# "I'm an Old-fashioned Chinese-style Scholar Who Writes in English": An Interview with Professor Richard John Lynn

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**Abstract:**

This interview commences with Professor Richard John Lynn's recalling his academic career, full of intellectual exploration and varied research interests. Then Professor Lynn gives his own opinions on topics concerning the achievement of Professor James J.Y. Liu, methods of translating classical Chinese poetry, the function of review articles and the evaluation of such research on Ming-Qing women writings. Professor Lynn also refers to his friendship with Professor Zhang Longxi and his writing plans in the future.

**Keywords:** classical Chinese poetry, translation, James J.Y. Liu, English-speaking world

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**Shi Guang (henceforth SG):** Let's start this interview with a question that perhaps you have often been asked heard. You researched Chinese literature for decades, but what led you to choose Chinese literature as your lifelong occupation? Are there any special motivations involved?

**Richard John Lynn (henceforth RJL):** Well, I have to give you some history of my training. At Princeton, I wandered from various disciplines for two years and then I settled on Art and Archaeology. I was going to do Greek-Roman antiquity, so was going to be a *kaogu jia* (archaeologist 考古家 ), archaeologist in the Roman and ancient Greek, Mediterranean world. But then, I took a course in Chi-

nese art by Professor Fong Wen[1] and I became very interested in Chinese art, so I changed course to start focusing on East Asian subjects, and I wrote a dissertation on the influence of Japanese art on European painting in the 19th century. Professor Fong arranged for me to study at Yale University for a summer semester, intense beginning Chinese, so I began to study Chinese there. Two years later, I entered the Princeton graduate school to study Chinese painting, which was a mistake. I should have moved to another university at that time. I could have gone to Harvard to study with Professor Max Loehr (1903-1988)[2], who was the Professor of Chinese art there, but I decided to stay at Princeton at that time. Actually, what I really wanted to do was travel to see the world and to do different things somewhere else. When I had the chance the following year to go to Taiwan, Stanford University was in charge of the Inter-university Center for Chinese Language Studies at Taibei 台北 on the National Taiwan University campus. I went there for a year. While I was there, by chance I read James J. Y. Liu's 刘若愚 (1926-1986) *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. I thought this was very interesting, and I liked his approach, and decided that I wanted to study literature that way. Well, I did have a chance to move to another university, and went to the University of Washington in Seattle for the MA degree, for which I wrote a dissertation on *Yuandai Sanqu* (free lyrics of Yuan dynasty 元代散曲 ), directed by Professor Hellmut Wilhelm (1905-1990)[3], who is very famous Sinologist. You know, his father was even more famous, Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930)[4]. Anyway, that got me into literary studies. The next year I finally was able to study with Professor Liu, when he took me on as a Ph.D student at the University of Chicago, so I moved from Seattle to Chicago. But as soon as I met him, the very first day I met him, he told me he was going to Stanford University the following academic year. He said if I wanted to go with him, he would arrange a fellowship for me, and he did just that. That's why I did my Ph.D at Stanford. So, that's how I got interested in Chinese literature, especially poetics. While I studied at Chicago, I

1 Fang Wen ( 方闻 ), born in Shanghai in 1930, Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Art History Emeritus, taught Chinese art history at Princeton University from 1954 until his retirement in 1999. His publications include *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century*, *Returning Home: Tao-chi's Album of Landscapes and Flowers* etc.

2 Max Loehr ( 罗越 ) was an art historian and Professor of Chinese art at Harvard University from 1960 to 1974. As an authority on Chinese art, Professor Loehr published eight books and numerous articles on Chinese bronzes, jades and ancient Chinese painting.

3 Hellmut Wilhelm ( 卫德明 ) was a German sinologist known for his studies of Chinese literature, thought, and history.

4 Richard Wilhelm ( 卫礼贤 ) was a German sinologist, theologian, and missionary. He lived in China for 25 years. He is best remembered for his translations of philosophical works from Chinese into German that in turn have been translated into other major languages of the world, including English.

did nine courses in the graduate school, half of them were just one-on-one with Professor Liu. He had no other Ph.D students, so this was terrific opportunity to study with such a scholar. The rest of the time I took courses in the English department, the "Chicago School of literary criticism", so-called "Neo-Aristotelian". You might look into who they were and what they did. That was a very exciting and revelatory experience, I learned to think properly there in Chicago, because the systematic way, philosophical way of approaching literary study from such scholars as Wayne Booth (1921-2005)[5], Elder Olsen (1909-1992)[6], Richard McKeon (1900-1985)[7], and other scholars, these were really important in 19th and mid-20th century scholars of English literature and Philosophy, who specialized in literary theory and approaches of literary analysis and study.

At that time, I chose Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711) as a dissertation topic. I was meeting with Professor Liu, we were reading *Shihua* (discussions of poetry 诗话 ), a survey of original texts for me to translate: I would prepare passages and we would go through them in minute detail. In the English department, I read much of the literary criticism of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) in one course, a poet and literary theorist, as well as a practical critic. I remember I asked Professor Liu one day: "Is there anyone like that in the Chinese tradition?" He immediately responded with the name "Wang Shizhen", which is why I chose him as my dissertation topic, which I began two years later after finishing coursework at Stanford, this was 1966-67 in Chicago and 1967-68 at Stanford. Earlier, I had done three summers at Stanford studying Japanese and had one year at the Inter-University Center in Taiwan, and all of those counted for Stanford credit. So, all I needed was one more year of residency to fulfill the residency requirement. I took my general examinations in June of 1968 and passed them. My committee was a quite impressive bunch of people, Professor Liu, David Nivison (1923-2014)[8], Patrick Hanan (1927-2014)[9], who was soon to go to Harvard, I think, two years later. The committee chair was George

5 Wayne Booth was an American literary critic. He was the George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in English Language & Literature and the College at the University of Chicago.

6 Elder Olson was an American poet, teacher and literary critic. He was one of founders and leading figures of the so-called "Chicago school" of literary criticism.

7 Richard McKeon was an American philosopher and longtime professor at the University of Chicago. His ideas formed the basis for the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8 David Nivison ( 倪德卫 ) was an American sinologist and scholar known for his publications on late imperial and ancient Chinese history, philology, and philosophy, and his 40 years as a Professor at Stanford University.

9 Patrick Hanan ( 韩南 ) was a New Zealand scholar of Chinese literature who was the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Chinese Literature at Harvard University. As a sinologist, he specialized in pre-20th-century vernacular fiction.

William Skinner (1925-2008)[10], a sociology and history scholar of Chinese society. This was quite a powerful committee, and they asked me some very hard questions, but I passed. I remember that Professor Skinner asked me the most difficult one, because I did one field in the intellectual history of Ming and Qing China, he asked me whether I thought Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398) was insane or did he pretend to be insane in order to intimidate the court. Who can answer a question like that! So, I argued both sides and that seemed to satisfy both him and the committee, but it was a really tough question. I was very pleased to have studied with David Nivison in particular, I did courses with him both in philosophy and also Chinese thought. We did an interesting seminar in causality, which has helped me a great deal ever since. Patrick Hanan was very helpful. He just died a few years ago. I got to see him later in New Zealand, for he was a New Zealander and was there in the early 70s on a visit with his family. He came by Auckland where I was teaching then, and was a good friend of the chair Professor Douglas Lancashire[11], so I saw him there. After I moved back to the United States, I was often at Harvard and I saw Professor Hanan quite often during the later 1970s, and also got to know some of the other professors there: James Robert Hightower (1915-2006)[12] and William Hung 洪业 (1893-1980)[13]. William Hung was a delightful man, I treasure the memory of meeting him. Anyway, I had a marvelous career in graduate school, and I was able to study with many very prominent scholars in Chinese history, Chinese art history, literature and other fields. Europeans, Americans, Chinese scholars who were then working in the United States. So, I had a very rich training experience.

Then in June 1968 I went back to Taiwan again and to research and write my dissertation. I worked at *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan* (Academia Sinica 中央研究院 ), *Taida* (National Taiwan University 台大 ) and a few other places. I had a good friend who was working at the National Palace Museum. So, I often was able to work there and I remember reading Wang Shizhen's works in the *Siku quanshu*

10 George William Skinner ( 施坚雅 ) was an American anthropologist and scholar of China.

11 Douglas Lancashire was born in Tianjin, China. He graduated with BA Hons. (University of London) in Chinese in 1950, BD (London) in 1954, and MA (London) in Classical Chinese in 1958. He commenced his teaching career at the School of Oriental & African Studies in January, 1945, while serving in the Royal Air Force. From 1966-1981 he served as Professor of Chinese (Foundation Chair) and Head of Department of Asian Languages & Literatures, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

12 James Robert Hightower ( 海陶玮 ) was an American sinologist and Professor of Chinese at Harvard University who specialized in the translation of Chinese literature.

13 William Hung ( 洪业 ) was a Chinese educator, sinologist, and historian who taught for many years at Yenching University, Peking, which was China's leading Christian university, and at Harvard University.

(complete library in the four branches of literature 四库全书 ), you know, the original texts contained in sandalwood boxes, big and beautiful handwritten pages. It is amazing that they let people touch it in those days. I copied out page after page by hand (no copy machines yet!) and prepared various ways of approaching the material. After almost a year in Taiwan, I decided that I should go to Japan and use the Japanese that I had learned earlier at Princeton and Stanford. Fortunately, I then had the opportunity to conduct research at Kyoto University. That was a really good experience that allowed me to use my Japanese and gradually improve it. However, once I entered the Humanistic Science Research Institute ( 京都大学人文科学研究所 ), I found I could speak Chinese with most older Japanese scholars there, because they all had been in Beijing in the 1920s. I've used Japanese scholarship ever since, as you can see there's quite a lot of Japanese books on the shelves here. I've usually found Japanese scholarship on whatever I do to be very helpful. I remember asking Donald Holzman[14] who, though originally an American, taught at the University of Paris for many years. He's now quite elderly, 92 this year, I think, long retired and no longer engaged in scholarship. He once said to me: "Well, the Japanese study Chinese literature the way Westerners do except, they're a lot better at it (because of the language advantage)". We've been in touch often ever since, he was a major influence on me too, I have all his books. He stayed with in the Six dynasties period pretty much his whole life, it produced a lot of wonderful books on Ji Kang 嵇康 (ca.224-ca.263) and Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263). His wife, Jacqueline, was French, but, alas, passed away five years ago. Though he had his entire career in Paris, he often came to the United States as a visiting professor, at Princeton, Harvard and a few other places. I learned a great deal from this earlier generation of scholars and I treasured that. I knew most of the great scholars of the generation prior to mine, and that has been a very good influence on me.

Well, this brings us up to the dissertation. After that, I just kept working on Yuan, Ming and Qing literary studies and literati culture until I got involved with translating early philosophical texts. This happened at beginning of the 1980s, and I largely concentrated on this area from the mid-1980s on, when I began working on the *Wang Bi zhu Zhouyi* (Wang Bi's commentary on *Zhouyi* 王弼注周易 ). That was very difficult to do and took me a very long time, but then it was done

14 Donald Holzman ( 侯思孟 ) was a scholar of Chinese literature who lived and worked in France for decades. As a sinologist, he specialized in the poetry of Wei Jin and the Northern and Southern dynasties.

and published in 1994[15]. And then, I decided to do the *Wang Bi zhu Laozi* (Wang Bi's commentary on *Laozi* 王弼注老子 ), that I did entirely from beginning to end in one year[16]. After that, I started the *Guo Xiang zhu Zhuangzi* (Guo Xiang's commentary on *Zhuangzi* 郭象注庄子 ), which when complete means I have done all of the *sanxuan* (three arcane works 三玄 ) of ancient-medieval Chinese philosophical works. I hope to finish the *Zhuangzi* book by the end of this year, so I can then get on to other works. For example, along the way, I've gotten interested in Huang Zunxian 黄遵宪 (1848-1905) during his time in Japan and translating the *Riben zashi shi* (poems on miscellaneous subjects from Japan 日本杂事诗 ). I want to finish that perhaps next year. I have some other projects on Wang Shizhen and especially want to complete a monograph, book-length study of Wang, about whom I published a dozen article-length studies up to now, but no book. Recently, I have been collecting research material concerned with Wang. More recently, I've also gotten involved with Ming dynasty poetry and poetics, especially that of a generation or two before Wang Shizhen and which have connections with Wang's literary thought and practice. If I'm asked to do a book review or book article review on some Ming writers, I usually accept, and that's what I've been doing lately, such as a review article on Li Mengyang 李梦阳 (1473-1530)[17].

**SG:** Recently Chinese scholars have a lot of discussion on the question "what is China?". This concept has changed according to different contexts, times, and perspectives, so it's not a stable concept. From a personal perspective, what is China for you?

**RJL:** It is a hard question to answer. Questions like this can involve a larger or smaller set of issues. I gave a lecture in 2005 to the University of Toronto Alumni Association, 500 people in a big lecture hall, about China and Chinese Studies. Afterwards someone asked me: "Who are your graduate students? How do they find jobs?" I said: "Well, many of our graduate students, in fact, the majority are from China." This seemed to surprise people. Why would any Chinese young people come to study China in a foreign University? I said: "Within China, there is the tradition of *guoxue* (national studies 国学 ), in which one studies China as a domestic mode of learning, but to come to the University of Toronto or Harvard or Princeton or UC Berkeley, you study China as an international discipline, with an international global perspective, a comparative perspective and this is very often a very

15 Lynn, Richard John. *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I-Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

16 Lynn, Richard John. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Daodejing of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

17 Lynn, Richard John. "Literary Archaism, Personal Expression and Self-Cultivation in Ming China: Li Mengyang and his World." *China Review International* 23.1 (2016): 10-27.

different way of doing it. So many Chinese are now interested in studying China from this non-Chinese point of view for comparative purposes and also simply to expand one's own worldview and enhance one's own intellectual life." That seemed to satisfy them. So, that's really why I'm studying China. It's a way to cultivate my own intelligence and expand my experience, allowing me to become bicultural as much as possible: it's a way to enrich one's life. The works that I've written and the lectures about these things have been done for the same purpose, to expand people's perspectives and sensibilities and so forth. I think that's the best goal that an academic career can have. Now, as far as what China is to somebody like me. It's, first of all, an object of intellectual inquiry. I'm glad I studied China rather than Japan or India or some other non-Western culture. It's a very rich culture and I engage with its texts as a kind of game that I play at to figure out what they really mean. I have had a great deal of satisfaction doing this, and after all these years, I finally think I have become rather good at it, but it's taken a long time. For instance, you're a young Chinese person and you have a perspective on your heritage and your culture of pre-modern times, but you're not a pre-modern Chinese, you're not an *gudai wenren* (ancient literati 古代文人). In a way, we have a similar thing in common. I'm not a *gudai wenren* either, but I try to be, I mean, imaginatively, creatively. I think that's the way I try to approach Chinese studies. I get at it by through the text themselves. I am not at all inclined to study Chinese literature or poetry or anything else about China from a Western perspective, to use some post-modernist, post-colonial approach, all that stuff. I don't do that at all, I think it's a distortion. The only way of getting to know the real *gudai Zhongguo* (ancient China 古代中国 ) is through its own texts directly. So, I'm quite at odds with the whole raft of post-ist approaches which in some circles have become so fashionable these days. Actually, pre-modern Chinese Studies has largely escaped attention by post-modernist approaches, whereas contemporary Chinese Studies is infested with them. Pre-modern studies escape because it's so much more difficult to deal with the texts involved and these people who are so wedded to post-ist, ideological positions, apparently don't have the patience to learn how to read literary Chinese well enough. It's a big effort, they would far prefer to spend their time studying Saussure, Foucault and Derrida, instead of learning how to read these things. I believe in the integrity of texts that they actually mean something and I believe in authorial intentionality. I think we owe it to these people in the past to study them on their own terms and not try to twist them to fit some literary theory developed entirely outside of China.

**SG:** I have read James J.Y. Liu's several books, such as *Chinese Theories of Literature* and *The Art of Chinese Poetry.* In these books, it seems Professor Liu's in-

tent is to interpret Chinese Literature in a systematic way, wanting to give Chinese literature a theoretical framework. The most important source of this framework seems to have been M.H. Abrams' theory. What's your opinion about this?

**RJL:** I can claim to have introduced him to Abrams' work. When I was reading Abrams's work while taking courses in the English department at the University of Chicago, I once said to him: "Look at this, don't you think it's interesting?" In fact, he did develop his own hermeneutical circle out of Abram's methodological framework as it appears in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critic Tradition*. However, at the high level of analytical abstraction Professor Liu developed, can one say that he distorted the history of Chinese literary thought in any way? I don't think so. He simply organized it in a way that no Chinese ever did before and nobody else ever did since. I have played about with this approach myself. I did one critical review of *Chinese Theories of Literature*[18]. Have you read it? I think I come to terms quite successfully with the main issues involved. When Professor Liu produced this book, he received a lot of criticism, people expected either a chronological history or at least a survey of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist theories of Chinese poetry. He didn't do it that way but organized it entirely differently, so though different, it is not distortion. Earlier, he went through several stages of shifting theoretical positions. Before he went to England, while still in China, once graduated from Fu Jen Catholic University, he went to Tsing Hua University to study English literature, where one of his professors was William Empson (1906-1984)[19], Empson was a student of I.A. Richards (1893-1979)[20], and I.A. Richards invented the intrinsic, self-contained approach to literary works, the so-called "New Criticism," which influenced so many for so long, including Professor Liu was through his own early career. In fact, much of that is apparent not only in *The Art of Chinese Poetry* but also his book on Li Shangyin 李商隐 (ca.813-ca.858)[21]. That book also outraged many since he read poems of Li Shangyin the way the New Critics did: as dramatic performance, which really irritated some people, who were stuck in the view that Chinese poetry cannot be anything but personal expression. This kind of thinking is very simple-minded and quite wrong. By the time we

18 Lynn, Richard John. "*Chinese Theories of Literature*, A Review of a Recent Study". *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association*. XIII. 1 (1978), 64-67.

19 William Empson was an English literary critic and poet, widely influential for his practice of closely reading literary works, a practice fundamental to New Criticism.

20 I. A. Richards was an English educator, literary critic, and rhetorician whose work contributed to the foundations of New Criticism.

21 Liu, James J.Y. *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-century Baroque Chinese poet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

arrive at the late Tang, even before that to the later poetry of Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), one can see a shift to a kind of dramatic, fictional performance among Chinese poets themselves, which from an Orthodox mainstream point of view was deplorable. That's why the *qianhou qizi* (the former and later seven masters 前后七子) of the Ming era, who approved only of the High Tang style, did not like late Tang poetry at all. I think Professor Liu was quite sensitive to all this and realized that the only way one could understand Li Shangyin's poetry is to read it intrinsically rather than trying to relate it to personal biography the way Romantic critics in the West did, you know, the poetry is the person, the man is his works and so forth, all that personal, expressive, individualistic stuff, from the later 19th century, which so influenced early modern Chinese views of literature. I should say, at this point, that Chinese literary thought and the practice of literary criticism is a very complicated subject. When I started working in it in the 1960s, I was practically the only person in the Western world to do so, besides Professor Liu, of course. I was hoping that I would be at the start of a major trend, the first of many, and now there are, to be sure, a few others, but it really hasn't developed into a major field of inquiry. If I live long enough and if I'm healthy long enough, I'd like to do a general study of Chinese literary thought, however it's a daunting, formidable project that requires a lot of work. I don't know whether I can manage to do it or not, but I think a good way of getting into it might be to write the book on Wang Shizhen.

**SG:** Will this new book be based on your dissertation or be something quite different?

**RJL:** It's going to be very different book. The dissertation was essentially a very brief and sketchy, kind of life and time approach, an attempt to relate Wang Shizhen's literary thought to contemporary developments in Neo-Confucianism, and then a description and account of his literary theory, and then thirty poems in annotated translation, and finally an attempt to relate the poems to the theory. That's it. The book will be very different. I don't know exactly what it might turn out to be. You missed Daniel Bryant (1942-2014)[22], who passed away before you arrived at UVic, but he wrote a magnificent book[23] on He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521). Daniel was a very close friend, a very good scholar, a very good man too. The He Jingming book was something he worked on for practically his whole career. I don't

22 Daniel Bryant ( 白润德 ), Professor Emeritus of Chinese Studies in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Victoria, passed away in 2014. As a sinologist, he specialized in the poetry of Ming dynasty.

23 Bryant, Daniel. *The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483-1521) and his World*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008.

think I want to do that, we'll see. The way I go about scholarship is, first, I have a general idea, which I begin to develop, allowing the sources that I encounter shape what I do, rather than trying to impose a pre-determined framework. However, before I get to this book, I want to finish off a book about Huang Zunxian in Japan. I have published so much on it already, I've translated probably close to half of all the poems in the *Riben zashi shi*, so it might be quick to bring out. I may even bring out a smaller monograph on a particular area of his experience in Japan, his experience with the Japanese literati and their exchanges of poetry, there's a small volume of this poetry published in 1880, I think, in Tokyo, where someone collected all the poetry Huang exchanged with his friends. I've discussed this briefly with Victor H. Mair[24]. You see, I've got a lot of plans to do, I've got to be healthy for a long time. I'm going to be 78 years old soon (June 28, 2018). I feel not bad, so far so good.

**SG:** Thank you for sharing your research plans. As for Huang Zunxian, we know there already have several monographs discussing him and his poetry, for example, Professor Jerry Schmidt's[25] *Within Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905*, how will your work differ from his?

**RJL:** Well, Professor Schmidt didn't deal with the *Riben zashi shi* very much, he has one chapter on Huang Zunxian in Japan. I was dissatisfied with it, I thought he didn't do a good job on that part at all, so that's what got me interested in Huang in the first place. Have you seen my review article on his book? We also differ greatly on our ways of translating. I think he paraphrases it rather than translates, so he gets only the *dayi* (main points 大意 ) of poems. That's not translation. So, it'll be a certainly different style of translation and it'll be far more extensive both in scope, and also in depth and detail concerning Huang's experience in Japan, especially his experience with literary figures. Kamachi Noriko 蒲地典子, I met her only once, we had lunch in Ann Arbor in Michigan, probably back in 2001 or 2002. I was invited to give a lecture at the University of Michigan and then I contacted her before I returned to Toronto. We had lunch and discussed things. Her approach to Huang

24 Victor H. Mair ( 梅维恒 ) is an American sinologist and Professor of Chinese at the University of Pennsylvania. Among other accomplishments, Mair has edited *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* and *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*.

25 Jerry Schmidt ( 施吉瑞 ) is Professor of Asian studies in the University of British Columbia (UBC). He gained his doctorate from Professor Ye Jiaying at UBC, and his research focuses on classical Chinese poetry with an emphasis on Qing-dynasty poetry. His publications include *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), *Harmony Garden: The Life, Literary Criticism and Poetry of Yuan Mei, 1716-1798* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) etc.

was historical, she was especially interested in diplomatic history. Her book[26] was originally a dissertation directed by John King Fairbank at Harvard. I think she got one thing very wrong, she seemed to think that Huang was quite critical of Japanese writing in Chinese and that he didn't think very much of it and was even disparaging. I don't agree, I think he was very impressed by the quality of *Kanbun* ( 漢文 ) and *kanshi* ( 漢詩 ) written by Japanese at the time. This view is readily apparent throughout Huang's writings. In fact, he exchanged poetry with Japanese literati, some, in fact, were close friends. His life was actually saved by one of his Japanese friends in Beijing in 1898. At that time, the secret police from the palace were arresting everybody connected with the reform movement, leading to that horrible scene where many were beheaded *en masse* in the palace grounds. He was going to be arrested too, but, was hidden by a Japanese diplomat in his house until the crisis had passed. This was a man whom he befriended, while in Tokyo (1877-1882), then learning spoken Chinese (*guanhua* 官话 ), who later was posted to Beijing, a few years later, he died in the Boxer Rebellion defending the foreign legation quarters. After Huang returned in retirement to his native place in Meicheng 梅城 , Guangdong, he wrote many poems about his friends in Japan, which all express positive feelings about them. I'm going to deal with these things too in the book. That's easy to do now that there are digital editions of his complete works. Chinese-Japanese cultural history is very interesting and now becoming quite a kind of hot topic. Certain scholarly circles in China are also quite interested in *Guangxu shidai* (Emperor Guangxu's era 光绪时代 ), which is a good thing too.

I've always wanted to do a book on Buddhism and Chinese poetry. I don't know if I will ever have time to do it, but that's another possibility. That's another project. I keep attending conferences and presenting things. I usually do three or four presentations a year. I keep myself very busy. I probably work on the average close to five or six hours a day. Being retired helps, I don't have to teach students. I don't have to mark papers, and if a professor is involved in university administration, you know that's very time-consuming. Now, I don't have to do any of that, so I have all this time. I usually work after breakfast until lunch, and maybe one or two hours afterwards. I've maintained a very large network of associates and friends through email contact practically every day. I'm going to do something for Victor Mair this summer: translating a Tang dynasty tale, *chuanqi* (legend of Tang dynasty 传奇 ), *Liushi zhuan* (biography of Miss Liu 柳氏传 ). My wife (Sonja Arntzen, retired professor of classical Japanese literature, University of Toronto) and I also get com-

26 Kamachi, Noriko. *Reform in China: Juang Tsun-hsien and the Japanese Model*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1981.

missions from various international Chinese art dealers to translate inscriptions on Chinese works of art, this is interesting work and pays very well. It all helps.

**SG:** You mentioned translation several times. When I read your review articles, I think you have a very strict standard for translating Chinese texts. And I also found that you worked quite hard on translations of your own during your own early academic career. So, could you talk about your method, standard and principles of translation?

**RJL:** When I now read earlier things I've written, I'm sometimes quite embarrassed about how I got things wrong. Being good at translation is simply a matter of experience. I think I'm better at it now than ever. Taking the whole issue, I think the key element of translation is context. If you want to get the right translation of something, you have to be very aware of the context involved. I think of translation in terms of a series of nested contexts, starting from the largest, and then coming down to the very text itself. For example, one starts with "China", and then premodern China, and then the historical period in which is written, and then perhaps there's a certain circle of writers or part of that literary culture that is distinct from others, maybe that's another context, and then there is the context of genre, and then you even have the context of sub-genre, and finally one works down to the individual and his close associates, and then that writer's collected works. This is why global search in digital editions is so important. Now, you can compare the same expression used in different places by the same author. Of course, traditionally scholars had all this in their heads, right? I can never do that, no matter how long I live, but I can do it now thanks to computer databases and digital files. I use these a lot, especially with philosophical texts, such as the *Zhuangzi* with Guo Xiang's commentary. I find it very useful to compare the use of a term in the *Zhuangzi* that appears in perhaps three or four places, and then compare them all. If I am still uncertain as to the meaning, I can consult the *Huainan zi* (master of Huainan 淮南子 ), which is a close contemporary text. I avoid the argument about which came first. So, this is how I focus closer and closer on what the most likely meaning is of difficult terms, that's how I do translations. It's very time-consuming, and often extremely difficult, but I tend to be pleased at the result, for I think I am getting at such meaning much closer than other translators now at work.

**SG**: From my perspective, this sounds like *xiaoxue* (philology 小学 ) conducted by traditional Chinese scholars.

**RJL:** It has been quite a long time before I began to realize that this was so. Even though I write in English, my research methodology is very traditionally Chinese. It's unusual, I mean, there are not so many people like me in the Western

world. Daniel Bryant and I were very similar in this respect.

**SG**: I remember that you published a serious review article, arguing with Professor Daniel Bryant on how to translate Chinese poetry.

**RJL:** No, that was not with Daniel Bryant but with Jonathan Chaves[27]. I wrote a review[28] of the Mei Yaochen 梅尧臣 (1002-1060) book that Chaves published. He didn't like my argument at all. My basic assumption is that the grammar, the *wenfa* (syntax 文法) of lines of poetry are the same as in classical Chinese prose, except that it is more elliptical. Word order is essential. It's not just chosen for the *pingze* (tonal patterns 平仄), rhyme schemes. I think one is led astray if he ignores word order in translating Chinese poetry, as I claimed Chaves did in that review article. I have been very good friends with Chaves for many years. I've known him since 1969, when we were both graduate students in Kyoto, but we disagree on this. Anyway, he responded[29]. I think things then became focused on Du Fu's famous couplet in Tang poetry, "Shanuan shui yuanyang" (沙暖睡鸳鸯). Jonathan translates it into something like "the sand is warm and on it the mandarin ducks sleep", whereas I translate it as "the sand is so warm, it puts the mandarin ducks to sleep", turning intransitive "sleep" into causative "put to sleep." Jonathan's response, if I remember rightly, was something like "Then there must be thousands of such causative verbs and putative verbs in Chinese poetry!" Implying that that is impossible. And then, unfortunately, he went on to say something to the effect: "This is Edward Schafer's (1913-1991)[30] way of translating, Schafer would probably would do it in this way." Of course, Professor Schafer then took offense and wrote a surrejoinder against Chaves. It was a big argument, indeed. Bryant also criticized Chaves in much the same way in a review article on another of Jonathan's books, which outraged Chaves as well. Anyway, the core of the argument is whether it is best to translate Chinese poetry with a strict grammatical approach, very philological, or use para-

27 Jonathan Chaves ( 齐皎瀚 ) is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He is a translator of classic Chinese poetry.

28 Richard John Lynn, "Review: *Mei Yao-ch'en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry*. by Jonathan Chaves; *Heaven My blanket, Earth My pillow: Poems from Sung Dynasty China by Yang Wan-li*. by Jonathan Chaves.", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 36.3 (1977).

29 Chaves, Jonathan. "On Translating Chinese Poetry", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 37.1 (1977).

30 Edward H. Schafer ( 薛爱华 ) was an American Sinologist, historian, and writer noted for his expertise on the Tang Dynasty, and was a Professor of Chinese at University of California, Berkeley for 35 years. Schafer's most notable works include *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* and *The Vermilion Bird*, which both explore China's interactions with other cultures and regions during the Tang dynasty.

phrase to obtain fluency. Burton Watson (1925-2017)[31] often tends to paraphrase in his translations, sacrificing the precise syntax of Chinese poetry for the sake of a good English line. You should know that Chaves was Watson's student.

**SG:** Well, I agree with your interpretation of "Shanuan shui yuanyang". However, due to the limited number of word in lines of traditional Chinese poetry, is it possible that there are several different ways to understand it?

**RJL:** Well, there's no hard evidence, poets don't tell us how we should read their poetry, it would be wonderful if they did, but they don't. And rarely did editors or commentators interpret Chinese poetry in those terms. This feature of Chinese poetry, I think, makes translation more interesting. That's why I choose to follow the word order in a very strict way, which, I believe, presents the true meaning of poems. Comparing this one line, "the sand is warm, on it the ducks sleep", to "the sand is so warm, it puts the ducks to sleep", I think the latter one is better. It's just more exciting. It conjures up more interest and charm. It's almost dramatic. By using this way to translate, you can get more of this, I think, in Chinese poetry. I rather think that's what poets meant, but again, I can't prove it. Anyway, I prefer to do it this way, though occasionally, it doesn't work, and then I try something else. There's no way of proving that one way is right and the other way wrong, but I often find that following a strict syntactic model helps enormously, otherwise it's too much guesswork. You know, at least you have a rational, empirical reason for doing it one way, rather than another. You just go with what feels right, which, though vague and impressionistic, is my way. Actually, I found when I was translating the *Zhuangzi* with Guo Xiang's commentary, my experience with poetry has helped a great deal. There's another large study of Guo Xiang's commentary done by Brook Ziporyn[32], who teaches at University of Chicago. He apparently has little or no experience with Chinese poetry and in translating Guo Xiang, I think he often gets Guo's texts quite wrong. Though he translates them literally and grammatically, I think he misses the point very often, because of his inability to appreciate the putative and causative verbs. Again, I can't prove it, but that's just the way I do it.

**SG:** Sometimes, I feel poetry is a tricky game played by poets, so it is really interesting to read them.

**RJL:** Yes, you can do it in several ways, they are deliberately different, it is sort

31 Burton Watson ( 华兹生 ) was an American scholar best known for his numerous translations of Chinese and Japanese literature into English.

32 Brook A. Ziporyn ( 任博克 ) is a scholar of ancient and medieval Chinese religion and philosophy who works at University of Chicago. Professor Ziporyn received his BA in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D from the University of Michigan.

of deliberate ambiguity as a rhetorical device. I agree that you can read a line of poem in several different ways. In some cases, that may have been because of the threat of the state, like Su Dongpo 苏东坡 (1037-1101) and his problems back in the Song dynasty and with the Qianlong 乾隆 Emperor scrutinizing works of contemporary poets to see who was really seditious and causing trouble, so poets tended to hide what they mean in poetry by being deliberately ambiguous.

**SG:** We have talked about your method of interpreting Chinese poetry, another question I want to ask is about the beauty of Chinese poetry. In your opinion, is it possible to convey it to readers in the English-speaking world?

**RJL:** We can but only try. I've been trying for many years and I think I'm getting better at it. I try to convey what the original poet seems to have tried to convey himself, that's my goal. Again, this is context sensitive. For effect, the translator has to imaginatively become the poet, to understand his circumstances at the moment, what the subject means as a collection of tropes or devices and the new creative approach it thus takes. It means a lot of effort on the translator's part. Probably, it's impossible to get it exactly right with the same exact meaning, but I try. Sometimes I succeed better than others, and certain poems work better than others. I tend to translate complete works of individual poets or by some group of poets, therefore, have to do all the poems involved whether the poems lend themselves to translation well or not. Watson was very careful, he wouldn't publish translations of poems that didn't translate well; he was very selective. So, all of his translations are x*uanben* (selected works 选本), not *quanji* (complete works 全集). Chaves does the same thing, you don't get any complete works ever from either. I'm sure that I will choose when I do the work on Wang Shizhen, for it will be impossible to translate all his poems, there are far too many! So, literary quality aside, when there's something essential in a poem that must be addressed for some reason, say, an essential biographical fact or insight, I shall still translate it. As for prose, when I translate the Guo Xiang's commentary, I'm do every single word of it, since all of it is essential for the work as a whole. There are some passages that are so extraordinarily difficult that I am never sure of the exact meaning, but I still have to do it. So, it's an imaginative act, you have to imagine yourself as the writer himself, which involves being a rather literate person in both his and one's own culture. I read a great deal and take language very seriously, so I try to get better and better at it. I don't know what else one can say about it, it's a question of sensitivity and experience, the one contributes to the other.

**SG:** There is another interesting phenomenon relating to the translation: sometimes, readers in the West don't care about the original meanings of works from

other languages, it seems as if they just expect what they want to expect, for example, Ezra Pound's (1885-1972)[33] translation is very representative of this.

**RJL:** Well, his are not translations. Pound didn't know any Chinese. He used existing translations. Achilles Fang (1910-1995)[34] at Harvard helped him to read the texts and told him literally what they meant in the original Chinese, out of which he created something completely different. Here is a problem that relates to my antipathy to the post-ist agenda, which assumes that one can never know a literary work from another tradition in the same way as when it is one's own. This is a basic assumption underneath post-ist critics do, therefore why try? Any reading of any foreign text is as good as any other, this is another conclusion that they draw. I'm totally opposed to that, the more you know about where, for instance, a particular poem comes from, the closer you are likely to get to a translation that is close to the original meaning. Simply giving up at the beginning and say: "Well, it's impossible to get anyway, so why bother with it?" Emphasis on "reader reception," so prominent among such critics, focuses so much on the limitations and cultural prejudices of the reader, which are supposed to make it impossible for him to understand and appreciate works outside his own tradition on their own terms, that the reader is free to make of such works whatever he wants. I don't agree with this view of that camp at all, I'm totally opposed to it in my own work.

The translation of Chinese poetry into English, French or into other Western languages started in the 1880s. These Victorian era Sinologists occasionally translated Chinese poetry, but they tended to turn it into English, French, German or other Western verse forms. This is the domestication route: if you turn a foreign poem into a Western poem, this is "domestication". On the other hand, if you try to expand or alter English or another Western language, twist it or do something new with it, trying to incorporate features from Chinese or other non-western languages, this is "barbarization". I seem to find myself somewhere between domestication and barbarization. I don't try to barbarize the English language to fit Chinese grammar, some of the worst translations in English have tried to do that. For instance, Wai-

33 Ezra Pound was an expatriate American poet and critic, as well as a major figure in the early modernist poetry movement. His contribution to poetry began with his development of Imagism, a movement derived from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry, stressing clarity, precision and economy of language.

34 Achilles Fang ( 方志彤 ) was a Chinese scholar, translator, and educator, best known for his contributions to Chinese literature and comparative literature. Fang was born in Japanese-occupied Korea, but attended university in mainland China. After completing his undergraduate degree, Fang worked for *Monumenta Serica*, a prominent scholarly journal of Chinese topics. He then moved to the United States, where he took up residency in Cambridge, Massachusetts, studying and teaching courses at Harvard University.

lim Yip's 叶维廉 translations of Chinese poetry, which I think are dreadful. I also am totally opposed to Yip's theory of translation, which I address in my *Guide to Chinese Poetry and Drama*[35]. After all these years I still believe he has done an enormous amount of damage to the appreciation of Chinese poetry, with his view that there's no grammar to it, that is instead simply a series of images, like frames of motion pictures with no syntactic relations among them. Michael Duke[36] early in his career did a book[37] of Lu You 陆游 (1125-1210) before he got into modern Chinese literature, in which his translation try to follow Chinese word order. I don't think this works well at all, because English grammar is not Chinese grammar, and though they share certain features in common, for both are subject-verb-object language, the way subordinate clauses work in different word order. I mean even though they are similar in one way, they're very different in others. Therefore, you just can't do it in Duke's way. That's why I've always tried to find syntactic equivalence when translating, an essential feature of my work: Chinese syntax or grammar is the basis of translating lines of Chinese poetry, for poetry shares the same basic syntactic rules as prose.

**SG:** Translation is really an interesting question, while poetry creation is also an interesting question. I found a lot of English poems are inspired by Chinese culture and full of Chinese elements. How do you think about this?

**RJL:** That's something else. Gary Snyder[38] must be a major figure here. I got to know him years ago when we both attended a conference on the influence of Chinese poetry on contemporary American poetry, held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. I remember that Snyder made no attempt to say his works are meant to be translations but that his was a new way of writing poetry, inspired by his undergraduate training in Chinese poetry at UC Berkeley with Professor Chen Shih-hsiang 陈世骧 (1912-1971).[39] As for the Imagist Movement, whereas the original poetry by Amy Lowell (1874-1925)[40] is terrific, her translations of Chinese po-

35 Detailed information could be found at pages 40-42 of *Guide to Chinese Poetry and Drama* (G.K. Hall & Co., 1984).

36 Michael Duke ( 杜迈克 ) is an Emeritus Professor of University of British Columbia, his publications include *The author of Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post Mao Era* (1985) etc.

37 Duke, Michael S. *Lu You*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.

38 Gary Snyder is an American poet (often associated with the Beat Generation and the San Francisco Renaissance), he is also an essayist, lecturer, and environmental activist.

39 Chen Shih-hsiang was a Professor who taught at the University of California, Berkeley, he specialized in traditional Chinese literature and Comparative literature.

40 Amy Lawrence Lowell was an American poet of the imagist school from Brookline, Massachusetts. She posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1926.

etry are just awful. It's interesting to read her *Fir-Flower Tablets* as English verse, but it had nothing to do with Chinese original meaning whatsoever. Bishop William Charles White (1873-1960)[41], who collected many great Chinese art works for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, translated some Chinese poetry once, which was reviewed in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, where it was condemned as mere guesswork[42]: you have a line of poetry and you might know what each individual character means, and then, I guess, the method was to sit back and to do the translation like a puzzle. How can you put this all together into an English sentence? It's just doesn't work, but that's the way Chinese poetry was translated by some of these early figures involved in Chinese scholarship in the West. I'm quite interested in these early people, the range of competency was enormous, some were very good and some were just awful, it's an interesting subject that I'd love to spend some time on and publish the results. I think some missionaries probably knew Chinese better than anyone today in the West, since they lived in China and hired Chinese tutors to teach them one on one, for example, Tomas Francis Wade (1818-1895)[43], Herbert Giles (1845-1935)[44] and James Legge (1815-1897)[45]. Legge often wrote to Wang Tao 王韬 (1828-1897) , their correspondences are in the New York Public Library, Legge's ability to compose in elegant literary Chinese is quite extraordinary.

**SG:** These early missionaries also have a close relationship with the development of the Chinese printing industry, I found a lot of early books in China were published by factories sponsored by these missionaries. This is a hot academic topic now.

**RJL:** It was mixed information, mixed construction. We usually think that many terms such as *wenxue*, *wenhua*, *zhengzhi* (literature, culture, politics 文学 , 文化 , 政治 ) were invented by Japanese. Actually, they weren't. They were invented probably by the *yesuhui huishi* (Jesuits 耶稣会士 ), back in the Kangxi 康熙 and

41 William Charles White ( 怀履光 ) was an Anglican missionary bishop to China and later an academic specializing in the study of Chinese culture and art. In addition to his missionary work, he was a great collector of Chinese artifacts. A majority of his collection are the foundation for the Chinese collections at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada.

42 Review by George A. Kennedy of *An Album of Chinese Bamboos; a Study of a Set of Ink-Bamboo Drawings, A.D. 1785*. By William Charles White (The University of Toronto Press, 1939). *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 3:3 and 4 (1941), 392-400.

43 Thomas Francis Wade ( 威妥玛 ), was a British diplomat and sinologist who produced an early Chinese textbook in English, in 1867, that was later amended, extended and converted into the Wade-Giles romanization system for Mandarin Chinese by Herbert Giles in 1892. He was the first Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University.

44 Herbert Allen Giles ( 翟理斯 )was a British diplomat and sinologist who was the Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University for 35 years.

45 James Legge ( 理雅各 ) was a Scottish sinologist, missionary, and scholar, best known as an early and prolific translator of Classical Chinese texts into English.

Qianlong eras. Later 19th century Protestant missionaries just stole them and they found their way into tracts and pamphlets on all sorts of subjects, both religious and secular, which were printed and sold in Shanghai, where Japanese visitors took them to the Japan, then Chinese students learned the terms in Japan and took them back to China. There's a German scholar who has studied this, Jaochim Kurtz[46]. He's been studying these missionary tracts and pamphlets for the development of modern scientific and social science vocabulary in Chinese. His research has shown that most of these terms came originally from China, I mean, including those coined by the Jesuits with their Chinese collaborators in the 17th and 18th centuries.

**SG:** I think that the late Qing is really an amazing era, even though it is a miserable historical period, but it is also an era full of cultural collisions, exchange and syntheses.

**RJL:** Yes, that's often the case. The times were just terrible and yet a lot of exciting and interesting things happened. Do you know about Edmund Backhouse (1873-1944)[47]? He was a strange Englishman, who arrived in Beijing in 1899, the end of the *Guangxu* era, where he survived the boxer uprising and where he lived the rest of his life, eventually dying in a Japanese prison in 1944. Backhouse was a great forger, who actually forged a diary supposedly by a Manchu official, Jingshan 景善 (?-1900), which he claimed to have found at the home of its recently deceased author when he occupied it after the Boxer Uprising in 1900. He ingeniously wrote all of it by himself, fooling everyone at the time, both Chinese and Western, passing it off as an original court official diary. However, he was eventually caught out since his calligraphy was learned in Japan, and, you know, the Japanese sometimes do not make strokes from right to left but left to right, and one Dutch scholar, J.J.L. Duyvendak (1889-1954)[48], noticed this and a few other inconsistencies and exposed it in 1940, forty years after it happened. To know Chinese that well! Who among us could do that now, I am certainly not up to it. Backhouse's story published by Penguin Books, as a biography of him by Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003)[49], *Hermit*

46 Joachim Kurtz ( 顾有信 ) is a Professor of Intellectual History at Heidelberg University. His research focuses on cultural and intellectual exchanges between China, Japan and Europe, with special emphasis on practices of argumentation, logic, political theory, rhetoric, translation studies, historical semantics, and the history of the book.

47 Edmund Backhouse was a British oriental scholar, Sinologist, and linguist whose books exerted a powerful influence on the Western view of the last decades of the Qing dynasty.

48 Jan Julius Lodewijk Duyvendak ( 戴文达 ) was a Dutch Sinologist and professor of Chinese at Leiden University. He is known for his translation of *The Book of Lord Shang* and his studies of the *Dao De Jing*.

49 Hugh Trevor-Roper was a British historian of early modern Britain and Nazi Germany. He was Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford.

*of Peking: The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse*. He was quite an astonishing man, in a way, for he was a crook who made a lot of money out of this and other fraudulent schemes. Anyway, we're getting off onto a very strange corner of history.

**SG:** After a series of translation questions, next question I want to ask is about the wide scope of your research topics. Most scholars just focus on one specific area, but it seems that you do something quite different. How did it all start, what's behind it and what was it that so influence your academic life this way?

**RJL:** The reason is rather silly. When I still a senior at Princeton, Professor Frederick W. Mote (1922-2005)[50] was writing up a state of the field of Chinese studies essay for *The Journal of Asian studies*. I can't remember if it was I was in class or in a seminar or just in conversation, but Professor Mote said something to the effect that now that Chinese studies has reached the point where scholars can specialize by discipline and no longer "have to do it all". But I thought to myself, "I do want to do it all." I didn't actually come out and say that, of course, I just thought it. So that is how my wide range of interests started. The benefit of doing things this way is that one can discover many connections among Chinese language, literature and culture that more narrow specialization often misses. However, it takes a very long time to acquire real expertise here, but eventually one can see how relationships exist across disciplines, chronological periods, literary genres, among all sorts of things. That's the advantage. The disadvantage is that, it's a lot harder, because it involves such a wide range of subject matter. However, I've never been inclined to stick to one chronological period or one particular literary genre or exclusively specialize in literature and not history. For example, I mentioned that my experience with poetry is helping me translate Guo Xiang's commentary. And that would not have happened if I was not familiar with both kinds of texts. For another example, I can translate and appreciate what Huang Zunxian is saying in the late 19th century, largely because I'm aware that he was influenced by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and Song dynasty poetry, areas which I have worked in, so I can appreciate what he's doing in terms of that particular theoretical and practical tradition of Chinese poetry. So, not to be bound by one particular genre or one particular historical period, is, I think, a good thing. However, I can be envious of some scholars who spend an entire career doing nothing but studying particular eras of literature or just certain poets. Once, I had a conversation with Professor Liu in which I said how much I wanted to use Chinese literary theory to interpret Chinese works of literature, you

50 Frederick W. Mote ( 牟 复 礼 ), was an American Sinologist and a Professor of History at Princeton University for nearly 50 years. His research and teaching interests focused on China during the Ming dynasty and the Yuan dynasty.

know, using Chinese poetics to interpret Chinese poetry for a Western audience. At first, he thought that was kind of a crazy idea and that it even couldn't be done. But later, he changed his mind, and in his later works he seems committed to this approach. However, Professor Liu remained very much a comparatist, far more than I am. Whereas I am a rather straightforward literary historian, he always looked for the comparative angle on things. I found my wide scope of interests very helpful, for example, when I wrote that long review of Jerry Schmidt's book Huang Zunxian's book, in which I discuss in detail Huang's place in the tradition of expressionist, individualist poetry. So that aspect of my training can pay off richly.

**SG:** I read several articles you wrote about Wang Shizhen and found that you do not just focus on Wang himself and his works but explore connections he had with poets before and after him. That relates to a lot of topics. For me, your research method is very inspiring.

**RJL:** Well, I hope so. One thing might be worth considering when working on one particular author is to find out what other authors did that author read, and which ones influenced him. That was his place in the context of the tradition he's working in. That's an essential issue that immediately comes to my mind. Until you know such things, you're not get that author right. That's my firm assumption. There are certain sort of hints or clues that can be found. When you start to read a literary critic from the post-Song era, try first to find out what that critic thinks of Su Dongpo. Does he like him or not? What is his opinion of Su Dongpo? For to do so, we can clarify what his view is of many other things. For example, Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) really liked Su Dongpo, which makes sense, because he's in that tradition of expressionist and individualist poetry. Other people in the 18th century did not like Su Dongpo at all but thought he was very dangerous, you know, like Yan Yu's 严羽 (ca.1195-ca.1245) description, *yehu waidao* (Wild-fox heterodoxy 野狐外道 ). I wrote a long article[51] on all this, in which Yan Yu is the focus. I also trace the later development of Chinese literary thought and what they thought of Yan Yu's *Canglang shihua* (Canglang poetic discourse 沧浪诗话 ). This of course, falls into two categories: poetry as self-cultivation or poetry as self-expression, which really provides another way to understand Chinese poetics, an extremely interesting area that I'd like to do more with. That's another reason why I want to get back to Wang Shizhen again.

**SG:** Your academic career started with Wang Shizhen. Why was he so impor-

51 Lynn, Richard John. "The Talent-Learning Polarity in Chinese Poetics: Yan Yu (ca.1195-ca.1245) and the Later Tradition", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 4:2 (1983): 157-184.

tant for you at that time? Why is he still important for you now?

**RJL:** Well, I wanted to do something different, one basic inclination that I have is to do something that I can work with primary sources and that there isn't much secondary literature about, to do something new. At the time I finished my dissertation, nobody was writing about Wang Shizhen, while, of course, now a lot of people are concerned with him. To do Qing dynasty poetry at all was very unusual back in the 1960 and early 1970s, so people never knew what to do with me. When I began to look for jobs, there was no advertise for a specialist in Qing dynasty classical verse, not in the U.S. or Canada or anywhere in the Western world. The departments of Chinese literature in the West are still completely influenced by the *wusi yundong* (May Fourth movement 五四运动 ), which organized Chinese literary history rigidly in terms of *Tangshi Songci Yuanqu Ming-Qing xiaoshuo*" (Tang poetry, Song lyrics, Yuan free lyrics and Ming-Qing vernacular fiction 唐诗宋词元曲明清小说 ). If you look at our departments in Canada or in the U.S., that's how they still hire people. Daniel Bryant and I were going to write something about this simplistic view of Chinese literary history, but we never did, to explode the way May Fourth movement historians and critics warped, twisted, and distorted Chinese literary history, to re-write it for their own polemical purposes. However, their view is largely still the way people think today, which is a pity, for there are so many far more interesting ways to approach it. For instance, a recent book on Li Mengyang[52] is quite interesting, done originally in part as a Ph.D thesis at Harvard, but the author, Chang Woei Ong[53], does not now have a position in the U.S. or Canada, but teaches in Singapore. Daniel Bryant, who authored his magnificent He Jingming book, taught his whole career at the university of Victoria, which is largely an undergraduate teaching University and does not contain an advanced research center of Chinese studies. Daniel was a Ming dynasty literature specialist, but his teaching duties never covered that area but consisted of all sorts of things of a general nature. It is still rare to find anyone in the West who specializes on Ming-Qing classical verse. Jerry Schmidt does, but he did Song dynasty poetry for quite a while before he went on to the later periods.

**SG:** But there are many scholars who focus on Ming-Qing women's writing.

**RJL:** That's one way of getting around May Fourth movement-inspired preju-

52 Ong, Chang Woei. *Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016.

53 Ong Chang Woei ( 王昌伟 )is an associate Professor in the department of Chinese studies of National University of Singapore, his research interests include intellectual history of later imperial China, military history of later imperial China etc.

dices and distortions, for it is entirely fashionable nowadays to study women's literature. But to study Chinese women authors, the great majority of sources, especially for classical verse, are from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Grace Fong[54] at McGill has done much good in this area, as has Ellen Widmer[55] and several others.

**SG:** And Professor Kang-I Sun Chang[56] and Nanxiu Qian[57]?

**RJL:** Kang-I got hired as a Tang dynasty specialist, once she finished her dissertation at Princeton. Chen Zilong 陈子龙 (1608-1647), the subject of her most important works, was a particular interest of hers that developed later largely because of Chen's relationship with Liu Rushi 柳如是 —so back to women's writing again. It is still rare to find people who work in Ming-Qing classic verse, for their number is very small. I mean, in Western university Chinese literature departments at best there is someone in Pre-Qin texts, and then you someone in *Weijin nanbeichao* (Wei Jin and the Northern and Southern dynasties 魏晋南北朝 ), and then more positions in the Tang and Song, and then usually more in vernacular literature of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing, plus, of course, a modern Chinese expert. At the most, this usually means five to cover the entire history of Chinese literature—but very few have that many. Harvard does, but where else? I can't think of another place. That's not enough, you know, such under funding of needed positions happens because of university administration priorities elsewhere, the current way things are going is quite frustrating.

**SG:** Besides the university administration and the May Fourth movement, from your perspectives, what else leads to this neglect of Ming-Qing classical letters in the English-speaking world?

**RJL:** It's much harder subject to become competent at. You have to have a good

54 Grace S. Fong ( 方秀洁 ) is Professor of Chinese Literature in the department of East Asian Studies, McGill University. She received her Ph.D in classical Chinese poetry from the University of British Columbia. She teaches courses on Chinese culture, poetry, fiction, and women writers, as well as Classical Chinese. Her research encompasses classical Chinese poetry and poetics, women writers of late imperial China, and autobiographical writing in pre-modern China.

55 Ellen Widmer ( 魏爱莲 ) is a Professor of East Asian Studies in Wellesley College, her research interests include traditional Chinese fiction, history of Chinese women's writing, history of the book in China, and missionaries to East Asia.

56 Kang-i Sun Chang ( 孙康宜 ) is a Chinese-born American scholar of classical Chinese literature. She is the inaugural Malcolm G. Chace Professor and former Chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University.

57 Qian Nanxiu ( 钱南秀 ) is Professor of Chinese Literature in the Chao Center for Asian Studies at Rice. She received her M.A. from Nanjing University, China (1982) and her Ph.D. from Yale (1994). Qian's research interests include classical Chinese literature, Chinese intellectual history, comparative literature, and studies on the Sinosphere.

foundation of earlier Chinese literature as well, you can't just study Wang Shizhen in isolation or only in the context of the Qing dynasty, you have to know the whole tradition of poetry before him. So, it's just more difficult, people are put off by the linguistic requirements involved.

Here is an issue I don't know if you want to talk about: How I've reached the point where I am now. As a non-native Chinese speaker, I began to learn Chinese only as an adult, I started a few days before my 21st birthday; I should have started at the age of four with grandpa, reciting *Tangshi sanbai shou* (three hundred Tang poems 唐诗三百首). To be truly a good translator, you not only have to be bilingual but actually bicultural, something that Professor Liu once told me. Professor Liu himself learned Italian so he could better appreciate Italian opera, and he also could read French and German. This took much time and effort. He told me that when he first arrived in England, he was terrified to be out in public, even riding in a bus, because he couldn't read the street signs that went by so fast he could not read them and keep track of where he was. The only Chinese scholar nowadays with Professor Liu's level of East/West cultural sophistication is Zhang Longxi 张隆溪.[58] And if there is now a successor to Professor Liu, it is Professor Zhang, and certainly not me, for I do very different things.

**SG:** Professor Zhang is an outstanding scholar. His *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* always appears on the booklist of every Chinese student majoring in comparative literature.

**RJL:** His other works are also very important, he always keeps improving. I put his books together with books by Professor Liu on the same shelf over there, for I believe that they belong to together. When Professor Zhang came to visit here, he noticed them there and approved, saying "That's good!"

**SG:** You don't think you are the successor to Professor Liu, so what's the major difference between you and him?

**RJL:** I'm not a comparatist. Professor James Liu was very determined to develop an East-West comparative perspective on Chinese literature. As we were talking about it earlier, I'm an old-fashioned Chinese-style scholar who writes in English. We are very different, I am a literary historian and a translator of complete works, and he didn't want to do that but something different. He was 59 years old when he died from cancer of the oesophagus. He went very fast after diagnosis, dying within

58 Zhang Longxi is a leading scholar in East-West cross-cultural studies. He holds an MA from Peking University and a Ph. D. from Harvard. He had taught at Harvard and the University of California, Riverside, and is currently Chair Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation at City University of Hong Kong.

two months, very quick. If he had lived another 20 years, he would have produced much more interesting and valuable contributions to the field. I remember when he once read an article in Chinese written by Zhang Longxi, and said: "This man is really good, I can hear his footsteps close behind me." When I told this to Zhang Longxi, when I first met him back in the later 1980s, he was quite pleased.

Actually, Zhang was greatly influenced by Professor Qian Zhongshu 钱锺书 (1910-1998)[59]. They first met when Zhang went to be Qian's translator when Qian met with Douwe Fokkema (1931-2011)[60] in Beijing. Zhang told me that at first Professor Qian thought he was just some party functionary who came to make sure that nothing wrong was said about the state. In fact, Douwe Fokkema actually could speak Chinese quite well, and Qian could also speak English quite well, so they could have conducted the discussion either in English or Chinese. Anyway, they started talking about the *Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye (1912-1991)[61], which Qian had heard about it but hadn't seen. Zhang told me that he then spoke up and said that he had read it, which astonished Qian. At that time, Zhang was doing his master's degree at Peking University. That's how he got to know Professor Qian and they had a close relationship from that point on. Professor Qian help Zhang get accepted at the Harvard graduate School for the Ph.D degree.

Qian Zhongshu was really a hero, just like James Liu. I admire them both greatly. I once thought to translate Qian's *Tanyi lu* (record of discussing literary art 谈艺录), I think this is a great book. You know, I actually argue with Qian Zhongshu in one paper[62] that I presented at the University of Hong Kong years ago, in which I say his view of Wang Shizhen's theory of poetry is quite wrong; and I have written more about this since.

59 Qian Zhongshu was a Chinese literary scholar and writer, known for his wit and erudition. He is best known for his satirical novel *Fortress Besieged*. His works of non-fiction are characterized by their large amount of quotations in both Chinese and Western languages (including English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin).

60 Dowe Fokkema ( 佛克马 ) was a famous Netherlandish scholars, sinologist and comparatist, his publications include *Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism* (1984), *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West* (2011) etc.

61 Northrop Frye was a Canadian literary critic and literary theorist, considered one of the most influential of the 20th century, his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) is one of the most important works of literary theory published in the twentieth century. Frye's contributions to cultural and social criticism spanned a long career during which he earned widespread recognition and received many honors.

62 Lynn, Richard John. " 钱锺书对严羽和王士祯的了解：洞察和谬误 Qian Zhongshu on Yan Yu and Wang Shizhen: Insights and Errors," a paper presented at the conference " 钱锺书与 20 世纪中国学术国际研讨会 (International Conference on Qian Zhongshu and Twentieth Century Chinese Scholarship)," University of Hong Kong, 11 October 2002. 35 pp.

**SG:** It seems that Professor Qian doesn't have a high evaluation of Wang Shizhen's poetry and poetics in *Tanyi lu*.

**RJL:** That's because his own view of poetry was very English romantic, you know, expressionism and individualism. He was a product of the May Fourth Movement, though he belongs to the next generation, and that colored his view of the Chinese literary tradition, so he didn't think highly of the critics and theorists who approached poetry in terms of self-cultivation, which was very much a Neo-Confucian discipline. He didn't like that at all, and I don't think he understood it entirely either, because of his own predilections and the intellectual prejudices of his day. Nobody has called me on that, I mean, no Chinese has ever come up to me and say: "How dare you? Who do you think you are criticizing Qian Zhongshu?" No one has ever done that. But I've always expected someone to, but no one ever has, even though Qian is quite an iconic figure in China. I've profited immensely by looking into things he has to say about various poets and critics, I quote him often, quite favorably, but I do disagree with him on this particular issue. I would have liked to know him, but unfortunately, we never had the chance to meet, but maybe I will have the chance in the next life.

**SG:** You wrote many review articles in your career, some of which are quite influential, what's the meaning and function of review article for academic research?

**RJL:** Well, let me put it into a particular context. Bad books are easy to review, because you can easily point out all the things wrong, and good books are also easy to review, because you can just describe how wonderful it is. But if a book is a mixture of good and bad, that makes it difficult to review. For example, Professor Ong's book on Li Mengyang consists of much good information and insight, but I think he completely missed the whole issue of poetry as self-cultivation in the *qianhou qizi* tradition of criticism. Such problems are difficult to deal with because of the complex issues involved and as such are impossible to judge simply "good" or "bad." So, that's the value of review articles, and as for their, one owes it to the field to make value judgements, in effect, one should be a kind of a guide to or monitor of quality. The harsh criticism that I once made of Wai-lim Yip's work, for instance, was quite unusual for me. When I was writing it up, Professor Liu told me: "I couldn't do that, because he is Chinese and I am Chinese, so no one will listen to me, but you're not a Chinese, so you should do it." Professor Liu was actually in agreement with me and didn't like Yip's theory of poetry or his practice of translation at all. Such hostile feeling between them was entirely mutual, by the way. I review many book manuscripts for publishers and articles for journals, for I think it an important duty. The field will only get better if standards are maintained. However, although

I am on good terms with Jerry Schmidt, I still think he could have produced much better work if he had been more careful with his sources, the books on Yuan Mei and Huang Zunxian in particular, his latest book[63] on Zheng Zhen 郑珍 (1806-1864) seems much better. Perhaps he's been listening to criticism I and others have made of his work after all. And Jonathan Chaves and I have maintained friendly relations for many years, though he knows we do things rather differently.

**SG:** Your research began from Qing poetry and poetics. Recently, there are several scholars in the English-speaking world focusing themselves on Ming-Qing women's writing. How do you evaluate this phenomenon?

**RJL:** I think the primary focus here is on women's history in China and those who are researching this nowadays are using the writings of Ming-Qing women writers to explore the role of Chinese women in pre-modern society in general. That's a good thing, because it's dispelling the myth that Chinese women weren't educated and they had no place in literary culture, which now has been clearly proven to be quite wrong. Elite women were often very well-educated, and in many cases, they were better educated than their brothers who became officials. It is good that this is resulting in a radical revision of social history of pre-modern China. Though it may be true that the scholars involved are not studying women's poetry chiefly as poetry but studying it as primary source material for the lives of Chinese elite women, so what? I mean, that's okay. It'll probably progress beyond that as time goes on and as more and more scholars tend to it. Professor Grace Fong has done a marvelous job of putting together the Ming-Qing Women Writing database, by utilizing the resources of the Harvard-Yenching Library. That's fantastic, it's really going to revolutionize our research, for it's a genuine ground-breaking foundational work. From this, a new, wonderful light should illuminate areas of Chinese literary history that up to now have been too long neglected.

**SG:** I think I have already covered all the questions I want to ask. Thank you so much for your time to conduct this interview, it is really a nice experience to talk with you. Hope you can keep healthy and look forward to reading your new books.

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