

Response to Daniel Hsieh's Review of *Confucian Prophet: Political Thought in Du Fu's Poetry (752-757)*, by David K. Schneider, Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2012. (CLEAR, vol. 39, December 2017)

On the first few pages of *Confucian Prophet*, I anticipate this type of review of a book that proposes to read Du Fu's poetry as political thought: "One faces . . .decades of entrenched scholarly opinion about how [Du Fu] should be read and understood" (p. 1). I go on to enumerate what the book is not attempting to do. Nonetheless, this review proceeds to critique the book, along deeply entrenched conventional lines, for not doing what I said it would not do.

Daniel Hsieh sees "two kinds of flaws" in my method. First, "how readily thoughts, feelings, and images found in poems are isolated and turned into definite political and philosophical ideas." Second, "perhaps pressured by the lack of real proof, he is often compelled to stretch the evidence." The problem with this review is that neither of these points has anything to do with the method employed in this study. Hsieh seems not to have read the first chapter of the book, "Poetry and Political Thought: Toward a Method of Reading" (44 pages) – he never mentions it – which places Du Fu and his political poetry in the history of Tang literary and cultural reform movements, which emphasized the idea of a return to antiquity *fugu* 復古, and in which I explain very clearly that my methodology is not concerned with emotion and feeling, but rather with language, specifically the figurative and political depth of the language which Du Fu inherited from the philosophical and literary tradition that was the focus of the *fugu* intellectual movement of which Du was an important early figure. My method considers issues such as realism and representation, figuration and allegory, and the political-philosophical history of words, images, and type scenes – explicitly not feeling and emotion. With no understanding of the method of the study, Hsieh appears to be unable to see the evidence that method demands.

Take Du's flood imagery, a point Hsieh makes and issue of, as an example. Hsieh says that my reading of "Climbing the Pagoda of the Temple of Compassionate Blessings with Several Friends" (Climbing the Pagoda) is "speculative" in that I argue that Du's call to Shun at the end of the poem signals an impending flood. In other words, that I have turned to speculation for lack of evidence. Quite the contrary. Hsieh completely ignores my reading of the poem as a juxtaposition of two models of kingship, and consequently ignores a wealth of textual evidence rooted not only in the poem itself, but also in the inherited textual tradition, a rather rich textual tradition, concerning floods and their political significance, all of which feature King Shun as a central political-cultural figure, preserved in texts that, as I argue in my chapter on methodology, were at the center of the Tang literary-political *fugu* movement. An allusion to Shun is strong evidence that we are dealing with flood imagery and its political implications. I provide an extensive discussion of the flood narratives contained in the *Shang shu* and their political implications. Further literary evidence from Du's text includes allusions to *Liezi* and the story of King Mu of Zhou. I also draw comparisons with Du's Tang contemporaries and work with commentaries by Qian Qianyi, Qiu Zhao'ao and Hu Shunzhi. Yet, ignoring all but one piece of this evidence, Hsieh claims that I rest my argument on a misreading of Hu Shunzhi. But Hsieh quotes only a fragment of a much more extensive treatment of Hu's commentary that extends for nearly two pages. Hsieh moreover cites a mere fragment of Hu's comment, thereby significantly distorting Hu's analysis. The combination of all this clearly delineated evidence actually provides a very strong case for my reading of much of Climbing the Pagoda as an allegorical depiction of the Tang Court. Strangely, Hsieh even claims that he does "not know of any other similar reading of these lines." One must wonder how such a claim could be made when on p. 48, a page Hsieh himself notes in his review, there appears a passage of commentary by Qian Qianyi that makes nearly the same argument about this poem as my own. In fact, my argument is a development and extension of Qian's insightful comment. This example of Hsieh's discussion of my argument concerning Du Fu's flood imagery characterizes the rest of the review, which purports to critique my method and evidence, but in fact critiques neither.

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