

research on migrants' identities, since it gives agency to remigrants themselves by treating meaningful aspects of their lives (personal relationships, social expectations, family planning to readapt, etc.) and creatively using different tools to do so (literature, fiction, art, as well as social scientific methods).

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Ten Thousand Scrolls: Reading and Writing in the Poetics of Huang Tingjian and the Late Northern Song. By YUGEN WANG. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011. ix, 283 pp. \$39.95 (cloth).
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By nonchalantly calling the poet Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) an “innovator” (p. 39) and reminding us that many critics likewise considered him innovative until recent decades when the issue of “original” versus “derivative” came to define much of the discussion about Huang and “Jiangxi” poetry, Yugen Wang recasts the old question of how to approach Huang’s rich textual borrowing. The problem seems to be whether Huang used allusion in a fundamentally new way or merely used it more than normal. Beneath that debate lurks the notion that he either represented a decline from a more meaningful poetry of the past, or else (as some contend, and Yugen Wang agrees) became a new peak—a transformational voice who “significantly shifted the theoretical basis of poetic composition” (p. 7). *Ten Thousand Scrolls* looks to explain that shift by analyzing Huang’s own criticism and contemporary literary culture. Anyone interested in how Tang, Song, and later poets went about their business will find much to ponder in this cogent, plain-spoken study that begins with Huang’s pronouncements on poetic craft but quickly moves into broader areas.

At the heart of Wang’s reasoning is his observation that Huang’s generation experienced an explosion of printed books. (“Ten thousand scrolls,” once a symbolic number, suddenly became a reasonable size for a good private library, such as that of Huang’s uncle and guardian Li Chang.) This textual glut, which Wang compares to our current media revolution, meant that a writer could cram his mind with far more written lore than had been possible even for Su Shi (1036–1101), only half a generation older than Huang. Committed craftsmen such as Huang may have felt pressure to actually learn all that lore, then painstakingly unload it into their work, all the while striving to sound spontaneous. The resulting technically complex poetry, based on “bitter,” arduous reading, Wang suggests, fit well into the “extremely competitive world of the late eleventh century” (p. 138). (But does calling a task “bitter” mean it is no fun?)

Wang also proposes that Chinese poetry may have changed forever after it was abolished from the civil-service examinations in 1071, and changed even further after it was devalued by the neo-Confucianism that eventually dominated

exam culture. By this reasoning, attaining the *jinshi* in 1067 would have landed Huang Tingjian in one of the last generations of scholars who needed poetry for social and political success, and simultaneously in the first generation forced to rethink how and why to write it. In discussing this and related issues, *Ten Thousand Scrolls* goes beyond the usual phrases associated with Huang (“not a word that comes from nowhere,” “transform iron into gold,” and the opaque, perhaps apocryphal “snatch the embryo, transplant the bone”): rather we learn about “method” (*fa*), “marking-lines,” “hatchet handles,” “nourishment,” and the “stream”—as well as the evocative “Leopard in the Fog,” the theme of chapter 3, the rawest, most intriguing, and most open to debate of the five chapters. When one realizes how voluminously Huang discussed those concepts as he mentored nephews, friends, and friends of friends, it becomes clear that in fact he did create a school of poetry, even though it would not be labeled “the Jiangxi Poetic Community” until after his time. Wang is persuasive that this school not only was real, but represented such a major current that even anti-Jiangxi poets shared many “Jiangxi” assumptions about the art form.

Ten Thousand Scrolls is to be commended for concentrating its multilayered argument on what Huang Tingjian *said* and *believed* about reading and writing, rather than trying to trace how he actually composed. Wang is clearly aware that Huang’s prescriptions varied depending on his audience, that he broke his own rules, and that he barely codified them anyway, but kept them largely where poets find rules to be most powerful: as metaphors. If the book has a drawback, it may be that we see a few too many broad conclusions extracted from rather short quotes, and not enough of Huang’s colorful self. If some of the excerpts from his letters and essays were lengthened and contextualized (and if more were used—we still have over six hundred of his letters), it might reveal how he often used advice about writing to dispense recommendations about living, or provide an avuncular pat on the back, deflect jealousies among his protégés, even lodge an exile’s complaint or two (couched, of course, as praise for the regime). This could further clarify how his thinking evolved. Richer contextualization would also highlight large parts of Huang’s poetic approach that he did not invent but absorbed from his friends and elders: learning-heavy lines whose surface meaning, allusions, sounds, and overtones blended seamlessly in a quest to draw from a primordial Source; celebration of the grandeur of humble events; one-upmanship in rhyme-matching; channeling Du Mu in couplets about river, wind, and lamplight—all were elements of a collective culture in which Huang partook with gusto. In other words, the real picture of those times may be too modulated, understated, and specific to fit into a tight set of theories.

But Song poetry must be approached step by step, especially in English. *Ten Thousand Scrolls*, with insights on almost every page, takes a crucial new stride and deserves detailed reading.

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