

鄭毓瑜：舊詩語的地理尺度：

以黃遵憲《日本雜事詩》中的典故運用為例

The Geographic Measure of Traditional Poetic Discourse: Reading Huang Zunxian's 'Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects from Japan'

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1. Traditional Poetic Discourse and Modern Subject Matters

IN REGARD TO Huang Zunxian's literary writings, it is tempting to understand his work purely from within an intellectual historical context. The famed writer and critic Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967) asserted that, in reading the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* 日本雜事詩, 'it is not of primary importance to treat these as poems—I feel that what is most important is to focus on the author's thinking, and what is secondary is to consider the poems as a record of Japanese subject matter'¹ Both Zhou's emphasis on the writer's thinking (*sixiang* 思想) and his account of 'Japanese subject matter' (*Riben shiwu* 日本事物), situate Huang's poetry within the question of tradition vs modernity, which was a major theme for late Qing writers.

Similarly, many of Huang's contemporaries, including the eminent Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), understood his poetry as history, writing on one occasion that a poem by Huang was 'a fragment of history', and 'those who read this can all reflect upon themselves—how could this be a poem [intended] only for [other] poets!'² If Liang hoped to elevate Huang beyond the realm of pure

¹ See Zhou Zuoren, 'Ribenzashi shi' 日本雜事詩, in *Fengyu tan* 風雨談 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 104.

² See Liang Qichao, 'Yinbing shi shihua' 飲冰室詩話, in *Yinbing shi wenji* 飲冰室文集, v (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), 20.

literature, the late Qing official and scholar Qiu Fengjia 丘逢甲 (1864–1912) would see him in even grander terms, praising Huang’s poetry as ‘the poetry of the new world’ 新世界詩 and figuring him as ‘the Columbus of the poetic realm’ 詩世界之哥倫布. However, Qiu would later lament that Huang would not turn out to be China’s Cavour (Camillo Benso; 1810–61), who unified modern Italy, or its Bismarck (1815–98), who unified modern Germany—only the Cavour or Bismarck of poetry.³

Because of Huang Zunxian’s importance within the late Qing intellectual and historical contexts, the literary qualities of his poetry have rarely been given proper attention. Yet we cannot discuss Huang Zunxian’s relationship to modernity or his understanding of Japan without first inquiring into the medium through which he represented this ‘modern subject matter’ (*xin shiwu* 新事物)—to adapt Zhou Zuoren’s phrase. What I will argue here is that it was the set of 200 *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* that allowed these various Japanese matters—from historical events and institutions to customs and native objects—to be discovered by the late Qing. Huang’s poems were not simply a matter, as the Cantonese poet Zeng Xijing 曾習經 (1867–1926) would write, of ‘using classical poetry to adorn contemporary things’ 以古詩飾今事.⁴ What Huang did was to use classical poetry to underscore the geocultural distance between classical tradition and the modernity that he experienced in Japan—which leads to the question of how one might forge a compromise between these two spaces.

The answer to this lies in Huang’s dense usage of allusions and commonplace phrases (*diangu chengci* 典故成辭). Allusions forge connections between events or experiences of the past and those of the present, between something that is already known (the original referent of the allusion) and something that is not yet known (the subject to which the allusion is applied). Allusion thus becomes an epistemological strategy, a way of knowing and interpreting something new through the lens of a familiar, pre-established system of knowledge, or implicating one set of cognitive modes with another. Within the domestic knowledge system of China, this is embodied by traditional encyclopedias (*leishu* 類書), which create archival storehouses of knowledge through the collection of allusory materials.

For Huang, however, allusion becomes an act of translation, as he is bringing the modernized Japanese world into a new relationship with traditional Chinese culture. Huang’s use of allusion determines a new relational space for the ‘foreign object’ (*yuwai shiwu* 域外事物) to appear; however, since it is the

³ ‘Huang Gongdu *Renjinglu shicao ba*’ 黃公度《入境廬詩草》跋, in *Qiu Fengjia ji* 丘逢甲集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2001), 815–17.

⁴ Quoted in Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯, ‘*Renjinglu shi ba*’ 入境廬詩跋, in *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu* 入境廬詩草箋注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), 1085.

immanent (Chinese) system of knowledge that defines the modern (Japanese) subject matter, Huang's translations—or mistranslations—may well be biased. On the other hand, because Huang is responding to new circumstances when translating this 'modern subject matter', he may, for the sake of expedience, end up using traditional allusions in ways that go against their original meaning and possibly reveal what is 'untraditional' within 'tradition'. Some modern scholars have criticized how Huang Zunxian failed to recognize the gap between classical poetry and the modern world, how he could not relinquish the expressivity of traditional poetic discourse.⁵ However, this kind of criticism does not acknowledge the significance of how traditional modes of perception and expression respond to historical change or how they are transformed in the process. Allusions and commonplace expressions bear meaning because they embody a 'geographic measure' (*dili chidu* 地理尺度), one that both refers to the shared system of knowledge that marks the geographic boundaries of understanding and reveals the limits of that system of knowledge.

2. From Separation to Contact: The Three Divine Mountains and the Peach Blossom Spring

HUANG ZUNXIAN'S poem 'Setting Off from Shanghai and Arriving at Nagasaki' describes the first impressions of a diplomat arriving in Japan, using a number of classical allusions. The most prominent of these is the use of the term 'Three Islands' (*sandao* 三島) to refer to Japan. The 'Three Islands' are none other than the 'Three Divine Mountains' (*san shenshan* 三神山) of Penglai 蓬萊, Fangzhang 方丈, and Yingzhou 瀛洲. Huang then combines these with the figures of the Great Peng 大鵬 bird riding the winds and the Yellow Dragon 黃龍 carrying the boat, along with the emergence and submergence of the River Earl 河伯 and sea gods.

Huang Zunxian locates Japan within an atmosphere of myth and legend, though it should be noted that these myths took shape over time. The earliest record of Penglai, the most famous of the three mountains, can be found in the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 [Classic of mountains and seas], which states: 'Penglai Mountain is located upon the seas.'⁶ It was the *Shi ji* 史記 [Records of the historian]

⁵ See, for example, Lin Gang 林崗, 'Haiwai jingyan yu xin shi de xingqi' 海外經驗與新詩的興起, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 (Winter 2004), 22–30.

⁶ See Yuan Ke 袁珂, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 山海經校注 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1992), 7.378.

and its ‘Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices’ (‘Fengshan shu’ 封禪書) that combined Penglai, Fangzhang, and Yingzhou as the ‘Three Divine Mountains’ and further described how there are immortals and undying herbs to be found upon them.⁷ Later, the *Liezi* 列子 (likely compiled during the Wei-Jin period) would do away with traditional conceptions of geography and remove the divine mountains from their supposed location in the Bohai, placing them a hundred million miles to the east. The *Liezi* would also add the mountains Daiyu 岱輿 and Yuanqiao 員嶠 to make a new grouping of ‘Five Mountains’ 五山.⁸ Both of these later descriptions of the ‘Three Mountains’ or ‘Five Mountains’ can be regarded as elaborations of the account of Penglai in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, since they draw upon the geographical imagination that is articulated in this early text. Huang Zunxian would also turn to this body of mythic knowledge in its representations of Japan, though in his case, this would be a Japan that was mediated through poetic language.

At the same time, Huang was aware that precise knowledge of Japan at the time was limited and tended to be influenced by such legend-based accounts. In the commentary to the last of the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, he writes: ‘*The Classic of Mountains and Seas* has already recounted facts about Japan (*Woguo* 倭國), but regarding such histories and gazetteers throughout the ages, not even one in ten have been accurate in regard to geography and customs.’ In an attempt to remedy this situation, the ‘*Linjiao zhi*’ 鄰交志 [Treatise on relations with neighbouring states] in his *Treatises on Japan* 日本國志 contains a discussion of China’s earliest knowledge concerning Japan:

The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* claimed that the Northern and Southern Wo lands [Japan] belonged to the territory of Yan. The ‘Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices’ of the *Records of the Historian* stated that Kings Wei and Xuan of Qi, and King Zhao of Yan, all dispatched people upon the sea to the Three Divine Mountains, where they saw the so-called undying herbs of the immortals. Since then there has been no end to the eastward crossings of the Bohai. The place they reached would appear to be what is presently Japan.⁹

⁷ See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji*, 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 28.1369.

⁸ See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, ed., *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 5.151–52.

⁹ See *Riben guozhi* 日本國志, in Chen Zheng 陳錚, ed., *Huang Zunxian quanji* 黃遵憲全集, 2 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 932.

Though these would normally be considered lore and not fact, Huang speculates that these records constitute the first historical references to Japan, as well as evidence of the beginnings of communication and exchange between China and Japan.

Moreover, in examining the ancestry of the Japanese, he turns to the story of the Qin diviner Xu Fu 徐福, who crossed the sea in search of immortality, taking several thousand young boys and girls along with him.¹⁰ The fifth poem of the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* focuses on this episode from the *Records of the Historian*, and in the commentary to the poem, Huang discusses why he believes that the Japanese were the probable descendants of Xu Fu. Among other things, he notes that the sword, mirror, and seal which served as the imperial regalia were made in the Qin style; that the Japanese believed in spirits and in the arts of the diviners; and that there are both a tomb and shrine for Xu Fu. Moreover,



¹⁰ See *Shi ji*, 6.247.

Huang changes some of the details from *Records of the Historian*, casting Xu Fu as seeking ‘to escape Qin’, rather than voluntarily requesting to search for immortals abroad. In this way, Huang is able to relate Xu Fu’s legend to the Peach Blossom Spring. Tao Qian 陶潛 (365?–427), in his ‘Account of Peach Blossom Spring’ 桃花源記, states that the people of the Peach Blossom Spring ‘said of themselves that their ancestors escaped the chaotic age of Qin, and leading their wives, children, and townsmen, came to this remote place and never again left it. Thus they had been cut off from people on the outside’.¹¹

The figuration of Japan as a distant utopia is further elaborated by Huang elsewhere in his *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*. For example, in the poem ‘Shanshui’ 山水 [Landscape], he describes the voyage to Japan, referring to the country by the name of ‘Fusang’ 扶桑 (which is also the mythical tree on the eastern horizon). He notes how the landscape of Japan differs from that of China, lacking such great rivers as the Yellow River and the Yangtze. However, in the last line, he refers to the Qin diviner Lu Ao 盧敖 and the Daoist heaven of ‘Highest Clarity’ (*taiqing* 太清), transforming human geography into a celestial one. Similarly, in the poem ‘Qingting Zhou’ 蜻蜓洲 [Dragonfly island], which refers to the dragonfly-like shape of Japan’s islands, Huang speaks about the isolation and inaccessibility of Japan, pointing to the legend of the wind that repelled seafarers from the shores of the Three Mountains on the one hand, and to the mutable nature of Penglai’s waters, sometimes deep and sometimes shallow, on the other.

The commentary on ‘Dragonfly Island’ seems to contradict the poem’s description of Japan’s remoteness. The first half of the commentary indicates that since the founding of Japan, its territory has remained the same, just as stated in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, among other historical and anecdotal texts. In the second half of the commentary, however, Huang criticizes the imagery of the Three Divine Mountains as a representation of Japan:

Nowadays, foreign countries are all accessible by water or land, so where would one see the so-called Yuanqiao and Fanghu? It may be the case that diviners from Yan and Qi knew the eastward traces of Junfang [Xu Fu] and thus borrowed this fact to spin their fabrications. These [the so-called divine mountains] in fact should be the lands of Japan.

By pointing out that in the present age ‘foreign countries are all accessible by water or land’, Huang dismisses the utility of depicting Japan as obscure and

¹¹ Lu Qinli 遼欽立, ed., *Tao Yuanming ji* 陶淵明集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 6.165–66.

remote. He then undermines the very notion of the Three Divine Mountains by asserting the likelihood that it was Japan all along that the diviners knew to lie over the seas.

Though Huang may see the figuration of Japan as the Three Divine Mountains as somehow inadequate, he nevertheless returns to this image throughout his writings. In a letter to the pioneering journalist and reformer Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–97)—who published the first edition of the poems in 1880—Huang wrote that ‘I kept thinking that the land of Japan had long been called “Penghu”’ and so ‘I threw myself into this journey into the unknown.’¹² And when Huang was transferred to the position of Chinese Consul General in San Francisco, he expressed similar sentiments to his Japanese friends, noting that when he embarked upon the diplomatic mission to Japan: ‘I came to the Three Divine Mountains, on a journey to the unknown.’¹³ Huang’s allusions to the Three Divine Mountains and the Peach Blossom Spring overlay the imagery of an essentially unknowable utopian realm upon one that was experientially knowable. However, far from reifying the image of Japan as a place of unknown mystery, Huang’s series of allusions functions as the medium through which Japan can become known. In other words, these allusions comprise a familiar cognitive mode for understanding spaces outside of the cultural sphere, one that translates a problem of geographical measurement into one of poetic knowledge.

Yet there are questions of commensurability between Huang’s poetic allusions and his intended new referents, particularly as he consistently problematizes and complicates his allusions in the face of modern realities. For example, the first couplet of the poem ‘Fengsu’ 風俗 [Local customs] reiterates the separation between Japan and the world through Zou Yan’s discourse on the nine great regions and the legend of the divine Kunlun Mountain. The second couplet, on the one hand, admits that the legends of the Three Divine Mountains are false rumours, but on the other hand, insists that the pure customs of Japan are indeed the same as those of Peach Blossom Spring. In fact, in regard to Japanese customs, Huang asks rhetorically in the commentary to the poem, ‘Is this not why it is said that its people honour ritual and deference, and they are neither thieves nor wantons?’

¹² See ‘Letter Sent to Wang Tao’ 致王韜函 in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 319–20. This is dated as 25 July 1880.

¹³ From the first of the ‘Receiving Orders to Serve as the Consul General of San Francisco, U.S.A.: Detained on Parting by Various Japanese Gentlemen, in Five Poems’ 奉命為美國三富蘭西士果總領事留別日本諸君子五首. See *Renjinglu shicao jianzhu*, 4.337.

The commentary to the poem presents the isolation of Japan and its pure customs from a different perspective, one that privileges history over mythic representation:

[Japan] is surrounded by sea on four sides, and since the time when the Tokugawa clan presided over the closure of the harbours, it was even more cut off from other countries. However, [in this way] it sustained a period of uninterrupted peace, shutting its gates and living in seclusion for over 200 years.

Under the Tokugawa shogunate's *sakoku* 鎖國 policy of exclusion, Japan had closed its borders to foreigners for a period that lasted from 1641 to 1853. When Huang writes that Japan was 'cut off from other countries', he is borrowing from how Tao Qian had described the traveller to the Peach Blossom Spring, who 'came to this isolated region', a place that was 'cut off from people outside'. Here, again, Huang exchanges the image of the 'Three Divine Mountains' for that of the Peach Blossom Spring. He takes up the issue of *sakoku* isolationism also in his 'Dili zhi' 地理志 [Treatise on geography], where he writes:

But Japan closed its gates and embarked upon an isolationist policy, not allowing any communication to pass through and remaining completely unaware of external matters. Not until the 'sturdy ships and mighty cannons' lay siege to its ports did it behave 'like one just awakening from a dream' or 'one just sobering from drunkenness'.¹⁴

Here, Huang acknowledges how the image of Japan as the Peach Blossom Spring could no longer exist, given that modern ships could easily reach its shores.

The new global reality meant that no country could be truly separate from any other country, that geographic distance had now been erased. In the 'Treatise on Relationships with Neighbouring States', Huang quotes the eminent Japanese military scholar Hayashi Shihei 林子平 (1738–93), who wrote:

From Edo's Nihonbashi to the various nations of Europe, one body of water connects them both. They steer the mighty ships over the oceans as if travelling on level ground, and look upon foreign lands as if close neighbours. ...¹⁵

¹⁴ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1011.

¹⁵ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 974.

The vast ocean that had once provided separation between kingdoms now becomes the means by which the European nations could gain access to Japan. Huang elaborates on this by again quoting Hayashi, this time in the chapter ‘Treatise on Geography’:

The waters that flow beneath Nihonbashi are directly connected to London and Paris. Those barriers of the past that were once relied upon now turn out to be as easily passed as a courtyard. If we consider this, would a natural barrier be sufficient?¹⁶

The so-called ‘natural barriers’ are no longer effective, and this has implications not only for military matters but also for cultural influence.

While the problem of coastal defence may have been on Hayashi Shihei’s mind, what Huang notes is a further complication in terms of Japan’s ‘pursuit of the foreign’ (*wuwai* 驚外). In the ‘Treatise on Relationships with Neighbouring States’, he writes:

From the the most recent period on, Japan forged relations with Europe and the United States, and their embassy buildings [were so numerous] that they abutted one another. From the standpoint of astronomy and geography as well as of governmental and military preparation, to the system of laws and language and literature, even down to the details of daily life and the trifles of leisure activities, nothing was not modelled upon the West. ... This even reached the point at which the eyes were mesmerized and the mind intoxicated, mouths would talk and fingers sketch it unceasingly. People would fight to take out their savings in order to buy foreign objects; as for the things of their own country, they would discard them like trash and never mention them again. This can be called ‘pursuit of the foreign’.¹⁷

Huang’s observation points out in detail that the bypassing of ‘geographic barriers’ resulted not only in a transformation of geographic measurement, but also one of culture, as embodied in the ideology of Western imitation. As expressed in his poems, the contrast between the classical style of Huang’s poetry and his modern, prose commentaries reflects not only the geographic distance between a still tradition-bound China and a modernizing Japan, but also their cultural distance. At the same time, if the poems provide a means of understanding this geography and of transcending ‘geographic barriers’, then they also provide a means of understanding the transformations in culture and of transcending ‘cultural barriers’ (*wenhua fanli* 文化藩籬).

¹⁶ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1011.

¹⁷ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 932.

3. From Geographic Barriers to Cultural Barriers: ‘Reforming the Calendar and Changing Clothing Styles’

WHILE GEOGRAPHIC BARRIERS can be overcome by a different means of transportation, cultural barriers have to be negotiated through hermeneutical understanding. Japan’s modernization was not simply a political or economic matter, but had far-reaching implications within the cultural realm as well. However, for Huang and many other pro-reform Chinese intellectuals, the cultural aspects of modernization were received with ambivalence, and even outright disapproval. The eminent diplomat Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838–94), who wrote the preface for Huang’s *Treatises on Japan*, wrote, ‘They [the Japanese] reformed the calendar and changed their clothing style; they will not be able to escape being laughed at and scorned by the world’.¹⁸ Xue’s comment focuses on two of the major ritual aspects of dynastic transition: reforming the calendar (*gai zhengshuo* 改正朔) and changing clothing styles (*yi fuse* 易服色). This is described in the ‘Li shu’ 曆書 [Treatise on calendrics] in the *Records of the Historian*, which states:

As kings, they receive the Mandate with each change of royal clan; they must be cautious in how they begin, reforming the calendar and changing clothing styles. They should examine the first principle of Heaven and compliantly receive Heaven’s intention.¹⁹

Whereas Sima Qian 司馬遷 is describing the ritual complement to dynastic transition, Xue is using this allusion to describe the shift from the East Asian lunar calendar to the Western Gregorian calendar, from traditional styles of clothing to modern Western fashions. These two topics are also discussed by Huang in his *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, and in this section, I have selected poems on clothing and the calendar that discuss how Huang understood Japan’s changing cultural norms through traditional allusion, how he represented the cultural space of Japan through his poetic framework.

I begin with the topic of fashion. The poem ‘Keenly Learning from Western Methods’ 銳意學西法 takes up the change of fashion styles in Japan, contextualizing this cultural transformation within the broader process of institutional modernization. By noting the idle traditional looms and the adoption of Western-style clothing, Huang criticizes Japan’s blind reverence for foreign styles—one that

¹⁸ See Xue, ‘*Riben guozhi xu*’ 日本國志序, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 817.

¹⁹ *Shi ji*, 26.1256.

would lead to a growing imbalance between the importation of Western goods and the export of Japanese goods, and result in a severe trade deficit for the Japanese economy. This point is also made in the ‘Shihuo zhi’ 食貨志 [Treatise on economics] from the *Treatises on Japan*, where Huang writes:

Where Japan erred was in changing clothing styles and its national customs, mobilizing the entire nation to imitate the West. From important matters such as ritual and music and sociopolitical institutions to trivial matters of daily life, not a single thing did not rely upon outsiders. What was obtained was minor, but what was lost was great. ... In recent years, looms have remained empty and livelihoods become more hard-pressed day by day—the social ills are already quite evident.²⁰

However, ‘changing clothing styles’ is clearly not related only to economic matters. Another poem, ‘Ritual Garb’ 禮服, talks about the change of clothing and accessories during court ceremonies, as well as the change from the practice of kneeling to that of ‘a slightly bended waist’ 小折腰 (that is, bowing) and ‘competing to clasp hands’ 爭攜手 (that is, handshaking). Furthermore, in his ‘Treatise on Economics’, Huang discusses how, after the Japanese had adopted Western fashions, they unbound their hair, stopped carrying knives, and abolished old customs such as shaving eyebrows and blackening teeth.²¹ Thus we can see that ‘changing clothing styles’ was a total transformation that encompassed not only fashion, but also makeup and accessories, including even etiquette and general appearance.

In the poem ‘Nü zi’ 女子 [Women] Huang is more forthright in his preference for traditional clothing styles and makes clear his opposition to the Westernizing trends prevalent in Japan at the time. In his commentary, he states that most women wore ‘traditional clothing’ (*gu zhuangshu* 古裝束), ‘lacking rings on their ears, bracelets on their arms, flowers in their topknot chignons, and feet in constraining shoes’. Moreover, their behaviour was unaffected and was neither shy nor lewd; this was ‘the same as the ancient style’. His nostalgia for the traditional institutions and customs of Japan reveals his discomfort with the innovation and modernization taking place at the time.

Of course, it should be remembered that what the poet sees is not a pure apprehension of the outside world, but rather is a selection of things that catches his eye. That is, poetic language is not a transparent medium of objective

²⁰ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1235.

²¹ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1211.

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Nymph of the Luo River 洛神 by
Yuan Shaoqiong 袁少瓊 dated
1982. Courtesy of the Hong
Kong Museum of Art

perception; it is the subjective means by which the object is actually formed and moulded. In this way, the examples used for ‘changing the clothing styles’ cannot but be implicated in larger questions of Huang’s understanding of the changing historical and cultural contexts. Thus, on the surface, the line about the *tabi* would seem to simply describe the stockings worn by women, but Huang praises them both for their unadorned appearance and for their ‘ancient and simple’ (*gupu* 古樸) style. However, this characterization of the socks as simple, almost rustic, is complicated in another poem, ‘Liang qi wa’ 兩歧襪 [*Tabi* stockings]. In the course of the quatrain, he uses allusions to the famous beauties Xi Shi 西施, the Luo River Goddess 洛神, and Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, casting the wearing of socks and clogs in a rather more sensual context. In contrast to the way in which the poem unfolds a scene of anticipated seduction, moving from Xi Shi in the Gallery of Echoing Clogs 響屨廊, to the Luo River Goddess skimming the watery waves, and finally ending with a scandalous glimpse of Yang Guifei’s embroidered stockings, the commentary to the poem simply discusses how these socks and clogs

belong to traditional Asian styles.

What Huang seems to long for is the atmosphere and mood produced by traditional clothing styles. The adoption of Western clothing, even if it were only a change as minor as footwear, results in a broader transformation of all aspects of one’s lifestyle. For example, in his ‘Lisu zhi’ 禮俗志 [Treatise on ritual and customs], Huang mentions that in the Tokugawa shogunate, common people were not allowed to wear clogs and socks. The ban was later removed, and ‘in recent times, people wore leather shoes and everyone wore socks’. Thus, one’s choice of footwear served to distinguish between officials and common people, but this visible sign of class hierarchy disappeared after the lifting of the ban, and moreover could not be separated from the shifts brought on by modern fashion or the changes occasioned by Westernization.

Thus, beyond footwear, changes of fashion brought on by Westernization transformed the entire experience of social space, which was something that Huang also lamented. The poem ‘Yuan ting’ 園亭 [Garden pavilion] speaks to a

traditional appreciation of seclusion and tranquillity, even when visiting with friends. The quatrain ends with the line, ‘All day long I only hear the sounds of clapping hands’, about which Huang makes the following comment:

The gates are always closed. Walking in the courtyard, it is tranquil as if no one is there. I once paid a visit to my friend, and we held brush-pen conversations [*bitan* 筆談] for half the day, not hearing the sound of anyone.²² When he wanted the servant boy to make tea, he simply clapped his hands, causing one to feel free and unfettered, with thoughts of having departed this dusty world.

By contrast, in the ‘Treatise on Economics’, Huang described how after the Japanese began to wear leather shoes, carry walking sticks, and use the pince-nez, other social customs were also affected. Moreover, he writes, ‘if one were to stay at someone’s home, and the host did not have Parisian wine or Cuban tobacco to offer the guests, then he would feel embarrassed’. Not only wealthy families would ‘cover their walls with woven tapestries and their floors with woollen carpets’, even common families ‘also buy scarlet wool for mattresses, use blue-green glass as inlays for their windows, in order to show off in their villages’.²³ In this sort of luxurious environment with numerous foreign objects and a heightened sense of competition through conspicuous consumption, the leisure and enjoyment of traditional social activities became ever more difficult to pursue.

Huang relies upon an idealization of the traditional past, using it as a cultural measure to mark its distance from the modern Japanese scene. However, his idealization is based upon an ecosystem of objects: paper windows, grass mats, wooden clogs, and *tabi*. These objects then comprise the network of meanings that derive from traditional literary allusions and lore. When leather shoes replace wooden clogs, when woollen carpets replace grass mats, when glass windows replace paper ones, and music and dance replace tea and serious conversation, this represents not simply the emergence of ‘modern objects’ or a new language, but also a challenge to the entire system of traditional knowledge. Huang’s response is to summon forth a classical scene and to lay it over the site of the new referent, creating a palimpsest in which one locality (which is always Japan) is covered over by one of a different sort (the classical scene).

²² These were conversations that took place through the exchange of written classical phrases, since Huang Zunxian was not fluent in spoken Japanese and his Japanese friends could not speak Chinese.

²³ *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1211.

To follow the above discussion of the ‘change in clothing styles’, I turn to the other ritual hallmark of dynastic transition: ‘reforming the calendar’. There are two poems that speak directly to this among the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*: ‘Xin li’ 新曆 [The new calendar] and ‘Jiu li’ 舊曆 [The traditional calendar]. In ‘The Traditional Calendar’, Huang shows his clear opposition to calendrical reform, criticizing how the Japanese have forgotten their origins. In the commentary to this poem, Huang quotes his friend Shen Meishi 沈梅士 as identifying Japan with the mythical ‘Land of Xihe’—the land of the sun charioteer, later sun goddess. Huang goes on to cite Shen as stating:

I suspect that in the past, this land [Japan] had scholars who were specialists in celestial phenomena and calendrical calculations. In high antiquity, these were the same as in China, and they were used by ‘solar officials’ [astrologers]. It was following this that they [Japan] used the name of the country [the land of Xihe 羲和之國] as their surname, and then took the surname to title the official position. It is for this reason that the position of the solar official is called ‘Xihe’.²⁴

The point here is that since the identity of Japan was (supposedly) founded upon its relationship to traditional calendrical practices and knowledge, the adoption of the Western calendar would amount to Japan rejecting its own ancestors.

However, Huang’s own concern regarding calendrical reformation went beyond this issue, raising the question of the calendar’s central importance to political symbolism and societal order. The *Institutes of Zhou* 周禮 make clear that the promulgation of the calendar was enacted by the king. Further, according to the Tang commentator Jia Gongyan 賈公彥, the Son of Heaven would issue the calendar and edicts to the feudal lords, combining the functions of the temporal order as embodied in the notion of the first month (*shuo* 朔) and those of political administration (*zheng* 政).²⁵ Thus, changing the calendar clearly proclaims a supersession of power (either from dynasty to dynasty or from dynasty to nation-state). Huang builds upon this ideology with the first line of the poem, ‘The New Calendar’, which alludes to the moment that Duke Yin of Lu 魯隱公 assumed the regency as recorded by the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋. Notably, the state of Lu continued to use the Zhou calendar, honouring the political legacy of the Zhou

²⁴ On this, also see Li Ling 李玲, ‘Huang Zunxian gai liguan de sixiang licheng’ 黃遵憲改曆觀的思想歷程, *Xueshu yuekan* 學術月刊 (Dec 2004), 88–96.

²⁵ See *Zhou li zhushu* 周禮注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 26.695.

kings, when other states such as Ruo 郤 and Deng 鄧 had already abandoned it. In the last line, Huang refers to the astrological divination that confirmed the rightful ascension of Emperor Wen to the throne, despite the Lü clan's efforts to usurp it. Huang's poem and its choice of allusions imply that, unless the imperial clan is threatened, the calendrical system that has been in existence for 2,000 years should not be rashly revised, and moreover, that the integral relationship between the calendrical and political systems should not be taken lightly. Just as Huang indicates in 'Guotong zhi' 國統志 [Treatise on the state system], the imperial Japanese throne 'has been transmitted for 120 generations and has endured for more than 2,000 years, all under a single surname'—which is to say, it had never been 'transmitted to a different surname'.²⁶

However, at that time, the reason why Japan abolished the Chinese calendar and adopted the Western calendar seems to be totally different from Huang's claim that the calendar should be understood as a political symbol. The commentary to the poem 'The New Calendar' describes the Western calendar as follows: 'Every four years it inserts a leap day, and after seventy years, there is only an error of one day; this is indeed more precise than the Chinese lunar calendar'. In the 'Tianwen zhi' 天文志 [Treatise on astronomy], Huang also records a discussion about calendrical reform with his Japanese friends. The Japanese considered calendrical reform to have been the best policy of the Meiji Restoration. Since 'the solar calendar has a fixed number of days in a year, in regard to regulating state finances, issuing official salaries, and carrying out the law, it is precise and uniform, lacking any irregularities'. As for Huang's critique of Japan's calendrical reform, the friends responded that, 'during the period of the Three Dynasties, three different calendars were used in succession', thus arguing that calendrical reform had its precedents in traditional China. In response Huang simply states that he 'has no means by which to argue against them'.²⁷

Nevertheless, it is clear that Huang has other concerns in regard to calendrical reform. The first has to do with the calendar as political symbol. There is also, as I will show, a more general question about the way in which calendars structure time, and how this structure is experienced by ordinary people, many of whose lives were centred around agriculture and other traditional livelihoods. In considering the traditional experience of time, Huang looked to the Song dynasty scholar Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031–95), who created the 'twelve solar terms' (*shier qi* 十二氣) and substituted them for the twelve lunar months in order to resolve the

²⁶ Riben guozhi, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 892.

²⁷ Riben guozhi, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1007–1008.

conflict caused by the lunar calendar's intercalary month.²⁸ Following Shen's example, Huang added a chart of the solar terms at the end of his 'Treatise on Astronomy', hoping to preserve some components of the traditional calendrical system even as Japan changed to the Western calendar.

The solar terms also inform the original version of 'The New Calendar', which on its surface seems to simply depict a day of quiet leisure. However, his use of the botanical images of the pawlonia (*wutong* 梧桐) and pennycress (*mingjia* 蔞莢), which are both plants used to mark the passage of time, reveals an underlying allusory structure, one that relates to the solar terms as a measurement of time. *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年 [The bamboo annals] record the pennycress as follows:

There is a pod-bearing grass that grows in stages. On the first day of the month, it will grow one pod, and by the midpoint of the month, it will have grown fifteen pods. After the sixteenth, it will drop one pod each until the end of the month when all the pods are gone. If the month is short, one pod will wither without dropping. This is called the podded pennycress or the calendrical podgrass.²⁹

As for the pawlonia tree, it is described in the *Huajing* 花鏡 [Mirror of flowers] as follows:

It grows twelve leaves on each branch, and each side of the branch has six leaves. Counting from the bottom, one leaf stands for one month. If there is a leap month, then there are thirteen leaves. Observe the leaf that is smallest, then one can know which one is the leap month.³⁰

It is clear that when people were familiar with the cycle of solar terms and phenological changes, they would be able to tell the date through botanical observations or whether there was a leap month that year. When Huang laments that he can no longer determine the date in this traditional manner, he is both refuting the so-called precision of the Western calendar and (more importantly) implying that people are no longer familiar with these older methods of calendrical measurement.

²⁸ Shen Kuo, 'Bu bitan' 補筆談, in *Mengxi bitan jiaozheng* 夢溪筆談校證 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 933.

²⁹ Wang Guowei 王國維, *Jinben Zhushu jinian shuzheng* 今本竹書紀年疏證 (rev. edn, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), A.208.

³⁰ Chen Haozi 陳湜子 (b.1612), *Huajing* 花鏡, in Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, gen. ed., *Zhongguo kexue jishu dianji tonghui* 中國科學技術典籍通彙, iv (Zhengzhou: Henan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 105.

Underlying his sorrow is the realization that the cognitive and experiential relationship to the world in the past, one in which time and space were unified and interpretable through changing phenomena (such as the growth cycle of plants), has now been lost. The last couplet of the original version of 'The New Calendar' speaks to this, with its mention of a future Sunday of leisure. After the Western calendar was implemented, the week was divided into seven days, and Sunday was designated as the day of rest. Thus, a leisure activity such as taking wine and viewing flowers would be directly related to the idea of Sunday within the Western calendar's new ordering of experienced time, rather than to the actual cycle of plants and trees in bloom. Huang, in his advocacy of the traditional calendar, was not concerned simply with the question of calendrical precision, but more broadly sought to argue for an essential relationship between the phenological cycle of solar terms and lived, human experience. It was this relationship that the Western calendar, in its abstraction from nature, could not address.

4. Conclusion: Between the 'Nine Regions' and the New World

THE PREVIOUS SECTIONS discussed the way in which the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* used classical allusion and other commonplaces, locating Huang's experience of Japan within a pre-established conceptual framework. As I have argued, these traditional poems, with their epistemological contexts and rhetorical habits, were the medium through which Huang represented Japan, and that it was through this traditional poetic discourse that a previously unknowable Japan could be rendered knowable. However, at the same time, this strategy also speaks to the limits of Huang's understanding of this new world, since the poetic discourse carries within itself a particular cognitive framework, one that cannot but constrain and limit his knowledge of Japan. These familiar allusions express only that which is knowable within the terms of the traditional epistemological framework, thus excluding, to a certain degree, that which is not knowable—which is to say, that which the traditional framework cannot address. Although Huang acts as the intermediary between tradition and modernity, he must fit the new world of Japan to the yardstick of traditional poetic language—and this yardstick may not be adequate for his purposes. Moreover, in taking this kind of measurement, the scale of the yardstick itself—the frame of traditional poetry—may also be re-evaluated and recoded, accruing new meaning and interpretations.

In his preface to the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, Huang criticizes how traditional scholars are familiar only with Zou Yan's mythography. Huang takes note of how the traditional discourses of the 'Three Divine Mountains' and the 'Great Nine Regions' 大九州 indicate a general unwillingness not only to address the factual reality of Japan, but also reveal a deliberate and persistent rejection of empirical investigation. Huang speaks from the perspective of personal experience of Japan, and thus when he resorts to these same traditional allusions, he is also reflecting upon whether this distant land conforms with traditional understandings. For this reason, the concept of the 'Great Nine Regions' should not only be taken simply as an allusion, but rather indicates the beginnings of an active inquiry into lands and countries beyond Chinese borders.

However, why should Zou Yan's mythography have become the lens through which Huang Zunxian understands the world outside of China? As Sima Qian recounts, within Zou Yan's systemic theory, the world was divided into nine regions, and each of these nine regions had nine parts. The region of China comprised only one of these eighty-one parts.³¹ However, as Huang Zunxian was well aware, Zou Yan was actually making a broader argument about the relationships among Heaven, Earth, and human beings, which is to say, about the relationship between the cosmological and the sociopolitical realms. Huang, in his 'Treatise on Astronomy', affirms that the aim of ancient Chinese astronomy is 'to lodge oneself in self-cultivation and reflection that conforms to the changes of Heaven'.³² Thus, Huang agrees with Zou Yan in seeing a correspondence between the celestial order and the conduct of human beings upon the earth, though he dismisses more overtly superstitious beliefs in disasters and omens.

Zou Yan's doctrine of the 'Great Nine Regions' allowed traditional scholars to represent regions outside of the familiar geography of China, often in highly imaginative ways. However, what is more important, by the late Qing, is how the doctrine of the 'Nine Regions' was no longer only a symbol of the fantastic, but clearly represented a change in the Chinese world conception—one that moved away from a sinocentric belief system to a new recognition that China was one nation among others. It is clear that this new recognition provided an important topic of debate and dialogue among contemporary Chinese intellectuals (as well as with their Western counterparts). The reception of Zou Yan's doctrine represents a problem for how one defines and interprets the genealogy of

³¹ *Shi ji*, 74.2344.

³² *Riben guozhi*, in *Huang Zunxian quanji*, 1003.

traditional geographical studies in China. Thus, the fact that Huang's prefaces for the *Poem on Miscellaneous Subjects* and the *Treatises on Japan* borrow from Zou Yan's writings show that these were part of the adjustment process for Chinese intellectuals seeking a new vocabulary. Huang was not simply interested in preserving the past, but wanted to construct a middle ground between the past and the present, one in which traditional poetic language could analogously provide a means of understanding the modern world.

Since Huang Zunxian's *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* takes Japan as its theme, it is very tempting for readers to assume that he has simply translated his experiences abroad into writings that either introduce or present the local customs and circumstances of a foreign country. However, Huang bases his descriptions of Japan on a system of allusions (*diangu xitong* 典故系統)—one that was constructed from an archive of accumulated figures, events, things, and places—and thus the poems do not seek to present a strictly factual, geographic record of Japan. Although the poems thematize scenes and objects from a Japanese space, the poems also construct the meaning of this Japanese space through traditional Chinese culture. That is, Huang situates Japan within the contextual framework constructed by classical poetry, and furthermore, allows for a sense of recognizable familiarity in the representation of Japan.

Moreover, during that period Japan precisely was in the midst of the Western-influenced Meiji Restoration. One can say that the Japan in the *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* served as the arena of exchange and competition for both 'Western Learning' (*Xixue* 西學) and 'Chinese Learning' (*Hanxue* 漢學), which resulted in a negotiation between the new terminology and traditional discourse. In his commentaries, Huang consistently makes use of the new terminology, but within the poems, Huang uses allusions—such as 'Three Divine Mountains' and 'Peach Blossom Spring', 'changing the first month' and the 'Nine Regions'—for the same referents. This juxtaposition of traditional discourse and modern objects clearly makes it difficult to expect perfectly apt, one-to-one correlations, though it does afford the opportunity to reflect upon the differences and departures between the old and new epistemic paradigms, as well as how they were adapted to daily life and social experience. Simply put, the various forms of meaning that had been established within the paradigm of traditional knowledge and had, in turn, been treated as the basis for practice, have suddenly become, in this new world, questions that one had to revisit.

After the fifteenth century, because of its nautical explorations, Europe was suddenly exposed to a seemingly endless supply of new information and experiences, to the point that traditional understandings of astronomy, geography,

and biology were all overturned. At the same time, Europe also had to come to terms with the traditional knowledge that it had previously trusted and believed, and responded with a new emphasis on empirical method and evidentiary proof. Similarly, at the end of the Qing dynasty, China experienced a similar awakening in the face of a new global awareness, and Chinese scholars faced questions like how to respond to epistemological questions that had been taken as already settled, or how it was that traditional systems of knowledge had been called into question. These were not simply matters of conservative or progressive world-views, since these problems did not concern only the content of knowledge, but, at the same time, involved questions of how knowledge had been transmitted, and how discursive formations were determined and normalized. From the perspective of the West and its emphasis on scientific falsification, this would have been understood in terms of data measurement and calculation. However, for Huang Zunxian, who took a literary perspective, the answer would be found in the contested space between traditional cultural understandings and the new world of modernity, a grey zone of negotiation that revealed how there was as yet no clean break between the two worlds of the old and the new.³³

From the commentary to Huang's 'Miscellaneous Poems' and his *Treatise on Japan*, it is clear that he was aware of the neologisms and other recent linguistic coinages being produced in Japan and the West. His choice not to use the new terminology in his poetry, to separate modern terms in the commentary on the one hand, and traditional allusions in the poetry on the other, can be seen as a response to the cultural dilemma that he faced. As discussed above, these allusions and phrases held significance as the genetic components of traditional culture and yet could be appropriated in the literary representation of the new age. In other words, Huang Zunxian was not only involved in the work of cultural translation; nor was he simply attempting to resolve the linguistic differences that lay between China and Japan, East and West, and tradition and modernity—he was seeking to construct a model for a new cultural hermeneutics. For Huang, the system of familiar discursive formations allowed him to represent, transform, and reconstitute both self and other in regard to a global perspective, at times like a prism through which the objects and events of modernity are refracted, and at other times like a palimpsest in which images are superimposed and layered over one another.

³³ On the question of how the late Qing negotiated questions of modernity, see David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1–12.