests. The facts of Chinese literary history do not support Schmidt's assertion that the Ming suffered a "nadir" and that the Qing witnessed a "remarkable rebirth" of "Song-dynasty" poetry.

Much of the best of Qing poetry is based on the creative synthesis of Tang-style and Song-style elements—for example, the use of daring and sophisticated figurative language to portray everyday life, sometimes with ironic and/or humorous twists. The great Qing poets, despite the efforts of modern literary historians to pigeonhole them as either Tang-style or Song-style poets, were all successful synthesizers of both styles (and, often, of pre-Tang poetry as well)—poets such as
Schmidt's translations are inconsistent: while some versions are accurate and reveal a good understanding of the Chinese texts, others seem very flawed and consist of nothing but loose paraphrase that does little justice to the originals. In general, Schmidt is better at poems and parts of poems that consist primarily of the straightforward language of narrative and discourse but decidedly less successful when it comes to coping with figurative language. Since much of Huang's best poetry is rich in metaphor and other tropes, one can only be disappointed in the overall results of Schmidt's efforts: Schmidt translates Huang as if he always wrote in the loose, straightforward style of a Fan Chengda or a Yang Wanli, but this fails to do justice to much of his best poetry.

If one understands original prose texts (and, to some extent, prose-like poetry), paraphrase can often work well enough when converting narrative or discourse from one language into another, but it is poison when it comes to figurative language. Schmidt exhibits such consistent inattention to the original syntax of lines of Huang's poems that I am left with the strong impression that he does not translate directly from original texts but instead works up his English versions out of intermediate glosses, which might consist of various mixtures of prose paraphrase, associations, external information, and interpretation. Such glosses in modern Chinese (baihua) on texts in literary Chinese (wenyan) called dayi (the general idea/drift), are common features in modern Chinese publications of studies, anthologies, and editions of classical works. Although it would be foolish to ignore such glosses, they should never be regarded as substitutes for or equivalents to the original texts—especially for poetry. A paraphrase is a paraphrase whether it is from literary Chinese to English, literary Chinese to modern Japanese, or literary Chinese to modern Chinese.

According to Schmidt's Preface (p. x), his understanding of Huang's poetry largely depends on the "learned comments" of Qian Esun (Zhonglian), a foremost expert on Huang Zunxian studies, and his ability to comprehend "the subtleties of the Changshu dialect he [Qian] speaks." Qian's annotations to Huang's poetry, the Renjinglu shicao jianzhu 人境廬詩草箋註, rarely include in-
terpretative comments or directions on how to construe the syntax of lines and passages but consist almost entirely of factual background and biographical information or quotations of passages that identify the source of allusions. Thus, it appears that Schmidt’s English versions must significantly derive from verbal glosses delivered to him by Qian, as Schmidt says, during two visits to Qian’s home at Suzhou University (p. x). However, if Qian ever tried to explain how the syntax of Huang’s poetry worked, I find little evidence of this in Schmidt’s translations, which rarely exhibit respect for the wording of poems. Schmidt lists several annotated selections of Huang’s poems in his bibliography (p. 342), and these also must have proved helpful with the dayi (the general idea/drift) of individual lines, couplets, and, in some cases, whole poems:


Li Xiaosong 李小松, editor and annotator. Huang Zunxian shixuan 黄遵宪诗选 (Selected poems by Huang Zunzian). Taibei: Yuanliu Chubanshe 原流出版社, 1988.

Liu Shinan 劉世南, editor and annotator. Huang Zunxian shixuan zhu 黄遵宪诗选 (Selected poems by Huang Zunzian, with annotations). Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe 古籍出版社, 1986.

Zhong Xianpei 仲賢培 et al., editors and annotators. Huang Zunxian shixuan 黄遵宪诗选 (Selected poems by Huang Zunzian). Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe 廣東人民出版社, 1985.

The combination of Schmidt’s dayi paraphrase approach to translation and his frequent disregard of Qian Esun’s “learned comments” results in numerous deficiencies and errors. The following set of passages, unfortunately, is typical of Schmidt’s selections as a whole; the same kinds of problems can be found throughout the 150-odd poems that he presents in the book:

Page 217: 感懷 [Schmidt] Meditations; [Lynn] Impressions / Stirred By My Emotions

卓哉千古賢
獨能救時弊

[Schmidt] The wise men of antiquity were vastly superior to this scholar,
Or at least they could deal with their society’s problems!

[Lynn] How glorious! Those worthies of ages past,
Who alone could rescue their times from troubles.

Page 218: 乙丑十一月避亂大埔三河墟 [Schmidt] In the Eleventh Month of 1865, We Escape from the Rebellion to Three Rivers in Dapu County; [Lynn] In the Eleventh Month of the Year Yichou [December 18, 1865–January 16, 1866], We Escape the Rebellion at Three Rivers Town in Dapu District [northeastern Guangdong]
[Schmidt] Everyone flees and begs relatives for help;

[Lynn] All wander as refugees, calling out “Old Sir!” “Young Sir!”

That is, refugees beg any man for help, whether young or old. The commentary of Qian Esun rightly directs the reader to Ode 37 in the Shijing (Classic of poetry), “Maoqiu” (The escarp), where shu xi bo xi (Oh young sirs! Oh old sirs!) is traditionally taken as an address to the ministers of Wei, made by refugee officers of the neighboring state of Li, begging for help. It is most likely that shu bo 伯叔, literally “older uncle [or] younger uncle,” in Huang’s poem are meant as respectful addresses to strangers for help.

Page 219: 潮州行 A Ballad of Chaozhou

平江荡柔橹

[Schmidt] The still river quivered as we plied our oars.

[Lynn] The calm river lets our weak sweep go with the drift.

Surely, dang 荡 here is not “quiver” but “drift”—as it occurs in the expression dang chuan 荡舩 (let a boat drift / drift around in a boat): Huang’s refugee family, still trying to escape from the Taiping Rebellion, leaves Three Rivers, where the Mei River joins the Han River, and travels south down the Han to supposed safety at Chaozhou. Already worn out by previous flight, the exhausted (“weak”) boatmen who man the stern sweep (not “our oars”) fortunately are allowed by the calm river to rest and let the boat drift with the current. Roulu 柔橹 could also mean “gentle sweep”—that is, only a gentle working of the stern sweep is necessary to assist the boat to make its way downstream in the calm current. A few lines later, ambushed by bandits hiding in the thick vegetation at the river’s edge, the refugees are overtaken by the bandits’ boat:

快橹疾如雨

[Schmidt] Their boats flying more swiftly than a squall of rain.

[Lynn] The fast sweep flies like rain.

Schmidt’s paraphrase completely obscures the dramatic contrast between the roulu 柔橹 (weak/gentle sweep) of the Huang family boat and the kuailu 快橹 (fast/powerful sweep) of the bandits’ boat (nothing in the poem suggests “boats”), which quickly catches up, allowing the bandits to overpower them and demand that they hand over their possessions. (The Huangs, however, are close enough to Chaozhou city that a cannon is fired, people shout “kill the bandits,” and they are saved in the nick of time.) It is also possible that the line contains an ellipsis: “The fast sweep scatters / makes fly [water] as if it were raining.” Or, the line might be construed as “The fast sweep makes them fly like the rain.”
A Trip to Lake Abundant

Lotus leaves stand erect, so slender and graceful—
Like millions of emeralds spitting dewy beads from their mouths

Erect and graceful stand lotus leaves—
Countless jade stones brimming over with dewy spittle.

Schmidt’s paraphrase obscures the parallel structure of the couplet, which argues against taking tuo 縲 (spit/spittle) as a verb. Han 含 is not “mouth” but “hold in the mouth,” “hold in/back,” “be replete with / brim over”—a verb parallel to li 丶 (stand) in the previous line. The couplet consists of two halves of a metaphor, but Schmidt needlessly turns it into a simile. “Emeralds” are translucent, bright, flashy stones, a poor simile, anyway, for the soft and glossy, jade-green leaves of the lotus. Of course, bi 碧 does not mean “emerald” but fine “jade stone,” surely a more appropriate translation for this Chinese poem about a scene in China. No word in the original corresponds to Schmidt’s “beads.”

The spring wind puffs against the trees in my garden
And they sigh together as if autumn had arrived.
Drenched clouds wriggle free from craggy peaks;
Layers of drifting waves slap against the sky.

The spring wind so blows the garden’s trees
They shake and flap as if in autumn.
Drenched clouds gang up on mountain peaks, emerge
As layered waves, buffet the sky, flow on.

“Puff” and “sigh” are gentle actions, but this is a violent scene, and the violence is echoed two couplets later in the description of storm clouds. Although shushu 聲樹 usually means “tree after tree / each and every tree,” it is more likely that here it is an instance of onomatopoeia, “shushu,” which suggests a sound—“sigh,” “sough,” or “rustle” if gentle, and something like “shake and flap” if violent. Since a storm is coming up, I have chosen “shake and flap.” In this context, Schmidt’s “moan” seems out of place. Anyway, trees do not “moan” when the wind merely puffs on them. In the second couplet quoted, cuan 水 does not mean “wriggle
free” but “come together” or “surround” / “gang up on”—as in the expressions
*cuán’ou* 撞ッ or *cuánda* 撞打 (surround and beat up someone). Although Schmidt
seems to have translated this second couplet so that the first line describes
the clouds and the second deals with the river’s waves, it is more likely that both lines
refer to the storm clouds. The couplet brilliantly invokes a double-layered meta-
phor: the cloud-bullies first gang up and threaten the mountain peaks, then turn
into *diéláng* (layered waves = storm waves), which come out, beat up the gentle
spring sky, and finally spread to cause mischief down below among gardens and
along the peaceful river. We know that the fury of the storm has not yet struck,
however, because the final couplet tells us:

不識新治長
沙邊有睡鷹

[Schmidt] A seagull dozes drowsily on a sandy bank,
Ignorant that the waters are already rising.

[Lynn] Innocent of the swell of new waves,
The sandy margins keep their sleeping gulls.

Schmidt’s paraphrase misses the point: the sand flats at river’s edge are, as yet,
unacquainted with (untouched by) the long reach of high waves, newly stirred up
by the onset of an unseasonable storm. The waves are “new,” we can assume, be-
cause this is the first storm since winter. The river gets fresh, unspoiled sand flats
each spring, and these, untouched until now, are about to be washed over, wrecked,
and the gulls deprived of their place to sleep. One could argue, of course, that it is
the gulls that are yet unaware of the new swelling waves and so stay asleep—the
syntax is ambiguous enough to permit this reading, and such a reading would be
logically plausible, since gulls are sentient beings and sand flats are not. But such
logic, I believe, robs the poem of much of its charm. Huang’s poem is full of
drama, witty metaphor, and layers of meaning, but, unfortunately, very little of
this comes across in Schmidt’s English version.

Page 232: 不忍池畔遊詩 Even Outings to Lake Shinobazu, I

開門看雨夢殢醒
一抹斜陽照畫眉
隨著西風便飛去
弱花無力壓蜻蜓

[Schmidt] Just wakened from my dream, I open the door and watch the rain;
A blotch of setting sun glows on the painted screen.
Dragonflies wing away, docilely following the west wind—
The blossoms are too weak to make them drop in for a chat.

[ Lynn] Only when we open the door to watch the rain do we wake from dream
To find a daub of slanting sunlight lighting up a painted screen.
Following the west wind, let’s just fly away—
These tender blossoms lack the power to fetter you dragonflies!

I have translated the function word / grammatical particle cai 咦 [才] as it occurs in the vernacular Chinese. Classical usage (hardly, barely, scarcely) suggests:

"Opening the door to watch the rain / We're [I'm] scarcely woken from dream."

The colloquial usage lends itself to a more dramatic and intimate narrative: Huang seems to be with Japanese friends in a geisha house (or, at least, in some restaurant or other establishment attended by geishas). Now, it is late afternoon or early evening. After being caught up in a dream-like mood (sake, women, song!), the mood is dispelled by taking a look outside. Schmidt's version of the line—the poet wakes up and then opens the door and watches the rain—is not possible, given the word order of the line and the presence of cai 咦 [才], in either its classical or its vernacular usage. The "painted screen" (huaping 画屏), of course, is a conceit for the scene outside. Schmidt's rendering of yimo 一抹 as "a blotch," an ugly expression, is most unfortunate, for it surely refers, in keeping with the painting / real scenery conceit, to a brush stroke, as if the setting sun at the clear western edge of a rain-shrouded sky were adding a bright stroke to a dark painting. Instead, Schmidt has the sun cast a blotchy patch of light on an actual painted screen inside, missing Huang's stroke of genius completely. In the third line, bian 便 does not mean "docilely" but "immediately" or "just/simply." Schmidt has missed other conceits: the ruohua 荷花 (tender blossoms) of the last line surely refer to ruo (young, tender) geishas and the qingting 蜻蜓 (dragonflies)—strong, assertive, mobile creatures—refer to Huang's Japanese friends. Huang was well aware that an old name for Japan was Qingtingzhou (Akitsushima 青蜻洲), "Dragonfly Isles," so this was a perfect opportunity for him to use his lively wit and call his friends "dragonflies." Now that they have awakened from reverie, he suggests that they should break free and simply (bian 便) leave. Schmidt's reversing the order of the third and fourth lines is consistent with his misunderstanding of the poem as a whole. His version does little justice to the original, an extremely witty and clever poem, for it merely assembles a few disjointed impressions, lacks structure and integrity, and completely obscures the genius of Huang's metaphoric figures and dramatic economy. The gratuitous "drop in for a chat" at the end of Schmidt's version does not deserve comment.

Schmidt translates a selection of fifteen of Huang's Poems on Japanese miscellaneous subjects (pp. 238–241), but the sixteenth, Qingtingzhou 青蜻洲 (Dragonfly Country), is not included among them. I provide my own translation here:

巨海茫茫浸四圍
三山風引是耶非
蓬萊清淺幾多少
依舊蜻蜓點水飛

The great ocean, infinitely vast, drenches its edges all around—
Might it have been the wind from the Three Mountains that drew me here?
This Penglai with its clear shallows has existed ever so long,
Now as always, a dragonfly tripping across the water as it flies.

Huang's own commentary reads:

From the time of its [Japan's] founding until the present, its national boundaries have always remained the same. When Jimmu 天皇, the first emperor of Japan (660–585 B.C.) reached Yamato 大和, he climbed a mountain, looked into the distance, and said, "How beautiful is this realm! Does it not just look like a dragonfly tripping across the water!" Thus, Japan is also called the Qingtingguo (Akishima) 青蜻蜓洲 [Dragonfly Country]. Our histories mention the Three Mountains of the Gods 三神山 that exist beyond the sea, to which the wind draws you but which you never can reach.

Huang then quotes from the Shanhaijing 山海經 (Classic of mountains and seas), to show how the ancient Chinese thought that the mythic Penglai Isles, abode of the Immortals, were located where Japan is, lying far beyond the eastern sea.18

The bitan (Japanese, hitsudan) 笔談 (brush conversations) that Huang had with his Japanese friends (1877–1882) record many instances when those friends tried to involve him with geishas or assist him in acquiring a concubine. Huang apparently refused all such attempts, remaining loyal to his wife back in China. The story of Huang's love and dedication to his wife and other women in his family is treated in considerable detail by Noriko Kamachi (pp. 4–6), who notes Huang's resolve never to take a concubine because of the influence of his great-grandmother, Madam Li 李太太. Thus, whenever Huang's friends suggested an excursion or gathering, he always expressed enthusiasm for the idea but invariably added something like "but you simply need not order any geishas 但不必招妓者耳!"

Page 232: 不忍池曉遊詩 Evening Outings to Lake Shinobazu, III

薄薄櫻茶一吸餘
點心清露絹芙蓉
青衣擎出酒波球
幾片玻璃紙夾魚

[Schmidt] One tiny sip of subtly flavored cherry tea
Makes a snack that refreshes like dewdrops on lotus.
Then black-robed waitresses bring out green rippling wine,
With transparent sashimi, sliced thinner than paper.

[Lynn] The remains of a sip of delicate, subtle cherry tea
Form a morsel of pure dew to ladle from a lotus blossom.
Black gowns elevate and bring out wine rippling green
And sashimi in paper-thin slices on foot-wide glass plates.

Schmidt ignores the 諸 (the remains) at the end of the first line. The poet does not quite finish the tea, and a bit remains at the bottom of his lotus-shaped cup, as if it were dew held in the calyx of a lotus blossom. "Snack" is an unfortunate
choice for *dianxin* (morsel), and Schmidt’s resort to a nonexistent simile suggests that he has seriously misunderstood the syntax of the couplet. In the third line, *qingchu* (hold something up high (as a sign of respect) and bring out), is weakened by Schmidt’s simple “bring out.” In the context of this poem, *qingyi* (black-robed waitresses), but why suppress the synecdoche of the original and expand it into an interpretative paraphrase? And is it really necessary that *jiupo lu* (wine rippling green / wine that ripples its green color) be rearranged as “green rippling wine”? Schmidt’s understanding of the last line is, I think, impossible, for it reads: *jingchi boli zhipian yu* (foot-across glass, paper-slice fish). He ignores *jingchi* (foot in diameter) and has it that the glass describes the fish: “transparent sashimi.” The syntax of the original might support the interpretation “foot across [transparent as] glass: paper-thin fish slices,” but, while sashimi might certainly be sliced so thinly that it seems transparent, it is most unlikely that it would ever be cut in foot-wide slices. I suppose it is possible that Huang here indulges in hyperbole, so that the line might mean: “Paper-thin slices of fish—[transparent and big as] foot-wide panes of glass.” But Schmidt’s paraphrase misses even this reading.

Page 254: [Schmidt, writing not in italics, as if this were the preface or introduction to the poem and not its title] I composed this poem after gazing at the moon from a ship in the Pacific Ocean on the night of the Midautumn Lunar Festival; [Lynn] *A Poem Composed upon Gazing at the Moon aboard Ship on the Pacific, Night of the Fifteenth, Eighth Month* [September 23, 1885, Midautumn Festival]

[Schmidt] Since embarking I’ve seen the moon wax and wane four times, and we’ve already sailed three thousand miles back home. (/PO)

[Schmidt] Since setting off on my journey I’ve seen the moon this bright four times, and the homeward-bound ship has already crossed a thousand miles. (/PO)

Schmidt’s version clearly states that at least three lunar months have elapsed (“I’ve seen the moon wax and wane four times”) since embarking on *this* voyage back across the Pacific to China and that in the space of this supposed ninety or ninety-plus days the ship traveled a mere three thousand *li* (one thousand miles), that is, at the most, about eleven miles every twenty-four hours—a slow boat to China if there ever was one! How did Schmidt get so confused? *Si hui ming* does not mean “wax and wane four times” but “[this] bright four times,” which echoes the fourth line:

[Schmidt] But tonight her clear rays glow with double purity
But tonight she emits twice the beauty of her pure rays.

According to Qian Esun, Huang Gongdu Xiansheng nianpu (Chronological biography of Mr. Huang Gongdu), Huang left his post in San Francisco on the twelfth day of the eighth lunar month (September 20, 1885), that is, three-plus days before the night of this poem, which accounts for the "homeward bound ship has already crossed a thousand miles." In fact, Qian quotes this very couplet, noting that the poem is dated the fifteenth of the eighth month, to prove that Huang left San Francisco on the twelfth day: "It can be deduced that the day that Mr. Huang left America was the twelfth." In other words, the night of the poem is the fourth night since the ship sailed. Even in 1885, a reasonably fast ship could travel 250 miles or more in twenty-four hours, so three-plus days could easily account for about one thousand miles. Schmidt is unjustified to translate three thousand li (one-third of a mile) as three thousand "miles," for Huang obviously was trying to be precise in his reckoning of the distance traveled. Equally obvious, Schmidt has no idea where the ship was on the night of the poem, for he says elsewhere in his long commentary on this poem included in the chapter "Huang Zunxian and Modern Science": "When Huang is celebrating the Midautumn Festival aboard the ship, his family is probably sleeping on what is for them the morning after the festival (depending, of course, on whether he has passed the International Date Line or not)."

The ship that Huang traveled in, by the way, traveled via Japan and arrived in Guangzhou at the end of the ninth lunar month (early November 1885), so he was on board a total of about six weeks.

Clouds so lazy they let dragons lie down;
Wind so mild it allows birds to go back.
The mountains above my wall are perfectly good in themselves,
So what need have I to brag about mountains of the gods?

The third characters in the two lines of the first couplet, sui (let) and ren (allow), are synonyms. The two lines exhibit an obvious parallel structure—so obvious that it is astonishing that anyone could have missed it. Or, perhaps, does the translator think he can improve on the original by suppressing the parallelism.
and inventing a new meaning for the first line? Wo 躺 (lie down / rest / adopt a posture of sleep) can only be a verb, parallel to huan 返 (go back) in the next line: up there in the sky, clouds are so idle that dragons need not exert themselves to keep up with them and so can rest; down on earth, the wind is so mild that birds have no trouble returning to the mountains—they do not have to fight an afternoon wind to go home to their nests. Schmidt seems to collapse together wo 躺 (lie down) and wo 廪 (nest, refuge, lair), but there is nothing in the text or context to justify this reading. I prefer a more literal reading of the second couplet and have translated it accordingly. Shenshan 神山 “mountains of the gods” deserves more than the paraphrase “foreign mountains.” Schmidt discusses such references in detail on pages 96–99, where he demonstrates how Huang uses allusions to Buddhist and Daoist paradises to express the exoticism of “foreign climes,” so it would have been easy to translate shenshan literally and add a brief reference note.

Page 265: 施密特 [Schmidt] Trying to Cheer Myself Up; [Lynn] Seeking Release from Depression

While flowers bloomed and wilted, I closed my gate to sleep;  
Please excuse me, dear spring, I can’t help that I missed you.  
Hardly anything in this world works ever out as you plan;  
The men all around me become younger each day.  
Evening rain drips on like some dreary tune;  
Time waltzes past me with a quick, lively step.  
But on this day, at this moment, only I exist—  
Tea steams, and this sick layman enters a Zen trance on his bed.

Blossoms bloomed, blossoms fell, but I closed my gate, and lay down.  
I’ve so neglected you, splendor of spring! How shall I make it up to you?  
Seldom have national affairs actually turned out as I wished;  
Now, those I place hope in increasingly come from the next generation.  
The evening rain plays a soughing, sighing tune, note after note,  
For the fleeting splendor to stamp out its measure, farther and farther away.  
On this day, at this moment, here’s an “I” that exists only for the present—  
A sick Vimalakirti with his tea steam and his meditation seat.

Paraphrasing 嘗食春光拉汝何 as “Please excuse me, dear spring, I can’t help that I missed you” misses much of the original meaning. Fu 負 (carry on the back / turn the back on / violate, neglect, fail, shirk [obligations, etc.]) is a far stronger
word than “miss”: Spring in all her glory offered herself to the poet, but he turned her down! Also lost in Schmidt’s paraphrase is nai ru he, which should have been rendered something like “What shall be done for you,” “What shall I do for you,” or “How shall I make it up to you,” all with the rhetorical force of “Nothing can be done about you,” “I’ve blown my chance as far as you are concerned.” Schmidt’s insipid paraphrase misses all this. His version of the second couplet wrongly individualizes Huang’s lament, as if tianxiashi were merely things in his own life that did not go as he wished, whereas they surely refer to world/national affairs, with which he was so concerned all his adult life. Schmidt’s paraphrase of the second half of this couplet is also far off the mark. Yanzhongren does not mean “the men all around me” but “those in my mind’s eye”—those whom the poet always has before his mind’s eye, those for whom he longs and hopes. Yanzhongren is an expression found numerous times in the works of many a poet, where it usually refers to a missed friend who is far away. Juxtaposition with tianxiashi (national affairs) indicates that Huang has in mind those who can work for and save China, a task Huang himself hoped to help achieve that he now realized was passing to members of the next generation. In the third couplet, liuguang surely refers to the chunguang of the second line of the poem and not simply to “time”: the evening rain plays a song for the fleeting glory of spring, which dances farther and farther away, as if it were stamping out the beat of the song, measure by measure. However, Schmidt’s paraphrase completely obscures this clever metaphor and the images associated with it. His version of the last couplet contains serious errors. You jinwo (here’s an “I” that exists only for the present) refers to the Buddhist doctrine that it is an illusion that the self, personality, or ego has real existence and that instead it is only a temporary and ever-changing aggregate of the five skandhas, the pañcaskandha (wuyun)—(1) se 色 (form), (2) shou 受 (perception), (3) xiang 想 (conception), (4) xing 行 (volition), and (5) shi 聲 (consciousness); there is no such thing as a permanent “I” or “self” (wu wo or wu changwo); instead, Schmidt’s “only I exist” defiantly asserts an egotistical subjectivism, a solipsism quite at odds with basic Buddhist doctrine.

Schmidt explains his paraphrase of bing Weimo as “this sick layman” in a note immediately following the translation of the poem: “Literally, ‘a sick Vimalakirti,’ Vimalakirti being the main character in one of the most popular Buddhist scriptures, the Vimalakirtinirdesasutra, in which the layman Vimalakirti demonstrates that he has a knowledge of Buddhism superior to that of all the Buddha’s disciples. At the beginning of the scripture, Buddha asks his disciples to visit Vimalakirti, who is reported to be ill. This work was particularly appreciated by Chinese officials and was one of the main scriptures of the Zen (Chinese, Chan) sect.” Indeed, Vimalakirti was the layman par excellence in the Chinese
tradition and the model most often emulated by literati who sought wisdom and solace in the teachings and practice of Chan. For example, the great Tang poet Wang Wei 王維 (701–761) even took Weimo 觀摩 as his personal name (zi 子). Schmidt might have said more about the attraction of poets to the Weimojie suoshuojing 維摩詣所說經 (Scripture spoken by Vimalakīrti), especially since one famous poet who was devoted to Chan and this scripture was Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), a Tang poet whose style Huang greatly admired, emulated, and tried to surpass. It is likely that Huang, a close student of Bai’s work, was familiar with a group of Bai’s writings—poems and letters exchanged with his close friend Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831)—that deal with the same topics as this poem: depression and how to deal with it, aging and the awareness that one is oudiving one’s friends and colleagues, and the solace and wisdom of Chan Buddhism. Kenneth K. S. Ch’en, in his The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, devotes an entire chapter to Tang-era Buddhism and literary life, and most of this chapter is concerned with the poetry and prose of Bai Juyi. One passage in Professor Chen’s book is particularly relevant:

This period of grief coincided with misfortunes that befell his closest friend, Yuan Chen [Yuan Zhen]. . . . After arrival in Chiang-ling [Jiangling], Yuan wrote to Po [Bai] about his depressed mood in the south. In answer to Yuan, Po wrote a long piece consoling him, and suggested that he might find solace in reading such Buddhist scriptures as the Vimalakīrti, . . . He specifically recommended that “if one wishes to eradicate grief and sorrow, one should read the Ch’an [Chan] sutras. One should realize that all things are empty, and not allow thought to be attached to anything.”

Schmidt’s version of the last line is marred by another error: chanta 禪榻 does not mean “enters a Zen trance on his bed” but “meditation seat.” A chanta (or chanchuang 禪床) is not a bed but a platform-like piece of furniture that looks like a large coffee table with extremely short legs. Nothing in the line justifies Schmidt’s paraphrase “enters a Zen trance.”


燕雲北望憂情多
時出漢印三摩挲
忽憶遜東渡死歌
印兮印兮拉爾何

[Schmidt] When he gazes northward to Korea, he fumes with righteous anger,
Takes out his Han seal and strokes it over and over.
Suddenly he recalls all those senseless deaths in Manchuria,
Cries, “Oh! My seal! My seal! What can I do now?”

These last four lines bring to a close the tragedy of Wu Dacheng 吳大澂 (1835–1902) and his disastrous attempt to defend China’s Northeast and Chinese inter-
ests in Korea during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Wu lost a major battle in the spring of 1895, attempted suicide, and soon retired in disgrace. He was an accomplished calligrapher and antiquarian who had obtained a Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) general’s seal, which was inscribed Du Liao jiangjun (The general who rules Liao). Wu regarded the seal as an omen that great military accomplishment was ordained for him, so it is especially ironic that he suffered the great reverse of his life trying to defend the very territory named in the seal. (The fact that the seal was very likely a fake does not enter into our story.) Schmidt explains all this in considerable detail both in the notes to this poem and in an extended narrative and analysis in chapter 10, “The Late Satirical Poetry” (pp. 170–173).  

I have no argument with the first three lines quoted above, but I believe that his analysis of how the poem ends and his version of the last line miss something important—an allusion to General Xiang Yu’s famous lament, which he sang on the last night of his life, after his troops were overwhelmed and surrounded by the Han forces at Gaixia:

And so, King Xiang got up in the middle of the night and began drinking in his tent. He had a beauty whose name was Yu, whom he always favored and allowed to accompany him, and a horse whose name was Dappled, which he always rode. Then, King Xiang sadly began to sing a heroic and noble song, whose lyrics he himself composed:

力拔山兮气盖世
時不利兮骓不逝
骓不逝兮可奈何
虞兮虞兮奈若何

Strength to uproot mountains, oh, spirit to cover the earth,
But the times are against me, oh, so I can’t let Dappled run!
Can’t let Dappled run, oh, so what can be done?
Oh Yu! Oh Yu! What shall I do for you?

Since Huang’s last line, 虞兮虞兮奈若何, so resembles Xiang Yu’s last line, 虞兮虞兮奈若何, I suggest that Huang’s last line ought to be translated as “Oh Seal! Oh Seal! What shall I do for you?” Schmidt’s “What can I do now” is too vague—he has the same trouble here with 奈何  as he does with 奈何 in 遺悶,

[Schmidt] Trying to Cheer Myself Up; [Lynn] Seeking Release from Depression (p. 265): he does not seem to appreciate how the “you,” whether 虞 or 虞 or 虞, functions in the expression nai ru / ruo / er he, “What shall I do for/about you?” “What shall be done for/about you?” As Xiang Yu knew he was responsible for the disaster that was about to befall his beloved, Lady Yu, and fully aware that there was nothing he could do for her, so Huang has Wu Dacheng give voice to the same kind of lament: the seal represents the Liao territory (the Northeast) that was entrusted to him, but he failed this trust and now realizes that there is
nothing he can do: Liao is lost! Thus, he addresses the seal with the rhetorical question “What shall I do for you?”

If Schmidt had followed up Qian Esun’s commentary to Huang’s line, he would have caught the allusion to Xiang Yu—though he would have had to do some spade work of his own, since Qian did not tell the whole story. Immediately after Huang’s last line, 言兮印兮摩爾何, Qian’s commentary reads: “Du Fu shi: Chao hu Chao hu nai er he” 杜甫詩: 潮乎潮乎奈爾何 (A poem by Du Fu [712–770]: Oh Chao! Oh Chao! What shall I do for you?). At first glance, all Qian seems to have done is draw attention to a similar line in a poem by Du Fu, and after noting this mildly interesting fact, one could ignore the annotation since it does not seem to help in interpreting Huang’s own line. However, one ignores such annotations at one’s peril! Du Fu’s line is the last in his 李潮八分小篆歌 (A song for Li Chao’s eight-divides and small seal script calligraphy). Li Chao was a maternal cousin of Du’s, whom he met late in life in Guizhou (Sichuan) and who was an accomplished calligrapher in the bafenstä and xiaozhuan (small seal script) forms. The last four lines of Du’s poem read:

巴東逢李潮
逾月求我歌
我今衰老才力薄
潮乎潮乎奈爾何

In eastern Ba I met Li Chao,
Who for more than a month has been asking me for a poem.
But I’m now so worn out and old, my talent and strength so paltry,
Oh Chao! Oh Chao! What shall I do for you?

Qian probably was reminded of these lines of Du Fu because of the connections suggested by Wu Dacheng’s seal, with its inscription in Han-dynasty seal script, the calligraphy of Li Chao, and the similarity in the way both poems end. However, many commentators on Du Fu’s poetry have drawn attention to the similarity between Du’s last line and the last line of Xiang Yu’s lament—for example, the Song-era commentator Zhao Yancai 趙彥材 (twelfth century), one of the commentators whose remarks are preserved in the popular annotated edition of Du’s poetry, the Jiujia zhu Du shi 九家注杜詩 (Nine masters annotate Du’s poetry). Perhaps Qian Esun thought that the allusion to Xiang Yu was so obvious that there was no need for him to mention it and instead drew attention to the less obvious connection to Du Fu’s poem.

Although much is wrong with Within the Human Realm, it is still well worth reading and keeping on one’s shelf as a reference work. Schmidt should be given much credit for this pioneering effort and its valuable contribution to the study of Huang Zunxian and late traditional Chinese poetry and intellectual history.

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NOTES

1. In preparing this review article, I have used the following editions of Huang's principal writings:

*Riben zashishi guangzhu* 日本雜事詩箋著 (Poems on Japanese miscellaneous subjects, with expanded commentaries). Ed. Zhong Shuhe 鍾叔河. *Zou xiang shijie congshu* 走向世界叢書 edition (English Series title: From East to West: Chinese Travellers Before 1911). Changsha: Yuelu Shushe 魯書社, 1985. (The expanded commentaries consist of (1) excerpts that Zhong Shuhe gleaned from Huang's *Riben guozhi* 日本國志 [Treatises on Japan] that seem to expand upon Huang's poems and his original commentaries to them, and (2) Zhong's notes on textual variants as they occur in different editions of the *Riben zashishi.*)


4. Zhang Tangqi defines "intension" 内涵 as "the stuff of one's life experience and the author's perceptions, evaluations, feelings, and attitudes toward it—the sum total of subjective elements—that are present in a literary work: the subject matter and expressive and thematic aspects that are constructed out of these elements." See Zhang Tangqi 张堂基, Huang Zunxian ji 黄遵宪及其诗研究 (A study of Huang Zunxian and his poetry) (Taipei: Wenshizhoe Chubanshe 文史哲 出版社, 1991), p. 105.

5. Repartee poems include "banquet repartee poems" 宴席, "offer and response poems" 和唱 (usually done on the same shared occasion), and "poems presented and composed in return" (usually done at a distance) 赠答.

6. A sizable portion of Huang's poetry is concerned with both the critique and advocacy of political, military, and social policy (general and theoretical arguments) and the promotion and encouragement of patriotism, courage, dedication, industry, and other individual and social virtues. He was determined to make China face up to the realities of the modern world and take determined and concerted action. No longer could China hide behind empty words and outdated gestures: honest words had to be matched by forceful actions. Zhang Tangqi categorizes Huang's more general and theoretical works of this type as "poetry of argument" 讨论诗 and those that address individual issues and advocate specific action as "pragmatic poetry" 实用诗 see pp. 128-132.


8. An interesting and insightful study of the formal aspects of Huang's poetry (not listed in Schmidt's bibliography) is Ono Jitsunosuke 大野貴之助, "Keitaimen kara mita Ko Junken no shi" 細工業から観た郭君憲の詩 (Poetry of Huang Zunxian viewed from the aspect of formal characteristics), Chūgoku koten kenkyū 中國古典研究 (Research in classical Chinese studies) (Waseda Daigaku Chūgoku Koten Kenkyūkai 渣大日本大學中國古典研究會 [Waseda University Society for Research in Classical Chinese Studies]) 12 (December 1964): 55-69.

9. Cf. Schmidt's translation of the same passage: "When I cultivate a style, I do not name it after any previous author or exclusively imitate the form of a Cao Zhi. . . . What is most important is that I do not fail to write my own poetry. . . ." Besides getting the phrase burning yige 不名一格 backwards (syntax just as in the common expression burning yiwên 不名一文 "not a cent to his name"—i.e., he does not lend his name to [claim] a single cent), Schmidt's paraphrase (he rearranges the order of sentences in the passage) obscures the exact meaning of yao bushi hu weiwo zhi shi 要不失乎為我之詩. He also should have drawn the reader's attention to the fact that the expression weiwo 為我 alludes to the extreme self-centered philosophy of Yang Zhu 楊朱 cf. Mencius 孟子, 3.2.9: "Mr. Yang advocates 'be for yourself,' but this is to deny one's sovereign." 楊氏為我, 無君也. Huang was hardly a latter-day follower of Master Yang, but his use of Yang's slogan (well known to any educated reader) is significant, for it signals both his willingness to go outside Confucian orthodoxy (but stay within the Chinese tradition) for terms and concepts and his struggle to find ways to express new ideas—in this case, how creativity depends on individualism and originality, a commonplace notion in the Western world.
of the nineteenth century, still in thrall to Romanticism, but an unusual and heterodox view in Huang’s own Chinese world.

10. Zhang Tangqi, Huang Zunxian ji qi shì yanjiu (A study of Huang Zunxian and his poetry), p. 200. Zhang’s list of late “lesser masters” of recent times who are likely to have influenced Huang is derived from observations made about Huang’s poetry by Qian Esun, Chen Yan, Long Muxun, and Qian Zhongshu. His authority for including Xie Ao, the late Song “patriot poet” is Chen Yan. See below.


15. For a survey of late Ming and early Qing criticism that advocated Song poetry and an account of contemporary anthologies of Song verse, see Lynn, “Tradition and the Individual,” pp. 7-16.

16. It is more than coincidence that Schmidt has produced books on these two poets: Yang Wan-li (Boston: Twayne, 1976) and Stone Lake: The Poetry of Fan Chengda (1126-1193) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

17. One principal complaint that pro-Tang and anti-Song critics had against Song-era poetry, especially poetry by Southern Song poets such as Fan Chengda and Yang Wanli, was that its discursive character turned it into nothing more than “rhymed prose.” See, for example, passages translated from the criticism of Yan Yu, Li Mengyang, Xie Zhen, and Hu Yinglin in Lynn, “Tradition and the Individual,” pp. 3-7, and Richard John Lynn, "The Talent-Learning Polarity in Chinese Poetics: Yan Yu and the Later Tradition," Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews 5 (1983): 158-161.


20. Qian Esun, Huang Gongdu Xiansheng nianpu (Chronological biography of Mr. Huang Gongdu) (Renjinglu shicao jianzhu edition), p. 32.
21. Precise definitions of the five aggregates, pañcasākṣaṇḍha or wuyun 五蕴, often differ from school to school, but the definitions here seem to have had more general acceptance than most. See Junjirō Takakusu, The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 72.

22. J. D. Schmidt, Within the Human Realm, pp. 59, 63–64, 143–144, 151, 154.


25. Schmidt does not list in his bibliography an extremely useful work for the study and translation of Huang's poems about warfare: Suzuki Torao 鈴木虎雄, Chūgoku senran shi 中國戰亂詩 (Chinese poems about the turmoil of war) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō 諫山書房, 1968).

26. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War is misdated 1898 on p. 170—obviously a typographical error, since the very same paragraph contains the sentence: "His [Wu's] troops met the Japanese at Niuzhuang in the spring of 1895."


28. It is difficult to translate bafen 八分 since conflicting opinions have existed as to what the term means—even as early as the time of its invention during the Qin era or the early Han (third century B.C.), when it developed out of the lishu 誦書 (clerical script form). The most likely explanation is that characters written in this script form tend to left-right symmetry: the position of strokes and their length and width are arranged to attempt a balance so that each half mirrors the other. The character that most lends itself to this formal feature is ba 八 (eight), which can be divided (fen 分) almost perfectly into two symmetrical halves, and this is the rationale for my translation of bafen as "eight-divides."