In Praise of Alienation:
A Role for Theory in Reading Classical Chinese Poetry

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Classical Chinese poetry offers compelling orderings of the human experience of the world. If we commit ourselves to this seemingly simple affirmation of the power of poetry, however, we have to confront some rather complex interpretive issues that I shall explore in this study.

The central problem is that we are more creatures of our time and place than we usually care to acknowledge. Let me begin with some obvious statements. I am a fairly typical Caucasian male born into the middle class in mid-twentieth century United States. My knowledge of—and belief in the constancy of—biology, chemistry, and physics shapes my understanding. I know the interconnections by which the models of those sciences relate to the material realm. As events unfold in my experience of the world, I attribute the underlying causes to biology, chemistry, and physics, even if I may not know the particular facts that can justify the attribution. When I look up at the night sky, I see a Copernican, Newtonian array of stars moving in their orderly arcs as the earth rotates, and not the Ptolemaic heaven of the medieval European world. I trust there will be no sudden holes opening up in the causal net of the natural sciences. Gravity will not decide to stop. Electrons will continue to do their strange quantum dance that makes my computer work. I will not wake up tomorrow as someone else.

Entering the social realm, I bring biological commitments with me and believe in gender equality, but this seemingly abstract modern belief plays a visceral role in my closest relations. I believe in democracy, but this is based not on biology but on a different level of ordering, the social-contract model of society, as well as on my personal experience of growing up in the United States. I believe that it is not acceptable to kill people on a whim, and this commitment is yet more complex: beyond the social-contract model for participation in society are the lingering remnants of religious beliefs that deeply if quietly inform our moral values. That is, I am thoroughly embedded

in a network of commitments that shape how I physically perceive the world, how I understand my place in the world, and how I act. This network, however, is not stable; it has a history and continues to evolve: my children are not part of the same world as I am. The network also varies geographically: my wife, raised in Seattle, shares many values but also reveals local variations.

Let me stress that when I encounter events, when I find meaning, I do so through this network of commitments about the world. And when I read Classical Chinese poetry, I bring to it, as well, this array of early twenty-first century beliefs. The problem, of course, is that these poems are from Tang or Song China, not contemporary North America. Moreover, I believe that when Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) in the Tang or Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) in the Song wrote their poems, they did so within an elaborate, all-encompassing network of commitments about the world that were deeply different from mine. So, if I believe that poetry offers compelling modes of ordering experience, I must decide: am I going to look for the ordering as Du Fu imagined it, or will I draw primarily from the structures of the contemporary world? I cannot have it both ways. I have chosen, because I am restless in my own world, to try to hear Du Fu and Su Shi on their own terms and to see into their world. Yet I can begin to do so only if I accept difference, and this is the alienation of my title: I must see that Du Fu and Su Shi are writing from different worlds and that I must risk my assumptions, change my grasp of the world if I am to begin to hear them well.

Theoretical Framing

The branch of literary theory that systematically explores the problem of engaging texts across differences is hermeneutics, the study of understanding. How to bridge the gap between cultures—the modern West and late medieval China—has two components, one theoretical, one practical. To understand difference, one must begin with a belief in commonalities in human experience that arise out of basic features we all share as part of our biological (and existential) condition. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) at the turn of the twentieth century suggested that we begin by thinking in terms of basic conditions of lived human experience—our physical and social needs and desires, our shared pains, joys, and hungers—and that we think of the objects of the constructed culture of any time (Tang China or contemporary North America) as an objectification of intentions, as a means through which we have sought to shape our collective lived experience.[1] Dilthey's presentation of the social and cultural world as structured through—and giving objective form to—human intentionality increases the difficulty and complexity of the task of understanding because we live historically: we grow up in a world of already objectified forms of human intention and learn to think and act through those forms, including our inherited languages, even if our world in

fact has outlived some of those forms. Thus, the reconstruction of the world of Tang and Song poetry, the grasping of the human in a culture distant from ours in both time and space within all of these sedimentations of intentions long obscured, is difficult and requires careful attention. But, Dilthey argued, because we do indeed share basic human qualities, the project is not impossible.

In hermeneutics, the process of seeing shared forms of lived human experience within very different cultural constructions is a slow, patient iterative cycle beginning with a preliminary understanding of the pieces of the earlier, foreign world and seeing them all as parts of a lived culture. Once one has a somewhat clearer sense of how the pieces fit together, one returns to them in their particularity and develops a more fine-grained understanding of their roles, which in turn allows one to better understand the totality of which they are parts. This is the famed "hermeneutic circle" of understanding the whole from the parts and the parts from the whole.

Most often, people describe the larger process of understanding a different, distant culture made possible by the hermeneutic circle as the "fusion of horizons," a term developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. In my view, however, Gadamer's account of the fusion of horizons presents a cautionary tale, a counterposition—perhaps even the dominant one in contemporary thought—to what I propose in this talk. For Dilthey, historicity was the condition that made understanding the objectifications of life-experience possible and at the same time provided an insuperable constraint on the complete realization of understanding. Just as, for Kant, our knowledge of the world can never reach either "things in themselves" or the "transcendental subject" that grounds the synthesis of knowledge within the phenomenal realm of appearance, for Dilthey, we can never escape our historical condition to know a self or a text outside of time. We must live with a form of alienation from ourselves and from what we study in the human sciences. In contrast, Gadamer formulates the "fusion of horizons" as a mode of continuity that dissolves the danger of self-alienation. He describes the relationship of the "horizon of the present" and that of the past as beginning in self-conscious difference but ending in restored unity. [2] Gadamer's proposal to assimilate the past to the present erases the deep alterity of the past and forecloses the difficult encounter with historical difference. I therefore suggest a second hermeneutic circle, a model of engagement that differs from the metaphor of fusion. It is the perhaps bleak, surely agonistic model embodied in Harold Bloom's formulation:

Assimilation is Alienation.
Alienation is Assimilation.

That is, when one assimilates the meaning in a text and the voice of its author into one's own modes of understanding, one displaces and covers over—alienates—the actual inherent structure of the text. Conversely, when one sees the difference and refuses fusion, when one strips away easy readings and certainty in understanding—when one alienates the text—one restores the possibility of seeing into the powerful structures of meaning within the world of the text. This second "hermeneutic circle" of doubt crucially complements the primary hermeneutic circle of progressive understanding.

Discovering Doubt

In my own career of reading Chinese poetry, I did not seek out this doubt and this focus on deep cultural difference hiding in plain sight: rather, these issues came to me. Many long years ago, when I was working on my doctoral dissertation on Su Shi's *shi* poetry, I had a straight-forward plan: I would read the collections of the major writers of the early Northern Song and then turn to Su Shi and read his poetry in the context of his other writings and the writings of the major figures of his day. I would rely on a few late imperial annotations of Su Shi's work, but I would *not* read more broadly in the later reception history. When I had finished my survey of Su Shi and Northern Song literary culture, I looked up to see what Southern Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing scholars had written, and we clearly were not talking about the same person. All of our Su Shis were brilliant, broadly learned, and had a sharp tongue that often brought trouble. But my Su Shi was a careful, systematic thinker deeply engaged in larger reflections on selfhood, knowledge, experience and the world, all of which was directly reflected in his poetry. Theirs was Su Shi, the "gay genius" of Lin Yutang's biography, subjective, undisciplined, drawing on his creativity but far outside the mainstream of Northern Song thought.[3] I, of course, believed I was right, but if I was right, how could I show it, and how did they manage to be so wrong? This is where theory comes in. The problem was not of being ignorant of texts but of understanding how (and why) one reads them. The problem was one of framing, bringing to bear an adequate understanding of the intellectual and aesthetic contexts within which Su Shi wrote. Later readers had assimilated Su Shi to their world, without acknowledging that he was not in fact of their world.[4]

Issues of intellectual context are the easiest to sort out. Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) worked very hard to redefine the Northern Song *Daoxue* 道學 advocates—and especially Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107)—as the central figures in Northern Song intellectual culture.[5] They were not. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), above all others, was at the heart of the elite culture of his day,

and yet, by the end of the Southern Song, he had been effectively written out of the narrative.[6] Ouyang Xiu had shaped many aspects of Northern Song cultural practice. He had been a historian, statesman, political theorist, epigrapher, classical scholar, and the best belletristic writer of his day. He had been very skeptical of the growing trend toward philosophizing over abstract terms like "nature:" these abstractions did not help men in their daily duties in governing the realm.[7] The displacing of Ouyang Xiu in favor of the *Daoxue* partisans thus seriously distorted the intellectual culture of the day.

Most crucially, the term *li* 理 that generations of American scholars have translated as "principle" in accordance with Zhu Xi's redefinition of the term, meant something quite different in the Northern Song. Cheng Yi was beginning to use *li* as an abstract, all encompassing, undifferentiated ground for moral knowledge that Zhu Xi later adopted, but this was a distinctive, polemical interpretation quite far from the broader, descriptive use of the term. Cheng Yi reconceived of *li* as constant among humans and identical with their natures and that problems for humans arose because of the impurity of their substance:

> Question: "Since human nature is basically perspicacious (*ming* 明), whence is there obstruction?" "One needs to explore and understand this. Mencius was right in stating that human nature is good. Even Xunzi and Yang [Xiong] did not know the Nature. Wherein Mencius exceeds all other Confucians was that he was able to be clear about the Nature. In the Nature, there is nothing that is not good. Wherein what is not good is the material (*cai* 才). The Nature is *li*, and *li*, from Yao and Shun to the man in the street, is identical. The material is received from *qi*, and in *qi* there is both the pure and the turbid. Those who receive the pure are the worthy; those who receive the turbid are the dolts."[8]

In contrast, for Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi, and Northern Song elite culture generally, *li* meant "pattern." The "myriad patterns of the phenomenal realm" (*wanwu zhi li* 萬物之理) were all the many interlinking patterns immanent in the world of experience. Su Shi's "Account of the Paintings in the Jingyin Hall," for example, suggests the breadth of Northern Song usage:

> When I once discussed painting, I said that people, beasts, palaces and halls, utensils, and equipage all have constant shapes. Now, as for mountains, rocks, bamboo, trees, water, waves, mists, and clouds, though none has a constant shape, each does have a constant inherent pattern (*li*). Everyone will recognize a lapse in a fixed shape, but if the constant patterns are not right, there will be some who will

not know it even though they understand painting. Therefore, one who would deceive the world and acquire a reputation must do so through [objects] without fixed shapes. However, a lapse in a fixed form stops at the fault itself and will not mar the entirety. But if the inherent pattern is not right, then the whole is worthless. Because its shape is not fixed, one must be very careful with the inherent pattern. Of the present artisans, some can exhaustively follow the contours of the form, but as for the inherent pattern, if they are not elevated spirits, they cannot discriminate it.

Yuke [Wen Tong] truly can be said to have obtained the inherent patterns of bamboo, rocks, and barren trees. Thus it is born, thus it dies. Thus it is cramped and gnarled, thus its branches stretch and flourish. The roots, stalk, joints and leaves, sprout tips and veins, through ten thousand transformations, never encroach on one another, and each is in its right place. They are in accord with Heavenly creation and satisfy human thought. Is this not perhaps the work of a "realized" (*da* 達) man?[9]

Su Shi in his writings turned again and again to an understanding of himself as meaningfully linked to the larger patterns of the world of experience as represented in the term *li*.[10] Yet this Northern Song usage was occluded and erased in later scholars' reading of *li* as Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's "principle." In this assimilation, Su Shi disappeared. Alienation—the realization that Su Shi's *li* was not their *li*—would have been crucial, but they were men of their times and read Su Shi through the demands of their time.

The *aesthetic* ramifications of the displacement of "pattern" by "principle" are more complex and plunge us deeper into theory. Poetry can offer compelling and creative orderings of our experience of the world. Poetry therefore necessarily works not on words alone but on a world to which language refers; its creativity—its bringing into being—is *through* language, but it is an ordering of larger structures of experience. The ordering of experience in a world encompassed by myriad interconnected patterns is profoundly different from that in a world of "principle." How language participates is different; the nature of the intuitions of order that can be captured within the web of words is different.[11]

Su Shi's "Aboard Boat, Rising at Night"

To convey some of the qualities of aesthetic ordering of experience among the "myriad patterns of the phenomenal realm," let me turn to a poem Su Shi wrote in 1089 en route to taking up the post of magistrate in Huzhou:

Aboard Boat, Rising at Night	舟中夜起
A light breeze rustles, blowing the reeds.	微風蕭蕭吹菰蒲
As I open the door to watch the rain, the moon fills the lake.	開門看雨月滿湖
The people on the boat and the water-fowl both share the same dream.	舟人水鳥兩同夢
A large fish starts and scurries to hide like a fleeing fox.	大魚驚竄如奔狐
The night is late: people and phenomena do not involve one another.	夜深人物不相管
Alone I, my shape, and my shadow amuse ourselves.	我獨形影相嬉娛
The hidden tide grows on the bank: I lament the cold earthworms.	暗潮生渚弔寒蚓
As the setting moon hangs amidst the willows, I watch the suspended spiders.	落月掛柳看懸蛛
In this life, so hurried amid sorrow and calamity,	此生忽忽憂患裏
Can a pure scene passing before the eyes last more than a moment?	清境過眼能須臾
The cock crows; the bell strikes; the many birds scatter:	雞鳴鐘動百鳥散
At the prow they beat the drum and call out to one another.[12]	船頭擊鼓還相呼

In the deep quiet late on a moonlit night, Su Shi reflects on his place in the phenomenal realm. The scene Su Shi encounters is indeed *phenomenal*, that is, a world of objects that appear before him as objects of perception but whose inner causality distinct from his apprehension of them remains hidden. Su Shi in many writings stresses that we know the "being like this" (*ran* 然) but do not know and do not have access to "that through which it is like this" (*suoyiran* 所以然).[13] This may seem a mere abstraction, but the poem gives sensuous form to this vision of the world.

Phenomena are tied to perception, and perception can be wayward and be brought up short by the world: Su Shi hears the rustling of the reeds in the light breeze and takes this to be the sound of rain falling lightly on the reeds. He is in a mood to watch the rain and thus steps out of his closed cabin to the deck and discovers not rain but a bright moon (ll. 1-2). He thematizes misperception here: he begins inside his own thoughts and expectations only

to encounter a beautiful but unanticipated scene. In a quiet, meditative state, he takes stock of the scene and notices patterns linking the human realm to the larger world. The people aboard the boat and the water fowl are both travelers in mid-journey resting for the night; they somehow are parts of one another's dreams (l. 3). This is strictly a speculative projection on Su Shi's part, born of the quiet and his wakeful reflection on a "sleeping world." His comparison of the fish diving into the deeps to a fox reveals analogous patterns that link the nocturnal riverine world to the land, but he explicitly presents this linking as a comparison, an act of thought, as he searches for ways to situate the moment (l. 4). The abstraction—the pulling away from particulars—of the next couplet is a way to convey his mood of reverie in the vast stillness of the scene. Within this reverie, there is still an acuteness of perception as he notes subtle shifts in the landscape: the tide rises, the moon sets, and the flux of the world is framed by these movements (ll. 5-6). The earthworms on the bank respond to the tide, while the setting moon makes the threads of the spiders' webs glisten brilliantly against the surrounding dark (ll. 7-8). Again Su Shi slips into reverie: the fifth couplet stands in for Su Shi's now nightlong vigil and indeed explains it: he honors the moment amid the unceasing flow of temporality (ll. 9-10). But then he brilliantly recasts that moment, sees it as part of the larger rhythms of the world in which he, the boatmen and all the creatures who shared the nighttime scene equally find their place (ll. 11-12).

The poetic intuitions of ordering the scene that move the poem from line to line, couplet to couplet, beginning to end, are complex and very distinctly Northern Song. Su Shi assimilates his own subjectivity—the moods and expectation that drive the poem—to the patterns discovered in the poem. These particular orderings of objects, images, thoughts, emotions, and events in the poem are only possible within Su Shi's larger structure of commitments about the world and his sense of how the world coheres. This aesthetic synthesis utterly falls apart if one replaces an understanding of *li* as the inherent patterns that encompass the self and the phenomenal realm with Zhu Xi's abstract and morally centered understanding of *li* as principle. The powerful aesthetic coherence of the poem simply disappears.

Su Shi's *li*—so vital to his poetry—was not that of the later tradition, and the distinction hidden within the continuity of the term itself makes all the difference. To achieve an understanding of Su Shi's poetry, I was compelled to deal with the intersection of poetry and intellectual history. Yet it took me many years to grasp the ways in which aesthetic experience and intellectual history intertwine in Su's poems and in Classical Chinese poetry more broadly. Every paper I write now eventually turns to Immanuel Kant's account of aesthetic judgments precisely because his approach grounds aesthetic experience in how people understand the structure of the

experiential realm *and*—crucially—grounds people's understanding of experience in aesthetic intuitions.[14] We are not given the order of the world: we must discover it. But before we can articulate and name it, we must intuit the presence of an order to be explored and finally named; providing those intuitions is the role of aesthetic experience. Kant, in arguing that art grounds the very possibility of knowledge of the world, thus confirms that poetry matters deeply in our engagement with experience. This, I assert, is a universal principle of human nature.

However, while the formal principle is a constant, we have seen how history strongly informs poetic experience—both the reading and the writing—through the evolution of a culture's understanding of the larger structures that organize the experiential realm. As those structures change, poetry and the poetic forms and tropes that shape aesthetic experience must change as well. In my recent monograph, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes*, I sought to explore this model of poetic change by tracing the interweaving of poetic, social, cultural, and more specifically intellectual history from Su Shi's death through the Southern Song to the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty. I examined in particular the ramifications of the failure of Su Shi's belief that people could find their way through life through a creative recognition of and response to the immanent patterns of the world of which we are a part. Su Shi's understanding of *li* as inherent pattern could not provide people with the sort of certainty and collective commitments they needed to respond to the increasingly intense cacophony of partisan debate they encountered in the late Northern Song. As people began to reconceive the sources of authoritative meaning by which to organize experience, this restructuring had a direct impact on the sorts of intuitions of order poetry could capture and the techniques through which writers could embody those intuitions in poetic form. Conversely, however, as Zhu Xi proposed a conception of *li* as principle that was "above form" (*xing er shang* 形而上), meaning retreated both inward and upward, threatening to disappear outside the experiential realm altogether. Zhu, thus, was proposing a ground for moral authority that was beyond the sensuous intimations of meaning that poetry provided. But poetry and its crucial aesthetic intuitions of an immanent order in the phenomenal realm provided the limit to what Zhu Xi could propose. Thirteenth century *Daoxue* advocates subtly changed Zhu's conceptual structure to make it amenable to the sensuous intuitions of order by which poetry grounded experience. Even so, *Daoxue* at the end of the Southern Song offered an understanding of the source of order in the human realm that differed profoundly from Su Shi's, displaced his, and rendered his all but invisible to the late imperial inheritors of the *Daoxue* worldview.

The Tang World

For late imperial readers, Su Shi presented a forceful personality, great erudition, and impressive flights of imagination, but he did not quite speak to the world as they knew it. Yet, if Su Shi in the Northern Song presents a problem for later readers—including us—what of the poets of the Tang Dynasty? Did the same matrix of connections between the shaping of meaning in poetry and the authors' understanding of the experiential realm inform the work of poets like Wang Wei 王維, Li Bai 李白 (701-761), Du Fu, Han Yu 韓愈 (768-825), Li He 李賀 (790-816), and Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813-858)?[15] The theoretical reflections I have presented so far argue that indeed the same problems of historical change, distance, and difference should make us step back from any easy assumptions about our ability to read the poets from *throughout* the Chinese poetic tradition. The great Tang Dynasty poets are especially challenging because we as the inheritors of the Chinese interpretive tradition believe that their poetry captures meanings of particular depth and importance, and thus the stakes for reading well are very high. Yet, to complicate our approach, the great Tang poets do not form a coherent group. Wang Wei was the consummate court poet who shaped a distinct style by taking to the extreme the erasure of the individual in the court style. Li Bai was the radical outsider whose training in poetry came from what he could read of the poetry of bygone eras. Du Fu, although from a great clan lineage, pushed poetry far beyond the values of the court and died an apparent failure. Only later, as cultural values shifted in the wake of the An Lushan rebellion, did writers discover in Du Fu a poet who powerfully addressed what they saw as the dynamics of meaning in their new world. For them, Wang Wei was part of an already lost cultural synthesis, and his poetry could not speak to them or for them as could Du Fu's. Thus the challenge of reading the High, Mid- and Late Tang poets is in the fragmented character of their intuitions of order in the world. Still, there are deep commitments about the basics of human experience that hold the poets together, even as the catastrophe of the Rebellion forced them to confront the limits of the model of human nature and its relationship to the cosmos articulated in those commitments.

Recall my argument that knowledge of the world depends on aesthetic experience because we would not seek out patterns in the phenomenal realm if we did not first intuit the existence of the patterns we later clarify through investigation. Yet, we would not have intuitions of order without some sense of a large-scale orderliness to the world that makes these intuitions possible. For Su Shi, that orderliness is in *li* as "inherent patterns" that encompass the self and all phenomena.[16] The Tang writers, however, participated in an older understanding that derived from the Warring States. For them, Heaven granted humans their nature, which included their physical form, their

faculties of perception, their minds and their emotions. This inner connection with Heaven was what underlay the intelligibility of the world and the Way. Du Fu wrote at the cusp of an important shift as the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) was proving all too clearly the hollowness of the confident correlative cosmology of the medieval period. The fundamental understanding of human nature as Heaven-granted endured, but the certainties about the specific correlations between a Heavenly order and the political order of the Tang Dynasty failed. Heaven retreated. It remained the ground for the human encounter with the world, but it became inaccessible as an object of knowledge in a way directly parallel with how, for Su Shi, *li* was the inaccessible ground for coherence. Su Shi insisted that while one could know the *ran*, the way things are, one could not know the *suoyiran*, that by which things are as they are. All of this perhaps seems very abstract, yet I would argue that these underlying commitments about the world—particular to Du Fu's cultural moment shaped by the An Lushan Rebellion—were viscerally part of Du Fu the poet and his poetry. They shaped the structuring of Du Fu's verse and informed the aesthetic imagination immanent in his poems, just as Su Shi's commitments gave life to "Aboard Boat, Rising at Night."

Du Fu's "Weary Night"

In order to illustrate the role of this historically situated structure of intuitions of meaning in the human encounter with the experiential realm, I would like to explore Du Fu's "Weary Night" 倦夜, a late-night poem that we can compare with Su Shi's "Aboard Boat, Rising at Night."

Weary Night	倦夜
Bamboo coolness invades the bedroom.	竹涼侵臥內
The outland moon fills a corner of the courtyard.	野月滿庭隅
The heavy dew forms water drops that fall.	重露成涓滴
The sparse stars flicker, now there, now gone.	稀星乍有無
Fireflies gleam in their own light as they fly in the dark.	暗飛螢自照
The birds stopping for the night on the water call out to one another.	水宿鳥相呼
Ten thousand affairs all hemmed in with weapons:	萬事干戈裏
In vain I sorrow that the pure night passes.[17]	空悲清夜徂

To a certain extent, comparing the aesthetic structure of a regulated verse

poem like this with Su Shi's old-style poem presents a problem, but I would like to focus less on the construction of the parallel couplets and more on other aspects of organization and movement that are not specifically determined by generic requirements.

Like Su Shi, Du Fu is awake alone on a moonlit night, but he is awake unwillingly, and we don't know why. In the first six lines Du Fu assembles elements in the surrounding nightscape both to articulate the concerns that keep him up and to recast them by placing them in the larger order of which he discovers himself to be a part. Thus the aesthetic goals of imaginatively shaping encountered events are largely the same for both Du Fu and Su Shi, but the pieces from which the whole is built are different, as is the nature of the coherence and the role of the author in that order. Du Fu begins by noting a "bamboo coolness invad[ing] the bedroom." "Invade" (*qin* 侵) is a courtly variation on the verb "enter" but it remains slightly ominous.[18] The coolness, however, is welcome, since this is the end of summer, and the slight movement of air passing through the bamboos outside his window brings relief from the heat. Du Fu steps out of the bedroom into the enclosed courtyard to see the bright moonlight slanting into one corner of the courtyard, leaving the rest in darkness. The moon, however, is an "outland moon" bringing the vast stretches of wild country outside his courtyard into his home. This too has a slightly ominous inside-outside tension. The second couplet picks up elements from the first: dew is forming, now that the temperature is falling deep in the night, and the dewdrops on the plants in the courtyard glint in the moonlight then disappear as they roll off the leaves. Above, the stars are few because the moon is bright. This surely brings to mind Cao Cao's 曹操 (155-220) line "The moon is bright and the stars few" 月明星稀 in "Short Ballad" 短歌行, but the phenomenon and the allusion are commonplace.[19] Those few stars, however, flicker in the humid atmosphere and thus repeat the pattern of points of light appearing and disappearing that Du Fu has noted for the dewdrops. This pattern takes a new shape in the fifth line with the glow of the fireflies of late summer, whose time is now short, visible in the dark portions of the courtyard. The flashing of the fireflies, however, transforms the image of small lights sparking on and off: the fireflies illumine themselves amid the darkness. There is a correspondence that is subtle—and derives from the physical details, not allegory—to Du Fu's own situation, a sense of temporality and restlessness against the darkness, and of course Du Fu is writing a poem. This correspondence takes a new form as Du Fu moves from the fireflies glowing intermittently to the unseen waterfowl beyond the courtyard calling out to one another from time to time. The waterfowl are migrating because of the change of season; they are here tonight but will continue their journey tomorrow. Du Fu shares their fate of moving as the seasons of man compel him, and they and the fireflies are temporary

companions following the physical rhythms of a world in flux. In line seven Du Fu speaks at last of the concerns that frame his observations, focus his attention on particular aspects of the landscape, and explain his sleeplessness. The fighting continues; he and his family are not yet secure. Still, despite these concerns, this *is* a beautiful scene. It must pass, but it is a fragile moment in time when Du Fu sees himself as part of calm processes of change that he has captured in poetry for us to read twelve hundred years later.

The intuition of order in "Weary Night" is very circumscribed and deals with largely observable patterns in the physical world.[20] Du Fu does not make significant implicit claims about the extent to which people are "of the same category" (*tong lei* 同類) in participating in these patterns. True to the assertion in the preface to the *Mao Shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Mao commentary on the Canon of Poetry), resolve—a structure of human commitments—holds the poem together, but the objects and events of the poems speak to the poet's resolve in complex, multivocal ways as he shapes his response and reads the significance of the confluence of events structured in the poem. A. C. Graham puts Du Fu at the beginning of his *Poems of the Late Tang* because Du Fu is cautious about the earlier world of correlative cosmology and surrenders much in order to preserve a smaller realm shaped by human concerns.[21] Poets in the Mid- and Late Tang grew increasingly self-conscious about the role of human desire in shaping the order they saw in the world until by the time of Li Shangyin, desire largely dominated the poetic intuitions of coherence in experience. Yet the point to be stressed is that Du Fu is *not* reading the world in "Weary Night" as a moral allegory. Instead, the poem builds on a recognition of patterns in the world that evoke complex emotions based on how those patterns speak to the poet's commitments. The poem is not about Du Fu but about how he places himself in a world of meanings. In recognizing substantive patterns, he recognizes himself and takes his stand.

Conclusion

I am arguing for a deep continuity in the poetic tradition from Du Fu to Su Shi but also a significant shift. For both authors, occasional poetry in particular is about seeing oneself, defining oneself through the emergent patterns of events. But the connection between the world and the self, the ways in which the poet participates, changed over the three hundred years separating Du Fu and Su Shi, and thus the nature of the aesthetic coherence and the poetic techniques through which the poet sets out this coherence changed correspondingly. One cannot read Du Fu and Su Shi easily within one aesthetic and conceptual framework. Each demands something different from us. Learning what they demand from us takes time, patience, and acuteness of sensibility. But it requires first of all that crucial step of alienation, a recognition of difference: "This poet's world is not my world."

This is—at least at the beginning—a *theoretical* injunction. Theoretical reflection tells us that if poetry speaks powerfully about human experience, it must do so precisely through the poem's rich connections to the world. But theory tells us again that these connections between poet, poetry and the world are as complexly historical as are we ourselves. We thus must give up something of our world—we can no longer be fully of our world; we must accept and even seek alienation—if we are to begin to gain insight into the structures of meaning through which the poetry of the Classical Chinese tradition speak. However, what we gain in our alienation is a rich past and powerful poetic voices that open up before us. These are far greater than what we surrender.

Endnotes

1.   Dilthey argued:

> I have shown how significant the objective mind is for the possibility of knowledge in the human studies. By this I mean the manifold forms in which what individuals hold in common have objectified themselves in the world of the senses. In this objective mind, the past is a permanently enduring present for us. Its realm extends from the style of life and the forms of social intercourse to the system of purposes which society has created for itself and to custom, law, state, religion, art, science and philosophy. For even the work of genius represents ideas, feelings and ideals commonly held in an age and environment. From this world of objective mind the self receives sustenance from earliest childhood. It is the medium in which the understanding of other persons and their life-expressions takes place: For everything in which the mind has objectified itself contains something held in common by the I and the Thou. Every square planted with trees, every room in which seats are arranged, is intelligible to us from our infancy because human planning, arranging and valuing—common to all of us—have assigned a place to every square and every object in the room. The child grows up within the order and customs of the family which it shares with other members and its mother's orders are accepted in this context. Before it learns to talk, it is already wholly immersed in that common medium. It learns to understand the gestures and facial expressions, movements and exclamations, words and sentences, only because it encounters them always in the same form and in the same relation to what they mean and express. Thus the individual orientates himself in the world of objective mind.
>
>   This has an important consequence for the process of understanding. Individuals do not usually apprehend life-expressions in isolation but against a background of knowledge about common features and a relation to some mental content.

Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum Press, 1985), 155.

2. Gadamer writes:

> In fact the horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all of our prejudices. An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons. Understanding, rather, is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves.... In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other.
>
> If, however, there is no such thing as these horizons that are distinguished from one another, why do we speak of the fusion of horizons and not simply the formation of the one horizon, whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition...? Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation but by consciously bringing it out. This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project an historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence distinguishes the horizon of tradition from its own. On the other hand, it is itself, as we are trying to show, only something laid over a continuing tradition, and hence it immediately recombines what it has distinguished in order, in the unity of the historical horizon that it thus acquires, to become one with itself again.
>
> The projecting of the historical horizon, then, is only a phase in the process of understanding, and does not become solidified into the self-alienation of past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusing of horizon, which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously removed.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Crossroad

publishing Company, 1982), 273.

3.   Lin Yutang, *The Gay Genius: The Life and Times of Su Tungpo* (New York: John Day, 1947). For an excellent set of surveys of Ming, Qing, and modern assessments of Su Shi, see Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊, ed., *Su Shi yanjiu shi* 蘇軾研究史 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001). The changing views of Su Shi are part of the complex cultural and literary history of the Ming and Qing dynasties, but the constant theme—whether an author honored or loathed Su Shi—was his combination of talent and learning. The later writers do not explore the intellectual structure of Su Shi's world or his works, except for the occasional reference to Buddhism or Zhuangzi that displaces his actual intellectual positions.

4.   Modern scholars of Su Shi such as Zeng Zaozhuang and Wang Shuizhao 王水照 are important exceptions. They have been very attentive to the totality of Su Shi's writings and to the mid-Northern Song context in which he wrote.

5.   Zhu Xi recognized Su Shi in particular as a threat to his project of redefining *li* as moral principle. See my "Aesthetics and Meaning in Experience: A Theoretical Perspective on Zhu Xi's Revision of Song Dynasty Views of Poetry," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 65.2 (2005): 311-355.

6.   Neither Feng Youlan's 馮友蘭, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* 中國哲學史, revised ed. (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1994) nor Wing-tsit Chan's *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) has a section devoted to Ouyang Xiu or Su Shi. Chan mentions Su Shi just once, in a footnote on Cheng Yi. Peter K. Bol in *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) presents Northern Song intellectual history in a manner that much more closely accords with what the texts of the period tell us.

7.   "I worry that in our time many of those who [seek to] learn speak of Nature, and thus I once composed an explanation: Nature is not what those who learn are anxious about, and the sages rarely spoke of it." "Answering Li Xu," second letter 答李詡第二書, *Ouyang Xiu quanji* 歐陽修全集, 6 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001) 2:47.669; Hong Benjian 洪本健, ed., *Ouyang Xiu shiwenji jiaojian* 歐陽修詩文集校箋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2009), 2.1169; Zeng Zaozhuang 曾棗莊 and Liu Lin 劉琳, eds. *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, 360 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu, 2006), 33:697.54.

8.   Cheng Yi, *Er Cheng yishu er Cheng waishu* 二程遺書二程外書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1992), 18.8b-9a. This is a reprinted

photocopy of the *Siku quanshu* edition.

9.   Su Shi, "Jingyinyuan huaji" 淨因院畫記, in *Su Shi wen ji* 蘇軾文集, edited by Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 367-368. See my discussion of this text in *The Road to East Slope: The Development of Su Shi's Poetic Voice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 84.

10. I discuss Su Shi's developing sense of the significance of *li* in the chapter "Fengxiang and the Poetry of Immanent Pattern" in *The Road to East Slope*, 78-118.

11. My recent monograph *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes: Southern Song Poetry and the Problem of Literary History* (Cambridge: Harvard Asia Center Press, 2014) explores the relationship of intellectual and literary history—the orderings of language and experience—in the transformation of poetry that occurred from the late Northern Song to the end of the Southern Song.

12. Wang Wengao 王文誥, *Su Shi shi ji* 蘇軾詩集, edited by Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 17.891-892; Wang Wengao 王文誥, *Su Wenzhong Gong shi bian zhu ji cheng* 蘇文忠公詩編註集成 (Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1967), 17.18b-19; Ogawa Tamaki 小川環樹, *So Shoku* 蘇軾 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972), 1.123-129; Burton Watson, *Su Tung-p'o: Selections from a Sung Dynasty Poet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 65-67.

13. For example, in his commentary on the "Explanation of the Trigrams" (Shuo gua 說卦) in the *Canon of Changes* (Yijing 易經), Su Shi writes:

> The transformations of the Way and virtue are like rivers constantly rushing downward…. The sages considered that if one stood at the end, one could not know the whole and exhaust their transformations. Therefore they went upstream and followed them back to their beginnings. The Way is where it travels; virtue is its traveling (*xing* 行, also "enacting") and bringing to completion. Pattern (*li*) is that by which the Way and virtue are as they are, and rightness (*yi*) is the explanation of that by which they are as they are.

Su Shi, *Su shi Yi zhuan* 蘇氏易傳 (Taipei: Guangwen, 1974), 9.533. I discuss this passage in "Moral Intuitions and Aesthetic Judgments: The Interplay of Poetry and Daoxue in Southern Song China" in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368 AD)*, edited by John Lagerwey (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1307-1377.

14. For my use of Kant's approach to aesthetic experience, see *Drifting*

among Rivers and Lakes, 18-24.

15. I explore this question in detail in two recent articles: "'Renwen': Zhongtang shiqi shige he shenmei jingyan zhuanbian" "人文": 中唐時期詩歌和審美經驗轉變 (Patterns of the Human Realm: Poetry and Transformations of Aesthetic Experience in Mid-Tang China), in *Chuanhe xiansheng rongxiu jinian wenji* 川合先生榮休紀念文集 (Retirement Festschrift for Kawai Kōzō), edited by Jiang Yin 蔣寅, 195-222 (Hangzhou: Fenghuang Press, 2017), and "'Juanye'—dui Zhongguo gudian chuantong zhong roushen shixue de fansi" "倦夜" 一對中國古典傳統中肉身詩學的反思 ("'Weary Night:' A Reflection on Embodied Poetics in the Classical Chinese Tradition"), *Zhongguo xueshu* 中國學術 (Chinese Scholarship) 38 (2017): 119-137. "Patterns of the Human Realm" explores the relationship of poetic practice and cultural transformation in the Mid-Tang, while the second essay, "Weary Night," examines the character of aesthetic experience in a poem by Du Fu.

16. My monograph, *The Road to East Slope*, explores the process by which Su Shi came to his broad, capacious view of *li* as "inherent pattern." His distinctive understanding of its role in grounding the human engagement with the world moved beyond the narrowness of the post-An Lushan Confucian humanism, of which his mentor Ouyang Xiu was the last great advocate.

17. Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲, ed., *Du shi xiang zhu* 杜詩詳注, 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 5:14.1422-1423; Peng Dingqiu 彭定求, ed., *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, 25 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 7:227.2465. Stephen Owen, trans., *The Poetry of Du Fu*, 6 vols. (Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2016), 4:13.

18. Cf. Li Bai, "Jade Staircase's Grievance" 玉階怨: "White dew grows on the jade stairs. / The night is long, invading her gauze stockings." 玉階生白露 / 夜久侵羅襪. Zhan Ying 詹鍈, ed., *Li Bai quanji jiaozhu huishi jiping* 李白全集校注彙釋集評, 8 vols. (Tianjin: Baihua Wenyi, 1996), 2:5.727-731. "Jade Staircase's Grievance" is a title (and theme) that originated in Southern Dynasties court poetry.

19. Cao Cao, *Cao Cao ji* 曹操集 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1973), 5.

20. The commentaries cited in Qiu, *Du shi xiang zhu*, largely respect Du Fu's close attention to the night scene and his place in it. Even though critics acknowledge the comparisons to Du Fu's own circumstances implicit in the images of the fireflies and the water birds in the much-admired third couplet, physical presence of the insects and birds in the scene remains central.

21. Angus C. Graham, *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 39-56.