饒宗頤國學院院刊　第六期
2019 年 8 月
頁 467–475

SWARTZ, Wendy. *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry: Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China*. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 111. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018. Pp. xii+304.

ZHU Mengwen
The Jao Tsung-I Academy of Sinology, Hong Kong Baptist University

Xuanyan 玄言 , or discoursing on the mysterious, poetry represents one major trend of poetic interests in early medieval China. The rise of this trend accompanied the development of *xuanxue* 玄學 (Learning of the mysterious), and a growing taste for *qingtan* 清談 (pure conversation) among the elite intellectuals during the Wei-Jin period. Entering the Southern dynasties, *xuanyan* poetry gradually fell out of favor, overshadowed by a renewed sense of poetic directness and a keen intent in pursuing prosodic forms.[1] Indeed, among the several major works of criticism passed down from the sixth century, poetry incorporating the *xuanyan* mode does not seem well received, and is generally reprimanded for being "flat and pedantic" (*ping dian* 平典).[2] As a matter of fact, this sixth-century distaste for *xuanyan* poetry has come to represent a voice of such authority that for over a millennium thereafter, the Wei-Jin poetry written in this particular fashion has not only gravely dwindled in quantity, but also been largely, if not completely, missed out from narratives of the poetic tradition. Modern scholarship since the 1980s has witnessed an increasing interest in *xuanyan* poetry, with several important works on literary history devoting substantial discussions to it in the 80s and

1 Among the earliest critics of *xuanyan* poetry was Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), advocate for poetic directness, fervent promotor and practitioner of prosodic rules. Shen's assessment of *xuan*-style writings essentially represents a changing literary taste among the elite men of letters in the southern Qi and Liang dynasties. See Shen Yue comp., *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 67.1778–1779.

2 See Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 , Cao Xu 曹旭 annot., *Shipin jizhu* 詩品集注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994), 24.

90s,[3] and a number of monographs focusing exclusively on it in the past two decades.[4] While each certainly has their own merits when it comes to repositioning *xuanyan* poetry back onto the early medieval literary map, they nevertheless fall short in terms of pioneering new approaches that yield new insights into this poetic trend, remaining, for the most part, faithful reiterators of the old rhetoric of criticism by faulting its artistic value and lyrical drive.

It is against such critical and scholarly backdrop, that Wendy Swartz's recent book entitled *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry* offers an excitingly groundbreaking take on *xuanyan* poetry. The other half of Swartz's book title, *Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China*, reveals the key concept that guides this research: intertextuality. Drawing primarily from the Western cultural theories, the author sets out to re-contextualize *xuanyan* poetry in an era that "witnessed an exponential growth in cultural wealth as the literati class developed a distinctive mosaic of ways to participate in their cultural heritage,"[5] and by so doing tapped into a rich reserve of texts, signs, knowledges and meanings. From these perspectives, Swartz embarks on a very different scholarly quest from her predecessors: rather than trying, and failing, to measure the literary merits of the early medieval *xuanyan* poetry against the critical tastes of later times, she aims instead, for a better understanding of this particular mode of poetry writing as a manifestation of cultural memories, and as an effective means of generating meaning. Following a general discussion in its first chapter on the various facets surrounding the activities of reading and writing in early medieval China, the major content of this book is neatly structured around five individual cases spanning from the Wei (220–266) regime of the Three Kingdoms (220–280) period to the southern Song (420–479) dynasty. Unlike the

3 Some influential works in this period include Ge Xiaoyin 葛曉音 , *Badai shishi* 八代詩史 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1989); Wang Zhongling 王鍾陵 , *Zhongguo zhonggu shige shi* 中國中古詩歌史 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyuchubanshe, 1988); Luo Zongqiang 羅宗強 , *Wei Jin Nanbeichao wenxue sixiang shi* 魏晉南北朝文學思想史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996); Zhang Bowei 張伯偉 , *Chan yu shixue* 禪與詩學 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1992), etc.

4 Several monographs focused on *xuanyan* poetry in the past two decades include Zhang Tingyin 張廷銀 , *Wei Jin xuanyan shi yanjiu* 魏晉玄言詩研究 (Taipei: Wen shi zhe chubanshe, 2003); Hu Dalei 胡大雷 , *Xuanyan shi yanjiu* 玄言詩研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007); Wang Shu 王澍 , *Wei Jin xuanxue yu xuanyan shi yanjiu* 魏晉玄學與玄言詩研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007); Yang Helin 楊合林 , *Xuanyan shi yanjiu* 玄言詩研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai gujichubanshe, 2011); Cai Yanfeng 蔡彥峰 , *Xuanxue yu Jin Nanchao shixue yanjiu* 玄學與魏晉南朝詩學研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013), etc.

5 Wendy Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry: Intertextual Modes of Making Meaning in Early Medieval China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 3.

香港浸會大學饒宗頤國學院

prevalent critical and scholarly views that mostly associate *xuanyan* poetry with a handful of Eastern Jin writers, Swartz's strategically organized and well argued cases across the five main chapters provide a larger picture of the evolution of *xuan*-style writing, as well as offering a compelling argument that *xuanyan* poetry, instead of constituting a delineated sub-genre or representing a defined school, rather "illustrated a mode of perceiving and articulating metaphysical notions through materials ranging from abstractions to text to landscape."[6]

Chapter Two entitled "Xi Kang and the Poetics of Bricolage" introduces Xi Kang 嵇康 (ca. 223–ca. 262), the well known "Bamboo Grove" recluse, zither player, and advocate of unorthodox teachings, as the "first *xuanyan* poet." Borrowing the term "bricolage" from Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1908–2009) work of cultural anthropology where a bricoleur is described as a sort of "professional do-it-yourself man", whose identity is defined by his ability to make use of the materials from a limited and heterogeneous repertoire,[7] Swartz stresses on the diverseness of Xi Kang's textual sources. Through a close examination of Xi's eighteen tetrasyllabic poems written to his brother Xi Xi 嵇喜 , where a variety of seemingly unrelated sources were drawn upon, and each utilized from a distinctive angle,[8] Swartz aptly discussed Xi Kang's judicious selection and appropriation of an array of heterogeneous textual sources, in the manner of a bricoleur, to form "a coherent address to his brother on his career choice and a cohesive personal narrative of spiritual growth."[9]

The point that Xi Kang's poetics takes on a certain form of handiwork where materials are retrieved as if from a "tool kit" and appropriated according to the tasks at hand, touches upon the theory of cultural repertoire, which is nicely unfolded and extensively explored in the following Chapter Three, dedicated to Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371), a figure of "literary patriarch of his time" (*yishi wen zong* 一時文宗), and a pioneer *xuanyan* poet of the Eastern Jin.The better part of this chapter is thoughtfully organized around three multi-stanzaic exchange poems, respectively addressing Xie An 謝安 (320–385), master of *xuan* learning, celebrated military commander and recluse-turned-

6 *Ibid*, 45–46.

7 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

8 As Swartz observes, Xi Kang "turned to the *Shijing* for ready lines imbued with evocative imagery and symbolic associations… drew on *Chuci* for established moral allegories of virtue and corruption… on Jian'an poetry for treatments of the military theme, and the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* for lessons on quietism, self-preservation and transcendence." See Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 73–74.

9 *Ibid*, 74.

statesman;[10] Yu Bing 庾冰 (296–344), kinsman of the royal household and one of the prominent founding ministers of the regime;[11] and Xu Xun 許詢 (ca 326–?), Sun Chuo's peer in *xuan* learning and *xuanyan* writing, and a lofty-minded recluse with fervent resolution.[12] Based on a meticulous and in-depth reading of all three tetrasyllabic verses, Swartz makes nice observations that by purposefully selecting from a diverse collection of literary and cultural sources, and masterfully appropriating what is useful for the topic and suitable for the intended addressee at hand, Sun Chuo's writing of these exchange poems in the *xuan*-style attests to poetics of a certain intertextual mode as he taps into the rich and heterogeneous repertoire of various philosophical, literary and textual sources, in pursuit of praising his addressee, communicating his *xuan* thoughts, or advancing his social status.

Chapter Four looks at one of the most famous gathering scenes of early medieval China, the Lanting 蘭亭 excursion. Unlike the other case studies in this book, here instead of delving into one singular poet, the author turns to the singularly significant collection of *xuanyan* writings, composed at this occasion by its various attendees. Their writings, including Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303–361) preface, most famously recognized as the masterpiece of

10 Swartz dates this poem to sometime around 360, when Xie An finally emerged from seclusion and accepted an official position from Huan Wen 桓溫 (312–373), see Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 114. Hasegawa dates it to 362, three years after Xie An's assuming the position, see Hasegawa Shigenari 長谷川滋成 , *Son Shaku no kenkyū: risō no "michi" ni akogareru shijin* 孫綽の研究：理想の「道」に憧れる詩人 (Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 1999), 212. Yang Helin's dating of this poem is slightly earlier, in 355, when Sun Chuo was promoted to the position of Governor of Yongjia, see Yang Helin, *Xuanyan shi yanjiu*, 362. We lack evidence to definitively date this poem, but in any case, Swartz's observation is sound in attaching this poem to Xie An's image around 360 as a recluse-turned-statesman.

11 Yu Bing is the younger brother of Yu Liang 庾亮 (289–340), who served as co-regent alongside Wang Dao 王導 (276–339) to Emperor Cheng of the Eastern Jin (Sima Yan 司馬衍, r. 325–342). The Yu brothers are not only among the most prominent founding ministers of the regime, but also in-laws to the royal household (both are maternal uncles to Emperor Cheng). Both Swartz and Yang Helin date this poem to 339, when Yu Bing rose to prime minister upon Wang Dao's death. See Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 120; Yang Helin, *Xuanyan shi yanjiu*, 338–339.

12 Xu Xun, while being Sun Chuo's junior in age, shared Sun's fame as one of the most celebrated *xuanyan* writers of the time. See Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 comp., *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 , with commentary by Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 and annotated by Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 310. Unfortunately Xu Xun's poetic works is almost completely lost, saving only a handful of pentasyllabic lines. See Lu Qinli 逯欽立 comp., *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 894.

香港浸會大學饒宗頤國學院

traditional calligraphic art, are to a great extent inspired by their encounter with the landscape of Lanting, located in the then Commandery of Guiji 會稽 (in modern Zhejiang), and together represent a nice specimen showcasing the interconnection between the landscape appreciation and the *xuan*-style writing, an important point which Swartz keeps revisiting throughout her book and which I shall later review in further detail. In addition, this chapter also sheds some new light on the cultural phenomenon of group writing activities. Centering primarily on the two prefaces attributed respectively to Wang Xizhi and Sun Chuo, as well as their poetic contributions to the Lanting collection, Swartz notes that while both alluding to the notion of "leveling things" (*qi wu* 齊物) in the *Zhuangzi*, Wang's and Sun's prefaces show a pronounced divergence in terms of their representations and contemplative manners, a divergence likewise reflected in their poems, as well as in the poems composed by other attendees. In this light, she rightly points out a certain individual uniqueness that tends to be understated amid the lexical commonality and the spirit of camaraderie as one would normally expect of a set of group compositions.

The remaining two chapters deals with Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365?–427) and Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), the two arguably most highly exalted and extensively studied literary figures in early medieval China since Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232). In fact, Swartz herself has also contributed a focused, book-length research to the richness of the Tao Yuanming scholarship.[13] As widely recognized paradigm writers each associated with a particular sub-genre, both Tao Yuanming's poems of gardens and reclusion, and Xie Lingyun's verses on nature and landscape have been found to contain certain *xuan*, or metaphysical elements, but neither is regarded as a conventional *xuanyan* poet. In her endeavor to re-reading the early medieval *xuan*-style poetry, Swartz also makes apparent room for discussions on Tao and Xie, but she simultaneously makes a wise move by not diving straight into the thick of things, and rather approaches, quite effectively, from the angle of reviewing certain broadly accepted claims regarding the duo. In the case of Tao Yuanming, she ponders over the issue of Tao's acclaimed poetics of "spontaneity" (*ziran* 自然 , of which another viable translation is "naturalness", depending on the subtle variations in the interpretation), which "precludes or discourages any inquiry into his sources."[14] Based on a thorough examination of the recurrent themes such as "death", "forgetting", "authenticity" and "transformation" in a number of Tao's poems,

13 See Swartz, *Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427–1900)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008)

14 Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 5.

including the one famously titled "Body, Shadow, Spirit" ("Xing ying shen" 形影神), the author manages to trace an undeniable existence of *Zhuangzi* and its commentaries in Tao Yuanming's poetry, as she convincingly raises:

> In the *Zhuangzi*, Tao Yuanming found a rich repository of concepts and connections for developing his discourse on death and reclusion, twin determinants of much of his corpus. His major statements on these two subjects simply cannot be appreciated in their full scope of signification without considering this key referent text and commentary.[15]

As for Xie Lingyun, his iconic writings on landscapes are likewise often praised for being *ziran*,[16] although compared to Tao Yuanming, Xie Lingyun's "spontaneous" or "natural" poetics tends to be more associated with his choice of nature as the subject matter, and his supposedly "realistic" manner of approaching and representing nature. Exploring in particular the pronounced textual connections with the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*) in Xie Lingyun's poetry,[17] Swartz's take on Xie's being a "realist poet", as well as his poetic appropriation of the *Yijing* is especially insightful. In her opinion, by drawing

15 *Ibid*, 220.

16 For example, Bao Zhao 鮑照 (416?–466), a fellow Song literary man compared Xie Lingyun's poetry to the freshly blossomed lotus flower, which he deemed "natural and adorable" (*ziran ke'ai* 自然可愛). See Li Yanshou 李延壽 comp., *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 34.881; a century after Xie Lingyun, Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551), the southern Liang prince and leading man of letters, also adopted the notion of *ziran* in his assessment of Xie Lingyun's writings. See Yao Silian 姚思廉 comp., *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 49.691.

17 While Swartz's discussion on Xie Lingyun's appropriation of the *Yijing* is certainly inspiring, she however neglected to acknowledge some recent developments on this topic, noting that except for Francis Westbrook's 1980 article "Landscape Transformation in the Poetry of Hsieh Ling-yün", "scholarship on Xie has rarely devoted exclusive attention to the poet's significant use of this text (*Yijing*)." See Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 222. In fact, there has been several articles focusing on Xie Lingyun's use of the *Yijing* in the past decade, for instance, see Li Morun 李謨潤,"Xie Lingyun shanshui shi yu *Zhouyi*"謝靈運山水詩與《周易》, *Qinghai shifandaxue xuebao* 青海師範大學學報 32, no. 4 (2010): 73–77; Zhang Yinan 張一南, "Xie Lingyun shiwen huayong *Yi* dian fangshi yanjiu" 謝靈運詩文化用《易》典方式研究, *Yunnan daxue xuebao* 雲南大學學報 11, no. 2 (2012): 94–112; Fu Zhiqian 傅志前, "Zhen guan juemei—Xie Lingyun shanshui shenmei *Yi* xue jiedu" 貞觀厥美——謝靈運山水審美易學解讀, *Zhouyi yanjiu* 周易研究 126, (2014): 63–67; Liu Yuxia 劉育霞, "*Yi* dui Xie Lingyun jiqi shiwen de yingxiang"《易》對謝靈運及其詩文的影響, *Zhongnan minzu daxue xuebao* 中南民族大學學報 34, no. 5 (2014): 137–140.

from *Yijing* specific terms, hexagrams and images, Xie Lingyun identifies with a particular relation between the realm of heaven-and-earth and that of human affairs, and signals, with his poetic writing, a transition from the external, natural landscape to his own situations. In this sense, as the author points out, Xie's landscape writings cannot be reduced to "objective realism", for packed with empirical experience, textual knowledge and epistemological issues, they "invite readers to follow not only the poet's physical movements through time and space but also a spiritual landscape whose contours contain many twists and turns."[18]

One vital departure in the modern scholarship on early medieval *xuanyan* poetry lies in a keen attention to the relation between the landscape portrayal and *xuan*-style writings. In this respect, Swartz's book, organized around particular poets or, in the case of Chapter Four, one specific group of poets, and targeting, in each chapter, specific topics according to the case in question, does not appear, at first glance, to contain a substantial part specially devoted to discussing *xuanyan* poetry and the poetic representation of landscape. However, throughout the entire work, the author makes repeated efforts to return to this issue, and especially offers valuable insights in her studies of Xi Kang, the Lanting collection and Xie Lingyun. On Xi Kang, she raises that many of Xi's tetrasyllabic poems, seldom mentioned in the history of landscape poetry, actually reveal an intimate engagement with nature, which separates itself from the analogical, symbolic or sentimental modes of landscape writing, as one would spot in earlier works such as the *Shijing* (*Classic of Poetry*), *Chuci* (Lyrics of Chu) and Jian'an poetry, with an "aesthetic gaze" that "surveys the patterns, processes and laws in nature and thereby probes into the Dao that operates in and is manifest through nature and its work." Such "aesthetic gaze", as Swartz observes, was not only carried on, but also greatly elevated by the Lanting poets, as they engaged in contemplative appreciation of nature, and more consistently as a group, "probed the Mystery (*xuan*) embodied by the landscape."[19] When it comes to Xie Lingyun, the conventionally recognized grand master of landscape poetry, Swartz again shifts her attention to one intriguing criticism commonly accepted among scholars, known as the problem of the "tail-end in *xuanyan*" (*xuanyan weiba* 玄言尾巴), which refers to lines articulating a sort of metaphysical meditation often appended to Xie's landscape poems. Departing from the long held criticism on this issue,[20] the author opts for a refreshingly different reading. She suggests that if we consider

18 Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 245–246.

19 *Ibid*, 159–160.

20 For a discussion on previous scholarship on this issue, see *ibid*, 224 and 257.

this structural pattern against the pattern outlined in *Yijing*'s "Commentary on the Appended Phrases" ("Xici zhuan" 繫辭傳), in which "words are attached to images, and images to ideas, in order to ensure correct interpretations", then we can perfectly make sense of and "appreciate the way in which discursive statements in the second half of a given poem by Xie Lingyun reinforce and augment the significations of the landscape images found in the first half."[21] In this manner, Swartz further connects Xie Lingyun's landscape portrayal with Xi Kang's and the Lanting poets', and nicely reveals an underlying trace in her book of the evolutional progress of the early medieval landscape poetry.

While there is no doubt that by expanding the parameter from texts to intertexts, and by drawing inspiration from Western cultural theories, this book has certainly introduced quite a few intriguing points regarding the literary tradition, the cultural memory and the poetic evolution from the third to the fifth century in China, it nevertheless also invites some serious concerns, at the center of which is the applicability of these very modern, and very "Western" theories. For example, the author's discussion surrounding Sun Chuo's poetic "repertoire" in Chapter Three owes its insights to Ann Swidler's *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*, a sociological study of the contemporary American culture of romance.[22] In her attempt to outline the antithetical views on culture between Swidler and another American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, and acknowledge Swidler's pertinent role in helping shape her own viewpoints, Swartz directs her writing onto a somewhat confusing, albeit brief, sidetrack.[23] On the one hand, it remains questionable, whether or not Swidler's findings in one particular aspect of contemporary American social culture could be so freely applied to the literary culture of early medieval China; on the other hand, for many potential readers of this book, who might not have been familiar with Swidler's or Geertz's works, they would more likely to find themselves distracted and confused by the author's mentioning them. In her opening statements of Chapter Two, in a likewise free and casual manner, Swartz introduces a juxtaposition between the Western poetic theories and the early medieval Chinese literature. To help establish her point that in pre-modern China, writers furthered their writing by reading the works of their predecessors, Swartz cites Miner and Brady's argument that in East Asia, literary language may be "more properly termed the anxiety of not

香港浸會大學饒宗頤國學院

21 *Ibid*, 257–258.

22 For details on Swidler's work, see Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

23 See Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 108–109.

being influenced," which, as she rightly observes, is a witty play on Harold Bloom's famous term "the anxiety of influence".[24] Admittedly, Bloom's theory of influence definitely deserves a closer look when it comes to studies of intertextuality,[25] and Swartz's observation that poetry of pre-modern China represents a rather different model of intertextuality from Bloom's characterization of Western poetic history is in itself an interesting topic to pursue, her arguments here, however, would certainly have benefitted more from a carefully defined and thoroughly discussed angle of comparison, instead of, as she has it, a less than convincing citation hastily followed by a somewhat insufficient argument.

On the whole, this new book of Swartz's brilliantly adds to the growing scholarly efforts, most evidently reflected in American scholarship of the past decade, of re-contextualizing the cultural landscapes of and revisiting the conventional and mostly paradigmatic understandings in the early medieval Chinese literature.[26] There are certain places where the author is overly free with her incorporation of the Western theories, and this occasionally leaves arguments wanting and readers in a sense of disconnectedness. The book is also not without spelling and editorial errors,[27] but it is mostly structured in a thoughtful manner, well-written with accurate and artfully-tailored poetic translations, and offers an overall enjoyable and inspiring reading experience.

24 See *Ibid*, 43–44.

25 For details on Bloom's work, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973)

26 In light of Stephen Owen's influential work *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* in 2006, which essentially brings to our attention the fluidity of the texts in China's manuscript era, American scholarship in early medieval Chinese literature has witnessed an increasing efforts of rethinking the cultural contexts of this period and readdressing some fundamental issues accordingly. For details of Owen's work, see Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

27 For example, in Chapter Two, Note 6 is missing the word "the" at the front in its reference of Lévi-Strauss's book; in Note 7 on the same page, the author of the first referred work should be "Yang Helin" instead of "Chen Helin", an error continued in the bibliography, see Swartz, *Reading Philosophy, Writing Poetry*, 45 and 282; in Note 132 from the same chapter,"Zhuangzi" refers to the book rather than the person, and therefore needs to be italicized, see *ibid*, 92; in the title of Yang Rubin's article mentioned in Note 162, one word should be romanized as "zenmo" (怎麼) instead of "zemo", and the same error also occurs in Note 18 from Chapter Three, see *ibid*, 104 and 112; in Note 68 from Chapter Three, the correct Romanization for the word "邂逅" should be "xiehou" instead of "xiegou", see *ibid*, 124.